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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

●(1000)
[English]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this certificate of nomination proposes the appointment of the Right Hon. David Johnston to the position of commissioner of debates.

Pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table in both official languages a certificate of nomination, with biographical notes, for the proposed appointment of the Right Hon. David Johnston as the debates commissioner.

I request that the certificate of nomination and biographical notes be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

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OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL INVESTIGATOR

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table in both official languages today the 2017-18 annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator.

I am also tabling the response to one recommendation in that report that is directed to me in my capacity as Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the response to one recommendation directed to the Department of Public Safety, as well as the response to the 19 recommendations that were directed in the report to the Correctional Service of Canada.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table in both official languages the

2017 annual report on the RCMP's use of the law enforcement justification provisions.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table in both official languages the government's response to one petition.

* * *

●(1005)

PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE ACT

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-418, an act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to table the protection of freedom of conscience act. The purpose of this is to protect the rights of health care professionals who conscientiously object to participation in medical assistance in dying, making it an offence to intimidate or try to force a health care professional to be involved in this activity. It also makes it an offence to fire or refuse to employ a health care professional for refusing to take part, either directly or indirectly, in the provision of medical assistance in dying.

I believe it is time to stand up for the doctors and health care providers who are not willing to leave their core ethics behind when they are at a patient's bedside. Access to medical assistance in dying and the right to conscientious objection are not mutually exclusive.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC) moved that Bill S-240, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (trafficking in human organs), be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, for 10 years members of Parliament have been trying to pass legislation to address the scourge of international organ trafficking. My colleague, the member for Etobicoke Centre, as well as the former Liberal MP and justice minister Irwin Cotler, both presented bills on this issue in the previous Parliament. None have passed until this point though.

Routine Proceedings

I would like to commend to the House the excellent work of the Senate, and Senator Ataullahjan in particular, for getting Bill S-240 through the Senate. Great work was done and constructive amendments were proposed and passed at committee to ensure that we have an effective system for prohibiting the terrible practice of harvesting organs.

This is further than this bill has ever made it before, but it is critical that we pass this legislation in this Parliament, so we do not have to start it all over again. It has been 10 years with the involvement of multiple members and multiple parties. I hope we will finally be able to get this done in this Parliament.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS**HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING**

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this petition is timely, coming after the motion of the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. I am pleased to table a petition signed by several dozen Canadians who call upon Parliament to take action to curb organ harvesting and trafficking.

VISION CARE

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to table a petition calling for a national framework to promote eye health. Folks in my riding are asking the government to develop a national framework, stating that the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double in the next 20 years. They say there is an emerging eye health and vision care crisis affecting all segments of the Canadian population, but in particular Canada's most vulnerable populations. Children, seniors and indigenous people are at particular risk.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to acknowledge eye health and vision care as a growing public health issue, particularly for Canada's vulnerable populations, and to respond to it through the development of a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care. This would benefit all Canadians through the reduction of vision impairment resulting from preventable conditions and the modification of known risks.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this petition is quite timely, building on what my friend, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan mentioned regarding Bill C-350 in this House and Bill S-240 in the other place.

These petitioners from across Ontario are encouraging the government to act and prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs removed without consent or as a result of a financial transaction, and to render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who have participated in this organ trade.

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

The first is in support of Bill C-350 and Bill S-240, which has now passed the Senate and which I just tabled in this House.

Petitioners call on Parliament to quickly pass Bill S-240 to make it a criminal offence for a Canadian to go abroad to receive an organ that was violently harvested from someone without their consent.

• (1010)

CANADA SUMMER JOBS INITIATIVE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition deals with the Canada summer jobs values test. It notes the protections of freedom of conscience and beliefs in section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in light of that calls on the Prime Minister and the government to withdraw the values test attestation requirement from the Canada summer jobs program.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I would like to present a petition signed by 36 constituents in my riding of Etobicoke Centre. The petitioners are gravely concerned with the ongoing systematic persecution against the Uighurs and other ethnic Turkic groups by the Government of China.

These human rights violations have included mass arbitrary arrests, imprisonment in detention camps, torture, disappearances, forced ideological re-education and the deliberate obstruction of contact with family members of Uighurs living abroad, including in Canada.

The petitioners pray and request that the House consider all available options to put a stop to this persecution and urge China to fully respect its international human rights obligations.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ocean plastics are making their way into everything, onto every beach on our coast and into salmon that we eat. They are choking seabirds, albatross, whales and sea turtles. We have seen terrible images across the country.

Petitioners from Alma, Quebec, and from Nanaimo, Ladysmith and Gabriola Island in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, urge Parliament to adopt a strategy to combat plastic pollution, particularly focused on marine plastics.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition in support of Bill C-350 and Bill S-240, which was just tabled in this House, regarding harvesting organs for financial gain. This is a problematic issue that needs to be dealt with. These petitioners support Bill S-240 and are in favour of passing the bill.

*Government Orders***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (for the Minister of Democratic Institutions) moved that Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments, be read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-76, the elections modernization act. This legislation represents a generational overhaul of the Canada Elections Act and will allow it to better address the realities facing our democratic system in the 21st century. As many in this House will know, this legislation is making our electoral processes more transparent and more accessible to all Canadians.

Let us be clear. Voting is a right. As parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to make voting accessible to all Canadians. Members of this House will know from previous debates on this bill that Bill C-76 makes a number of important changes to federal elections in Canada.

This bill will make voting more accessible for members of the Canadian Armed Forces, those who lack certain types of ID, and Canadians with disabilities. It will make participation in our democracy easier for those who have children or are responsible for sick or disabled family members. It gives the Chief Electoral Officer the flexibility to make elections more efficient. It extends the right to vote to over a million Canadians abroad, and it repeals the element of the Harper Conservatives' so-called Fair Elections Act that made it harder for Canadians to vote, which is why of course so many people refer to Bill C-23 as the unfair elections act.

I am currently the only female member of Parliament elected from Nova Scotia. In fact, I am only the ninth ever elected to represent my beautiful province since Confederation. We clearly have work to do, which is why I want to focus for a moment on the provisions of Bill C-76 that make it easier for women to participate in our democracy.

Historically, women have been disproportionately responsible for caring for young, sick or disabled family members. Bill C-76 will do two things to help people in this situation. First, the legislation will increase the reimbursement rate for candidate expenses related to caring for a family member to 90%, and second, it will exempt those expenses from the campaign spending limit. No longer will candidates be punished for taking care of their young or vulnerable family members.

I would like to remind this House that this legislation is also repealing measures enacted by the previous Harper Conservatives, which made it harder for Canadians to vote.

Certainly, some of the more egregious aspects of this so-called Fair Elections Act included the elimination of vouching and the voter information cards, also known as the VIC, as a form of proof of address. As a result of those changes, many Canadians across the country saw increased barriers to voting. In fact, a 2016 Stats Canada survey found that approximately 170,000 Canadians did not participate in the last election because they lacked the required ID to vote. This is completely unacceptable.

The Conservatives will tell us that it is not hard for Canadians to obtain an ID to vote. They will make false comparisons between voting and boarding an airplane or buying a six-pack of beer. Let me assure members, many senior citizens who are living with relatives, who may not have a valid driver's licence or do not have bills addressed in their name would be greatly helped by the use of the voter information card in order to provide a proof of address. Other examples include Canadians who have their mail sent to a PO box, or students who are often in precarious living situations while studying.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1015)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members of the official opposition that they will have an opportunity to ask questions and comments. I would ask them to hold their comments right now until such time as I ask them for questions and comments.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Speaker, let me remind members of this House that in a democracy, voting is a fundamental right. Unlike the Conservatives, we believe our democracy is stronger when more Canadians, not fewer, vote.

I now want to touch on the amendments that official opposition members put forward at report stage. Simply put, their amendments would have removed accessibility measures, removed the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate to communicate with Canadians about voting, removed the ability for one voter to vouch for another, and taken away the right from over one million Canadians to vote. It is clear that the official opposition is opposed to more Canadians voting. Sadly, this does not surprise me.

Government Orders

The Conservatives will stand in this place and claim to be champions of Canadian democracy, but I wonder how they genuinely can say that when they have delayed and filibustered throughout the study of this legislation. Let us be honest. The Conservative members attempted to block this legislation purely for partisan purposes. Rather than strengthening our democracy in Canada, the Conservative members of the procedure and House affairs committee wanted unlimited spending ability for political parties in the pre-writ period.

We are levelling the political playing field with Bill C-76 to ensure that our elections are more fair, transparent and secure as a result of this amended legislation. However, the Conservatives insisted on delaying the important work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and preventing good legislation, which will help more Canadians vote, from proceeding through this House.

Earlier this fall, the committee invited the Minister of Democratic Institutions to appear at the start of the clause-by-clause consideration, but rather than agreeing to set a time and date to begin clause-by-clause, the Conservatives filibustered throughout the minister's appearance during which she waited for, but never received, a single question. To be completely frank, I still cannot see what their reasoning was for these delays, apart from wasting the minister's time, delaying the important work of the committee and preventing good legislation which will help more Canadians vote from proceeding through this House. I just cannot imagine how Canadians could support these games and tactics.

Many Canadians choose to study or work abroad at various points in their lives. With the advancement in technology, Canadians are more mobile than ever before. As it has been said many times before in this House, a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, and regardless if an individual was born in this country or took the oath of citizenship recently, by virtue of being a citizen of this country, that individual is entitled and has the right to have his or her voice heard in our elections. It is puzzling that Conservative members in this House would attempt to prevent over one million Canadians from voting in our elections simply because they are living abroad. In spite of attempts from members opposite, Bill C-76, if passed, will ensure that Canadian citizenship entitles people to vote in federal elections regardless of where they currently reside. It is as simple as that.

During the consideration of this legislation at the procedure and House affairs committee, the Conservatives put forward amendments that would require parental consent for young people to participate in Elections Canada's register for future electors; lower the administrative monetary penalties for those who break election laws; restrict the capabilities and independence of the commissioner of Canada elections in performing his or her duties; and restrict the use of the voter information card to provide one's address. Those are just to name a few.

I will return to an amendment submitted by a Conservative member on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It had to do with the requirement of parental consent for young people to participate in Elections Canada's register of future electors. Members of this House who are parents will know that parental consent is required for many memberships and to access various online platforms, and certainly for good reason, but to

conflate a young person's interest in the democracy of our country and our electoral system with something nefarious is just another attempt by the Conservatives to create barriers to voting in the hopes to suppress the vote.

● (1020)

Members on this side of the House are not surprised by this. The Harper Conservatives attempted to build a case of fear and distrust in our elections through Bill C-23 with the removal of the use of the voter information card to prove address as they felt it was being used by voters to vote multiple times, which as we know, is simply not true. We now see the same fear and divisive tactics by members of the former Conservative government now being used by the opposition with its proposed amendments.

It should also come as no surprise that the Conservatives did attempt to amend Bill C-76 to restrict the independence of the commissioner of Canada elections. After all, it was the Harper Conservatives who restricted the commissioner's power to investigate in the first place.

Members of the House will remember that through Bill C-76 we are reinstating the commissioner's independence and empowering him or her with the ability to better investigate possible violations of elections law. We are giving the commissioner the power to seek a warrant to compel testimony and the power to lay charges. We are doing this following the recommendation after the 2015 election where the Chief Electoral Officer stated, "The inability to compel testimony has been one of the most significant obstacles to effective enforcement of the act." Following the Chief Electoral Officer's compelling argument, I find it deeply concerning that all members of the House would not support this measure in Bill C-76.

What is stranger yet is that Conservative members on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs did not support the amendments submitted by the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, which would add additional punishment for third parties using foreign funding for regulated activities. Under this amendment, third parties who are found guilty of offences related to the use of foreign funds could be subjected to a punishment equal to five times the amount of foreign funds that were used.

The reason I find it surprising that they did not support this amendment is that it can also be found in Bill S-239, which was introduced by one of their Conservative caucus colleagues, Senator Frum. Given that the proposed amendment is the same punishment as set out in Bill S-239, I have to wonder if the amendment was purely not supported because it came from a member on this side of the House, or if it was not supported because it actually would strengthen the legislation. Either reason is completely unacceptable.

This fall the new Conservative critic for democratic institutions, the member for Calgary Midnapore, brought a new collaborative tone to our work and I want to thank her for that. Collaboration from all three parties at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has made this a stronger bill. Members will not always agree on everything in this chamber; in fact, it is disagreement and debate which can produce better policies for all Canadians.

Government Orders

That is why I want to highlight some of the amendments brought forward by opposition members that the committee was able to come together and agree on. These include more protection for information contained in the register of future voters; creating a better definition for third party activities in Canada; and expanding vouching so that any voter on the list in the same polling station can vouch for another voter.

This builds on other important amendments brought forward by the Liberal members on the committee. I would like to highlight just a few of the amendments presented by my colleagues on this side of the House that further strengthen this legislation. These include a complete ban on foreign money spent at any time, not just during the writ or pre-writ periods, for third parties; a new obligation on social media platforms to create a registry of all digital advertising published and paid for by third parties, political parties and nominated and prospective candidates during the pre-writ and writ period; and, as previously mentioned, allowing employees of long-term care facilities to vouch for residents.

During debate on the bill at report stage, we heard concerns from the member for Thornhill with regard to foreign funds in our elections. He said:

Bill C-76 would double the total maximum third party spending amount allowed during the writ period, and it would still allow unlimited contributions from individual donors and others, unlimited spending by third parties and unlimited foreign donations outside the pre-writ and writ periods....

In wrapping up, while there are, admittedly, some modest improvements made to Bill C-76, it remains a deeply deficient attempt to restore fairness to the Canadian election process.

• (1025)

Simply put, this bill, as amended at committee, would prohibit the use of foreign funding in all third party partisan activities and advertising regardless of whether they take place during the pre-election or election period. As a result, I am proud that this bill would ban all foreign money all of the time to further protect our elections from foreign influence. I must also note for the member's reference that this amendment was supported by all members of the committee, including the member's own caucus colleagues.

On the subject of pre-writ spending by virtue of the creation of these timelines during an election year, Bill C-76 has created a maximum writ period of 50 days. I have heard from constituents in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets that while levelling the political playing field is important to keep our electoral system fair, they also think that the fixed election date rules cannot be abused again. The previous government rigged the system to its own advantage and many Canadians were frustrated to be in such a gravely extended campaign period.

Before I wrap up, I want to go into detail on one other aspect of Bill C-76, which is Canadian Armed Forces voting. The women and men of the armed forces make tremendous sacrifices on behalf of our country and to protect our free and fair Canadian elections, yet they vote at a lower rate than the general population. This is likely in part because the Canadian Armed Forces' voting system is terribly outdated. Canadian Armed Forces members are required to vote on a base ahead of election day. Often they are required to vote in a different manner than their families. This system made sense when it was established, but it is no longer practical.

That is why we worked closely with the armed forces and the Department of National Defence to modernize forces voting. Under Bill C-76, Canadian Armed Forces members would be able to choose to use the civilian voting program. Those who wear the uniform face some of the most dire consequences of government policy. We have an obligation to ensure that their voices are heard during elections.

I will close by reiterating that this is important legislation. Bill C-76, as amended at committee, would make voting easier and more accessible to Canadians. It would make it easier for Canadians to run for office. It would make it easier for our women and men in uniform to vote. Bill C-76, as amended, would ensure that Canadians enjoy a democratic system that is more accessible, more transparent and more modern than ever before.

I encourage all members to support this important legislation, which would modernize our elections for future generations to come.

• (1030)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, in her speech, the parliamentary secretary had a lot to say about the Conservative opposition. I am disappointed that she would cast aspersions on the motives of the Conservatives in their opposition to this bill. No Conservative believes that a Canadian entitled to vote should not be able to vote in an election. Conservatives always believe that Canadians should vote, should be encouraged to vote and that all eligible Canadians should be able to vote in an election. It is absolutely untrue to suggest that any Conservative favours any kind of policy that would prevent eligible Canadians from voting. That needs to be clear.

A lot of the parliamentary secretary's speech was about the Conservatives. When Conservatives propose numerous amendments to legislation or insist on fully debating amendments, we are doing our job. We are not the audience. We are not elected to sit and watch a government propose and pass legislation that we oppose.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Speaker, I find the comments of my colleague across the way interesting.

First, a Statistics Canada survey in 2016 showed that 170,000 people were not able to vote because of measures brought in by the former government. That shows that the Conservatives did not want Canadians to vote.

Second, with regard to amendments being brought forward, as I mentioned in my speech, we worked closely with the opposition. We accepted amendments from all parties. We made sure we were able to come to agreement on things. However, it was discouraging when amendments were brought forward that the Conservatives' Senate bill supported and they did not support.

This is strong legislation and we need to make sure it gets through the House.

Government Orders

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am surprised the friendship between the Conservatives and Liberals broke down. It was actually a deal between the Conservatives and the Liberals to raise spending limits that allowed the bill to get through. It is sad the relationship has fallen on rockier times now. The bar was quite low for the government. All it truly had to do was repair the damage done to our elections process by the Harper government, and it actually introduced the bill two years ago to do it.

What did the government do with that bill? Nothing. It just sat on it for two years. It then rolled it into a larger piece of legislation, could not figure when to call it so it was late, and then broke a promise, which the member for Winnipeg North will remember well. In the last Parliament, the Liberals spent a whole opposition day saying that election acts should never be forced through Parliament under time allocation. What is Bill C-76? It is an election bill. What is happening to it? It is under time allocation. Strange how the Liberals say one thing in opposition and another in government.

My friend quoted the Chief Electoral Officer a number of times, and how important that testimony was. He said that the one place this bill fails dramatically is on privacy. Why do the Liberals believe the Chief Electoral Officer sometimes, but when it came to protecting our democracy from cyber-attacks and foreign influence on the web they rejected every amendment the New Democrats moved to improve this bill and ensure our democracy is kept safe?

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his passion on this file. With regard to privacy, the minister has said that more needs to be done. We believe there are a lot of concerns around privacy about how our system is structured. There are studies that are going to be done through committees, and we look forward to seeing what those privacy suggestions are.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her comments on our negotiation process. It was nice of her to mention that.

[*English*]

I have to share that during the last appearance of the minister at PROC, we asked if her government would ensure major announcements, particularly spending announcements, could not be made during the pre-writ period. We asked the following questions:

Will your government ensure that government resources are not used to pay for campaign-style events—for example, town halls featuring the Prime Minister or other ministers, public consultations featuring elected politicians as opposed to [bureaucrats or other] public servants, or other publicly televised or streamed events during the pre-writ period?

Will your government ensure that government departments cannot release public opinion research, reports, or other documents that may influence public opinion, except those of course required by law during the pre-writ period?

Will your government ensure that no major announcements about policy intentions or budget projections can be made during the pre-writ period?

Given those requests so kindly made to the minister, I have the following question for the parliamentary secretary.

[*Translation*]

Does she have any good news to share about the questions we asked during the minister's last appearance?

[*English*]

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Speaker, I can confirm to the member and this House that the government has updated its communications policy so the suspension of advertising activities now takes effect on June 30 in a fixed-date election year. This is in line with the proposed pre-writ spending period in Bill C-76. I also want to thank the hon. member for Calgary Midnapore for her work on this bill, and in particular for advocating for this change to the government policy.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I asked a specific question and referenced the Chief Electoral Officer. I can also reference the Privacy Commissioner, the BC Civil Liberties Association, and our European and American colleagues. The justice department in the United States even warned us that we need to dramatically improve our security regime.

There is a natural tension that sometimes happens around making the rules about elections between what the parties want and what Canadians need. The Liberals, the Conservatives and previously the NDP wanted to keep our privacy over how we collect data. The problem is there are no privacy rules that apply to the political parties at all right now. All the experts, including the Chief Electoral Officer, have said that cannot be done anymore. Foreign influences are looking to attack our democracy by hacking into the party databases, and unless there are rules governing and protecting that data, our democracy is made vulnerable.

The Liberals know this. We have already studied this. The ethics committee studied this, and came out with a recommendation Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats agreed with. For the life of me, I honestly do not understand. With all these warnings and being a year away from an election, where the threat is there and there is a clear and present danger to allowing Canadians to exercise their franchise in a free and fair way, the Liberals looked at all those warnings, had all that research already done and said that they would like to study it more. This is code for Liberals saying no. When Liberals do not want to do something, they say that we should study it some more. We did study this. We have the evidence.

Can the parliamentary secretary offer us one reason why it was a bad idea to include some protections for data and Canadians' privacy and some protections for our democracy?

Government Orders

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Speaker, it is interesting when the hon. member said that to study something means no. This bill came with 87% of the recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer. We have taken into account 87% of the recommendations, so to say that we did not study it is disingenuous. However, the fact of the matter is that we have talked about privacy. This is the first step in—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I am sure this happened unintentionally, but I believe that the member just used an unparliamentary term when she said that the hon. member had been disingenuous. I am sure she meant mistaken, or something like that, but disingenuous implies a deliberate attempt to distort things. The hon. member would never do that and I am sure she would never make that accusation. I am sure she will want to withdraw that word, and replace it with something else.

• (1040)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Speaker, yes, I withdraw the word. I should have used the word, “mistaken”. My apologies to the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

With regard to privacy, we know that this is something, and Bill C-76 is the first step. It is going to make sure we start a process that needs to be developed further, and we will make sure that we look more closely at privacy as we go forward.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in opposition to Bill C-76, a bill that would take Canada backwards if its goal is to protect and enhance Canada's electoral processes. I spoke to this bill at second reading, and at that time I focused on the absence in this bill of meaningful measures to protect Canadians from a growing trend of foreign interference in Canada's elections, and I am going to return to that theme today. However, I first want to take a step back, and address the broad failure of the current government's track record on the democratic institutions file at large.

Perhaps, before I get too far along, I ask for consent from the House to share my time with the member for Calgary Midnapore.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to share his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleagues. I appreciate that very much.

Following the last election, the government, when its ministry was sworn in, claimed that it would be the most open and accountable government in history. Ministers were issued letters that instructed them to ensure that they conduct themselves in a manner that would withstand the greatest public scrutiny. The government gave a Speech from the Throne that contained a very clear and specific commitment on electoral reform.

The wheels came off all of these assertions almost immediately. Within the first few weeks of the government, it came to light that its ministers were fundraising from their own lobbyists and their own stakeholder groups, in secret, with the cash-for-access fundraising

regime. We also saw how the promise of being the most open and transparent government in history quickly gave way to repeated assertions in this House, especially from its House leader, that it was acting in accordance with the law.

It went from the highest possible scrutiny to, “well, it is a loophole and it is not illegal, so what we are doing is okay”.

This is important because it goes to the heart of the principal problem, and there are many problems with this bill but I am going to focus on the one that I am most concerned about, and that is money. The governing party has demonstrated that it struggles to raise money from regular Canadians motivated by ideas and motivated by things that are simply important to them for the good of the country.

For its own reasons, the governing party relies on fundraising from lobbyists and stakeholders, people who have something directly in the game in their relations with the government. This has spilled over into the realm of third parties, and reliance on third parties to also act as proxies for the government and to help it win elections.

The first bit of business under this minister's predecessor was its promise on electoral reform. This was part of the Speech from the Throne. It was a campaign promise, although not one that the Liberals really led with in my part of Canada, in my riding. I do not recall my Liberal opponent bringing it up at all in the forums I attended with her. I do not recall hearing about it at the door. However, I know it was brought up, and the Liberals did campaign on it in other parts of the country.

The Liberals were deliberately cultivating support from the people who might be traditionally expected to vote for the NDP. These people voted for the Liberals and they helped elect them, and they expected that promise to be kept. We know what happened. Under the previous minister, the Liberals were surprised to find that opposition parties were not going to quietly roll over, let them rig the game to their advantage in the next election, nor was the Canadian public, for that matter, interested in doing so.

The government established a special committee, asked for its recommendations, and when it realized the committee was not going to tell it what it wanted to hear, it established a bizarre parallel rigged game of consultation. Finally, when the committee did make a recommendation that the Liberals could not accept, they buried that election promise and instructed the new minister to table a less ambitious bill.

In fact, there was already a bill at that time, which my colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley pointed out, that was tabled under the previous minister. It sat there for two years without anything happening on it, until this spring when we got into Bill C-76.

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With this history on democratic institutions and electoral reform, I cannot imagine why any of my constituents would expect me to give credit to the government and to support the legislation before us. As far as the specifics of this bill and the current conduct of the government goes, there are still very serious problems with this bill.

There were some minor amendments that were proposed at committee that may have made some subtle improvement, but right now foreign, third party entities can still fund their Canadian proxies and participate in our democracy with foreign money.

●(1045)

The parliamentary secretary said it was an amendment that was dealt with at committee, but it is not so. There is no provision for audits outside the writ and pre-writ periods. A foreign third party entity can give money to its Canadian proxy, which can advertise or conduct itself in opposition to a particular party or a particular issue. There is nothing to prevent the Canadian entity from using that money perhaps for administration or legal purposes, freeing up its other resources to participate in public discourse in politics.

I have real concerns about this, and it is not something we are making up. The Tides Foundation brags about how it influenced the last Canadian election. On its website, it takes credit for helping to defeat the last government. It sent millions of dollars into Canada. It sent money to LeadNow, which in its Harper report, talked about how it paid organizers to go out and campaign in the last election and how in 26 out of the 29 seats it targeted, Conservative candidates were defeated. It is not a secret. They openly boast about these activities and about the ability to influence a Canadian election.

Until we get this right out of politics and take a clear stand, with audit provisions that span the period between elections, we are going to be at risk of this type of activity. I used the examples of Tides and LeadNow and some of the groups they funded, because that is real and it happened in the last election. However, who knows, in the next election, which other organizations or governments might use the loopholes in this law? The government has very little credibility on this entire file, and I will not support the bill for that reason.

One other thing I want to point out in the minute or two I have left is that we saw this week that there was an expectation that four by-elections would likely be called this past Sunday, and in fact, only one was called. If the bill passes, the Prime Minister will not be able to call a by-election within the nine months that precede the fixed date that exists for next October.

Three seats are still vacated from the resignations of Peter Van Loan, September 3; Tom Mulcair, August 2; and Kennedy Stewart, September 16. If the Prime Minister does not call these by-elections soon, they will not be able to be called if this bill becomes law. That would be a real shame. Citizens of three ridings would go over a year without a member of Parliament. That nine-month prohibition against calling a by-election before a general election is scheduled, when added to the six months of flexibility the current Prime Minister has, will actually allow the non-representation of constituents for potentially 15 months. I hope that is not what is happening right now. I would hope that with the leader of a federal party nominated in Burnaby, the Prime Minister is not deliberately preventing this by-election from happening, but we will have to see how this eventually plays out.

●(1050)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was elected in a by-election, and Stephen Harper waited six months before he finally called the by-election in Winnipeg North. I did not make accusations that the prime minister was trying to manipulate. The prime minister was doing what he had the right to do. He waited a full six months in Winnipeg North.

I want to recognize what the Conservatives are doing with this legislation. Let there be no doubt that the Conservative Party does not support this legislation. They will do whatever they can to defeat this legislation. We saw it with the Stephen Harper mentality in the previous government.

Will the member put aside the facade and be very clear to Canadians that the Conservatives have no intention of seeing this legislation pass, period?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I am glad he was listening and heard the part where I said I do not support the legislation. That is true. I do not support this legislation.

If he had listened a little more carefully when I spoke about the timing of the call of a by-election, I was pointing out that under the bill, should the Prime Minister wait six months, as the previous prime minister did in the case of Winnipeg North, there will be no by-election. This is not about the timing of calling a by-election. My point is about preventing a by-election from actually happening.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just learned a new expression today. It feels good that we can still learn after all these years. My friend from Elmwood—Transcona just described the Liberal question as an “angry softball” that was just thrown to the Conservatives, because in his vehemence, my friend from Winnipeg North just asked the Conservatives, in an angry way, if they do not support the bill. No, they do not.

It was the Conservatives who mucked with our election process around vouching, the idea that a Canadian who has the ID and is on the records and rolls could vouch for another Canadian who is missing some of the ID requirements. My question is this, though. The Liberals claim that this is what they are trying to fix to allow Canadians to vouch for others. However, there is a strange piece in Bill C-76. A Canadian who is just one polling station over, voting in the same high school gym but on a voter roll that is different from a neighbour's, could not vouch for that neighbour. We thought that was just a technical problem. One can imagine that scenario happening, someone saying, “I know my friend from across the street. I would like to vouch for him. Here's my ID, everything is good.” Under Bill C-76, one would not be allowed to because of a tweak in the bill.

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We tried to fix that mistake, and the Liberals voted against it. The parliamentary secretary leaned down and told her colleagues not to vote for it. I wonder if my Conservative friend can understand the Liberals' motivation, if what they are trying to fix is enfranchisement and allowing people who live in the same community to vouch for one another.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I certainly would never profess to ever get into the motivation of the member for Winnipeg North and what he might have meant by that.

I want to restate this, because I have heard it in debate, mostly from the Liberals but now from the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. There is the assertion that somehow Conservatives do not want eligible Canadians to vote. Conservatives do want eligible Canadians to vote. We want systems in place that will facilitate all eligible Canadians being able to vote properly. Canadians want a system they can rely on and want people who are eligible to vote being able to vote.

•(1055)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today to again address this bill, Bill C-76. My colleagues and I have tried endlessly to intervene on the bill to improve it in an effort to provide true democracy for Canadians and to have integrity not only in our electoral process but, as my kind colleague, the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, just indicated, in the legitimacy of the electorate. I think that is something integral to Canadians having confidence in the electoral process. It is for these reasons that our attempts at committee were endless, really limitless, in trying to bring close to 200 amendments to make this bill watertight in terms of democracy for Canadians, instead of what it has, unfortunately, become, which is a public relations exercise by the government to demonstrate that it is doing something to attempt democracy, when in fact, the holes are so large, one could drive a Mack truck through them.

My colleagues and I on the committee can certainly look at ourselves in the mirror and look at Canadians and say that we did everything we could possibly do to attempt to have a process that was truly democracy for Canadians and completely made in Canada.

I might add that something we have also attempted to avoid is the potential for foreign interference and influence. I again bring to the attention of the House that this is a public relations exercise, really, by the government. It is attempting to say that it modernized the Canada Elections Act and that it has a process that will absolutely ensure that there is no interference or influence.

I have only been in this position six weeks now, so there has certainly been a lot for me to catch up on. However, I have the great benefit of amazing colleagues and wonderful staff. I have certainly tried to move the process along for the benefit of Canadians. We certainly can look in the mirror and say that we did everything we possibly could to have the best electoral process possible for democracy here in Canada.

Before I talk more about this, I would like to use a specific case example, which I have in front of me today, which is based on a study and investigation done on behalf of the former member for Calgary Centre. I would like to use that as a case example to show

that this bill would do nothing to fix the problems that were presented in this case.

However, I simply cannot proceed to that until I get to the two elephants in the room, or I guess it would be the donkeys in the room. That is a joke. The first one would be the by-elections. I simply cannot be here today without recognizing the fact that only one of the four by-elections has been called. This is incredibly unfortunate, because not only does it leave more than 300,000 Canadians without representation, as has been brought to the attention of the House by my colleague, but once again, it is unfortunately the current government's attempt to manipulate and politicize the political processes for its own gain.

•(1100)

I must admit that I was quite shocked last night in the House when I saw my NDP colleagues hooting and hollering over the joy of this bill being passed. They now have the potential of not having a leader sitting in the House for the next election. In fact, that is very possible and probable. I do not know how they can be completely overjoyed with something that potentially leaves them without their leader having a seat in the House of Commons. How can they possibly support a bill that would leave them on this front?

Beyond that affront to them, and who am I to speak up for them or have to defend their interests, I would merely like to point this out for their benefit since they did not seem to understand that in their joyous cries of support in the final vote last night. It sort of behooves me to mention that.

Then this morning, we had the surprise of the debate commissioner. I have to hand to our Liberal colleagues: They are very crafty in choosing the former governor general, sort of a kryptonite, someone selected by them to serve in this position, someone who was appointed Governor General by the former prime minister. However, it does not negate the process. Someone who is given the song sheet to anything, and it does not matter who it is, must sing the lyrics that are there. The rules we have seen for the debates have been laid out by the current government very specifically: two debates, one in English, one in French; participants meeting three of these criteria, one of which is so subjective. This is nothing new for the government, but it is again an affront to democracy.

My colleagues on the committee can verify whether we ever saw a shortlist or a name. I do not believe we did. Once again, it is an affront to democracy. The Liberal government is trying to rig the rules for its benefit. We will never accept that on this side of the House. We will fight for Canadians. Canadians have the right to say how they want to hear from the potential leaders of my nation. What could be more important than for Canadians to have the right to say what the format should be when they hear from their leaders. However, they are being denied that with the creation of this position and these rules. They are being denied their voice.

I would like to turn quickly now to Bill C-76 and this case study, which I am about to present, on how it does not address the problems at all.

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This was a complaint brought forward by the Canada Decides group. The first point is with respect to regulation of third parties. It is unfortunate, because foreign interference is talked about significantly in this first part of the complaint. I can verify that the rules brought forward in the bill would do nothing to absolutely ensure that foreign interference and influence would not occur. We asked for this time and again in committee. In our amendments, we asked for the creation of the segregated bank accounts to ensure that third parties would not have the opportunity to receive a million dollars for administration costs and then, lo and behold, move it into election spending. We pushed so hard in an effort to limit the activities to ensure political activity was recognized and held to account. Unfortunately, because of the push-back from the government, this was not the case. Therefore, with respect to this case, I cannot confirm these things were rectified.

I mentioned, as well, the requirements before the pre-writ and the fact that they could receive as much money as they wanted and could do whatever they wanted before those times. I can verify that it does nothing to attempt to fix that. As well, there are no donation limits on contributions received externally, again, prior to the pre-writ period.

I would like to say this with an amendment. I move, seconded by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley:

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following: “Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments, be not now read a third time, but be referred back to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for the purpose of reconsidering clause 378 with a view to amending it so as to prevent a government from cherry-picking which by-elections to call when there are multiple pending vacancies in the House of Commons.”

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me give a real example. During an election, Elections Canada will send out to Canadians all across the country a voter information card. Many constituents, and I will use my own riding of Winnipeg North as an example, take that card along with another piece of ID to the polling station, believing they can vote using those cards. Members of the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party and the Green Party recognized that being able to use that voter ID card was a positive thing. Stephen Harper's Conservative Party opposed it. They said to Canadians and to Elections Canada that the card could not be used.

This legislation says that Canadians should be able to use it. All political parties, as well as Elections Canada, agrees with that. Only the Conservative Party does not.

Could my colleague across the way explain to the constituents of Winnipeg North, indeed to all Canadians, why Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party, which really has not changed very much, opposed the use of the voter ID card?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I feel so strongly that our party really is the party of electorate legitimacy. Canadians will never hold our efforts to ensure there is legitimacy within the electorate against us.

We absolutely feel that Canadians should have to present the proper identification to ensure they are entitled to the precious right to vote, perhaps one of the greatest rights of being a Canadian.

Not only was the government negligent with respect to the subject of identification, but it was also negligent with respect to the non-resident electorate. We pushed so hard for the legitimacy of that as well.

Canadians will never hold it against us for trying to hold our electoral process and the legitimacy of the electorate accountable.

● (1110)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will speak to the amendment. The New Democrats certainly have no interest in delaying. We have been waiting so long, urging the government to get on with it. The reason the amendment makes sense right now is because of an unusual decision taken by the Prime Minister with respect to by-elections in Canada.

The practice for the last generation, if the Liberals care about democratic rights and Canadians having representation, has been that when a group of seats have been vacated, the by-elections take place as expeditiously as possible. The Prime Minister, very cynically I would argue, chose on the weekend to only have one out of a series of by-elections, the one that had to take place by law. However, the other ones are sitting there and citizens are waiting. The Prime Minister had said that those folks will have to wait.

On the amendment to section 378 in the bill, the New Democrats did not contemplate needing to improve this because we did not think the current Prime Minister, or any prime minister, would be so cynical as to not have by-elections on behalf of Canadians. This is a quick fix because this power needs to be limited. I do not think it should up to the Prime Minister to wait six months and then call a by-election that could go on for six or eight months more and deny Canadians that right. Is that not premise of the amendment and the fix that we need in our electoral laws?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, democracy is not a buffet, where we pick and choose what we want. Democracy should be served to all Canadians, and in this case it is not. I really hope the House will support this amendment in an attempt to address that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I welcome this debate because the Liberals have finally got on with it and introduced a bill to fix the work done by the previous government, and here I use the term “work” loosely, because that work made it more difficult for a whole series of Canadians to vote.

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As the parliamentary secretary was saying earlier, this bill, in their terms, is a “generational overhaul”. Even in the name of the bill itself, that it is a modernization act, conveys that. It gives Canadians the clear sense that we do not do this very often. We do not renew the election rules by which we all participate in our democracy, the ways in which the parties and third parties participate and the ways that voters experience the election, very often.

There was a longstanding principle in Canada, that we would never change those rules in this place unilaterally, that doing so was bad practice and bad faith for one party alone, the government, to force through changes to our rules unilaterally. Canadians would then be left with the very distinct impression that maybe the ruling party of the time was putting in rules that would help that party in the next election.

That is a fair assumption to make. People do not even have to be quite so cynical as some folks in the Prime Minister's Office are to make that assumption.

The practice in this place, for generations, was that when we changed election rules, we did it together collaboratively. The previous government, unfortunately, broke with that tradition over a fight about vouching. It felt there were problems with the vouching system. The New Democrats fundamentally disagreed and the evidence supported them, because there was no massive fraud taking place in our elections and those changes were more about disenfranchisement than ensuring proper enfranchisement of our voting rights.

How we got here with the current government is an important part of this conversation. The Liberals said that the bar was quite low, that their aim was to fix Stephen Harper's unfair elections act. It was not going to be hard to do; it just had to undo a bunch of the damage that the Conservatives had done in Bill C-23 in the last Parliament.

The government introduced the bill. It took a year, but okay, it was a new government. Then for two years, it did not move the bill. The bill just sat there on the Order Paper. I can remember getting up in this place to ask the democratic institutions minister, “Hey, where is your bill? What else are you working on?”

At the time, we had been going through the whole electoral reform process, some of my colleagues will remember well. The committee was called ERRE. It was a special committee. We had participation from all parties, including a representative of the Bloc and the Greens. We toured around the country. We visited every nook and cranny. I see that the Chair is smiling in fond recollection of all of those days we spent on the road together. It was an incredible privilege, not just because we got to hear from experts in Canada about our democracy and how it could perform better, about voting and how to count votes in different ways, but also heard about how much of Europe and most of the world, in fact, had changed over time.

Also, and more importantly, we got to hear from average, ordinary Canadians. We had an online survey. Some 33,000, I think, people participated. We went around and held town halls, and heard from witnesses from each of the provinces, but we also just had an open mic where people could come up for a few minutes and tell us what they thought was needed.

As a parliamentarian, this is the very lifeblood, the very motivation of why we should be here, to have that open access to Canadians. They poured their hearts out to us, talking about voting reforms they wanted to see. They overwhelmingly supported proportional voting systems. That was the evidence that we heard, both from the experts and from the public who came before us.

Then, unfortunately, at the 11th hour, in a most awkward and quite cynical move, the Liberals kind of pulled the plug and, for months, they would not talk about what they wanted to do, what kind of voting systems they were interested in. The Prime Minister had hinted at one out of Australia that he liked, a ranked ballot. However, very early on in the committee process, we heard from experts who said that ranked ballots would not work well in Canada, that it would be a first-past-the-post system but on steroids. It worked very well for a traditionally centrist party, a party that borrowed a bit from all sides at all times. Good gosh, who could that possibly help out? Right, it was the Liberals. That idea was shot down out of the gate.

Then the disinterest of the Liberals in moving anything forward became obvious, to the final point where the then-democratic reform minister got up in this place and slammed the committee itself for failing to do its job. She then became the former democratic institutions minister, because that did not go over well.

● (1115)

Moving forward, we then saw the government taking so much time that it actually blew past the Elections Canada deadline, which was last spring. Indeed, Elections Canada came before our committee and said that if we were going to make any changes to the way elections are run, it needed legislation passed by the House and the Senate last spring. The Liberals said, “right”, saw the deadline and introduced the bill the day after the deadline had passed.

The committee began to work, the Conservatives started a little filibuster, and that took all spring and into the fall, and then the government blinked and they worked out a deal together. It is so nice to see parliamentarians getting together and working things out. The Conservatives and Liberals worked out that there would be more pre-election spending money, thus putting more money into politics. The Liberals were okay with that. Now they are upset again at the Conservatives and so things are returning back to normal, I guess.

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We were just outside the House of Commons talking about the debates commission, which this very same committee had studied as well for quite a while and made clear recommendations, which I have here. The second and most important one is on the leaders' debate, which is an important part of our democratic process. A lot of Canadians watch these debates in French and English and make up their minds as to whom they want to support. However, it got a little tricky in the last election, with leaders not showing up and kind of screwing up the process a bit. Therefore, a debates commission was promised three years ago. However, for months and months, the new Liberal minister of democratic reform told us not to worry, that they were not really consulting with us because they were just going to use the report by the procedure and House affairs committee, PROC. We said, okay, if they followed what PROC studied and recommended, then we should be fine.

The second recommendation states that the leaders debate commissioner must be selected unanimously by all parties in the House. That seems like a good idea. We do not want the person who sets the rules over that important debate to favour one party or another, or to be chosen only by one party and not anyone else, because Canadians would then ask if it were not a partisan appointment, which is not right. It should not be a partisan appointment, especially by just one party, because then we would just watch the democratic reform minister step out in front of the cameras and say that the government has appointed a commissioner, that the government has decided alone and set the terms for who can participate in the debate and that the commissioner it has appointed will set the topics and all of the rules to follow. The Liberals say unilaterally, "Trust us".

On democratic issues, the government seems to have some kind of fundamental twitch that comes up again and again, in that when it comes to the decision between collaboration and working with others versus unilaterally having all the power in its hands, the governing Liberals choose the latter again and again. I do not know why. It is actually quite stupid strategically, because when they make recommendations that are only supported by themselves, they are open to proper accusations of bias, of trying to rig the rules. For heaven's sake, I just do not know why. It is not just for the sake of the spirit of collaboration that we try to work together to try to strengthen our democracy, but if that is not motivation enough, then doing so just for the sake of political strategy is sufficient reason. However, the Liberals do not understand that when they work with other parties and have them support their recommendation, there is just much less controversy out the other end and that Canadians will trust the results more. Yet, time and time again, the Liberals choose to go it alone and then it blows up in their face again and again, and then they want to blame someone.

Here we are with Bill C-76, which is pretty flawed. I mean, 338 recommendations and amendments, a whole bunch of them, came from the governing party itself. They wrote the bill and then had to correct the bill, and then just last night, we voted on more corrections to the corrections of the bill. It is not great that it took them three years to get here, and there were so many fundamental problems in it, and a bunch of things remain uncorrected. I will give one example, and I think it is a good one.

Canadians would worry about someone trying to cheat or steal votes in an election and spending money illegally. Well, how would Elections Canada be able to investigate that? It needs to compel testimony, which the bill includes. However, what the bill does not include, which Elections Canada wanted, is the power to require receipts, cheque stubs, from all of the political parties, as it does for us as candidates. As candidates, if we claim to spend money, we have to demonstrate how the money was spent. Political parties do not.

Well, that is strange. How can Elections Canada do an investigation and find out if something went wrong or if someone may be cheating if it cannot get the evidence? It would be like passing criminal laws in this place where we would strengthen the laws to protect Canadians, but deny the police the ability to gather evidence. We cannot bring a person to trial if we do not have evidence.

However, the Liberals actually had a provision in the bill to require receipts and invoices, but took it out. We tried to put it back in and the Liberals said no. The Chief Electoral Officer said that he needed that ability to catch the bad guys. If someone working in some party office started to cheat and spend money in a bad way, Elections Canada is not going to know, because it will not have the evidence. In order to have an investigation, we need evidence.

● (1120)

Let us talk about getting more women into Parliament. We all remember Daughters of the Vote. It is an excellent program. The government just decided to fund it a little more. Under that program, young women, particularly from each of the ridings across the country, come and occupy these seats, 338 of them. They sit in these seats. Last year they got to question the Prime Minister. They were good. They were tough and fair, but mostly tough.

When we look at our parliamentary situation and whether Parliament reflects what the country looks like, if we were to stand out on the front steps, the first thing one would notice is that there are not a lot of women. They represent 26% of members in this Parliament. In the last Parliament, they were 25%. It went up by one percentage point. At the current pace, we will have gender equity in Parliament in 83 years. The Daughters of the Vote said, "That is not a sufficient timeline, Mr. Feminist Prime Minister. When are you going to get on with this?"

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One of the ways we can all get on with this is to encourage more women and more people of diverse backgrounds to run. That is a good way of doing things. However, like many things in life, we have to follow the money. Therefore, one of the changes we proposed was included in the bill by our former colleague Kennedy Stewart. The Liberals said they liked that bill, but then voted against it. How typical. What it proposed was that when we reimburse parties for spending, which the public very generously does, we should reimburse to 100% those parties that try to present candidates that reflect the country, those parties that have candidates close to parity. The parties that just want to present 100% pale, male and stale candidates would get less money back from the public. It is a form of encouragement to not just mouth the words but go out and try to recruit diversity so that we can have diverse views here. How radical is that? The Liberals voted against that. Instead, they said they were going to allow women to claim child care expenses for 30 days as part of their election spending. They could fundraise on that and get child care for 30 days, as if that were the barrier holding women back from running for office, those 30 days in the 35 days of the actual writ period.

Come on. For an allegedly feminist prime minister—and I say “allegedly” because I do not have a lot of evidence to show that he is—one would think that if he had a proposal in hand that would result in more women over time getting into office, that would be good, unless he is happy with 26%. That seems to be the case, because he recently decided to protect all of his incumbents from nomination races. He just said, “They’re all protected”, which is essentially saying that he would like to have the status quo. I know this because I think there is a Liberal riding association that does not want to have its current incumbent MP represent them again, and the Liberal Party recently told it to step in line or walk out the door. That is love of the grassroots if I ever saw it.

Privacy was a huge part of the conversation that we had with Canadians. New Democrats believe in people’s right to have their personal data private. As we move deeper into the social media world, the Internet based economy, privacy and the protection of privacy become incredibly important in commerce but also in politics. Here is what the rules in Canada say right now with regard to how the parties manage huge databases of information about the Canadian voter. They say nothing. Canadian law says nothing. Therefore, if this is a modernization bill, a once in a generation attempt to make our elections free and fair and to protect our sacred democracy here in Canada, one would think that because it is 2018, we would have something in here about that data and protecting Canadians’ rights.

Here is the threat that we have seen exposed. It is not an imagined threat. Has anyone heard of Cambridge Analytica? People from Cambridge Analytica approached a number of MPs in the last Parliament, me included, and said that we should hire them because they could help us harvest data from our social media sites, from Twitter and Facebook. They said they would find out their associated email addresses, something one cannot normally do. If someone likes us on Facebook, then they like us on Facebook. That is no big deal. However, we cannot find out their email address. They said they would get us those people’s friends as well, that they would be able to micro-target folks who might be associated with them and of interest to us.

For political parties, that is red meat. That is interesting. That opens up whole new worlds. What we can do now with social media is to hyper-target people. The old days of putting out political ads with a sort of scattered approach in appealing to voters are gone. Micro-targeting is where it is at.

• (1125)

The Liberals up until last year prided themselves on being able to micro-target. They said that is how they won the last election. In fact, they hired Cambridge Analytica. They gave a \$100,000 government contract to do what? Has anyone seen the contract? No, because the Liberals will not put it out. They hired the guys who were caught up in a thing called Brexit.

Folks will remember Brexit. Britain certainly remembers Brexit because it is going through it right now. Voters in England were hyper-targeted. Databases had been harvested. Facebook likes and share groups had been manipulated and were only being sent a whole bunch of myths and disinformation about what Brexit meant. The British Parliament has been trying to unravel this thing ever since Brexit happened as to how that referendum vote happened.

I want people, particularly from Quebec, to imagine if in the last Quebec referendum we found out after the fact that the referendum had been tampered with by outside groups and agencies, that a foreign government had gone into the data profiles of Quebecers and targeted them one by one and spread misinformation about the effects of their referendum vote, and we found out after the fact. What would the reaction of Quebecers be in what was ultimately an incredibly close vote as to whether Quebec would seek to leave Canada? Would anyone cast aspersions on the results of the vote whether they won or lost, that whoever had lost would say that the vote was not done fairly? That is what is being said in England.

The U.S. justice department has said that the last U.S. election was tampered with and the current U.S. mid-terms are being tampered with right now through Russian and Chinese online hackers. The threat is real and the threat is now. When we look at this modernization bill and say what protections are we—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: It was 23 years ago.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That is very interesting. The vote was on October 30, 23 years ago. That is fascinating. I wish I had known that before I started talking because that would have made the point even stronger. It was 23 years ago today.

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Elections are happening right now in the U.S. The Democrat and Republican databases had been hacked in the last election. We saw the emails that were being spread about, in that case by Russian agents. The U.S. has warned Canada. In fact, our own secret service agency, the CSE, has warned Canada. The Minister of Democratic Institutions asked our spy agency to look at our democratic process and make recommendations. It reported last summer and said that on privacy, we do not have sufficient protections to protect our democracy. The report the minister commissioned from a Canadian agency said that things are not sufficiently strong.

The Liberal response was to reject every single recommendation that New Democrats put forward to make things better. The recommendations were based on the evidence we heard from the Chief Electoral Officer, from the Privacy Commissioner, from the BC Civil Liberties Association. In fact, there was not a single witness who came forward and said, "Please do not do anything."

Here is what the Liberals offered up in Bill C-76. Every party must now have a statement on its website about privacy. It does not say what the statement is or whether the statement is enforceable or there are any consequences for breaking a promise to Canadians. Whoa, Canadians are quaking in their boots. What strong, tough Liberals they are. We are to put a statement on our website that is not enforceable, that is virtually meaningless. That is what Liberals think is protection of our democratic institutions. My goodness. Come on, they should be serious for once on this.

There was not a single witness at committee who said the status quo is acceptable. In fact, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada said that if there is one area where the bill failed, it is privacy. The Privacy Commissioner said that this bill contains nothing of substance in regard to privacy. These are the experts. These are the watchdogs. These are the people who we trust. We should trust them.

Last night when we voted on these amendments to make things better, to encourage more women to participate, to allow for better protections of our privacy, to allow more enfranchisement, the Liberals rejected them again just as they did at committee. For the life of me I really do not know why. We are meant to work together in this place. We are meant to not have real fundamental disagreements about the rights of Canadians to cast a free and fair vote in our elections. I sure wish the Liberals would back up some of their rhetoric with action.

•(1130)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the member's speech, but I am not sure which conspiracy theory I want to deal with first.

In terms of the choice of the debates commissioner, I fail to see how David Johnston, a former governor general, is a partisan appointment. He is someone who has even moderated debates before.

On the timing of the bill, the member must know that even if a bill has not been passed, something he would know from the hearings at the electoral reform committee, Elections Canada begins preparing in advance of a bill passing. The commissioner even said that during the hearings on electoral reform.

Now I would like to shift to the official opposition's continual focus on electoral fraud. I would like the member's comment on a quote from the book *One Person, No Vote*, which of course is a play on the famous phrase. It is a book by Professor Carol Anderson, who writes, "The most common tool, though, [of voter suppression] are laws around identification: Crackdowns on what can be used as proof of address are often an indicator of suppression."

I would like the member's comments on that quote.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, particularly in the U.S., we have seen the most dastardly forms of trying to suppress certain votes. Sometimes it is done through identification and sometimes it is done through gerrymandering. There are all sorts of tactics that politicians there use, and I would say sometimes politicians here have used. Briefly, around vouching, it has certainly targeted folks who are homeless; younger people, who are more mobile and may not have those pieces of identification readily available; and particularly indigenous voters. Where I live, 40% or so of folks are indigenous, and there is less availability of ID for indigenous Canadians, particularly in rural Canada.

I would caution my friend though on the conspiracy theory comment, because I was very careful with the examples I brought forward. Unless he wants to say that the U.S. justice department is promoting conspiracy theories, or the European justice department is into conspiracy theories, or the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada or the Privacy Commissioner of Canada are into conspiracy theories, that language around this content is not deserving of the debate we are having.

Elections Canada had to make some of these modifications on the fly because the government was so late bringing the bill forward, but the Chief Electoral Officer said that this was not ideal. It is better to have a bill passed in its final form and then act upon it. Imagine if the police were to start enforcing things that were not yet passed into law. This is not good practice. He was forced to do it. Clearly, it was not the first choice.

•(1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always very interesting, enjoyable and exciting to hear my NDP colleague speak. Although we do not generally agree, it can still be inspiring. Indeed, much like the NDP member from British Columbia, I had the privilege of sitting on the electoral reform committee led by the member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Before I ask my question, I would like to remind the House that the 1995 referendum in Quebec took place exactly 23 years ago today. As everyone knows, that vote profoundly divided Quebecers. Perhaps there are people here who voted yes back in the day, but have since changed their minds.

Government Orders

Just a few minutes ago, the Liberal government announced a unilateral decision to appoint someone to oversee televised debates. We do not dispute that individual's expertise in any way, shape or form, but would it not have been better to make that announcement following consultations with the federal political parties?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I also have fond memories of that committee and I like to think that we did good work.

As far as the debate commissioner is concerned, we do not take issue with the person who was selected or his credentials. We take issue with the process. The government selected a name from a list and then asked if we were happy with that selection. It is ridiculous. Even if the candidate were Gandhi, it is not about his qualities or performance, it is about the process.

In fact, the minister promised me and others that she would respect the work of the committee, which recommended that all parties discuss the selection. At the very least there should have been a shortlist of two, three or four candidates. Otherwise, the government has all the say on something as important as the leaders' debate.

This seems to be a pattern with this government. Their principles and morality fall short when it comes to our democracy. This pattern is a threat to everyone because this government is obsessed with power.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member was in the chamber when I posed a question to the Conservative Party about wanting to kill this bill. An opposition party will often vote against legislation, but it does not necessarily mean that in all circumstances it will go out of its way to kill the legislation. The Conservative Party would like to filibuster the debate on this bill and kill this legislation so that it never becomes law. Surely to goodness, the member across the way, with the experience he has, understands that.

On the other hand, New Democrats say we should never use any tools at all in order to pass legislation such as this. Would the member not recognize that if we do not look at the tool box, with the Conservatives committed to never allowing this bill to pass, there is a certain element of hypocrisy or lack of transparency on the part of New Democrats to be arguing that they want the legislation to pass even though it might need some improvements and then say, at the same time, never to use any of the tools that would ensure the legislation does pass?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, normally when it comes to hypocrisy, I would tend to defer to my colleague because he is a bit of an expert on that. I have a whole series of quotes from his lips in this place, saying that the tactic they are taking right now should never be done.

The question is: How did we get here? We got here because the Liberals took so darn long to bring forward the legislation in the first place. Then when they are up against the wire, they are surprised when there is a six-hour filibuster, and they cut a deal with the Conservatives to get it through, and then they apply time allocation. Those are all choices made by members of the government. No one

put a gun to their heads telling them not to bring the bill in for three years. They just chose to do that, and one wonders why. I think they invoke the panic and the deadline. Then when they are past the deadline, they panic and rush it through without debate. They do it again and again. It might be hypocrisy, actually, just from a lack of incompetence. I will let everyone decide.

● (1140)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will start by agreeing with my colleague that Liberal incompetence does breed a certain sense of urgency, but for the Liberals to use that as a tactic is quite wrong. There are a lot of things that need to get fixed and we are worried about them, but to purposely delay, then present something complex and insist that we need to run roughshod over the complexities because of their delay is not a tactic becoming of this place.

On the question of the new debates commissioner, one of the things I find interesting about the process, or lack thereof, is that the government appropriated \$745,000 this year for a process to develop and implement a new debates commission. Presumably, the Liberals included the word "develop" because there was going to be some sort of substantive process that clearly required substantive funds.

I am wondering if the member can speculate as to how that money might have been spent given what appears to be a serious lack of process around appointing a new debates commissioner.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, why three-quarters of a million dollars is being spent on the process to pick the commissioner, I have no idea. I would have paid for the coffee if the minister wanted to come and talk to us, because we do not know the criteria by which they picked the new debates commissioner. We do not know who else was on the list. We do not know what job description they negotiated with the new commissioner. He is a very nice guy. He is smart and has done a lot of work. However, the fact that the Liberals spent three-quarters of a million dollars to unilaterally pick the former governor general, who was kind of just down the road at the time they started this, also begs the question of the \$5.5 million they have attributed to running debates, one English and one French, with podiums, glasses of water and a bit of a backdrop. The sum of \$5.5 million seems to be what the Liberals think that should cost.

The process is messed up. They know it is messed up. The Liberals do this again and again. They delay for two years, three years and sit on their hands on something. Then in the panic and the crisis, they say they would like to work with parties, but they cannot because there is no time available. It is getting weak.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Surrey—Newton.

I recall when the whole issue of amending the Elections Act first arose under the previous government. Ever since that time, the notion of amending the Elections Act seems to have revolved around the issue of voter fraud. All we heard about in the previous Parliament was how new rules needed to be brought into play in order to prevent voter fraud.

Government Orders

Then during debate on this bill, Bill C-76, what has mostly come from the official opposition is again a focus on voter fraud. I wonder if this kind of discourse does not breed an unfortunate misperception on the part of the public as to how our electoral system works. That has been the tack the official opposition has taken. Essentially, their discourse is focused on the issue of the voter identification card.

Ironically, voter fraud is not a problem. It is really a bogeyman.

The only recent incident of voter fraud that I am aware of is the robocall incident in which case a Conservative volunteer, Michael Sona, went to jail for his role in that. I remember campaigning on the last weekend in 2011 when my campaign manager called me in a bit of a panic saying that we were getting calls in our office from people who had gotten calls saying that the location of their voting station had changed. I do not know how many calls were made in my riding but some were obviously made and they were made across the country as well.

I would like to focus on an article in *The Globe and Mail* on the issue of voter fraud. It is an article by Denise Balkissoon, in reference to the U.S. experience, which is relevant because our systems are comparable in many ways. She stated that:

Meanwhile, the threat of voter fraud has always been manufactured. One study that focused on impersonation found 31 provable instances between 2000 and 2014, during which time more than one billion American votes were cast. This August, a Department of Justice investigation into the 2016 election process in North Carolina found that, out of almost 4.8 million ballots, 500 had been cast by ineligible voters. Most were people with criminal records, who didn't know their records prevented them from voting....

Therefore, those people in North Carolina were not attempting voter fraud. They just thought that they had the right to vote, which I guess they did not in that circumstance.

Meanwhile, the focus on voter ID is really motivated by a desire to dissuade voting, to suppress voter participation. I read a quote before, which I will read again, from Professor Carol Anderson, who wrote a book, *One Person, No Vote*, a play on the well-known phrase. She states that, "The most common tool [of voter suppression] ... are laws around identification: Crackdowns on what can be used as proof of address are often indicators of suppression."

By not allowing the voter identification card to be used as ID, the so-called Fair Elections Act made it just a little bit harder to vote, tilting the balance away from voting for some because we know that in some cases people get frustrated if they feel that somehow there is an impediment to going to vote or a minor inconvenience. Some people will decide not to vote in that election. We know that is some of the thinking that occurs sometimes. The Fair Elections Act's prohibition on the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to run programs to encourage voter participation is another example of this attempt in the previous amendment of the Elections Act to discourage voting. Bill C-76, I am glad to say, moves in the opposition direction, in the direction of increasing democratic participation, of expanding rather than reducing the franchise. I will give some examples.

Bill C-76 encourages voting in the following ways.

First of all, it allows the use of the voter identification card once again. It does not mean that individuals can just go to the polling station and show the card and get to vote. They have to prove who

they are with identification. It usually requires a second piece of identification.

• (1145)

A second example of how we are proposing to expand the franchise to vote is by allowing employees of long-term care facilities to vouch for multiple residents, which makes sense. In a long-term care facility there are usually one or two people attending to a number of residents. They know who these people are. They know their families. They know quite a bit about them. It makes perfect sense to allow that person to vouch for multiple residents. It is a common-sense change.

The bill proposes to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to sponsor voter awareness campaigns. To think that somehow the Chief Electoral Officer is advocating for one party over another is one of the conspiracy theories that have been born around the issue of amending the Canada Elections Act.

The bill proposes to create a national register of future voters to get youth engaged in the electoral process early, long before they reach voting age. That makes a lot of sense. I just met an hour ago with students from St. Thomas High School in my riding. They must have been about 15 or 16 years of age. I told them about that aspect of the bill and they seemed quite excited, as did their teachers, around the possibility of registering ahead of time before they reach voting age.

Another example of how we propose to expand the franchise is by expanding the right to vote of one million Canadian expats abroad. It would no longer be required to reside outside Canada for less than five consecutive years nor would it be required that a person intends to return to Canada to resume residence in the future in order to vote.

Last but not least, the bill proposes to make voting quicker and easier by allowing voters to vote at any table in the voting station rather than wait at a specific table.

Expanding the current use of mobile polls during advance polls to better serve remote, isolated or low-density communities is just another example of how we want to make voting easier. We want people to vote. We want to expand their democratic franchise.

We would be making it easier for people with disabilities to vote, which of course is the right thing to do. For example, assistance at the polls is currently only permitted for persons with physical disabilities. Bill C-76 would make assistance available irrespective of disability, in other words, whether it is a physical or an intellectual disability. An elector would be able to be assisted by a person of his or her choosing. Currently that is not possible.

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Many people with disabilities have a particular caretaker whom they know and trust. They would be allowed to have that person help them with voting as opposed to arriving at a voting station and being told the voting station will assign a person to help them out, which can be intimidating to some individuals.

Currently, a transfer certificate is only available for people with a physical disability when the polling station is not accessible. Bill C-76 would make it available irrespective of the nature of the disability and irrespective of whether the polling station is accessible. Further, the Commissioner of Elections Canada would have the flexibility to determine the application process for the certificate in a way that is less challenging for an elector seeking accommodation because of a disability.

The current process for persons with disabilities to vote at home would be extended irrespective of the nature or extent of the disability.

Finally, Bill C-76 proposes to establish a maximum reimbursement of \$5,000 per candidate and \$250,000 for political parties that take steps specifically to accommodate electors with disabilities and reduce barriers to their participation in the democratic process.

I am personally proud as a Canadian of the progressive values in Bill C-76, when it comes to implementing the rights of people with disabilities to participate in the electoral process.

Bill C-76 would strengthen the electoral system against fraud, including in the context of the new digital technologies that we are now seeing can disrupt election results based on the influence of false information and manipulation. In other words, the bill would empower the Commissioner of Elections Canada to seek judicial authorization to compel testimony in order to ensure timely and thorough investigations and it would authorize the commissioner to lay charges.

We are strengthening the bill to protect against voter fraud and we are expanding the franchise. I am very pleased and proud of that as a member of Parliament and as a Canadian.

• (1150)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend the electoral reform committee meeting in Regina and had the chance to get to know my hon. colleague across the way a little better. I want to make two comments with respect to two disappointments in this bill and ask for his comments.

Many of us would say that young people came out to vote, especially young New Democrat and Liberal voters, on the promise by the Prime Minister that 2015 would be the last election to use first past the post. I think that many of those voters, although they would be pleased to see some of the changes within this bill, would be very disappointed to see that the changes do not include that very explicit promise made by the current Prime Minister. I am wondering if my hon. colleague did not also expect more from this bill, given the fact we have waited three years for that change.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, likewise, I enjoyed chairing the committee with the hon. member present in Regina especially.

I will address the issue around electoral reform. I chaired the committee. I obviously was at all the hearings. I was part of the process from beginning to end. I entered the process with a very open mind with respect to what kind of system could possibly replace our current first-past-the-post system. What emerged over the course of that process was a realization that there was no consensus in this Parliament, in this House, as to what a best replacement system would be. Indeed, the Liberal Party favoured a preferential ballot. It is no secret that the Conservative Party did not want any change. We know that the New Democrats and the Green Party preferred proportional representation. I remember the Chief Electoral Officer saying that we could make a change without a referendum if the majority of the parties in the Commons agreed on a particular system. However, that was not the case. That I think is really the reason why we did not move ahead with this particular issue.

• (1155)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we put legislation in place, we know that the responsibility of parliamentarians is to protect our democratic system in Canada. It is a system that we hold very dear to our hearts. It helps us to function as the society we enjoy, as the country we enjoy and call home and invite others into to also call home with us. Protecting that democracy means that elections must be fair. They must be set up in such a way that one vote counts equally to another.

Under the changes put in place by the Liberals, there would be the ability for someone to come and present an identification card as a form of ID. In the last election in 2015, we know from Elections Canada that 16% of these cards were sent out in an incorrect way. They went to the wrong address, they went to the wrong person, they went to a non-citizen or an individual received multiple cards at one location. Therefore, being able to use those cards as an identification mechanism by which an individual is able to vote actually degrades our system, because it means that 16% of those votes are not valid. I would like to hear what the member opposite would say in response to that.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, this is the point I was making at the beginning of my speech, which is that the party opposite has branded the amending of the Canada Elections Act as an issue of voter fraud. We know that when people get to the polls they have to establish their identity and a voter information card by itself would not suffice. However, if there was such a problem with voter identification cards, we would see cases of voter fraud. We have not seen any. The only cases of voter fraud we have seen have involved the robocall scandal that took place under the previous government. I reiterate the quote that I read before, which is that a billion American votes were cast between 2000 and 2014 and there were only 31 instances of impersonation or the belief that someone was trying to impersonate someone else. It is just not a problem.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a good way to start is with something I put in the form of a question earlier today. The Government of Canada has wide support for many of the initiatives in this legislation, whether from New Democratic members, the leader of the Green Party or Elections Canada. We have listened to what Canadians have had to say on the importance of our electoral system in every region of our country. I believe that the minister has done an outstanding job in bringing things together and presenting to the House what is a modernization of Canada's elections laws. We want to see additional strength.

Today, around the world, Elections Canada is recognized for the strong leadership role it plays. In many countries throughout the world, we are often looked to as a country to go to for a better understanding of how we can have independent elections and how well we have done overall as a nation through the independent office of Elections Canada.

The minister brought in the legislation. A healthy debate took place. It went to committee. Unlike under the previous administration, when there were no opposition members listened to and when even Elections Canada was not listened to, we had many amendments. Amendments came from the Conservatives and the New Democrats. We had a great deal of input from the leader of the Green Party. Members on the government side listened to what the stakeholders, in particular Elections Canada, were saying, which led to many government amendments at the committee stage. We now have an even better piece of legislation as a direct result of having gone through that process.

The New Democrats will say that they had a lot more amendments that were rejected. Not all of their amendments were good. Not all of them were rejected. Some of them actually needed further study, and so forth.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, wanted to bring it back to the way it was, and we did not support that, and we believe that Canadians do not support that. The best example I can give was just referenced, and that is the voter card. Canadians across this country are sent in the mail or delivered a voter information card, which has their name and address on it. It tells them where they are going to be voting. A lot of Canadians, including me and my household, retain the card. Many people believe that they can take that card and use it as a form of ID. Why not? Elections Canada does not have any problem with that. Members of the Green Party and members of the New Democratic Party do not have any problem with that. It is only Stephen Harper and the Conservatives.

Even under the new leadership of the Conservative Party, there is no difference. What is the difference between Stephen Harper's party and the new leader's party? I do not know, especially when it comes to some of the legislation. The Conservatives have a problem with Canadians using something that is supplied by an agency, Elections Canada, which is recognized around the world as an independent body. The Conservatives, for whatever reason, do not believe that should be allowed for Canadians, because they do not trust it. Shame on the Conservatives for not recognizing what is a very obvious thing and an important part of democracy.

This legislation would do a great deal in terms of making changes to modernize the process. We are making the electoral process more accessible for Canadians with disabilities, caregivers and members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are restoring voting rights to the more than one million Canadians living abroad.

• (1200)

What I find interesting is that we have the Conservatives, who are very transparent, and we have the New Democrats, who are trying to hide their real political objective. Let me explain that. The Conservatives have demonstrated today, as they did in committee for many hours and days, that not only do they want to vote against this bill, they will do whatever they can to prevent this bill from ever seeing the light of day. It does not take a genius to filibuster a bill. Give me 12 or 14 members, and I could hold up a bill for weeks. It does not take a genius to do that. The Conservatives have made the decision that under no circumstances do they want to see this bill passed.

The New Democrats say that they support the legislation, but under no circumstances should the government use any of the tools to ensure that it is passed. If it were up the Conservatives, this bill would never, ever pass. We would be debating it until after the next federal election. I will give the Conservatives credit. At least they are being transparent. The New Democrats are trying to come across as great democrats, when they have no intention of trying to ensure that this legislation passes. They should be embarrassed, because they consistently try to give an impression that is just not true.

It is not the first time the New Democrats have done that. In their statements, they imply that I have advocated that time allocation should not be used on motions. What the New Democrats are not saying is that on many occasions, when I was in the third party, I stood up and said that at times time allocation needs to be used as a tool. Otherwise, if there were an irresponsible opposition, the government would be prevented from getting the business done that is important to Canadians.

The New Democrats and the Conservatives are asking why we waited so long. We did not wait long. This has been in the process for a long time. We finally got it out of the committee stage. There are other pieces of legislation. The government has had a fairly significant agenda, starting from day one.

On day one, the legislative agenda was the tax break for Canada's middle class, something that both parties in opposition voted against. Today we are talking about giving additional strength to our democratic institution, Elections Canada. In fact, that is what this is doing. I believe that over 80% of the recommendations from Elections Canada are in fact being acted on.

As opposed to recognizing the legislation for what it is, legislation that is very much reflective of what Canadians want to see in terms of electoral changes, legislation that gathers the vast majority of the recommendations from that independent agency, the official opposition wants to go back to the days of Stephen Harper and prevent this legislation from passing at all costs.

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We have the New Democrats playing a game, as if they want to see the legislation passed, but they are prepared to join the Conservatives in supporting a filibuster that would ultimately take it all the way past the next federal election.

I believe that Canadians deserve better. If members want to support and see a healthier democracy, they should not only support the legislation, they should support the idea of getting it passed in a timely fashion.

Elections Canada was very clear on being able to act on the legislation, as we went through the many hours and days of the procedure and House affairs committee dealing with this legislation.

● (1205)

There was a solid commitment by the government to ensure that we modernized the Elections Act. Whether the Conservatives want it or not, we are going to do it, and we hope to continue to receive the support of the Green Party and my New Democratic friends.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that Canadians deserve better, and he is absolutely correct. They deserve better than this mangled bill.

In the past, when parties won elections, they actually had a level of statesmanship and magnanimity in the way they approached things like this in dealing with opposition parties so that they could actually produce a bill that would be fair and beneficial for all Canadians. Instead, the Liberals produced a bill that would basically benefit them.

At the expense of sounding like I am defending my NDP colleagues, and I do not mind doing that on occasion, the member mentioned that they were not transparent. I have actually heard some words from NDP members today that were very transparent.

The member did not mention at all the fact that the bill does not deal with the security of our elections or the fact that our own security agency has warned the government about the ability of foreign interests to manipulate our democratic process. He did not mention the fact that the bill would impede the opposition parties from using the money Canadians have freely, lawfully given to them to use in an election. He did not mention either one of those things. I wonder who is not being transparent.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will not reflect on the individual who posed the question personally, but I will address what he just said as directly as I can.

The Conservative Party, under Stephen Harper, brought in legislation that had no support from other political parties, and when brought to committee stage, the Conservatives did not listen to any opposition, not only from opposition members but from other stakeholders, including Elections Canada, in making the changes they made. I made reference to a specific one that Canadians can really relate to.

Members need to get away from the speaking points and realize that what the member was describing was Stephen Harper when he was the prime minister and the changes the Conservatives made. We have been very—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

● (1210)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am astounded by the parliamentary secretary's speech. When he was in opposition, he said dozens of times that gag orders should never be imposed on members for any bills related to electoral reform, our elections and citizens' rights.

Today, he has changed his mind and done a complete 180°. If this bill is so important, why did the Liberals leave it on a shelf to gather dust for two years and bring it out only at the last minute? That is completely irresponsible.

The Liberals promised to consult all of the other parties before appointing a debates commissioner. Why then did they decide to impose their choice and make a decision on their own, a Liberal decision?

I would like the member to explain what the word “hypocrite” means to him.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what the member fails to tell people is that at times it is necessary to use the tools to get legislation through, because sometimes we get opposition parties that will, at all costs, prevent legislation from passing.

The member across the way has to explain why his party would be prepared, which is what we are hearing from New Democrats today, to never see this proposed legislation pass, because that is what the Conservative Party wants. The Conservative Party does not ever want this proposed legislation to pass.

If we do not follow the advice I gave when in the third party, that at times we need to use the toolbox to get the legislative agenda passed, it would not pass, and we would not be able to modernize the Elections Act.

The member across the way and the New Democrats need to look in the mirror. Do they want it modernized or do they not? I believe, if they want to be consistent, they should support the actions of this government on this issue.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the sake of novelty, I thought I would do my entire speech without yelling or screaming, even once. Let us see if that helps to set the tone for the rest of the debate. I thought it was going pretty well until the last intervention and then we sort of went off the rails.

I want to start by dealing with a couple of things that have nothing to do with Bill C-76.

The first is to draw attention to the poppy on my lapel. There has been a developing tradition here the last couple of years where members will be wearing poppies that are different from the traditional ones put out by the legion. Sometimes they are an aboriginal poppy. Sometimes they have some other significance. The one I am wearing is done by the women's auxiliary at the Perth legion and the funds go directly to the local legion.

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I also want to take a moment to deal with a matter that is near and dear to my heart, as I was unable to do so in any other spot. It is the issue of freedom of religion and the right to worship safely and peacefully. I am speaking of course of the tragedy that occurred last Saturday at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I chaired an all-party parliamentary committee dealing with anti-Semitism and, subsequently, along with the Liberal MP, co-edited a book about anti-Semitism. This is the very worst example of anti-Semitism we have seen in recent years on our continent. Like all members, I speak in solidarity with that.

I want to mention one other thing before I move on from this topic. I learned of this tragedy because I was informed of it by an email sent out by an Islamic group called LaunchGood, which raises money to assist people who face tragedies of this sort. Typically, these are tragedies within the Muslim community. A year ago, I and a number of other people, including some MPs, contributed to the LaunchGood effort to raise money for one of the survivors of the Quebec mosque shooting. This time, it is raising money on behalf of the victims of the synagogue shooting. That is indication of the kind of generosity and spirit we see among the great religions of the world and those who truly believe in their faith.

None of that is germane to Bill C-76, which I will turn to now. I will be splitting my time with the member for Battle River—Crowfoot, who like me is a survivor of the class of 2000. His riding name is more appropriate with time, as all of us who have been here since 2000 are developing deeper and deeper “crowfoots” at the corner of our eyes. It has been a great pleasure to serve beside him and the other veterans.

In dealing with Bill C-76, I will delve into a number of the issues relating to the way the government has pushed all too little on the bill until the last minute and now is in a panic to get it done in time to go into effect for the next election. This has been an unnecessary delay. I will return to that theme if there is time.

However, I want to start by talking about an issue that arose today, which is the proposed amendment to the motion before the House. That is the amendment introduced by my colleague and my New Democratic colleague calling for us to return it to committee so we can deal with the issue of by-elections.

There is a by-election under way now in the riding to my south, where my esteemed late colleague Gord Brown served. He sat in the seat near me. He passed away earlier this year. The Prime Minister took the maximum allowed period of time before calling a by-election for that riding. This means that the people in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes have gone without representation far longer than is appropriate. Shame on the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister has failed to call several by-elections for several vacancies, including the one in Burnaby South, where the New Democratic candidate is the current leader of the New Democrats, Jagmeet Singh. There can be only one purpose in delaying that by-election. It cannot be because the Prime Minister was caught off guard by this or because there is some kind of impediment keeping him from doing this. The former member for Burnaby South, Mr. Kennedy Stewart, our former colleague, resigned on September 14. However, he made public the letter to

the Speaker in which he announced his intention to resign on August 2. He made it clear back in May that he intended to resign. That is now four months in the past. The by-election should have been called immediately.

•(1215)

There can only be one purpose for delaying this by-election. Take account of all the insincere posturing about being a friend of democracy we hear from the Prime Minister of Canada right now. The reason for delaying this by-election is to ensure Jagmeet Singh does not get to take a seat in the House until the last second.

Why would the Prime Minister do this? Because this is an extraordinarily effective tactic for neutering the leaders of opposing parties. We saw an example of just how this works the year I was elected. It was also the year my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot was elected. We were elected November 27, 2000. The election was called, a snap election, in mid-October of 2000. Our former leader, Stockwell Day, was newly elected in a by-election on September 11, 2000. He came to the House, began speaking here, was beginning to bite and have some effect so the prime minister called an election to essentially neuter him before he could become effective.

The Prime Minister can no longer easily affect the date of the election, but he has the ability to delay and delay the calling of a by-election in order to ensure Jagmeet Singh will meet with a similar fate, that he will be unable to come here, advocate effectively for the causes he believes in and start nibbling into Liberal support from the left, just as our leader has been very effective in doing so from the right. That is an affront to democracy.

I do not care how many sincere looks the Prime Minister gives the camera while he explains whatever his ostensible motivation is. The fact is that he is stripping away a vital aspect of parliamentary democracy. There is a real need to deal with this sort of thing, to prevent this sort of misuse, especially when it comes to the election of party leaders to the House of Commons.

We have always had a practice of showing a kind of courtesy. I thought Jean Chrétien was egregious in his abuse and violation in turning away from that practice when he called a snap election in 2000. However, he really does not hold a candle to a prime minister who seems to simply want to hold off the by-election forever. It is wrong, it is always wrong and it is wrong when the Prime Minister does it.

Let me talk a bit the urgency of getting this bill through and the need to use time allocation. The Liberals introduced legislation dealing with elections changes, Bill C-33, in November 2016. Then they never brought it forward. Over a year later, they came out with the replacement for Bill C-33, containing most of what Bill C-33 contained plus some new additions. That is the current legislation, Bill C-76.

The year-long delay is not the fault of the opposition; it is the fault of the government. The government likes to say that the opposition was constantly filibustering in committee and it could not get anything done. The procedure and House affairs committee, on which I sit, met in the spring to deal with the bill and then it met again mid-September when the House resumed.

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An entire summer went by during which this committee did not meet. It could have met. There is nothing stopping a committee from meeting over the summer. Indeed, a couple of years ago, another committee I was on, the committee on electoral reform, met all through the summer. This past summer, a number of committees met. Some of them met several times. This committee could have done that. That is not the fault of the opposition parties; it is the fault of the government.

Going back yet further, the government could have started dealing with this legislation much earlier. Instead, it chose to deal with its electoral reform that would change our electoral system, and there were hearings on it. It delayed that for the better part of a year in order to consume enough time that only one electoral system could possibly be put forward and implemented in time for the 2019 election, which is preferential voting because it does not require redistribution.

At this point, there has been a delay of about two and a half years out of the three years that have gone by so far. All of it is because of the government's own delays. The government has tried to say that it ought to impose closure, limiting debate on a 300-page bill, because we dragged our heels. My response to that is that the government's mismanagement ought not to constitute my crisis nor ought to constitute a crisis for the people of Canada.

• (1220)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to my colleague's closing reflections on the mental gymnastics of the member for Winnipeg North.

The member for Winnipeg North was quick to point out that there may have been times in previous Parliaments, when he was in opposition, that sometimes time allocation needed to be used. However, I will not repeat the quotes, because we put a number of them on record. In the last Parliament, he was very clear that with special respect to bills having to do with modifications to the electoral system, it was a no-go zone. Even if he said that in other cases the use of time allocation might be appropriate from time to time, he was very clear in the last Parliament that on the issue of making changes to the elections process, it was not permissible to use time allocation and that a government unilaterally ramming through changes was not on. There is a little revisionism going on here.

I know the hon. member was in the last Parliament. I wonder if he might offer us the benefit of his experience to provide some reflection on this manoeuvring on the part of the member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, frankly, I am not sure I can add to what my colleague just said. Maybe I should let those comments stand.

However, it lets me draw attention to another matter that I know is very important to my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona as a New Democrat. That is the justification by the member for Winnipeg North and the defence he gave on delaying the by-election, saying that other by-elections had been delayed in the past.

First, I am not sure if the by-election delay for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes was legitimate. I do not see how

the people living directly to my south in that riding deserve to be unrepresented for six months. I do not see how it benefited them or the issues that exist in their riding.

This is a special case. This is a matter dealing with the leader of a party and allowing that party to function fully in the House of Commons. To withhold that by-election is utterly unjustifiable and cannot be justified on any precedent based on any riding in which the candidate will not be the leader of one of the recognized parties.

• (1225)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to debate Bill C-76. I will have a speaking slot later for which I am very grateful.

The timeliness of the intervention from the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston is very helpful for me. I was unable to pose a question earlier for the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, who did a spectacular job as the chair of our parliamentary committee on electoral reform on which both the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston and I both served.

However, I think the member for Lac-Saint-Louis misspoke when he said that everyone knew the Liberals favoured preferential voting and ranked ballots. Our committee was tasked with making a recommendation for replacing first past the post.

I wonder if my friend from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston could confirm my memory, that the Liberals on the committee never put forward to our committee the proposal for preferential voting. They did not put forward any proposal at all.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, that is my memory as well, but it is very clear that preferential voting was the preferred option for the Prime Minister at the start. There is no doubt about that. I wish he had said so openly. It would have led to a very different reaction in the 2015 election, when many voters fled the New Democrats and perhaps the Green Party as well for the Liberals, especially in British Columbia where this was a live issue for the Liberals. When he said that we would move to a different system, the assumption they made was that the different system would be some form of proportional representation. We can get some idea of the legitimacy of preferential voting for a parliamentary system, where every riding tends to replicate the results in every other riding, from the fact that it is not one of the items on the ballot in British Columbia.

Preferential balloting need not be a bad system in the right circumstance. We use it for electing Speaker of the House. I designed that system. I note that in the city of Kingston, through a referendum, which is what we should do before changing a system, the people have agreed to change to a preferential system for municipal elections. Again, there is no party labels in municipal elections. In that situation, it is a good system. I congratulate the people of Kingston on that decision.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

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Today has been one of those days on Parliament Hill. We just had a committee looking at parents who have lost newborn children or during pregnancy. As we sat listening to the stories of those individuals, it brought, I think, most of the committee to tears.

However, this afternoon we are looking at a bill to amend the Elections Act. It shows the broad range of things that happen in Parliament. This morning we saw people who were genuinely affected and now we are seeing a bill brought in place that really, for all intents and purposes, will just give an advantage to the Liberal Party.

I should say, though, that I sincerely regret the fact that many of my colleagues are denied a similar opportunity to speak, given the Liberal government's decision to move time allocation on this bill. Having an opportunity with an appropriate amount of allotted time for MPs to express the views of their constituents is a fundamental principle of democracy upon which the House of Commons is founded. This opportunity is being denied.

It is for this reason that we on this side of the House adamantly oppose the Liberals' blatant, disrespectful manoeuvre. Shutting down this debate is disrespectful to MPs and, more importantly, disrespectful to those Canadians who want to be heard on this issue.

I am confident that Canadians will justifiably punish the Liberal government for silencing them on this very important issue of electoral reform. At the very crux of our democracy are elections and how we facilitate those elections is key, and yet Canadians have had their voices silenced on this.

I am equally confident that Canadians will take great exception to the bill before us today, which leaves our elections wide open to foreign interference. It does so to the benefit to the Liberal Party. It is widely suspected that in the 2015 federal election, Liberal candidates defeated their opponents in several key ridings due to foreign interference.

The speed the Liberals are trying to ram this legislation through Parliament a year before the 2019 election clearly shows their eagerness to once again win with just a little extra help. I firmly believe that every vote cast by a Canadian citizen matters. I will therefore continue to work with my Conservative colleagues to keep foreign entities from undermining our democratic institutions, especially through the very fundamental exercise of elections.

As my honourable colleague from Thornhill pointed out last Friday, Bill C-76 would double the total maximum third party spending amount allowed during the writ period and would allow unlimited contributions by individual donors and others, unlimited spending by third parties and unlimited foreign donations outside the pre-writ and the writ periods. Effectively, this loophole would allow foreign charities to give millions of foreign dollars to Canadian charities, and those millions, as my colleagues stated, can be disbursed as Canadian dollars to third party groups to support and oppose parties and candidates.

Canadians deserve to know where the money for elections is coming from and it is up to the Liberal government to ensure that third party entities are being fully transparent and there is no undue and outside interference. Bill C-76 fails miserably in this regard.

It is also up to the government to ensure that non-resident electors are not treated the same as full-time residents, residents who are impacted in their daily lives by the regulations, decisions and economic realities and red tape of government. The individuals who are living here deal with all of these regulations. Allowing non-resident electors the vote, regardless of how long they have lived outside of Canada or whether they intend to ever return, is simply wrong.

● (1230)

Most non-residents were unable to vote in Canadian elections until 1993, when expats living outside Canada for fewer than five years and who intended to return were granted the right to vote by mail-in ballot. I wholeheartedly agree with the less-than-five-year rule, but obviously the Liberal government does not. Again, I believe that they do not agree because, for all intents and purposes, they are looking for ways to gain an advantage.

As a result, the legislation before us today goes further than simply restoring voting rights to short-term expats, because the Liberals feel it is to their advantage. Under Bill C-76, anyone who has ever lived in Canada would be able to vote. Following the introduction of Bill C-33, Bill C-76's predecessor, as noted in a November 2016 South China Morning Post article, "They would theoretically include most of the 300,000 Canadians who live in Hong Kong, most of whom are returnee emigrants and their children. Huge numbers of Hong Kongers emigrated to Canada ahead of the 1997 handover, but many have now returned as dual citizens."

The article gives the example that when Hong Kong was returned to mainland China, many people came to Canada and other countries. Now, many of them have returned. The same article goes on to express the divergent views of two Hong Kong residents. One, a civil servant close to retirement who spent 11 years in Canada before leaving in 1995, said:

Having the right to vote is an honour, this will motivate me to pay more attention to their political news because I still have family members living in Canada and I will spend more time over there after I retire.

In that article, he said he would vote in Canada at the time of an election if he were allowed to.

The same article made a comparison with a 39-year-old high school teacher in Hong Kong, who was born in Canada, but who said he would not vote, because he said:

I only lived there for 10 years when I was young. I do not know that much about Canadian politics and have not been following closely of their news, so I believe it would be irresponsible for me to vote.

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I would agree with that. It would be irresponsible, as it is irresponsible for the current Liberal government, to lift the less-than-five-year voting restriction and thereby open up the system to abuse. It is irresponsible for individuals who have no idea of the issues, no idea of the candidates and no idea of what is really happening, to put an X when their country and their passion is where they are residing, as was the case with this 39-year-old, for some 29 years.

Another measure in Bill C-76 that would leave the Canadian democratic process open to abuse is the use of the voter identification card as acceptable voter ID. In the last election in 2015, nearly one million erroneous voter identification cards were given out, creating huge potential for voter fraud. I cannot support a bill that has the potential to undermine our highly respected electoral system as a result of voter ID cards being taken as a valid form of identification when we know that out of the 16 million or 17 million people who were eligible to vote in the last election, more than a million of them were given erroneous cards.

• (1235)

What the government is trying to enshrine in this bill works against fair elections. It works against the very principles of democracy. When anyone is willing to take away the rights of someone else to advance his or her own, I would warn Canadians, because if Liberals are willing to take that from someone else, what will they be willing to take from Canadians in the future?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on a theme of today's debate, which is the denial by the member for Winnipeg North that he was very committed in the last Parliament against the use of time allocation on bills that modify the Canada Elections Act. I would ask my colleague what he thinks of the remarks made by the member for Winnipeg North in the previous Parliament, when he said, "We need to recognize that the Canada Elections Act is like no other. It defines the rules that apply when we knock on doors and ask for votes, when we ask Canadians to get engaged and vote. This legislation should be designated such that time allocation cannot be applied to it."

In the context of his remarks today, that sometimes time allocation can be used, I want to know what the member thinks about the fact that we are under time allocation on a bill that has to do specifically with the Canada Elections Act, when the member for Winnipeg North specifically said in the past that bills that amend that act should not be under time allocation. Why does the member think the member for Winnipeg North is trying to justify the government's use of time allocation on this bill today when he very clearly said that bills that amend the Canada Elections Act should never be put under time allocation?

• (1240)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the member. It is hypocritical to be on both sides of the issue, depending on which side of this place one is sitting. It really undermines the value of Parliament and what we do here. We bring forward facts that we hope will convince the government to make changes or to study at committee, but we debate these issues, we question the government and we expect the government to allow every member of Parliament to speak on these things.

I will say this. When we knock on doors or rub shoulders with our constituents, yes, they understand the issue of the legalization of cannabis, the legalization of euthanasia and the immigration issue right now, but they get this, too. Any time we change the way we conduct elections, Canadians are moved by it. There were a few constituencies where we know foreign money was spent and made a difference in an election. Do members not think those constituents were frustrated? Now we have a government that is shutting down debate on it, trying to bring this cone of silence over almost the whole issue of what it is trying to accomplish. It is a sad, sad thing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a very good story is that we have a government that is actually listening and responding to what Canadians in all regions of our country want, namely modernization of the Canada Elections Act, changing many aspects of the unfair elections act that Stephen Harper brought in. The biggest difference is that there is wide support for this legislation that goes beyond one political party, whether it is the NDP or the Green Party. The vast majority of recommendations from Elections Canada have been incorporated in this bill. I will contrast that with Stephen Harper's legislation any day, as I believe Canadians are very supportive of this bill.

I would suggest to my friend across the way from Elmwood—Transcona that if he read further, he would find that I have always indicated that there are times when we need to use the tools we have to advance the government's agenda. We have an opposition party that does not want this legislation to ever see the light of day. If it were up to the Conservatives, this legislation would be debated after the next federal election, and that is not good enough for Liberals. We want to modernize this legislation. Canadians deserve a healthier elections process.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member just contradicted himself. He said Canadians should put all their trust in the Liberal government, the Government of Canada. Then he said that Canadians just have to accept that the Liberals know what Canadians want, that the Liberals have consulted to some degree and they know what Canadians want. Then he turned around and asked a colleague in the NDP did he not believe that the government has these tools to advance the government's agenda. That is exactly what he is doing here.

All the consultation can be thrown out the window. The Liberals have not listened to Canadians. Some Canadians may think parts of this legislation are all right, and I imagine we could find certain parts of it that Canadians would agree with, but when we consulted with Canadians, we found out how bad this bill is, and Canadians want no part of it.

The member said that his government uses closure because it is a tool that it has to advance the government's agenda, and I would probably agree with him.

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● (1245)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame.

I am proud to rise today in support of Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

We are fortunate to live in one of the strongest democracies in the world. We are a nation that is respected for the strength of our human rights, equality and freedom. However, what makes our democracy so robust is the fact that we are willing to continuously look at ways to make it stronger, which is what this bill does.

After a careful review of the Canada Elections Act, the Chief Electoral Officer made over 130 recommendations on ways to improve how our democracy functions. Both the House and the Senate committees have studied these measures in detail. Along with input from experts from across all of Canada, our government has introduced this legislation to modernize the Canada Elections Act. This legislation will bring Canada's electoral system into the 21st century. Bill C-76 will make it easier for Canadians to vote, make elections easier to administer, and protect Canadians from individuals and organizations who would seek to influence their vote.

A key element of this bill reverses the changes made by the previous Harper Conservative government that weakened our elections and made it harder for Canadians to vote. Our open democracy and the right to vote underpin the strength of our country. When attempts are made to weaken our electoral system, it also weakens our nation. What we need is a more engaged electorate, high participation in elections and a fair election process so that the decisions we make in this House are truly reflective of the entire country, and so that voters will have confidence in our electoral institution.

The Conservatives repeatedly made attempts to put their ambition for power ahead of protecting and strengthening the rights of Canadians. This bill will bring an end to that.

As I said earlier, this bill follows over 130 recommendations that the Chief Electoral Officer made after the last federal election, as well as the extensive studies that were done at the committee level. I would like to briefly share what some of those changes are.

First, we are making several important changes that will strengthen our democracy and the faith that Canadians place in these institutions by banning all foreign donations and prohibiting foreign groups to advertise in our elections. We will also extend the pre-writ period so that these outside groups are less able to impact voters closer to elections. There will also be new measures to prevent the publishing of false statements to affect election results and stop political bots from interfering as we have seen happen in other countries.

Second, we are taking action to make more young Canadians participate in our elections. This bill will create a national list of pre-electors so that Elections Canada can pre-register youth aged 14 to 17 to vote.

● (1250)

Elections Canada will administer the list and sign up young people to receive information about voting until they reach voting age. In fact, this week, my son, who is 14 years old, was asking me questions regarding the electoral process. He and his classmates were debating two different issues. His entire class is very well engaged with what is happening on the federal scene and also on the provincial scene. This will help individuals like Arjan to participate more and to be prepared, when they turn 18, to vote.

This is a common sense change that all members should support. Our youth are our future. We need to do everything in our power to support and encourage them to vote, and this will do that. There has been much work and study done that clearly indicates if we educate the youth about voting at an early age, they are more likely to vote when they reach voting age. From that point onwards, they will be more inclined to continue to vote.

Third, we are going to eliminate the barriers that the Conservatives put up to prevent Canadians abroad from voting. The previous Harper Conservative government removed the rights from over one million Canadians. We believe that every citizen has a part and role to play in this country, and we need to make sure their voices are heard.

Fourth, on the issue of increasing participation and making it easier for Canadians to vote, through this bill, we will allow Canadians to use their voter information card as a legitimate form of identification at the polls so that individuals are not turned away from voting because of troublesome rules that seek to suppress voters.

Last, this bill will provide a complete modernization of our elections laws, including increasing the time advance polls are open and allowing for special ballot kits to be made available electronically. Advance polling locations will be required to stay open for a period of 12 hours during the four advance voting days.

Making special ballot kits available electronically will allow electors to receive their ballots electronically with instructions as to how to return the printed ballot in a way that will guarantee the integrity and secrecy of the vote.

This bill will also allow electors to vote at any of the tables in a polling station rather than wait at the specific table assigned to their polling division. This will require Elections Canada to introduce a minimum level of technology in polling stations to manage the list of electors.

It will enhance the electors' experience by making voting more convenient and significantly reducing the wait time on election day, as well as during advance polling days.

We believe these changes are important. We are a government that encourages Canadians to participate in the electoral process and seek to build consensus because, as the Prime Minister, the member for Papineau often says, there is more that unites us than divides us.

I hope all members of this House will join me in supporting these common sense reforms that will strengthen our democracy, make our elections more fair and accessible, and in doing so, make our country much stronger.

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• (1255)

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I greatly respect the member, but I have to say that his argument about broadening the franchise to Canadians so that it would be easier for them to vote is a little interesting in his case. The fact is, under the previous regime, he lost in 2011, but under the dreaded Harper regime, he won in 2015. How could it be so terrible if that was the case?

I want to ask him specifically about what the bill would not do. What it would not do is defend Canadian democracy against foreign intrusion. I wonder what he thinks of the fact that many amendments at committee instructed the government to take that into consideration and make that part of the bill. The government decided not to deal with it when, in fact, our own security apparatus, CSIS, said it was a great danger to our democracy. Why is it not included in the bill?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, before I get to the second part of the question, the hon. member asked how I got elected in 2015. There were two strong, different, stark visions in that election. One was the Harper Conservative right-wing philosophy. On the other hand, there were the progressive policies that the member for Papineau, now the Prime Minister, brought his vision. That is the key why Canadians were able to vote Liberals into a majority government and why I was able to get elected in Surrey—Newton.

On the second part, a Canadian citizen is a Canadian citizen, and I can give a perfect example. My brother, who is a Canadian citizen and committed to always make a difference, is working for a Canadian company overseas. He should be allowed to vote, irrespective of whether he is there for five or 10 years serving the Canadian company.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting debate in the House and an honour to participate in that debate. Of course, there were great debates in the last Parliament just as in this Parliament about the nature of the Elections Act that governs our elections. The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, in the course of those debates, had been very critical of the Harper government and the changes the Conservatives brought.

We are always in the market for good ideas about how to improve our democratic system and the Elections Act. One of the ideas put forward by the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader was that the Elections Act should be amended so that time allocation could not apply to it. I wonder if the member agrees with the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader or not.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I take pride when I stand in this House of Commons. When the first election happened, it was a mid-term election for Winnipeg North. I have seen the member for Winnipeg North working day in, day out to represent the desires and hopes of Canadians who live in Winnipeg North, and not only in Winnipeg North. I have had the opportunity to travel with him to India when he was fighting for the rights of his constituents, when he was talking to the consulate general there. In fact, he was in Surrey—Newton recently talking to voters to see how things could be done differently so that we have democracy and work progressively to make a difference in people's lives.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: But do you agree with him?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, from time to time, government has to carry forward its agenda, and that is what we are doing, because we are trying to represent Canadians and their best interests.

• (1300)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how I am going to follow that. It was quite blistering, intelligent and if I do say so myself, something I must surpass. I will try. I do not know if I will have any success, nevertheless we know the Lower Mainland of British Columbia is well represented.

I want to thank my colleagues for bringing forward their thoughts on this. We are into third reading on Bill C-76. We are just about to hand it over the Senate. I hope it gets the acceptance.

For me, this is a journey that has taken place for quite some time. It started for me with Bill C-23 in the last Parliament. At the time, it was called the Fair Elections Act. There was much to-do about the title, of course, and a lot of people made fun of the title. A lot of us felt that it was not fair in many respects. Some changes were made that were certainly acceptable, but for the most part, it was a bill that was troubled in the law. In my humble opinion, here we are now winding back some of the mistakes made in Bill C-23.

There are four main themes in Bill C-76. We are talking about amendments to third party spending, which is very important because third party spending has come up quite a bit in politics throughout the world. The United States grapples with this issue every year, not just every four years. Throughout Europe it is the same sort of situation, where one has to track the third party spending looking at how they plan to affect elections. This bill would substantially address that issue, far more substantially than what has been done in the past.

One of the things being encapsulated in this legislation is the fact that the activities around politics and the things we can spend on are being described. Right now, there are all sorts of ways of communicating with the people. With the onset of polling years ago, now we have push polls, pull polls and all that sort of thing, as well as the fact that we also have social media to contend with. In the past, advertising was held to newspapers, radio and television. Through social media, now there are all types of advertising, and ways to track advertising spending have become much more difficult as well. Therefore, encapsulating all of that in this legislation would go a long way.

For example, in the past we always talked about the advertising issue. Right now, there are three elements in this legislation we must address: election advertising, as I have mentioned; political activities, election activities such as rallies and those sorts of things that must be addressed; plus surveys, finding out the information and bringing it back to the candidate and the campaign, and the expenditures surrounding those.

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The second part of Bill C-76 is reducing barriers to participation and increasing accessibility. To me, the accessibility measures in this legislation are essential. I will get to those in a moment. However, part of this bill would be reducing the barriers to participate, in particular the voter information card, which is something that has come up quite a bit. I will also address that a little later. In terms of modernizing voting services, I mentioned the advent of technology. We are using technology a lot more in all facets of life, not just when it comes to election campaigns. Another element is amendments related to privacy and protecting personal information.

When it comes to third parties, what we would be doing here is broadening the scope of third party activities. A third party would have to register with a CEO, which we feel is necessary. If they spend more than \$500, then they would have to go forward, be registered and would have to be tracked in light of that. We are also talking about spending on advertising, as I mentioned, partisan activities and election surveys.

Now, we would be defining two periods to measure this. There would be a pre-election period and the election period, when the writ is dropped until election day. It is very important to capture what would be happening in the pre-election period in this legislation, because we want to track how it affects the election itself. Third party spending is a big part of that. Foreign prohibition also came up. I have been here 14 years, and this issue comes up substantially when talking about foreign participation in our elections. Now, it is not prolific to the point where it is a major problem, but it could be. The language in this legislation would curtail a lot of that activity.

• (1305)

To be precise, it would be people who do not reside in Canada. It would include corporations that do not carry on business in Canada or are not formed in Canada and groups where the responsible person does not reside in Canada. It defines the entity by which third party spending is done.

I want to move on to another subject that is also encapsulated in the bill that is a step ahead. It is called the register of future electors. There are many jurisdictions around the world, and even within Canada, that look at voters younger than the voting age of 18. They go through the process of registering them so that when they turn 18 it becomes a simpler measure. However, what it really does is incorporate younger people to get involved in the election itself. It is not like when one takes part in an election in school. What they are doing is enumerating themselves to be registered so that when the election arrives they will be far more ready and far more aware of the situation of how one registers to become involved. Let us face it, it is a right to vote. We have a right within our charter, and therefore, to exercise their right these people get to the point where they work up to the age of 18.

There are jurisdictions in Canada that do this right now. They are: Nova Scotia, P.E.I., Ontario and Yukon. Around the world, U.K., New Zealand, Australia and Argentina all partake in registering of younger voters before the age they are eligible to vote.

That is only fair. Within the major political parties in the House one can vote for a leader at 14 years of age. Therefore, if the parties recognize they are incorporating people at this age to vote, then certainly it is incumbent upon Elections Canada, which they agree

with and seem to be as excited about this as much as I am. They too are now involved in the process. That is also something in the bill that was overdue. Now we are embarking upon that.

On accessible voting, amendments to make it easier for those needing assistance to vote need to be improved. We are looking at assistance by friends or relatives to make the process of marking a ballot easier. Vouching in seniors residences would also become easier. The right to vote and the access to vote is an inalienable for Canadians and must be enshrined in legislation. The access to vote must be improved through the Canada Elections Act.

The other part of the disability involves when it comes to spending and how we do this. Money spent on those with disabilities can be included for election expenses but is not part of the cap. Therefore, we can be reimbursed for expenses for those with disabilities, but it does not go toward the overall spending cap. This is the type of legislation that could go a long way. It may seem like a small measure to many of us, but it is not if one is campaigning for someone with a disability.

Clause 5 restores the broad-based authority of the CEO to educate and inform the public. This was an egregious error in Bill C-23, the former Fair Elections Act, when they took that power away from Elections Canada. The problem with it was that Elections Canada was not able to inform the public about voting, the process and the democracy of it. It was basically pigeonholed to one particular part, which was only to youth. There is nothing wrong with that, that will continue, but now Elections Canada would have the ability to go beyond this and bring to the public information about democracy and voting. It would help promote to Canadian citizens above the age of 18 who have not taken part in democracy, and therefore is essential.

The other part is on the voter information card. How many times would I go around and see people with the voter information card on their refrigerator or on the door, waiting for election day? They would take it down to the voting booth as part of their ID and be turned away because it is not ID. To me, that was just wrong. Therefore, I am glad to see we are restoring the voter information card as valid ID. In the past, with Bill C-23, the problem with that legislation in many respects was it was a solution to a problem that did not exist. The problems around the voter information card were so minuscule that they felt it was unnecessary to use. To me, that was an egregious error so I am glad to see that back in all its facets.

• (1310)

Finally, I would like to say I am glad to see that the commissioner of Canada elections has returned to Elections Canada and has been taken out of the public prosecution office.

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Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that we have people with good memories around here. There was an opposition day motion tabled on April 10, 2014 requesting that Standing Order 78 be amended by adding the following, “No motion, pursuant to any paragraph of this Standing Order, may be used to allocate a specified number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act”, and that Standing Order 57 be amended by adding the following, “provided that the resolution or resolutions, clause or clauses, section or sections, preamble or preambles, title or titles, being considered do not pertain to any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act”.

The member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame was the sponsor of that motion. Although the Liberals waited two years to table this bill in this House, I wonder why he completely changed his mind about his own opposition day motion. What happened?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, if I recall, the debate was about changing Bill C-33, doing exactly what it is we are doing right now. That is the whole point of this. The point is to walk back what was done by the former Conservative government.

By the way, members of the NDP agreed with what we were doing at the time. I am assuming they are voting for this legislation for that reason alone.

There are so many egregious things that we wanted to fix and it is all done right here in Bill C-76. The whole point of the thing, as I said before, is that it was the making of a solution to a problem that did not exist. Right now, we are working it back because we truly believe it is an inalienable right for people to have access to vote in our democracy if they are above the age of 18 and a Canadian citizen. That is their right.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague always has intelligent and engaging things to say on this subject and, indeed, on all the subjects which have come across our table at the procedure and House affairs committee. I always find his comments to be a source of insight. It is always a great pleasure to work with him.

I want to ask my colleague about a matter that is not contained in the bill itself but that has been up for discussion today. It is the subject of a proposed amendment to the motion before us today. That is the issue of the by-election in Surrey South which at this point is being delayed, I think unnecessarily. I want to find out if he agrees with me that it is not really appropriate for the Prime Minister to hold off on a by-election in a seat that we knew would be vacant as far back as May when a party leader is a contestant. Does this not effectively strip away the ability of the New Democratic Party to participate fully in the debates of this House and to function as a potential alternative to the Liberals and the Conservatives? His thoughts would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I have never been in a position where I had to make a decision as to when a by-election would be held. I do not presuppose anything of that nature by saying what I would do as opposed to what someone else would do. I think there is a due process for by-elections and I think it is being followed, as it always has been. I even say that in regard to during the time of

Stephen Harper and going back to Paul Martin and so on and so forth.

As far as the party leader is concerned, it seems to me that would be his or her decision, as the case may be, as to when to run. There have been ample opportunities since then. I would only assume that it is a question of timing. It is not one for us to make sure that the timing is good for someone who wants to run in that particular election. Our goal is to make it due process by which the by-election follows when it is ready to be called.

I also want to thank my colleague for his kind remarks. I too feel the same way about him. His insight has always been beneficial. I have read his works as well.

Also, I look forward to the next round at the procedure and House affairs committee.

• (1315)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I do recognize there are members on the government side who are trying to get in on questions and comments. We are going back to speeches on the opposition side now, so there will be ample opportunity to do that. I know members have been quite talkative today and sometimes it is hard to rein that in, but in any case, we will resume debate and make sure that members to my right have an opportunity to get into the debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am splitting my time with the member for Perth—Wellington.

Fair and free elections are the bedrock of our democracy, something which all Canadians can and should be proud of. We all know that every Canadian citizen is entitled to vote and ensuring the fairness of the system is a civic duty that all parliamentarians and Canadians have an interest in. That is why Bill C-76 is so troubling, because instead of strengthening the integrity of our electoral process, it actually weakens it.

What is especially concerning is the proposal to allow voter information cards to act as acceptable voter identification. In the 2015 election, there were serious issues with voter information cards with some one million voter information cards having inaccurate information. That included cases of voter information cards having the wrong name or directing voters to the wrong polling station. There were even cases of voter information cards being mailed to people who were ineligible to vote, which is a very serious matter.

The 2015 election was also not a one-off problem. According to Marc Mayrand, the then chief electoral officer of Canada, these problems were normal and they were in accordance to past history.

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More recently, the Toronto Sun reported that a female asylum seeker who has been in Canada only 18 months was urged by Elections Canada to register to vote. The Elections Canada letter told the woman to register by October 23, saying that registering in advance will ensure she is on the voters list. The problem is the woman should not be on the voters list because she is ineligible to vote. Her husband, who is also not a citizen, said that this is not an isolated incident. He told the Toronto Sun that some friends of his here on work permits have also been urged to register to vote even though they too are ineligible.

Elections Canada continues to have serious issues in ensuring that its information is accurate. It makes absolutely no sense to rely on voter information cards as acceptable identification especially considering there are multiple alternative sources of identification that are readily available and that are not prone to such errors.

Under the current system used by Elections Canada, there are more than 30 acceptable forms of identification. One can use as the sole source of identification a driver's licence, a provincial or territorial ID card, or any other government issued photo ID with an address. In combination, a person could use a health card, a passport, birth certificate, certificate of Canadian citizenship, a bank statement, government statement of benefits, income tax assessment, residential lease or sublease, a utility bill, a label on a prescription container, or a letter of confirmation of residency from a school, shelter, seniors residence or first nation. Those are just a few of the possible options.

This legislation also fails to deal with foreign interference in Canadian elections. All Canadians can agree that foreign influence in any democratic election is a serious concern and we must absolutely forbid it. It is really disappointing that the government would leave such a large omission with respect to its legislation.

Ironically, Canadians probably have heard more about allegations of interference in the 2016 U.S. election than the very real foreign influence that happened in the last Canadian federal election. During the 2015 federal election, left-wing lobby groups, one by the name of Leadnow, with the support of the U.S.-based Tides Foundation, targeted 29 federal ridings and spent scads of money to influence the outcome of our election. The Tides Foundation also provided support for more than 14 other registered third parties.

• (1320)

The problem is that under the current rules this is somehow acceptable due to a loophole in the law. But again, according to former chief electoral officer Marc Mayrand, "Once the foreign funds are mingled with the organization in Canada, it's the Canadian organization's funds. That's how the act is structured right now, and they can use those funds between or during elections."

What this ultimately means is under the current rules, third parties have no limitations on the use of foreign funds during elections. I assure the House that everyday Canadians in my constituency do not think this is acceptable in any way.

I am left wondering why my hon. colleagues across the way are leaving this loophole in place at all. I have a funny feeling this loophole would be a much higher priority for them if the money had not directly benefited them in the last election.

If a registered third party would like to intervene in a Canadian election, it should do so only with money raised by Canadians. This is especially important because of the marked increase in registering third parties and their role in Canadian elections.

Comparing the 2011 and the 2015 elections, registered third parties more than doubled from 55 to 115 organizations and third party advertising spending increased sixfold from \$1.25 million to \$6 million. Instead of tackling this issue, Bill C-76 would actually make the problem worse in several ways.

Under the legislation, third party spending limits during the writ period will be doubled for each registered third party. That also means there is more foreign money that could be used in Canadian elections.

This legislation is also silent on unlimited contributions from individual donors. Donations to political parties now, as we are all aware, are limited to \$1,575 a year. Corporate and union donations, as we know, are banned entirely, as they should be. However, there are no limits whatsoever to donations to registered third parties outside the pre-writ and writ periods and that seems totally wrong. During those periods they can receive unlimited amounts of funding from individuals, corporations and unions, whether foreign or Canadian.

If the purpose of the limits to political donations is to ensure all Canadians can have an equal say in elections, should those contribution limits not be equally applicable to registered third parties? One would think so. By not limiting donations to registered third parties, some donors, even foreign donors, will be able to have significantly larger voices than other Canadians, and that is simply not acceptable.

To put it simply, Canadian elections should be about Canadians, by Canadians and for Canadians. Bill C-76 would not further that goal and should not be supported.

Canadians deserve and demand fair elections.

• (1325)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to let the hon. member know that the allegations that were just made on the floor of the House relating to the organization Leadnow were investigated and dismissed. I was just searching for all of the details. There was an investigation under Elections Canada which found that no foreign money whatsoever was used in the Canadian election by the organization Leadnow.

That is a finding of fact. The member may not like to hear it, but those are the facts.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Mr. Speaker, it is entirely because there is such a big loophole and it is going to remain a loophole. We know that this money was spent, and it is just wrong.

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We hear all the time about the foreign influence in the U.S. election and so on, but this was a wake-up call. There was an editorial in the Liberal-leaning Toronto Star that decried foreign influence in Canadian elections. When the Toronto Star starts getting up on a soapbox and decrying, we know we have a problem. That problem still exists under the legislation and it is not going to be fixed.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the great pleasure of sitting on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform with some of my colleagues in the House. During that time, we heard from many witnesses that, unfortunately, the civics education in Canada is not where it should be in terms of enticing young people to be involved in politics, whether it be participating in politics by voting or presenting themselves as candidates in elections. I did not hear anything in the member opposite's speech with respect to increasing voter participation and interest among our youth in our democratic institutions.

I would like the member's opinion on whether he feels that increasing the registration of young people to prepare them to vote would help increase the presence of younger people here in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, that would be a target market for all political parties. We would all like to have more youth involved, and I believe that they are getting more involved. I go to campus clubs all the time, and they are starting to get involved.

The matter at hand is that the act, as presented, is not going to help youth or seniors or any Canadians. It is still going to allow foreign interference in our elections, and that is a very serious concern. That is a very serious concern that would undermine our absolute democracy. That is far more troubling.

Of course, we would all love to have more youth involved. I would love to see the voting turnout percentage be 90%, which we can all work toward. It starts with education in schools. If there were a more balanced education in schools that considered the right, left and centre arguments instead of merely the left arguments, youth might get more engaged and come out to vote.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask for a quick clarification on the first part of the member's speech, when he spoke about voter cards. I am wondering if he believes, the way the legislation is written now, that a voter card would be the only piece of identification the general voter would need to vote.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Mr. Speaker, that is not the understanding, but the voter card is a very powerful piece of identification. As I pointed out, even Elections Canada says that there have been serious issues in the past with it, so why should we continue to go down that path, when it is so unreliable? It is a major issue. Let us face it. Do we not all want a system that is perfect, with less of a chance for fraud? I certainly want that. I assume that the party across the floor wants that as well, but from the legislation that has been tabled, it does not appear that it is quite as keen on that.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, free and fair elections are a fundamental part of our Canadian democracy. Unfortunately, the entire democratic institutions file has been a failure since the Liberals took office.

One of the greatest promises they made in the last election was that the 2015 election would be the last election under first past the post. There was no asterisk. There was no disclaimer. There was no fine print that said it would be the last election under first past the post unless, of course, they did not get the type of electoral system they wanted that would benefit them, "them" being the Liberal Party.

There was no such asterisk. There was no such small print. Nonetheless, the Liberals walked it back, and they blamed everyone else for their failure. They blamed the opposition. They blamed the committee itself. They blamed the multi-party committee, which came to a general consensus. They blamed that committee, which included Liberal members, for its failure. They blamed the general public for not having a clear consensus on what an alternative electoral system ought to be. However, the failure rests with the Liberal Party. It is, and it continues to be, the Liberal Party's failure.

While the Liberals were failing at the electoral reform committee, they also introduced Bill C-33, which they claimed would implement many of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer following the 2015 election. Here are the facts. Bill C-33 was tabled at first reading on November 24, 2016, nearly two years ago. Today that bill remains at first reading, unmoved and unloved. We have to question the motivation of the current Liberal government in introducing that bill, then allowing it to sit at first reading and never once bringing it forward for debate in this august chamber.

In testimony at committee, when the eminent political science scholar, Dr. Paul Thomas, questioned the very motive of the Liberal Party, he said:

The government's management of this file has been very poor, in my opinion. If [Bill C-33] sits on the Order Paper for 18 months, it says something about the commitment of the government to get this moving ahead

However, that is exactly what has happened. The Liberals introduced legislation for window dressing and allowed it to sit idly by.

There are other failures in the democratic institutions file. Take cash for access, for example, and the ethical lapses of the current Liberal Party when it comes to fundraising. The Liberal government had barely been sworn in when it was already using its ministers to fundraise, using lobbyists who were registered to lobby their own ministers to fundraise from them. Rather than admitting that they were wrong to be fundraising from access to federal ministers, the Liberals tried to legitimize this practice by introducing Bill C-50. Of course, being Liberals, they left a great big loophole, what we call the Laurier Club loophole, allowing their well-funded Liberal donors to continue to have unfettered access to Liberal decision-makers, as long as it happened at Laurier Club events. They might as well have named that clause the Laurier Club loophole, because that is exactly what it is. Rather than dealing with the issue, rather than dealing with the unethical nature of selling access to senior ministers of the Crown, the Liberals simply used legislation to try to legitimize their bad practices.

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The Liberals' failures do not end there. The Liberals even failed in the appointment process for the Chief Electoral Officer, the person in charge of ensuring that our elections run smoothly and appropriately, free from all interference.

• (1330)

The former chief electoral officer, to his great credit and foresight, announced that he would retire early from his position. He announced this in the spring of 2016 to allow whoever succeeded him as CEO to have enough time to get familiar with the job and to prepare for the 2019 election. However, at the end of December 2016, when he formally resigned and retired as chief electoral officer, there was no replacement in the offing. In fact, there was no replacement until this spring, nearly two years after Mr. Mayrand announced his retirement.

Even when they finally replaced the Chief Electoral Officer, they could not do it without failing. The media reported that a new Chief Electoral Officer had been chosen on April 4, 2018. They noted that someone had been selected, that the consultation had been done with the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the third party.

Lo and behold, weeks later, we found out that the original name circulated in both the media and to the opposition was in fact not the new Chief Electoral Officer. Rather, the very competent interim Chief Electoral Officer was appointed as the permanent replacement. I have to wonder how the Liberals could have waited nearly two years to appoint the person who was already doing the job. It is yet another example of the Liberal government's failing on the democratic institutions file.

That brings us to this bill itself, Bill C-76. Both the former and current Chief Electoral Officers were very clear about the need to have this legislation tabled and implemented early so that they could be prepared for the next election. In fact, when the acting, now permanent, Chief Electoral Officer, Stéphane Perrault, appeared before committee, on April 24, 2018, he stated:

When I appeared last February, I indicated that the window of opportunity to implement major changes in time for the next election was rapidly closing. That was not a new message. Both Monsieur Mayrand and I had previously indicated that legislative changes should be enacted by April 2018. This means that we are now at a point where the implementation of new legislation will likely involve some compromises.

What did the Liberals do? They sat on their hands for nearly three years and then finally tabled Bill C-76 on April 30, 2018, the same day the Chief Electoral Officer said he needed legislation fully enacted, with royal assent. The Liberals only introduced it on April 30 and then expected the opposition and the third party to simply roll over and allow this legislation to pass expeditiously.

• (1335)

We cannot ignore the fact that this very debate we are having in this chamber is under the guillotine of time allocation. Frankly, I am shocked, because it was the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister who introduced and supported a motion that would have amended Standing Order 78 so that:

No motion, pursuant to any paragraph of this Standing Order, may be used to allocate a specified number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of any bill that seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act.

Here we are with a bill that has 401 clauses and 352 pages. It is a bill the Liberal Party itself accepted as being flawed by introducing 65 amendments during the committee analysis, because it recognized that despite waiting nearly three years, it was rushing at the last minute to try to get some legislation on the books, and it tried to correct its own legislation this past summer.

We see that work has yet to be done in the Senate, in the other place. I am intrigued to see what amendments it will be relying on to fix some of the concerns expressed about this piece of legislation.

This legislation is flawed, and we will be voting against it.

• (1340)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the member opposite. I think he is more knowledgeable about the bill than a vast majority of people in this Parliament. He expressed this very accurately and cogently, and he cannot use this in his election material.

Therefore, I am disappointed with his speech. He is one of the few people who knows the details, yet he spent his entire speech not making one substantive comment on what was wrong with the bill. It was more crying over spilled milk about past schedules, which is fine.

However, it would be great if he could use his answer to say something substantive about what is wrong with the bill. I know he has a good appreciation of both the positive and negative things in the details of the bill.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, the member for Yukon chairs the procedure and House affairs committee. I have to give him credit. He is an exceptional chair when it comes to a very difficult file and ensuring the committee remains on track, especially during clause by clause. Therefore, I thank him. and I say that legitimately. It is a tough job.

The member asked for a specific example. I will use the issue of foreign financing. We heard recommendations at committee from none less an authority than Dr. Lori Turnbull, who was at one point a senior adviser to the Privy Council Office on democratic institutions. She recommended that there be segregated bank accounts for third parties to ensure that every dime spent in Canada by third parties would be from domestic sources, from Canadian sources that were legally entitled to donate to Canadian political entities, including third parties. The Conservative opposition introduced that amendment and it was voted down. It would have ensured a high degree of transparency and an appropriate usage of funds by a third party to ensure foreign actors would not unduly influence Canadian elections.

That is one major concern. If I had 20 minutes to talk, I could list off a number of amendments that were not approved but ought to have been approved.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his important work on the issue. I want to follow up on his comment about foreign influence in our elections. Working in the foreign affairs area, I find that the government is often dangerously naive about the kinds of threats we see around the world.

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I hear from Canadians, from cultural communities especially, about the number of foreign governments trying to influence the direction of debates on politics in Canada. It is a regular concern and it connects with the reality we see in other countries, where authoritarian regimes and other powers with particular interests want to try to shape the direction of our discussion. At one point, the government seemed to verbally acknowledge this problem, but it failed to put in place some obvious concrete mechanisms that would protect Canada from this kind of influence.

The member spoke about a segregated bank account so money could not be transferred before an election and would then be used during an election. Could he talk more about the naivety of the government when it comes to foreign policy and foreign interference in our elections and what Canada can do to respond to that?

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, a little known fact is that I and my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan went to university together. We were classmates at Carleton University back in the day. Therefore, it is an honour to now be a colleague of the hon. member.

The member talked about the very important issue of foreign influence. We do not want to see the challenges we have seen in other countries around the world being brought to Canada. We would have hoped that the Liberal government would have taken the issue of foreign influence seriously. Our Conservative opposition introduced a number of amendments that would have dealt with this, including one that would have had an outright ban on all foreign funding to third parties that were acting in our electoral process. Unfortunately, those were denied.

However, the government needs to take this issue seriously. It needs to realize that this is not a problem that will go away on its own. In fact, this problem will get worse. A number of amendments introduced by the Conservatives were voted down. They would have added safeguards for things like foreign influence with respect to social media financing and funding to third parties. It is unfortunate, but that was the reality. Now it falls to our opposition to hold the government to account and ensure that there are meaningful safeguards to prevent the foreign influence of Canadian elections.

• (1345)

Mr. John Oliver (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-76, the elections modernization act.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight the importance of the legislation to my riding of Oakville. One of the most significant issues that was raised at the doors in 2015 was how voters felt disenfranchised by the unfair changes to the Elections Act made by the Conservatives. Voters were unhappy with the additional complications and requirements for voting. My office still hears from expats who cannot exercise their civic duty from abroad.

The proposed legislation delivers on the promises our government made to strengthen our democracy. I am proud to stand in support of legislation that would make voting more convenient and more

accessible for all Canadians. Our democracy is stronger when we see the participation of as many Canadians as possible.

The bill includes proposed legislative changes that will reduce barriers to participation for specific groups of Canadians. That includes members of the Canadian Armed Forces and more than one million Canadians living abroad. We are changing the rules for Canadians living abroad by removing the requirements set by the Harper government that non-resident electors must have been residing outside of Canada for fewer than five consecutive years and that non-resident electors intended to return to Canada to resume residence in the future.

It is astounding to me that some Canadian citizens remain unable to vote in our current system despite being fully eligible. It is high time these changes are made to the Canada Elections Act to bring our electoral system into the 21st century.

In my remarks today I would like to focus particularly on the measures contained in the bill, which I believe will help in reducing barriers for Canadians with disabilities and those individuals caring for a young, sick or disabled family member who would like to run for public office. Our legislative process is stronger when we have a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds present in the House of Commons. These measures would help encourage the participation of new voices.

Running for federal office, as I think everyone in the House will agree, is an incredibly challenging effort. On top of the intense demands of a campaign, some of our colleagues from all sides of the House ran for office while raising young children or caring for sick or disabled family members. The additional pressures of this kind of responsibility may make running for office out of the question for many qualified, smart and passionate Canadians. This is a great loss to the House and to our country. By helping Canadians with the cost of care for young, sick or disabled family members, we can help ensure that every Canadian has more opportunity to put him or herself forward to represent his or her community at the federal level.

I look forward to seeing how these changes will bring new and under-represented perspectives to the House of Commons. We as parliamentarians are responsible for creating laws for all Canadians. It only makes sense that the House of Commons is comprised of people who represent the diversity of experiences Canadians face.

I would remind the House that in 2010, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. One of the obligations of the convention is to ensure that people with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. That includes the right to vote and the right to be elected.

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In his report on the 2015 general election, the Chief Electoral Officer noted that electors with disabilities were a growing percentage of the voting population and faced particular hurdles when seeking to cast their vote. Working with an advisory group for disability issues, Elections Canada has developed and researched various tools and procedures to help electors with disabilities cast their vote in secret and as independently as possible. The Chief Electoral Officer has also reported on ways to increase the broader participation of Canadians with disabilities in democratic life, such as attending debates and running for office.

The report of the Chief Electoral Office on the 42nd election was studied very carefully by the committee on procedure and House affairs. Many of its recommendations, agreed to unanimously by the standing committee, are reflected in the bill before us.

Currently, the act provides that assistance to voters by an elections officer is only available to persons with physical disabilities. The act states, for instance, that “The deputy returning officer shall, on request, provide a template to an elector who has a visual impairment to assist him or her in marking his or her ballot.” This bill would make assistance available to electors no matter the nature of their disability, whether it be visual, intellectual or cognitive.

• (1350)

The current act uses the term “level access” to define accessibility at polling stations, for example, providing ramps for wheelchairs. This concept addresses the needs of the mobility impaired. Under the bill before us, “level access” would be replaced by the concept of accessibility, which would include a broader range of difficulties, including vision impairment.

The act would continue to allow the use of venues which would not be accessible, if the returning officer were unable to secure suitable premises. In these cases, electors with disabilities could take advantage of a number of measures. For example, transfer certificates could be made available for electors with a disability. These would enable electors to change the polling station where they would be able vote. Under the current law, transfer certificates are available for people with a physical disability when the polling is not accessible. The amendment in this bill would make the certificates available no matter the nature of the disability and irrespective of whether the polling station would be accessible.

Further, the Chief Electoral Officer would have the flexibility to determine how the process would be applied. People with disabilities would also have an option to vote at home. This bill would expand that option to include any elector with a disability no matter its nature or extent.

The Chief Electoral Officer sometimes undertakes pilot projects to explore better options for providing service to Canadians, such as greater accessibility to the polls. With this bill, we would return to the process in place prior to the Harper government's Fair Elections Act, when pilot projects required the approval of appropriate committees of both the House and the other place rather than the full chambers of both.

The bill would expand the assistance which could be provided by a person of the elector's choosing. Under the current law, the elector with a disability may choose a friend or family member to help him

or her at the polling station. The same support is not available if the elector wants to vote at the office of the returning officer. Under this bill, when voting at the returning officer's office, an elector with a disability could rely upon the assistance of the person of his or her choosing.

Finally, the bill would implement the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendation that would give Elections Canada a more explicit mandate to explore assisted voting technology for the use of electors with disabilities.

I have been detailing the measures designed to remove barriers to voters on election day, but this bill goes further by introducing measures that would help people with disabilities participate more broadly in the democratic life.

Political parties can play an important part in helping persons with disabilities play an active part by making their campaigns accessible. Sign language interpretation could be provided at campaign events, for example. Campaign material could be provided in Braille. A ramp could be installed to access campaign headquarters. However, these come with costs. To encourage political parties and candidates to make these accommodations, the bill would reimburse the cost to make campaign materials and events accessible, up to \$250,000 for political parties and \$5,000 for candidates.

There are other measures in the bill that would encourage more candidates with disabilities or candidates who must care for people with disabilities to run for office. Currently, the additional personal expenses associated with these disabilities must be treated as campaign expenses. Under the bill before us, candidates would have the option to pay with their own funds, including child care expenses and other relevant home care or health care related expenses. The reimbursement rate for these expenses would be increased to 90% and be exempted from campaign spending limits.

I want to commend the Minister of Science and Sport for her work, in partnership with the Minister of Democratic Institutions, to see these important provisions included in the bill.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on a question I asked one of my colleagues earlier. It was about the issue of foreign interference in elections. Seeing news around the world, all members should agree this is a concern and something we should take seriously. In fact, it is something the Minister of Foreign Affairs herself has raised with respect to various issues, for instance, things which have been said about her and her family in messages put out by other governments.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[Translation]***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 40th ADISQ gala was held on Sunday night, and I just want to say how incredibly proud we are of our creators.

It was a night for Quebec to celebrate the rich diversity of its music scene, honouring rising stars like Hubert Lenoir, established artists like Klô Pelgag and legends like Harmonium.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to congratulate all the winners, as well as all the artists and creators working behind the scenes.

We are stronger as a society because of artists who have the courage to put their hearts and souls into their work. I am grateful to them for sharing themselves with us.

In closing, I want to remind all music lovers how privileged we are to have the opportunity to see these talented artists perform live in a vast network of top venues. Let us make the most of it.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien was on Radio-Canada recently expressing his concerns about the erosion of the French language in Canada and Ottawa. Some of my Quebec friends share those concerns.

I would like to reassure all francophones in Canada. Every day I see this language thriving as it enjoys first-rate protections within our institutions. Our government is ensuring that French continues to be valued across the country.

My colleagues and I have not forgotten that French Canadians are one of the founding peoples of our beautiful country. They are an integral part of the Canadian identity.

I invite and encourage all my colleagues and the House, its employees and institutions to continue their efforts to learn, protect and promote the French language in Canadian society.

Why did the government not accept a simple fix to this issue, which would ensure there would be segregated bank accounts? If foreign funding is coming in for political activity, then it cannot go into the same bank account that will then be used during an election for third party campaigning type of activities. If we have money from abroad, perhaps from another government with its own hostile or simply distinct interest from Canada, putting money into a bank account that is then to be used during an election period will surely create all kinds of opportunities for foreign influence. A simple meaningful fix would have been to require that separation.

Why did that member's party oppose a meaningful measure to prevent foreign interference in Canadian elections?

• (1355)

Mr. John Oliver: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to strengthening Canada's democratic institutions and restoring Canadians' trust in participation in the democratic process. We believe the strength of our democracy depends on the participation of as many Canadians as possible.

By undoing the unfair aspects of the Harper government's elections act, we are making it easier and more convenient for all Canadians to vote, but we are also strengthening our laws, closing loopholes and bringing more robust enforcement regimes to make it more difficult for bad actors, such as those to which the member referred, to influence our elections.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate for quite some time and hearing the opposition talk about time allocation and the issue with having the Chief Electoral Officer in place at a particular time.

I am hoping that my colleague from Oakville could speak to this and remind hon. members and all Canadians that we used 87% of the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer. We heard witnesses' testimony that amounted to over 100 hours of study of this legislation, where Bill C-23, the unfair elections act, only had less than 50 hours.

I am wondering if my colleague could speak to the dedication that we have put into this piece of legislation.

Mr. John Oliver: Mr. Speaker, Canadians want an electoral process that is more transparent and more accessible, that modernizes the administration of elections and that makes the electoral process more secure. As was commented on, this legislation addresses the work done by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs following the Chief Electoral Officer's report after the 2015 election, as well as the study by the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on third party spending in Canada. This is a very comprehensive bill following extensive consultation.

Statements by Members

●(1400)

[English]

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I have the privilege of honouring a remarkable individual from my constituency. This person has been a pastor for nearly 30 years and has chosen to serve selflessly. He is known for helping families through loss and grief, mentoring youth, training up leaders and opening his home to those in need of a place to celebrate Christmas. He is known for working overseas with the world's most impoverished, for teaching in places like Ethiopia and Egypt, and also for helping to raise a whole lot of money for local initiatives such as the school breakfast program, the YWCA women's shelter, and maternal health care in Ecuador and Nicaragua.

This man has served faithfully as a voice for the voiceless and an advocate for the weak. He is known as a hero to many. As a testament to his love for the less fortunate and his passion to see every child fed, clothed and cared for through an education, he has served faithfully on the board of Compassion Canada for 13 years and tirelessly recruits others to join him in his fight against poverty.

Today, I honour Ian Lawson for his selfless dedication to bettering the lives of others, and I thank him.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to draw attention to the deterioration of human rights currently occurring in Honduras, Venezuela, Guatemala and Nicaragua. As I speak, thousands of migrants from these countries are fleeing to other parts of Latin America and the United States out of fear for their lives and the lives of their children, and to seek a better future. Rampant government corruption and inaction have resulted in protestors being illegally detained, gang violence, torture and sexual violence. Millions are fleeing due to intense food shortages and a severe lack of necessities.

I am proud of our national government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who have condemned Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela for failing to protect their citizens. They have called for the end of all human rights abuses, for the perpetrators to be brought to justice, and for democratic and human rights to be restored and the rule of law followed.

I urge us all to be vigilant regarding what is happening in Latin America. Canada must continue to be a leader on the global stage and condemn regimes that fail to uphold the basic principles of democracy and do not protect the human rights of their citizens.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week dozens of constituents came to my community office. They shared their profound concerns about the sobering report of the inter-governmental panel on climate change on limiting global warming to one and a half degrees.

Canada has a climate plan that falls far short of what science says we need. The latest climate change performance index has Canada ranked a woeful 51st out of 60 countries. That index refers to Canada as one of the largest producers of absolute greenhouse gases, as well as of per capita emissions.

Canada could be a leader in fighting against climate change, but instead we have become an international embarrassment. We must strengthen our international climate commitments and begin to build a 100% renewable energy economy that respects indigenous rights.

Also, there is no way Canada will meet its Paris commitments if it goes ahead with the Liberals' Trans Mountain expansion. We need real leadership to address climate change, and we need it now.

* * *

HICKEY & SONS FISHERIES LTD.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the early morning hours of Friday past, I received the sad news that the fish plant operated by Hickey & Sons Fisheries Ltd. in O'Donnell's had caught ablaze and was lost to the fire. John Hickey and his three sons, Craig, Todd and Keith, have been operating the plant, as well as their own vessel, in the community for more than 30 years. This loss is felt not only in the community of O'Donnell's but across the St. Mary's Bay region, as the plant employed almost 100 people.

On behalf of myself, all my Newfoundland and Labrador colleagues, and indeed our government, I offer our full support for the Hickey family and the community of O'Donnell's during this devastating time. Our thoughts are with them today.

* * *

TEGAN AND SARA FOUNDATION

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this evening I am truly proud to be one of the hosts for an event highlighting the work of the Tegan and Sara Foundation. Many colleagues will know Tegan and Sara as the Canadian indie band composed of twin sisters Tegan Quin and Sara Quin. They are amazing musicians and songwriters whom I have had the opportunity to see perform several times.

Statements by Members

Tonight we shine a light on the Tegan and Sara Foundation, which fights for health, economic justice and representation for LGBTQ girls and women. The foundation raises awareness and funds to address the inequalities currently preventing LGBTQ girls and women from reaching their full potential. This work is critically important because LGBTQ women have higher rates of gynecological cancer, depression, obesity, suicide, and tobacco and alcohol abuse. Discrimination, provider bias, and exclusions from insurance and health coverage mean that LGBTQ women are struggling.

I invite my colleagues to join me tonight to celebrate this important work from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. in room 410 of the Wellington Building.

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● (1405)

*[Translation]***CANADIAN FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY**

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unsurprisingly, recent comments once again demonstrate an ignorance of our francophone communities outside Quebec.

I want to assure my colleagues that the Canadian francophonie is quite vast, diverse, proud and thriving. Our government's recent renewing of the official languages regulations is evidence of that.

Our communities are incredibly vibrant. In Manitoba, you will hear all kinds of accents, including Franco-Manitoban, Franco-Métis, Franco-European, Franco-African, Québécois and Acadian.

Our immersion schools are seeing record enrolment, and our francophone communities are welcoming thousands of francophiles who are passionate about the language of Molière.

From generation to generation, we have been here. From generation to generation, we will remain.

* * *

A.F. THERIAULT & SON

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, A.F. Theriault & Son is the largest family-run boatyard in Nova Scotia, employing 225 people in the municipality of Clare.

[English]

This shipyard is an industry leader in Atlantic Canada, building state-of-the-art vessels, such as Halifax's new passenger ferries and high-speed unmanned hammerhead craft that are used in navy training exercises in Canada and around the world. Such accomplishments have played a major role in the sustainability of our area's rural communities and have contributed greatly to the region's economic prosperity.

[Translation]

On October 20, I had the opportunity to join A.F. Theriault & Son employees and the entire community in celebrating this company's 80th anniversary.

[English]

Please join me in congratulating A.F. Theriault & Son on this historic year of their 80th anniversary, and wishing them 80 more years of success.

* * *

CALGARY CONFEDERATION

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I was door knocking in my riding and there were still far too many people unable to find work. I heard stories of people remortgaging their homes, exhausting their savings and borrowing from family just to stay afloat.

Calgary is being left behind and neither the NDP nor the Liberals seem to care. We know that pipelines are the safest and most environmentally friendly way for Alberta to get its resources to market, but the NDP have vowed to continue fighting the Trans Mountain pipeline while thousands of oil workers continue to suffer. The Liberals bought one pipeline and promised to build another, but it failed to deliver. More and more of my constituents are telling me that we need a change.

This coming year we will see both a federal and a provincial election in Alberta. When it comes time for my constituents to vote, the failures of the NDP and the Liberals will make their choice an easy one.

* * *

JOHNNY BOWER

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend we recognized one of our most revered residents, the late Johnny Bower, a Canadian hockey hall of famer with the Toronto Maple Leafs who tragically lost his life less than a year ago. Joined by Mr. Bower's wife, son and granddaughter, the City of Mississauga renamed rink 1 at Meadowvale as "Four Rinks" in honour of his legacy.

A part of the Toronto Maple Leafs last four Stanley Cup wins, he was the goalie who created the poke check. He was a great philanthropist and volunteer, and also a mentor in his community to young hockey players. Meadowvale residents filled the rink to show their support. I would like to acknowledge Councillor Pat Saito for being the driving force behind this.

Our riding honoured a great Canadian, and we know this dedication will inspire generations to come.

* * *

NEW BRUNSWICK SOUTHWEST

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell the House about an important recent event in my riding of New Brunswick Southwest.

Statements by Members

Several teams of volunteer firefighters joined together from St. Andrews, St. George's Volunteer, St. Stephen, Western Charlotte Volunteer, Lawrence Station, Oak Bay, Fundy Bay, Eastern Charlotte Regional Fire Service, Simonds Fire Rescue and Hampton Fire Rescue departments, as well as an all-female team made of up volunteer firefighters from Upper Gagetown, Upper Kingsclear, and various other smaller departments. They joined in St. Andrews for a fire truck pull to raise funds for Muscular Dystrophy Canada. Their challenge was to pull a 35,000 pound fire truck across the finish line. As crowds cheered from the sidelines it was the Hampton fire department that pulled ahead and took home the win. Of course, the real winner of the fire truck pull is Muscular Dystrophy Canada. Together, I am proud to say that they raised an incredible \$4,700.

I also want to recognize Blacks Harbour fire chief Dale Shaw for his 40 years of dedicated service.

I congratulate them all.

* * *

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I had the honour of welcoming to Ottawa the mayors of 25 municipalities and those responsible for economic development in the beautiful and vibrant riding of Mégantic—L'Érable. Mine is a typical Canadian riding, with its big city, small towns and even smaller communities, where factories, businesses, farmers, vacationers, hunters and fishers co-exist.

Projects are being carried out across the region. However, there are major challenges and certain tools are needed to make smaller ideas a reality.

It is hard to believe, but cellphone service is not available everywhere in my riding. Too many small businesses are stuck in blackout zones without high-speed Internet access. Many companies are putting off major job-creating expansion projects because of a shortage of labour. The list of challenges is long, and these mayors are here in Ottawa to get answers.

On behalf of my colleagues, I welcome the elected municipal officials from my riding, who did not hesitate to drive for over 12 hours to be here today to help their communities develop. I commend them for their dedication. I am proud to be their MP.

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[*English*]

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many places across Canada held their municipal elections for mayor and council in the past couple of weeks, just as we did in my riding of Northwest Territories. I want to express my gratitude for all those who put their names forward to represent their neighbours and their communities.

Running for election is one of the hardest job interviews, with no guarantee for success, and often coming at high personal cost, win or lose. I know this from experience, as a previous mayor.

Last week, NWT ran up some impressive and historic numbers in municipal elections. The four largest cities and towns have elected female mayors. This means the salutation for over 70% of Northwest Territories residents to use when they address their community leaders is now “Her Worship”. This can only mean good things.

I congratulate all of those who were elected. I look forward to meeting and working with them in the future.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2018 Vancouver homeless count found 2,181 people without a place to call home. This was a 2% increase from last year, and the highest number since the count began in 2005. That is not even counting the people who are couch-surfing. People are living in tents, on the streets, and in parks.

An average one-bedroom apartment in Vancouver rents for \$2,100 a month. Vacancy rates are under 1%. Home ownership is but a dream, with the average detached home in greater Vancouver reaching \$1.7 million.

Meanwhile, both the Liberals and the Conservatives refuse to acknowledge that housing is a basic right. Here is a news flash for both the Liberals and the Conservatives: The need for affordable housing is real and urgent. A national housing strategy that will not see 90% of the money flow until after the next election is absurd. They should flow the money and build the housing now, not after the next election.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been two months since the outrageous news broke that convicted murderer, Chris Garnier, was receiving veterans benefits despite having never served a day in his life. At the time, the minister promised veterans answers, yet no answers came.

When given a chance, every member on the Liberal side of the House voted against stripping Chris Garnier of these benefits. Since then, we have learned that veterans applying for benefits they have earned are being forced to wait months, and sometimes years, for those benefits. We have learned that the Liberal government's pension scheme is a shell game, and if people challenge the government on it, like Sean Bruyey did, it will send in high-priced lawyers to shut them up.

Susan and Dwight Campbell, the parents of Chris Garnier's victim, Catherine Campbell, are still waiting for answers. Enough is enough. The Prime Minister needs to show leadership, step in and revoke these benefits.

•(1415)

[*Translation*]

JUVENILE DIABETES RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members and senators and all parties represented in this place, we warmly welcome all those involved in Kids for a Cure Lobby Day organized by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

[*English*]

Twenty eight young people, aged six to 15, are here in Ottawa to meet members of Parliament and senators to enlighten us about the 24 hours a day, 365 days a year of blood-sugar testing, insulin doses, and the lows and highs of life with type 1 diabetes.

At the same time as raising awareness, these young advocates are here to thank parliamentarians for listening to them and to thank us for supporting the world-leading research conducted by Canadian scientists who are dedicated to turning type 1 into type none.

The juvenile diabetes caucus is truly non-partisan and we welcome new members. On behalf of all my colleagues in the House, we are truly inspired by the courage and leadership in Ottawa this week shown by Kids for a Cure.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

PRIVACY

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, StatsCanada has written Canada's nine largest financial institutions and demanded that they hand over millions and millions of financial transactions by hundreds of thousands of Canadians, and were it not for a Global News report, Canadians would never know that the government was this far into their personal information. They know now and they are appalled.

Will the Prime Minister use his power and direct StatsCan to cease and desist?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is ensuring that the personal data of Canadians is protected. Statistics Canada will use anonymized data for statistical purposes only. No personal information will be made public.

Statistics Canada is actively engaged with the Privacy Commissioner's office on this project and is working with it to ensure that Canadians' banking information remains protected and private.

However, high-quality and timely data are critical to ensuring that government programs remain relevant and effective for Canadians.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time the government has sought to receive private information from Canadians and not told them.

In October 2017 and January 2018, Statistics Canada demanded that the TransUnion Credit Bureau hand over millions of files to the government, and these were not anonymous. It demanded social

Oral Questions

insurance numbers, names, addresses, dates of birth, detailed credit information, balances owed, balances overdue and 30 other fields of data.

Will the Prime Minister tell Statistics Canada to stand down?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for a lot of Canadians this line of questioning by the Conservatives is all too familiar. For 10 years under them in government, they chose to govern by ideology and not by facts or science. When facts got in the way, they simply stopped collecting them. They fired the chief science adviser and eliminated the long-form census. We brought back both of them.

Statistics Canada is of course engaged with the Privacy Commissioner's office on this project to ensure that the information of Canadians remains protected.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): I want to be very clear, Mr. Speaker.

The Prime Minister is telling Canadians that it is okay for their government to understand all of their financial information held by banks, all of their financial information held by credit agencies, all of their financial information held by utilities and by their mobile phones. Every single thing we use in our lives is something that the current government wants to have its hands on. This is ridiculous.

Will the government tell Statistics Canada to back down from—

•(1420)

The Speaker: The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing here is that the Conservative Party of Canada learned nothing from Canadians in the 2015 election. When we restored the long-form census as the very first thing we did when we took office in 2015, Canadians from coast to coast to coast cheered.

The Conservatives attack data, science and evidence as the grounding of strong public policy. They continue to show they are still the party of Stephen Harper, that they are still the party of a war on science and facts.

The Speaker: Order. I would remind the hon. member for Edmonton Manning and others that the time to speak is when they have the floor, which one would think will happen eventually.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts: Statistics Canada wants to access the information of more than 500,000 Canadians without their consent. It wants to know our bank withdrawals, credit card purchases and even our social insurance numbers.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister told the House of Commons yesterday that he supports this practice that allows the Liberal government to get the personal information of Canadian citizens without informing them.

How can the Prime Minister agree to this request and allow this to happen?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is how. On this side of the House, we have confidence in the Privacy Commissioner.

We always ensure that the personal data of Canadians is protected. Statistics Canada will use anonymized data for statistical purposes only. No personal information will be made public.

That said, Quebecers and all Canadians understand that high quality data is critical to ensuring that government programs remain relevant and effective for all Canadians.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the law is clear. Under subsection 5(2) of the Privacy Act, the government cannot ask for Canadians' personal and confidential information without their permission.

I want to repeat something the Prime Minister said yesterday in the House. He said he was fine with how Canadians' information is being collected without their consent. It is completely unacceptable.

What is he waiting for to change tack, do the right thing and put an end to this situation immediately?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are seeing that the Conservatives learned nothing from Canadians in the 2015 election. They scrapped the long-form census and we brought it back. That was the first thing we did when we took office. Quebecers and Canadians across the country cheered because they know that pursuing policy based on data, facts and information gathered responsibly is the right way to go. They did not want to continue with the old way, Stephen Harper's way, of doing things.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency continues to be the talk of the town for all the wrong reasons. It dawdles endlessly when it comes to the wealthy KPMG clients and other names cited in the Panama papers yet ruthlessly attacks Canadians who receive government benefits but do not have the means to defend themselves. The CRA has recouped more than \$1 billion in five years from audits of 332,000 files, yet it is incapable of processing the 3,000 files on Canadians implicated in the Panama papers a year ago.

Why are the Liberals condoning this double standard on tax justice?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that Canadians receive the tax credits and benefits to which they are entitled. We have made significant progress in getting benefits to eligible Canadians. For example, the CRA now proactively communicates with low-income non-filers so that they can get the money they are owed. After 10

years of Conservative cuts, we will continue to invest in a new client-focused approach.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the problem right there. They are not going to provide benefits; they are going to take them out of people's pockets.

This kind of reminds me of how the Liberals promised to stop subjecting charities to gratuitous audits. It was even included in the minister's mandate letter. Furthermore, this summer, Ontario's Superior Court told them to stop.

Are the Liberals going to stop? No, they are planning to appeal the decision.

Are they going to stop going after Canadians who receive benefits? No, because these Canadians are too easy a target.

Are they going to go after the wealthy individuals named in the Panama papers? They have not done it so far, so why would they start now?

I will repeat my question. Why maintain this two-tier tax system?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, our government is taking meaningful action to ensure that tax evaders and tax avoiders are forced to pay taxes. During our first years in office, we invested nearly \$1 billion to help the Canada Revenue Agency better target individuals who are trying to avoid their responsibilities. We are also in the process of making sure that benefits reach those who are entitled to them, even if they have low incomes and lack the means to apply. That is the definition of a fair system that looks after people.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have seen the egregious holes in our income tax system with the paradise papers, the Panama papers, the Isle of Man scam and offshore tax havens. Wealthy Canadians getting off the hook on paying taxes.

The Liberal government has done virtually nothing to crack down on offshore tax havens, but it has targeted regular Canadians. Under the Liberal government, well over \$1 billion has been clawed back from Canadians, many of whom qualify for the disability tax credit or Canada child benefits.

Why are the Liberals denying benefits to families who deserve them?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to ensuring that Canadians receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled, as we recognize that they are essential for middle-class families to make ends meet.

Oral Questions

We have made significant progress in getting benefits to eligible Canadians. For example, the CRA now proactively communicates with low-income non-filers to encourage them to file so they can get the money they are owed.

After 10 years of cuts under the Harper Conservatives, we will continue to invest in a new client-focused approach.

* * *

BY-ELECTIONS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Liberals should be targeting tax havens, not targeting families.

The Prime Minister made a snide comment yesterday about the NDP when I asked him about the by-elections. It is not just the NDP calling for a vote. It is Canadians.

Today, party leaders from across the political spectrum called on the Prime Minister to show respect to voters. Three hundred thousand Canadians are being denied the right to representation by the Prime Minister.

Will he listen to parties representing 150 members of Parliament and call the vote now?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to go back to the CRA, we have made historic investments to fight against tax cheats. We fully adopted the international standard for automatic information exchange with our partners in the OECD to give the CRA useful data to help fight tax cheats even more effectively. With respect to offshore tax evasion, the CRA is currently conducting audits on over more than 1,100 taxpayers and has opened over 50 criminal investigations.

As for the by-elections, we look forward to calling them soon. I look forward to campaigning against people who are so enthusiastic about the democratic process.

* * *

PRIVACY

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has no right to snoop through the personal financial information of Canadians, yet the Liberals are demanding that credit bureaus and banks secretly hand over comprehensive personal information, bank balances, mortgage payments, online purchases, credit card statements, they want it all. When will they stop this unauthorized surveillance on Canadians?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear day in and day out, when it comes to privacy, when it comes to data protection, this is a priority for this government. With respect to Statistics Canada, it is subject to the Privacy Act, which means that it must ensure compliance with the privacy principles embedded in the act, including the protection of personal information. There is a rigorous and robust process in place. It also engages the Privacy Commissioner as well. Like I said before, we have been very clear. We will always make sure that data and privacy are respected.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, working with the Privacy Commissioner means heeding concerns about privacy for Canadians, not using his office for political cover. One expert has said that the law has never really contemplated anything on this scale. We are not talking about transactions with possible criminal links. These are regular Canadians going about their business and the Liberal government wants to know every detail of their financial lives.

It is 2018, not 1984. When will the Liberals hear the privacy concerns or are they going to continue their plans for an Orwellian intrusion into the lives of Canadians?

● (1430)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear, when it comes to privacy and data, that we will continue to make sure that the processes are followed to protect consent and issues of privacy.

What I find very interesting is the members opposite continue to undermine and attack Statistics Canada. They have a long track record against evidence-based decision-making, against facts, against data. What is their problem with good quality data? That is why the first decision point of our government was to reinstate the mandatory long-form census. This was applauded by Canadians from coast to coast to coast, including Conservative ridings. The members opposite should talk to Canadians.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill will come to order.

The hon. member for Edmonton Riverbend.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, identity theft is not a joke. Millions of families suffer every year. The Prime Minister is putting Canadians' personal information and identity at risk. There is no way to ensure this information will be protected when earlier this year Statistics Canada lost 600 files under his watch. The government has no right to track every financial decision of every Canadian citizen. Will the Liberals cancel this unprecedented and unauthorized surveillance?

Oral Questions

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. We understand the importance of protecting individual privacy and data. Again, I fail to understand why the members opposite continue to undermine a statistical agency that is revered by Canadians. Well over 80% of Canadians respect Statistics Canada. It is a great organization that collects relevant information, that helps communities and businesses, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, with appropriate data so they can make informed decisions. What do members have against good quality, reliable data?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Google and Facebook are reputable organizations too, yet they have had data stolen. The government wants to invade Canadians' privacy.

Considering all the chaos the government has caused over the past three years, how can we possibly trust it?

The Liberal government is planning to access Canadians' personal and financial information without telling them. Our credit card purchases, our cash withdrawals, our bill payments and our deposits belong to us.

When will the Prime Minister stop this unacceptable invasion of Canadian citizens' privacy?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, listen to them: "Data has been stolen".

No data has been stolen. Information has been requested. Statistics Canada makes sure that it follows a process, which is very rigorous and very robust when it comes to making sure it protects privacy and data. It has also engaged the Privacy Commissioner.

Members opposite have a fundamental problem with regards to Statistics Canada. They do not understand the importance of good quality data and of evidence-based policy-making. They have a fundamental ideological problem, and that is very unfortunate.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have 800 pages from just the last two years of times when Canadians' information had been breached by the government. Liberals do not protect data. They lose it, they misuse it and they leak it. Canadians do not trust Liberals when it comes to their information. I would be happy to table those documents after question period.

When will the Prime Minister stop this unauthorized surveillance of Canadians?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. Our government understands the importance of protecting privacy and protecting data. That is why we have engaged in a data and digital consultation process to further build more trust with Canadians when it comes to their data.

Our government understands why it is important to make sure that, in a digital economy when transactions occur online, people

have an understanding about privacy, consent, data ownership and data portability. We are taking additional measures to strengthen our privacy legislation as well.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians just do not trust Liberals with their private information. However, just as importantly, Canadians want to know why the government needs to know who they pay, how much they pay, what they purchase online and what they are giving to their children through e-transfers. Canadians want to know why the government needs to know that and not even tell Canadians they are going to be told about it.

This is Big Brother on steroids. It needs to stop. The Prime Minister has the ability to stop it. Why will he not stop this unauthorized surveillance of Canadians?

• (1435)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, all the appropriate processes were followed. Statistics Canada makes routine requests. It has clear, robust provisions in place to protect privacy, to protect data, to make sure it is anonymized. It has clear processes in place.

Members opposite fundamentally have an issue when it comes to data, because they do not believe in the facts. They do not believe in data. They fundamentally do not believe in making sure that we have a mandatory long-form census.

This is where the disagreement occurs: We support good, quality, reliable data, they do not.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women have been asking for pay equity legislation for decades. The act the Liberals introduced is a step in the right direction, but it includes none of the pay transparency measures advocates have called for.

Will the pay equity commissioner have the resources she or he needs to do the job well? We still do not know.

The Liberals have been making promises for the past three years, so why is there still so much work to do? Most importantly, why are women going to have to wait another four years for pay equity to become a reality?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was proud to stand in this honourable place with my colleague, the Minister of Status of Women, and the President of the Treasury Board to announce that our government will be moving forward with proactive pay equity legislation. This is fundamental to address the wrongs of unequal pay for work of equal value.

Oral Questions

Hundreds of thousands of women will benefit from this action. I am very proud of our government that understands that equity in the workplace is good for all of us.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women have waited 42 years for the Liberals to keep their promise on pay equity. Meanwhile, the unions fought Canada Post 30 years in court, and women's organizations have worked tirelessly to get us to this point to finally have pay equity legislation in the House.

They worked for decades. Women are done waiting. Do they really have to wait another four years in order to have equal pay?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to effective implementation and enforcement of proactive pay equity in federally regulated workplaces. Our pay equity plan was constructed with consultation from employers; yes, from labour; yes, from experts and advocates. That is why we are so sure that this approach is the right one to take.

We are very proud of introducing this proactive pay equity legislation, the first federal government in the history of this country to take this issue seriously.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Well, Mr. Speaker, they say a gaffe is when someone accidentally tells the truth, and yesterday the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment had such a gaffe. I asked him why his government was exempting large industrial emitters from the carbon tax. He said that if they were forced to pay a tax, we “could potentially have jobs leave and it will do nothing for emissions”, which is exactly what our side has been saying: High taxes drive jobs out of the country, global emissions up and do nothing for the environment.

Now that the Liberals agree, will they exempt all Canadians from their carbon tax?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country expect their government to take action to deal with climate change. That is exactly what our government is doing. We are ensuring a price across Canada on what we do not want, pollution, so we can get more of what we want, lower emissions, new business opportunities and more money in the pockets of Canadians.

The Leader of the Opposition is at Queen's Park today getting his marching orders from Doug Ford on Stephen Harper's failed plan to deal with climate change. Canadians expect better from the leader of the Conservative Party.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora will come to order, as well as the member for Banff—Airdrie.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he says now the carbon tax will create business opportunities. Yesterday the parliamentary secretary was saying exactly the opposite. He said that

exempting business from the carbon tax was being done because “The point is to keep jobs in Canada so that emitters do not pollute elsewhere.” We have been saying exactly that. The carbon tax will drive business out of the country to places with poorer environmental standards, killing jobs at home and driving global emissions up abroad.

Now that the Liberals agree, will they not axe the tax?

● (1440)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our plan is clear. We are putting a price on pollution and making life more affordable for Canadians. Climate change is real. Canadians deserve to know their government has a plan to deal with it, something the Conservative Party does not have.

What they do not expect is for the Leader of the Opposition to get ordered around by Premier Ford, who is pushing Stephen Harper's failed agenda of 10 years of doing nothing to deal with climate change. Canadians deserve better.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is upset that our leader is talking to my premier in my province. However, he should go back to his province for a moment and take a look at the new exemption that his government is giving to the Belledune coal-fired power plant, which will receive a 96% exemption on the emissions from the smokestack on that coal-fired plant.

Could he explain why he is charging more to grandmothers driving to get groceries, but almost nothing to coal-fired plants back in his province?

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask members to contain their excitement.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can tell by the excitement on the other side of the House that the members have missed me dearly.

I am so pleased to answer the question. Our government campaigned on a commitment to protect the environment and grow the economy at the same time. Our plan involves putting a price on pollution, including a price on emitters.

If the hon. member wants to talk about the coal industry, I would like to flag that we are actually phasing out coal by 2030. When the hon. member was actually sitting around the cabinet table under Stephen Harper's government, they did not plan to take this action until 2062. That is 32 years with cleaner air, less childhood asthma and a cleaner environment.

If the hon. member wants to get serious about the environment, I will take this conversation any time.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he will take the conversation any time, except for the first two questions.

The CBC has written that the Liberal plan will allow 96% of Belledune's greenhouse gas emissions to pass through its giant 168-metre smoke stack for free.

The Liberals say carbon taxes will save the earth. Why are they taking carbon taxes then off their coal-fired plants?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, in the last election, we campaigned on a commitment to protect the environment, grow the economy and help middle-class families. I am pleased to share with the hon. member that our plan to put a price on pollution applies to heavy emitters as well.

Our plan is actually going to leave middle-class families better off. Stephen Harper's former director of policy said so and we have confirmed that. We have come forward with the details on how New Brunswickers and members of other provinces are going to do under our plan.

I look forward to seeing the hon. member campaign in 2019 on a promise to take money from his constituents to make pollution free again.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, steelworkers are on the Hill this week to put pressure on the government to end pension theft. They were blindsided when the government announced a change to creditor protection legislation without including the measures needed to protect pensions.

The Liberals promised action in their last budget. The NDP has a bill ready to go. All we have to do is pass it.

When will the Liberals listen to reason and protect workers' pensions?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite's very thoughtful question is on an issue that we also think is very important. We support retirement security. That is why we strengthened the CPP, the Canadian pension plan. We also expanded the wage earner protection program. As the member also highlighted, in our 2018 budget, we put a whole-of-government approach when it comes to dealing with pensions in a meaningful way. We are absolutely committed to workers and pensioners.

• (1445)

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about pension theft, not CPP.

A steelworkers delegation is on Parliament Hill this week to remind the government about the need to change Canada's inadequate bankruptcy and insolvency laws. These people understand that under current bankruptcy laws, their pensions could be reduced with a stroke of a pen.

How can the government explain to these steelworkers its failure to protect millions of Canadian workers from the theft of their pensions? How can it explain this betrayal?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pension security is important to our government. That is why in our last budget we committed to a solution to strengthen the pensions. In my mandate letter, I am also pleased to say I have been tasked with this.

Our government has been consulting with stakeholders on this issue for the last number of years. We want to continue to get this right. We are consulting with stakeholders to ensure not that we get any solution, but that we get the right solution. This is a decades-old problem. What government is solving it? Our government is solving it. We are going to get the right solution to this problem.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the all-party women's caucus, I have heard from many individuals and groups in my riding and across the country on the importance of women's participation in our workforce and our economy. Pay equity is one way our government can move the dial toward equality and empowerment.

Could the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, who will be in my riding tomorrow, please update the House on our government's commitment to move forward with pay equity measures?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for her hard work on this issue. Yesterday I was so pleased to announce that our government was moving forward on implementing pay equity legislation. I want to thank the Minister of Status of Women and the President of the Treasury Board for their hard work on this file.

Pay equity is not just the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. When Canadian women can count on equal pay for work of equal value, our economy grows stronger. A strong middle class depends on an economy where everyone has a real and fair chance at success.

I want to thank employers, unions and advocates for the valuable input on our plan.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to undermine democracy in our country by failing to call by-elections for three of the four vacant seats in Parliament. He is picking and choosing which Canadians get representation based upon his own political agenda.

Rather than leaving over 300,000 Canadians without a voice in Parliament, when will the Prime Minister respect democracy and call these by-elections?

Oral Questions

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is such a pleasure for me to get up in the House and talk about democracy. Today Bill C-76 is at third reading. This means that more Canadians in 2019, if it passes through the other place, will have an opportunity to vote than they did under the previous government.

The Canada Elections Act sets out a time period for elections and by-elections. Those will all be called within the time allocated. We are very proud of the upcoming by-election on December 3.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to treat our democracy like his own personal game. He sets the rules and Canadians are his pawns.

Canadians were told today that he had chosen a commissioner of debates for federal elections. He has done this without any discussion or consultation with Canadians.

When will the Prime Minister stop acting like a dictator and start respecting our democracy?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after consulting with Canadians, after round tables organized by the IRPP, after the procedure and House affairs committee conducted an excellent study, and I thank it for its hard work on this, we are so proud to announce that the Right Hon. David Johnston is Canada's first independent commissioner for debates.

This is so important. In 2015 that party's former leader, Mr. Harper, did not participate, did not want to have those national leader debates. This ensures that Canadians will have official debates in English and French, accessible to all Canadians.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals made that appointment without any consultation with the other parties. What the Prime Minister has done is made a unilateral decision to name the debates commissioner, set the rules and spend \$5.5 million to set up the officer of the commissioner, an office nobody was asking for except for the Prime Minister's Office.

The Prime Minister continues to abuse our democracy for his own political gain. Will the Prime Minister abandon his attempt to manipulate and rig the upcoming election?

• (1450)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are so proud that the Right Hon. David Johnston will take on this role to ensure that all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, official language minority communities and Canadians with disabilities will have access to two debates, one in English and one in French, and to ensure all Canadians can see their leaders in a moment that is so important during elections to decide who they want to govern them.

We believe His Excellency, and we know Canadians will see this as well, will be an excellent independent commissioner for debates in our country.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have absolutely nothing against His Excellency Mr. Johnston. I remind members that he was the moderator at the

infamous 1984 debate in which Mr. Mulroney dealt a knockout blow to the Liberal prime minister with his famous quote:

[English]

“We had an option; you had an option.” History repeats itself because the government had an option, consulting or imposing.

[Translation]

Why is the government imposing a solution instead of holding consultations?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there were all kinds of consultations in the past year. We consulted parliamentarians. We consulted Canadians. We consulted media across Canada, and we developed an appropriate plan.

I am pleased that my colleague opposite acknowledges the importance of leaders' debates. It is so important for Canadians to have that kind of spontaneous interaction with their leaders; they are the ones making the decisions, after all. This is excellent for democracy, and I hope everyone in the House will work with the Right Hon. David Johnston to ensure that our debates are—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Vancouver East.

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[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Harper government quietly latched on to an interpretation of sharia law to block international adoptions from Muslim majority countries in 2013. This strange rule applies in countries that do not even follow sharia law. Meanwhile, families like Sarah's are blocked.

It has been six years and Sarah still cannot unite with her adopted son. The orphanage is now demanding that Sarah bring him home or give him up.

Why did the Liberals take three years to just review this bizarre policy? Will the government stop using an interpretation of sharia law for adoptions?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, international adoptions must always protect the safety and well-being of the children, as well as comply with the laws of both countries.

Oral Questions

Harmonizing these laws can be challenging, but the Harper Conservatives did not conduct enough consultations to make sure the provinces and territories, which are responsible for adoption, were on board with the moratorium. They went ahead and cancelled all adoptions from Pakistan, without taking into consideration the generosity of Canadians who wanted to sponsor.

We have asked the department to initiate a review of this policy, with the intent to institute a fairer process.

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CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday on the picket line with Canada Post workers I learned that the company has suspended a number of benefits, including short-term disability payments. Michael Wall, who has been employed at the company since 2004 and has a serious illness, is depending on those payments in order to make ends meet.

For Canada Post to respond to the strike by attacking its most vulnerable workers is cynical and cruel. While the strike is rotating, these cuts in payments are not. Will the minister be complicit in this mistreatment of Michael and those like him or will she get on the phone today and tell Canada Post to back off?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said time and again in the House, we believe in the collective bargaining process. We know this has been a difficult process. That is why last week I took the measure to appoint a new mediator. Both parties are working closely with the new mediator, and they are still at the table collectively bargaining, as they should. We look forward to an update on those talks in the near future.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council investigation into leaks from the Liberal cabinet meetings on shipbuilding revealed that 73 people were aware of the substance of the discussions. Of the 73, most were ignored; some were offered deals; one journalist was offered a job, and only one person is facing trial.

The Prime Minister speculated that Admiral Norman might face charges, and eventually those charges came. Of the 73 people, only one is facing charges. How did the Prime Minister know that only Admiral Mark Norman would be charged?

• (1455)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are obviously outstanding legal proceedings with respect to this matter. As has been explained in the House repeatedly, while those proceedings are outstanding, it is certainly inappropriate for the government to make comment on the proceedings. It is equally inappropriate for the opposition to press questions on that matter, because that has an interference with the judicial process, which members of Parliament are supposed to refrain from.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister says these questions are inappropriate. In the first part of question

period, there was a lot of talk about data protection. Mark Norman wants data for his legal defence. The only protection going on is the Liberals protecting their butts, both literally and figuratively, with Mr. Butts.

Will the government permit the Clerk of the Privy Council to appear before the ethics committee to confirm that none of the materials related to the shipbuilding cabinet discussions have been destroyed, deleted or amended?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the innuendo in the hon. member's question is entirely inappropriate.

The hon. members opposite are not legal counsel. They are not legal agents in the outstanding prosecution. They have no standing with either the defence or the prosecution. They are not parties to the legal proceedings.

All members need to allow Canada's independent court system to do its job without partisan interference.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is time for the government to stop playing hide-and-seek in the Admiral Norman case. We are asking for assurances that the documents Admiral Norman needs for his defence have not been destroyed.

Will the Prime Minister ask the Clerk of the Privy Council to appear before the committee to indicate whether the documents were destroyed, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the innuendo that is buried in that question is absurd.

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[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since we took office, the Minister of National Revenue has been working hard to repair the damage the Harper Conservatives did to client service at the Canada Revenue Agency.

Can the minister explain how the appointment of CRA's first chief service officer will help the agency to meet its client service objectives?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Since 2015, we have introduced a number of initiatives to improve the CRA's services, but we recognize that we can do more. The chief service officer will be responsible for leading the transformation of CRA's service culture using a client-centred, integrated approach.

My top priority is to improve the CRA's services to Canadians, including the people of Scarborough North, so that they are treated as important clients, worthy of respect.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. If the hon. member for Carleton wishes to have a loud conversation during question period when it is not his turn, I would ask him to do so somewhere else.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals said during debate last night that the Minister of International Development has personally raised Canada's concerns about particularly problematic material in Palestinian textbooks with the Palestinian Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, and that she raised it as recently as this summer. If that is true, if the government is aware of and is raising the issue of anti-Semitic content in UNRWA textbooks, then why is it also funding them to the tune of \$50 million?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I travelled to the West Bank last summer. While there, I had the opportunity to visit the UNRWA's facilities and schools and to speak with the principals, teachers and students. I also had the opportunity to talk to the Palestinian prime minister and minister of education.

I also had the pleasure of announcing funding for another organization, Right To Play, which supports education and teacher training in West Bank and Gaza schools.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are breaking their promises.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Families promised to improve EI sickness benefits, but they are not doing anything. Was it all just lip service? I have to wonder.

The Liberals are tabling the budget implementation act with partial reforms to EI, but it does not contain a single measure addressing sickness benefits. They have just one more chance, one more budget, before their term ends.

Are they going to improve EI sickness benefits?

• (1500)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for giving me a chance to remind all members of the House that employment insurance has an important role to play in helping families, especially those struggling to get by, because it is vital that they receive the high-quality services and benefits they need.

I am also pleased to say that since 2015, we have reformed the five existing special benefits and added two others. All these

Oral Questions

benefits, including sickness benefits, now have added flexibility, making them more responsive to families' actual circumstances.

* * *

[*English*]

GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after having band-aid solutions by the Harper government for 10 years, our grain farmers have asked our government for a solution to get hopper cars moving and to get our grain crops to international markets so they can make a living.

I know we listened and took action to address these concerns. Would the Minister of Transport please inform the Manitoba farmers and all Canadians about what he has done to fix the rail system?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for her advocacy for Manitobans.

The Harper Conservatives pretend to be the friends of our grain farmers, but for 10 long years they did not do anything. In fact, when we brought in freight rail legislation to help our farmers and shippers, the Conservatives voted against it.

Our grain farmers and other producers in this country should know that this government has their backs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals waited so long to pass Bill C-49 that it may not even have an effect this year.

Yesterday, the Liberal government proved once again that it has absolutely no understanding of the realities faced by supply-managed farmers.

How can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food justify the fact that the USMCA was signed a month ago, yet farmers are still in the dark?

Yesterday, the minister had a chance to announce how much money is available and how it will be distributed, but no, he is still figuring out how to set up two working groups.

Should he not have set up these working groups before he sacrificed our farmers?

[*English*]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we did exactly what we said we were going to do.

We understand there is an impact on the farmers, and we are committed to fully and fairly supporting them to make sure they can continue to succeed.

We are forming a working group with dairy processors and dairy farmers, and with poultry and egg farmers and processors. Together they will help our supply-managed farmers and processors innovate, grow and remain competitive and sustainable for future generations.

Oral Questions

We will continue to support our supply-managed sector, and every other agriculture— [English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel.

* * *

[Translation]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am quoting the report of the Transportation Safety Board. It says that the slow pace of implementing recommendations perpetuates safety risks. More than 60 recommendations are still outstanding, and a third are more than 20 years old. Ottawa is asleep at the wheel.

What will it take to get the Minister of Transportation to stop playing with Canadians' safety?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the chair of the Transportation Safety Board recognized that Canada has one of the safest transportation systems in the world.

We think so, too. At Transport Canada, our top priority is the safety of all modes of transportation. That will continue to be our focus. We are especially pleased that the Transportation Safety Board removed three major items from the Watchlist yesterday. That is progress.

We will continue our efforts to make our transportation system safer—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister does not seem to have read the report. The Transportation Safety Board was clear. The government is managing safety very poorly, and the oversight regime for federally regulated transportation companies falls short.

In addition, the department is falling unbelievably behind on regulating companies. In short, the transportation safety problem is the department's fault.

When will the Liberals stop playing with the safety of Quebeckers and Canadians?

• (1505)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that transportation safety is extremely important to all Canadians. It is important when they travel on trains or planes and it is also important when products are transported across our vast country.

We take transportation safety very seriously. We are doing everything we can to improve regulations, consult when necessary, and develop regulations that will keep our transportation system safe.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow night, Canadian children will be curious to see what gets into their Halloween bags. Unfortunately, trick or treat remains an apt metaphor for how our federal public servants are compensated under the Phoenix pay system. Tomorrow is also the two-year anniversary of the government's deadline to fix Phoenix.

How many more years will it take for the government to implement a payroll system that pays its workers accurately and on time?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that stabilizing the Phoenix pay system remains my absolute priority. We are seeing progress but it is taking too long.

Public servants deserve to be paid accurately and on time. However, we are seeing progress. We have dealt with 100,000 transactions in the backlog since January. We have 1,500 people working at the pay centre. We have paid out \$1.5 billion in retroactive pay as a result of the collective agreements that were not bargained and were not completed by the previous government.

We are taking every step possible to ensure that our public servants are paid.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I have heard a lot today from the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot who has not had the floor. Maybe tomorrow he will have the floor, but the thing is, if he keeps talking when he does not have the floor, he may not get the floor.

The hon. opposition House leader is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek unanimous consent to table a rather large document. It is actually over 800 pages, and no, it is not the Liberals' omnibus budget implementation act. In fact, it is answers from the government in regard to how many departments, agencies, Crown corporations and other government entities have breached the privacy of Canadians. It is over 800 pages' worth, in less than two years, of when privacy has been breached. I wonder if I would have unanimous consent to table this.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely apologize. It is my mistake. This actually already has been tabled. This is a response from the government. It was tabled on June 8, so it is actually in the record already that the breach of privacy has occurred tens of thousands of times in less than two years.

•(1510)

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER REGARDING LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 18, 2018, by the member for Montcalm regarding an alleged misleading statement made by the Prime Minister during question period.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Montcalm for having raised the matter.

During his intervention, the member for Montcalm argued that the Prime Minister had misled the House by providing inaccurate information when, during question period on October 17, 2018, he said that the provinces had asked the federal government for a period of eight to twelve weeks between the time the bill legalizing marijuana came into force and the substance's actual legalization. This answer, according to the member, contradicts a motion adopted by the National Assembly of Quebec on November 16, 2017, one which the member further claimed the Prime Minister was aware of. The hon. member for Montcalm thus feels that the Prime Minister intended to mislead the House, a contempt that constitutes a breach of privilege.

[English]

The question of whether a member has intentionally misled the House is always a serious one, and the member for Montcalm reminded us of this when he enumerated the three well-established questions the Speaker must answer when deciding whether such an accusation is a valid question of privilege.

Additionally, as I stated during a ruling I made on November 20, 2017, at page 15303 of the *Debates*:

Members know well that in any case in which the veracity of what a member of the House has said is called into question, the Chair's role is very limited to the review of the statements made in a proceeding of Parliament. In other words, the Chair cannot comment on what transpires outside of the deliberations of the House or its committees.

[Translation]

As a result, apart from the Prime Minister's response during question period, the Speaker cannot be officially apprised of anything said to have transpired outside the walls of this place and on which the hon. member for Montcalm is basing his argument.

[English]

As Speaker Milliken said on January 31, 2008, at page 2435 of the *Debates*:

any dispute regarding the accuracy...of a minister's response to an oral question is a matter of debate; it is not a matter for the Speaker to judge.

[Translation]

The proceedings in the House are a forum for differing opinions to be vigorously debated. This is the reason why I remind members to demonstrate the greatest care to ensure that the information recited to the House is clear; doing so will allow everyone to fulfill their roles as they should.

Privilege

Based on the remarks made in the House on October 17, 2018, there is no clear evidence that would lead me to conclude that the criteria for a deliberately misleading statement were met. Accordingly, I do not find that there is a prima facie question of privilege.

I thank all hon. members for their attention.

•(1515)

[English]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege concerning a deliberate attempt by the government to deny me information I requested through Order Paper Question No. 1316. This question read as follows:

With regard to the tweet by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on November 7, 2017, which stated that "Canada salutes Nicaragua and Syria for joining on to the Paris Agreement": what are the titles of all individuals who approved the tweet?

The answer states:

We have been clear: the murderous Assad regime must end the indiscriminate violence against its own people.

The people of Syria deserve a life free from violence. Canada will continue to support the Syrian people in reaching this goal and in achieving a long-term political solution.

Clearly the tweet was a mistake for which the Minister of Environment and Climate Change took full responsibility both through online communications and in the House of Commons.

In addition to this being a non-answer, and the subject of my question of privilege, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that you will find that the response actually breaches the Standing Orders as well, and that is a point I will get to later.

I was contacted last week by Dean Beeby, of the CBC, about an access to information request he had received an answer to. It is in reference to the tweet I referenced in my question. He suggested that his ATIP had turned up the actual document that shows the names and titles of those who were involved in approving the tweet. Mr. Beeby went on to publish this article on Thursday, October 25, 2018, and the article confirms that Mr. Beeby had indeed obtained information from the government through an ATIP that I could not obtain through a legitimate proceeding of Parliament. The article says:

CBC News has obtained documents under the Access to Information Act showing the minister's office gave a final thumbs-up to the tweet 51 minutes before it popped up on [the Minister of the Environment]'s official ministerial Twitter feed last Nov. 7....

The minister noted repeatedly that the social-media misstep occurred on the departmental Twitter account, rather than on her personal Twitter account, suggesting public servants were to blame.

Mr. Speaker, I did suspect all along that this was true as well. Because the government held back these details from me, I could not present the evidence to the House in my role as an opposition member. The article went on to report:

"The tweet in question was approved by the MO [minister's office] at 2:09 p.m. today and issued at 3:00 PM," says an assessment....

The package shows the names of at least 31 public servants involved in the ill-advised tweet. The released documents show the pre-publication vetting was carried out in advance by the department's "social media" and "home" teams, as well as by [the Minister of the Environment]'s office staff, whose names have been removed from the file.

Privilege

Finally, the article points out that the government also violated the timelines set out in the Access to Information Act. Now, that is not your problem, Mr. Speaker, but it does provide you with more evidence of the government's intent to avoid this issue by withholding information from me and delaying information to the media.

I would make one final point. Nowhere in the Access to Information Act does it permit a minister to refuse the names of ministerial staff when providing a response to an access to information request.

I do not begrudge Mr. Beeby the fact that he received an answer, but when a journalist and a member of Parliament ask the same question, one would expect the government to at least give the same respect to the member of Parliament as it gave to the journalist, or put another way, treat a proceeding in Parliament with the same respect as an ATIP.

In this case, I was given debate and an argument for an answer, whereas the journalist was actually given the answer. Not only is this an affront to the House, in so committing this offence, the government also breached the standing order I mentioned earlier. It is Standing Order 39(1), which says, in part:

in putting any such question or in replying to the same no argument or opinion is to be offered, nor any facts stated, except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such question the matter to which the same refers shall not be debated.

On December 16, 1980, at page 5797 of *Hansard*, the Speaker ruled:

While it is correct to say that the government is not required by our rules to answer written or oral questions, it would be bold to suggest that no circumstance could ever exist for a prima facie question of privilege to be made where there was a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an hon. member.

Omitting the information I was seeking in the government's response to my question and providing exactly what I was seeking to Mr. Beeby demonstrates that the government deliberately withheld information from the House.

● (1520)

On page 251 of the 24th edition of Erskin May, it described the contempt as follows:

Generally speaking, any action or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as contempt even though there is no precedence of the offence.

The government keeps repeating the same offence over and over again. After numerous questions of privilege and warnings from the Chair, it continues to deny members information while providing the same or more accurate information to the media.

I think it is important at this time to present to the House a few select examples of when you, Mr. Speaker, took notice of this pattern and heeded a warning.

On April 16, 2016, the Speaker found a prima facie question of privilege after the Leader of the Opposition pointed out that specific and detailed information contained in Bill C-14 was given to the media ahead of this House and members of Parliament. During that

discussion, Speaker Milliken was referenced, from his ruling of March 19, 2001, when he said:

To deny to Members information concerning business that is about to come before the House, while at the same time providing such information to media that will likely be questioning Members about that business, is a situation that the Chair cannot condone.

That is exactly the situation I was facing when Mr. Beeby approached me to comment on information he was given and I was not. While he was not impeded in the performance of his function as a journalist, clearly I was impeded in the performance of my function as a member in this place, which breaches my privileges and constitutes a contempt of this House, as outlined in our procedural authorities.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Milton for her question of privilege, which I will examine, and I will come back to the House in due course.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there have been discussions among the parties, and I would like to move two motions, which hopefully will have unanimous support. First, I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the deferred recorded division on motion M-161, standing in the name of the Member for Saint John—Rothesay and on motion M-155, standing in the name of the Member for Scarborough Centre, scheduled to take place Wednesday, October 31, 2018, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business, pursuant to Standing Order 93(1), shall be deferred anew until later today, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business. And that if a recorded division is requested later today on Bill C-376, An Act to designate the month of April as Sikh Heritage Month, it be deferred until Wednesday, November 7, 2018, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second motion is in relation to the ethics committee, or ETHI. I move:

That, in relation to its study on Breach of Personal Information Involving Cambridge Analytica and Facebook, three members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be authorized to travel to London, United Kingdom, in the Fall of 2018, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments, and of the amendment, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in debate at this point on Bill C-76. I want to take the occasion to start with a bit of a broad historical sweep, albeit going back just to 2014. It is important for Canadians to know what is being accomplished with this legislation and what remains to be done. It is not perfect. I want to stress that, but I will be voting for it. I am also gratified that at least some of my amendments were accepted in the committee that studied the bill.

I want to go back to 2014, when the current hon. member for Carleton was the minister of democratic institutions. He brought forward a bill in that Parliament, Bill C-23, that was given the unlikely title, given its content, of the Fair Elections Act. I was a member of the opposition at the time, as leader of the Green Party, but I struggled with other members of the opposition, the New Democrats and Liberals, to try to stop that piece of legislation because it clearly had less to do with fairness than with trying to create favourable conditions for the governing party, the Conservatives at that time, going into the 2015 election.

Therefore, it is with a great deal of irony that I have heard a number of times Conservative members say that the Liberals are just trying to change the terms to make them better for their party.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

We cannot forget the circumstances in 2014 when the member for Carleton introduced his bill. I hope that this will now be fixed by the changes to Bill C-76.

[*English*]

Going back to what the so-called Fair Elections Act did, it was consumed, as some members of this place still are, with a fiction—and I want to underscore the word “fiction”.

[*Translation*]

It is completely untrue. I want to stress that Canada does not have a problem with election fraud.

[*English*]

We do not have a problem of people disguising themselves, taking voter cards or any number of things that have been hinted at in the

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chamber in the last debate on Bill C-76. We do not have a problem of Canadians voting more than once under assumed identities. We have a problem of Canadians voting less than once. That is a serious problem, and that is why we needed the things that the so-called Fair Elections Act got rid of. These were things like being able to vouch for someone and being able to provide one's voter card as a piece of ID when going to the polls.

None of this would have been necessary if it were not for changes that the former Harper Conservatives made back at the very beginning of their first mandate. For the first time, they made it a requirement that Canadians produce a piece of government issued photo ID in order to vote. That, again, hinted darkly at the idea that people were voting more than once because we did not have enough checks on this problem. It was a non-existent problem then and does not exist now. It never existed. That is the evidence of several chief electoral officers, including Marc Mayrand and Jean-Pierre Kingsley, who both testified to the PROC committee that it was a non-problem.

Bill C-23 did a few other things. It took away some of the abilities of our Chief Electoral Officer to speak to us as voters when we needed information. One of those critical moments was, for instance, the election in 2011. The Chief Electoral Officer sent out a press release and got on the phone and radio. Robocalls were going on. Canadians were being misdirected, being told that their polling stations had changed. None of that was true. We had an investigation. I do not think it was ever adequately investigated. We know it took place, but we do not know who did it. That is a mystery that remains unsolved, but I think we know there was a gun lying on the floor, it was smoking, and several people standing around appeared to have used it. We have no conclusion, but we know for sure that voters who did not intend to vote Conservative were being told to go to polling stations that did not exist.

The Chief Electoral Officer then had the power to get on the radio and say “If you get a message on the phone that tells you it's Elections Canada on the line and your polling station has changed, ignore it. We have not changed any polling stations”. That was important.

What Bill C-23 did in 2014 was to take away the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer to do exactly that. It took away the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer to reassure Canadians that their polling stations had not changed.

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There were a number of other things that the so-called Fair Elections Act did. One was to say that if there were a particularly long writ period, more spending would be permitted. That meant that the really big parties, like the Conservatives or the Liberals, and this was certainly to the advantage of the Conservatives in that election, could spend more money if the writ period were longer. They spent a lot of money. In that election, they spent just shy of \$42 million. The people of Canada gave them half back, because of the way the so-called Fair Elections Act operated to their benefit.

Moving quickly, we had two pieces of legislation tabled in this 42nd Parliament to deal primarily with fixing all of the things that had gone wrong or were perverse under Bill C-23 in the 41st Parliament. In December 2016, we got Bill C-33. I was thrilled to see it, but it never got to second reading. Everything in Bill C-33 was added to Bill C-76, which emerged this year.

Let me just go through the great things that were in the original Bill C-33 and are now before us in Bill C-76. It gave the Chief Electoral Officer back the powers to warn people, to talk to Canadians, and to educate people in a non-partisan fashion. It got rid of the extended period in which parties could get more money out of the whole system. That is now in Bill C-76. It actually shortened up the period and restricted how much money big parties could spend, which means that the taxpayers will reimburse them less at the end, which is great.

The first part of Bill C-33, which has now come forward within Bill C-76, brought back the basics, namely that people are allowed to bring someone with them to the polls to say, "I know Joe. He's my brother-in-law. We live in the same neighbourhood. He's missing a driver's licence because his driver's licence has been taken away from him. I am here to vouch for him." Students voting at university have a very difficult time proving where they live and thus that they have the right to vote.

Far too many people were denied their constitutionally enshrined right to vote in 2015. The Conservatives said that voter turnout went up. Sure it did. Voters were desperate to get rid of Stephen Harper, and they showed up in large droves. However, the reality is that hundreds of thousands of Canadians were denied the right to vote because of the changes to the Elections Act that we are now getting rid of.

What is also really good and entirely new is the concept that the Chief Electoral Officer, that is, Elections Canada, can go into schools and try to encourage 14-year olds to register to vote for when they turn 18. They can start, right away, knowing that they are registered so that they can begin to think about their civic duty to vote.

The lack of voter turnout among our youngest citizens is a real problem. I would love to see us reduce the voting age to 16. That is not in this bill, but a good first step is allowing Elections Canada to go into the schools to talk to the young people when they are in high school. Their civics education will feel far more real when they are personally registering to vote. It is not that they have the right to vote, but they are pre-registered for when they turn 18 and do have the right to vote.

Bill C-76 does a number of other things. I do not think we will ever do enough to deal with the threats to social media, things like

Cambridge Analytica, the way that Facebook information can be mined, the way that Facebook ads can be targeted, and the use of fake news. Bill C-76 attempts to deal with this. I think we are going to have to come back to it and do more. I certainly support what they have done in this bill.

I certainly support having pre-writ election spending limits. This was a big vacuum in our laws. I think it is because the last time we looked at the Elections Act, no political party was spending money pre-writ. They kept their money and started spending it after the writ fell. It was not until Stephen Harper's attacks on Stéphane Dion in January 2007 that we started having attack ads outside of a writ period with no spending controls at all. Now we have spending controls.

What is missing? Here is the big gap. This was our opportunity to put political parties under our privacy laws. This legislation says that political parties must develop privacy policies and table them, but that is a far cry from having them under our privacy laws. It is a voluntary scheme. We need to put political parties under our privacy laws.

Back when Bill C-23 was going through the House in 2014, during clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, I did try to get an amendment passed that would make political parties subject to the Privacy Act. No party supported that then. I really want to thank the New Democratic Party for supporting my amendment, which did not succeed, to set out that parties must adhere to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, PIPEDA. We did not succeed, but I thank the NDP for being with me on that.

• (1530)

We need to keep working for fair elections in Canada. Bill C-76 gets us a long way toward them.

• (1535)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the member's comments in the House, as they are very well reasoned.

I do not want to debate, but to add some facts to make sure that people are clear about them. One is related to the voting card. That card is only a proof of address, so the person has to have identification anyway. If I were to pick up a voting card in Toronto that said "John Smith" and tried to vote with it and then showed my personal identification, obviously it would not say I am John Smith. That is why the Chief Electoral Officer said there was no fraud.

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The second point is related to the robo scandal case that the member brought up. One of the measures in the bill is to withdraw the commissioner from the Public Prosecutions Office and to make him independent again, including giving the commissioner the ability to compel testimony. If there were such cases in the future, the commissioner would not only be independent, but could also compel testimony and actually research those mishaps or inappropriate actions during an election.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the hon. member for Yukon's wonderful work as chair of PROC. It is a tough job and I am not a member of PROC. I am in a strange situation as a result of every committee having passed a motion that if I have amendments, I am required to show up there instead of exercising my rights at report stage. Nevertheless, I really enjoy appearing before PROC during clause by clause, as well from the discretion of the chair in allowing me to ask questions when I show up and it is not during clause by clause.

In the debate today, I have heard ridiculous claims made about the risk to voting and the security of voting if voting cards go astray. The member for Yukon is absolutely 100% correct. There is no threat of someone showing up to vote using a voting card to gain an erroneous privilege.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, toward the end of my friend's speech, she talked about an issue that the committee heard about in great detail from the Chief Electoral Officer and from the Privacy Commissioner. We have seen reports out of the United States and the U.K. about elections or referenda or anything in which a democratic society these days goes through a vote. I say "these days" because what is significantly changed from a generation ago is the existence of the Internet and social media. Time and time again from the Chief Electoral Officer on down, the recommendations were clear that Bill C-76 did not do much of anything on privacy. My friend moved an amendment. It was strong. We moved one that we thought was not quite as strong but that might be more acceptable to the Liberals, and they voted both of those down.

Can the member describe for us what the risks are if the political parties as they are constituted right now have no obligations to protect the private data they collect from Canadians or have no obligations not to then leak that data to nefarious actors or to be stolen. The only thing the Liberals have left in Bill C-76 is that each party must have a non-enforceable statement on their website somewhere. That is the sum total of all the privacy requirements in this bill.

Having watched Brexit and the last U.S. presidential election and all of the threats described by our own intelligence agencies about the risks to our fundamental rights as Canadian citizens, I wonder whether Bill C-76 does enough to address these serious concerns.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I commend my hon. colleague and friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his diligence on this matter. There is a fairly chilling level of information about Canadians that is kept by political parties. Of course, we do not know all of it.

I remember the former Conservative member Garth Turner who published a book called *Sheeple* about his experience as a member of Parliament. He referred to the database held by the Conservative

Party as FRANK, standing for friends, relatives and neighbour's kids. He related in the book how they collected data by going door to door and found out if someone hated a certain party and made note of that. If they found out that a person subscribed to a certain magazine, that information was kept. Canvassers tried to find out as much as they could about everyone, but that was just typical data collection taken to a new level, because now we are also looking at a new capacity to slice and dice the information and computer records. Then parties are able to start targeting riding by riding where the swing voters are.

Add to that the use of Facebook, the ability of the social media providers and others who are hacking into those systems to say they can tell us exactly who responded with likes to Facebook posts and use that information and post fake news that gets people to think they have to vote a certain way to protect something we know they care about. In other words, targeting voters with lies is made possible by keeping political parties from being subject to privacy protection.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lethbridge.

The first thing I want to say is that the Conservative Party believes democracy is an important institution. Democracy is important because it is how the people hold the government to account for its decisions. Democracy safeguards citizens' rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to vote, and other democratic rights. Members on this side of the House believe that each and every Canadian should be empowered to exercise their democratic rights.

We also believe that we must protect our democratic institutions by ensuring that foreign entities do not interfere with our elections. As we have seen elsewhere in the world, such as in the United States, foreign entities have tried to interfere with democratic institutions.

The Liberal government's bill does not include a single clause to prevent foreign entities from interfering with our democratic institutions. For example, even if this bill is passed, foreign entities will still be able to send money to Canadian entities before an election, and that money can be used to influence election outcomes.

Last Thursday, I asked the Minister of Democratic Institutions why the government had not included this type of provision in the bill, but she did not answer.

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In addition, the Liberals complained that we had proposed too many amendments. Apparently, the Liberals are okay with introducing a mistake-ridden bill of more than 200 pages, but not with us proposing so many amendments. That attitude shows that the Liberals do not take democracy seriously and that they do not want to take the time to follow the parliamentary process properly and ensure that we make the right decisions on this important issue.

When it comes to protecting our democratic institutions, we cannot limit debate. On the contrary, when we debate an issue as important as this, we must have as many amendments as possible and more time to debate them.

Moreover, Elections Canada will not have enough time to implement the changes stipulated by this bill. In fact, on April 24, 2018, the acting Chief Electoral Officer, Stéphane Perrault, said that in order for Elections Canada to have enough time to implement these changes, the bill would need to have royal assent in April. We are now October.

If the Liberals were really serious about addressing this issue, they should have introduced the bill much sooner. That way, we could have examined the bill more thoroughly, and we would have had time to present more amendments and study the amendments.

Instead, the Liberals decided to wait until the last minute before introducing the bill. Now they are trying to make up for their mistake by limiting debate on an incredibly important bill.

We seem to cycle through this process over and over again. The Liberal government tables an incomplete bill and then complains when the Conservatives try to make significant amendments to it.

I hope Canadians are aware of this process and see how the Liberals flout their duty to protect our democratic institutions.

• (1545)

[English]

We see with this bill so many problems in terms of the way that the Liberals approached these issues, their hypocrisy and the substantive problems with this legislation. I want to make a number of points in response to some of the things that have been discussed thus far.

First of all, we repeatedly hear this trope from the other side about how Conservatives want lower turnout allegedly and they also say that the changes that were previously made prevented Canadians from voting in the last election.

The government goes on and on about the data and evidence-based policy, though, so let us look objectively at the evidence. Let us look at Canadian elections over the last 60 years. If we consider a 60-year time horizon, a 40-year time horizon and a 25-year time horizon, and compare the elections won by Conservatives and won by Liberals, we will consistently see on average the elections Conservatives win involve higher turnout. As a bright-eyed staffer when I came to Parliament Hill, I was told that Conservatives want more people to vote because it is the right thing when more Canadians vote, but that there is also a practical reason. If we look historically, when more Canadians vote, Conservatives are more likely to win those elections. Anyone who disagrees can look at the numbers and do the averages. It is very clear.

Unfortunately, there is a downward trend in terms of turnout over the last 50 years in Canadian elections, but there are some aberrations to that. What we saw in the last election was actually a significant increase in voter turnout. If the government wants to claim that people were prevented from voting, it would have a hard time making that case since in the last election, after the changes that were made, there was a significant spike in turnout.

When the government says that somehow the Conservatives were trying to disenfranchise people, that people were prevented from voting, I would like to know what evidence it has to support that claim, and if it can find any indication of who those people are and what that situation would be. It talks about the issue of ID, and it does not seem to understand the reality that there are so many different options people can use for ID. What about a student? Maybe a student can use their student card. What about a person who is homeless? A person who is homeless can get a letter from a shelter. What about a senior? A senior using medication can use a prescription label as part of their ID. There are so many different options.

If there are Canadians out there who have none of these ID options available, then I would suggest that a better fix would be for us to look for ways to help those Canadians get access to ID. Even outside of voting, there are many benefits to having identification. There are many things that are very difficult to do if one does not have identification. If the government really thinks there is a population with none of the IDs we have listed, then I welcome a strategy from it on how we can ensure everybody in Canada has some means of ID, some ability to identify themselves. That is a much more logical solution. One listens to the speeches from the government, and it is clear it has a very difficult time identifying who could not have one of the IDs mentioned by Elections Canada. Again, if somebody does not, let us fix that issue rather than calling something ID which very clearly is not. I am referring to the voter information card, which we know is full of errors.

It is important to underline the failure of the government to address the issue of foreign interference in our elections. I am repeatedly frustrated by how naive the government seems to be in terms of its engagement in the world. Top of mind is a recent meeting between this Prime Minister and the leader of Turkey discussing the issue of how journalists can be protected. There are real issues in many countries that need to be addressed, but the pretense now seems to be to pretend the Turkish government is a champion of the rights of journalists, which is obviously pretty far off the mark given the realities happening in Turkey today.

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There are so many different countries and actors around the world that want to influence the direction of Canadian policy and are actively trying to do so. This is something I hear about repeatedly when I talk to Canadians in cultural communities. They see and hear about efforts by other governments or by other foreign entities to try to influence the direction of policy in Canada, and yet there are no meaningful measures in this bill to address foreign interference in our elections. The Conservatives proposed those amendments, but unfortunately they were rejected. There are many problems with this bill. The government needed to do better, and we are opposing this legislation on that basis.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. I have to give him credit for being able to see the upside in everything. He has a talent for always finding the silver lining. I also want to compliment him on his French, which keeps improving.

It is funny that he started his speech by talking about democracy and voting rights, since we know that 1 million Canadians were unable to vote because of something called the Fair Elections Act. I thought it was really interesting that he would bring this up.

He went on to say that some amendments had been accepted. He should give our government the credit, because we accepted a total of 70 amendments, including 16 from the Conservative Party.

I would like my colleague to tell us about two areas where this bill will have a positive impact. First of all, the bill will make the electoral process more accessible for people who had trouble voting in the past. Second, it will give members of the Canadian Armed Forces more flexible voting options, in accordance with the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations.

Could my colleague comment on accessibility for Canadian Armed Forces electors?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his compliments on my French. I am practising hard.

He spoke about some of the aspects of this bill, which is obviously an omnibus bill because it touches on so many different things. This is interesting because the Liberals were certainly against omnibus bills when they were in opposition. When they find themselves back in opposition after the next election, they will be able to once again oppose such measures.

In his question, the member spoke about important aspects of the bill that I agree with, such as the flexibility the government wants to give soldiers to participate in elections. However, I want to point out that we were able to get more Canadians to vote, in the last election. That means that we have very effective tools. The results are clear. There was a significant increase in the number of Canadians who voted in the last election.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for practising his French. That is to his credit.

In 2014, the previous government changed the Elections Act and did away with voter information cards. All of the parties opposed

that. Bill C-76 would bring back the voter information card. All of the parties agree that that is a good idea, except my colleague's party.

Why are the Conservatives opposed to this measure, when Canadians have always liked getting voter information cards?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I spoke at length about ID cards in my speech. We are the only party that is defending the integrity of Canadian elections. That is the reality, and Canadians will choose their preferred party after realizing this.

Clearly, there are several options that allow voters to prove their identity. Whether it is a student card or a letter from a soup kitchen or shelter, there are several options that allow people in different situations to prove their identity.

If the government believes that some Canadians are unable to obtain an identification card, we could address the problem directly by implementing measures to ensure that Canadians have an identification card. However, whether they use a library card or a credit card, Canadians have many options.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in the House today in order to speak in defence of Canadians and the democratic system that we hold dear.

The Liberal government is doing all that it can to ram Bill C-76 through the House of Commons and into full effect before the next election. In ramming it through, it is shutting down debate and not allowing us the opportunity to engage in a thorough discussion. It is also ignoring the testimony that was brought forward at committee. There was much testimony brought forward from expert witnesses whose backgrounds are on this subject. Instead, the Liberals are ramming the bill through. In doing that, they are actually rigging the system in their favour for the next election. My Conservative colleagues and I are committed to holding the government to account and, of course, we will engage in this discussion as much as we are allowed.

For Canada's democratic system to function properly, every Canadian citizen over the age of 18 must be granted fair and equal access to the voting process. Under our current leader, Conservatives will continue to hold the government to account with regard to these things. We watch as the government acts in its own self-interest and fails to protect Canada's democratic institutions. It needs to be held to account in this regard. Multiple measures introduced in Bill C-76 will prevent Canadians from engaging in a free and fair election and it is our responsibility to highlight those concerns here today.

As important as it is to ensure that all Canadian citizens have equal access to voting, for our democracy to be upheld, we must also ensure that voters can cast only one ballot, that they are citizens and that they are over the age of 18. These are our laws and this is what helps protect our democratic system.

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Our entire system is undermined when individuals vote in the wrong riding, when they vote more than once or when they vote under a false identity. In fact, it undermines our electoral system so substantially that it is actually called a crime if one engages in fraudulent behaviour like that. Contrary to what the Liberals are trying to make Canadians believe, if Bill C-76 is passed, it will actually increase the opportunities for these crimes to be committed.

Instead of working to prevent voter fraud, Bill C-76 actually amends Canada's current voter identification rules to create a loophole by which non-citizens will be able to vote and some citizens will be able to vote more than once. Bill C-76 would make it acceptable to simply produce a voter information card received in the mail as some form of acceptable ID. There is a problem with this because, according to Elections Canada, the cards have an error rate of about 16%. This means that in the 2015 election, approximately one million Canadians received an incorrect card. Those cards had a name illegitimately attached to an address, or an address illegitimately attached to a name, or they were sent to someone who was not even a Canadian citizen, or to someone who was not over the age of 18. One can quickly see how this would threaten the integrity of our electoral system.

It is easy to see that once Bill C-76 is in effect, there is a good chance that voter fraud will take place at a greater rate than it does currently. The Liberals make it seem like the current requirements for identification are unnecessarily burdensome, but in reality, there is a broad range of already accepted documents that make it possible for every eligible Canadian to vote.

Most people over the age of 18 likely have a driver's licence or a provincial or territorial identification card. Most have a passport, an Indian status card, a band card or a citizenship card. However, let us just say that some people may not have one of those, which is correct and I will acknowledge that. However, Canadians need not worry as there is a second option. Voters are also able to bring in two separate pieces of ID as long as one has the voter's current mailing address. These IDs can range from a person's blood donor card, a hydro bill, a rental agreement, a credit card statement, a library card, a public transportation card and the list goes on and on. However, let us assume that there is a chance that voters still cannot produce any one of these options. There is a third option. Voters can bring in two pieces of identification and individuals who know them are able to vouch for them that they are in fact who they claim to be and live at the address that they claim to live at.

With all of these options available to voters, why would the government add the voter information card which Elections Canada acknowledges has a high error rate?

• (1600)

Canadians need to show legal identification when buying a case of beer or a package of cigarettes or to board a plane. It should be all that much more important for Canadians to show proper identification when they vote, when they participate in Canada's democracy that selects the women and men who stand in this place and represent Canadians. It matters and an identification card must properly be shown for that.

When this is not the case, it dilutes the value of ballots that are cast legitimately. It demeans our democratic system. Bill C-76 is an

attack on our parliamentary system as we know it. It is an attack on our democratic system altogether and, therefore, a direct attack on Canadians.

I am proud of the previous Conservative government and the work that was done to create the Fair Elections Act in 2014. Our legislation upheld the democratic right of each and every citizen to vote while also protecting this country against voter fraud. In fact, in 2015, under the new Fair Elections Act, there was a record turnout of voter participation, one of the highest percentages in Canadian history. With knowledge of increased participation under the current system then, why would the Liberals rush to pass legislation that enables an increase in voter fraud and risks undermining the integrity of our current democracy?

After the 2015 election, the current Prime Minister tried to change Canada's election laws to benefit the Liberal Party. It was the Canadian people who pushed back time and time again over a series of months in a tremendous way to try to stop what the current government was trying to push through. Again the government is trying to push through this legislation, trying to make this change to the system, which will ultimately act in its favour and against the well-being of Canadian citizens.

In addition to creating an opportunity for voter fraud, the second issue I want to draw attention to today is foreign interference. Now more than ever in recent history, we must be vigilant. We must be vigilant about protecting the authenticity and independence of our elections. Sadly, under this legislation, the Prime Minister has failed to take the necessary steps to eliminate the possibility of foreign interference.

Bill C-76 allows for, and I would say even encourages, creating loopholes for foreign interference in Canadian elections. This legislation would allow unlimited foreign donations outside of the pre-writ and post-writ periods and would double the total amount of third party spending that is permitted during the writ period. Bill C-76 would allow foreign money to be funnelled into Canada and then disseminated to numerous advocacy groups during a new pre-writ period. The money donated by foreign entities would be used for the purpose of influencing Canada's elections outcome. We have to be concerned with that.

An example of this practice occurring is the Tides Foundation. This is an organization based in San Francisco that is totally opposed to Canada's energy sector. In the 2015 election, this organization funnelled \$1.5 million to Canadian third parties and is currently under investigation by the CRA. Many allegations like this are still circulating and are yet to be investigated. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister wants to do nothing to prevent these things from happening in the future.

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A government that puts Canadians first would be doing all that it could to protect elections from being hijacked by foreign investment groups. If the government were really concerned with the integrity of Canada's democratic system, it would be fixing the problem by closing these loopholes rather than creating more of them. The Conservatives tried to put forward a number of amendments at committee, but each and every one of them was shot down. Instead, these loopholes were safeguarded. I have to ask a question in that regard. Why safeguard these loopholes? Why allow foreign investment in our electoral process here in Canada?

With the election less than a year away, the Prime Minister is choosing to turn a blind eye to this. Canadians deserve a government that will protect the integrity of our elections. The Prime Minister is failing to crack down on foreign influence and voter fraud while, arguably, encouraging these practices in the legislation as it is outlined in Bill C-76.

As an elected official, it is my responsibility to hold the government to account and to insist on integrity within the voter system. It is clear that Bill C-76 undermines the very basic principles of democracy, so I urge members of the House to vote no to this legislation.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague.

She said that we must protect Canadians and the integrity of elections. However, one year before the election, the previous government abolished the voter card as a valid piece of identification for voting. People were confused. Everyone wanted to keep voter cards, except for the Conservatives.

For that reason, Bill C-76 will re-establish the voter card as a valid piece of ID for voting. Why are the Conservatives opposing this?

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member already knows this, or at least I hope she does. It is quite common knowledge to the rest of us in this House that after a period of time, about 10 years, it is up to Elections Canada to redistribute our ridings.

In other words, as members of Parliament, we are here representing approximately 120,000 to 125,000 Canadians. That is our responsibility. Over time, of course, the population grows, which means that we end up representing more than that number so there needs to be a redistribution process. That means the boundaries for our ridings adjust. Of course, they are adjusting so that Canadians are properly represented by their member of Parliament here within the House of Commons.

Therefore, yes, when we were in government under Stephen Harper as the prime minister, those electoral boundaries did change in order to make sure that Canadians are accurately represented within the House of Commons. We are not ashamed of that. That is due process. That is protecting democracy.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe I could illustrate the difference between Stephen

Harper's approach and this government's approach to changing election laws.

When it came time for the Conservatives to change the election laws, they did not have the support of the Liberals, the Green Party or the New Democratic Party, and they were very offensive with respect to Elections Canada.

Today, the legislation we are debating is supported by the Green Party, by the NDP and by Liberals. Yes, they would like to see some amendments, but they are going to be voting in favour of it. There is consultation that takes place with this government and there is wide support for the changes that are being made.

Perhaps the member could explain the difference to Canadians. Why is it that the Conservatives could do it without any consensus at all among the parties, and she feels that was fair? Could the member reflect on that?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the bill that is before this House went to committee. The hearings were cut short, arguably, with regard to the number of witnesses who were given the opportunity to testify.

In addition to that, my colleagues put forward 200 amendments and only six of them passed. They were good amendments. They were amendments that would prevent foreign investment in our country. They were amendments that would protect democracy. They were amendments that would be fair to each and every party represented in the House of Commons. Those were all shut down, with the exception of six small amendments that were accepted by the government.

I would highlight one more thing. Right now, we have the opportunity to call four by-elections in this country, and the government has chosen to call only one of them. For the Canadian public, that means there are three ridings that could have a member of Parliament here in this place representing them day in and day out and speaking on their behalf, but the Prime Minister is refusing to give them that democratic right.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding the information cards containing mistakes, I received a card in a past election. I went to the polling station the card indicated but it was wrong; the address did not match. I was sent to another polling station, supposedly where I was to vote, but because the card identified a different one, I was not allowed to vote at that one. Due to my recognition as a mayor of the city I was in, I was able to find the elections officer, who made some changes so I was allowed to vote. However, the information card was wrong, and that is part of the problem of using it as identification.

The member has referred to the problems with the information card and the zillions of other things that could have been used in that place, but because of a wrong information card, I was being denied the right to vote, until I found somebody who allowed me to vote.

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• (1610)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what I highlighted in my speech. The information cards are sent to the electorate. Most of them are accurate, but some of them are not. We know that in the last election 16% of them were not, which equals about 1.5 million electoral cards that did not land at the right address or did not go to the right person.

It means that those individuals are put into a situation where, potentially under this new legislation, they are able to vote when they actually should not be able to vote. They should have to show proper identification such as a driver's licence or a passport. They should have to prove that they do in fact live within that area and are able to vote there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, when I spoke earlier, I talked about the voter card. I never mentioned boundaries or maps. In my question, I was actually referring to the voter information card. The translation is very important. It seems that that is not what the translator heard. When I asked my hon. colleague the question, I actually spoke about voter information cards. I want to point that out because I was not talking about boundaries at all.

The Deputy Speaker: I cannot speak to the interpretation. I think the interpretation was working. Unless there is another point of order on this question, I think that MPs can answer however they wish. The Chair does not have an opinion on exchanges between members.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Humber River—Black Creek.

We are talking about Bill C-76. I had the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to participate in the debate on this bill and to better understand the review of the Canada Elections Act.

I join members in support of Bill C-76, the elections modernization act. Later on I will talk more specifically about the changes this bill makes to the rules governing political party spending.

All Canadians have concerns about the undue influence of money in the democratic process. According to existing rules, political parties must, in accordance with the Canada Elections Act, disclose the source of their money, so that the political fundraising and spending process is fairer and more transparent.

Political parties started to declare their expenses in 1974, after the Election Expenses Act was passed. Since 2004, riding associations, nomination contestants and leadership candidates have also had to disclose where the money comes from and where it is spent. Since 2007, companies and unions have been banned from making political contributions.

In 2014, contribution limits were raised for both parties and candidates, and rules were introduced around increasing spending limits if election campaigns were expected to last longer than the 37-day minimum mandated by law.

The time has now come to take the next step in addressing campaign spending limits for political parties and third parties. These changes are being made in response to the impact of fixed election dates on spending. After all, it is now much easier for political parties and third parties to plan their spending on political ads and ads about specific issues. Election campaigning can start well before the writ is dropped.

Canadians want to know elections are fair. That is why the Prime Minister mandated the Minister of Democratic Institutions to review the limits on the amounts political parties and third parties can spend during elections.

The bill before us would limit the length of the campaign, eliminate the proportional spending limit increase during the campaign, and limit pre-writ political ad spending. By limiting the writ period to 50 days, this bill will provide parties with greater certainty and enable them to better manage their spending.

Everyone here remembers the 2015 election, which lasted 78 days. Under the rules in effect at the time, for every day beyond 37 days of campaigning, the spending limits were increased by one thirty-seventh of the basic limit. In 2015, the national parties therefore had an upper limit of roughly \$55 million.

No party reached that limit, but the last electoral marathon resulted in significant reimbursements. During the 78-day electoral period in 2015, reimbursements for all the political parties and candidates totalled roughly \$102 million. By comparison, during the previous period in 2011, reimbursements totalled only \$61 million. That is a big difference.

Taxpayers might ask the following question: what was the added value of the \$41 million paid back to the political parties? They might also ask whether such high electoral spending had an undue influence on our elections. For example, does this give an advantage to the party in power? Under the current rules, the party in power can manipulate the duration of the electoral period according to the size of its financial reserves relative to the reserves of the other parties.

The bill removes the prorated increase in the spending limit for all political participants. This will help save taxpayers' money. Perhaps more importantly, this will help allay concerns over the influence money has on our elections and the perception that the prorated increase unfairly benefits the party in power.

I will now talk about the pre-writ period. Under the current rules, outside election periods, political parties are subject to limits on individual contributions but not on spending.

• (1615)

Establishing fixed dates for federal elections has allowed political parties and other political entities to plan their spending during the pre-writ period, so as to avoid some of the constraints associated with the election period.

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This raises concerns about the undue influence of big money. We want to ensure that the voices of political parties or other political entities with the most cash flow do not drown out other voices as Canadians turn their attention to electoral issues.

For the pre-writ period, which begins June 30 in a fixed-date election year, the bill sets a \$1.5-million spending limit for political parties. It also proposes spending limits for third parties during that period.

The June 30 date was chosen because Parliament is unlikely to be sitting at that time. In a fixed-date election year, the business of Parliament is likely to have been completed by June 30 at the latest in preparation for an election in mid-October. That is when campaigning really begins in earnest. That is when spending limits should apply. Voters can therefore feel certain that the voices of those with bulging coffers do not drown out the other voices. This is fair and vital to our democracy.

Canadians can be proud of the measures taken here in Canada to limit the influence of big money on our electoral process. This system continues to evolve as our democracy evolves. Establishing fixed election dates has presented new challenges in terms of maintaining fairness and transparency in our electoral system, and Bill C-76 will help us overcome those challenges.

I urge all members of the House to join me in supporting this bill.
[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the influence of big money in elections. When we talk about democracy, everyone's vote needs to count the same. One of the real flaws in the bill is that the Prime Minister is not taking the necessary steps to eliminate the possibility of foreign influence. In other words, where does the money come from? Could the member comment on whether the bill could be strengthened, especially in regard to foreign money influencing Canadian elections?

Also, the member knows there will be certain by-elections happening. The Prime Minister is stopping 300,000 Canadians from having a representative voice in the House. Considering the bill is about elections, does she not think there should be something in it to acknowledge the fact that by-elections should be called in a timely manner and equally across the entire country?

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, in his question, my hon. colleague mentioned people who are abroad. Bill C-76 will make it possible for all members of the Canadian Armed Forces who serve their country abroad to exercise their right to vote.

However, there are more than one million other Canadians who work abroad, not to mention Quebec's snowbirds, who may have already left the country in October, when we have fixed-date elections.

Bill C-76 will make it possible for all these Canadians to exercise their right to vote and to have the time to vote.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a part of the bill recommended by

the Chief Electoral Officer, which was in the original bill, but the Liberals stripped it out of the bill. We tried to put it back in last night in a vote, and the Liberals voted against it. It is the part that would require political parties to provide receipts for their spending. As MPs, any candidate who has ever run for office here knows if an election claim expense is made at their local riding level, for example, \$50 on food or \$100 on rent, it has to be proven with a receipt. However, political parties do not. The reason the Chief Electoral Officer wanted this is there would be new powers for investigation in the bill, but those powers would not mean anything if the Chief Electoral Officer did not have the evidence, often with money, to track where the wrongdoing might have happened. This was something the Liberals agreed with then stripped out of the bill. The Chief Electoral Officer wanted it in the bill.

What exactly are the Liberals afraid of? They say that they trust the Chief Electoral Officer, appreciate him and think that he is the greatest guy, except when he makes recommendations like that one or that there should be privacy laws that parties have to abide by. Then they choose to ignore the Chief Electoral Officer and do not like his advice so much. Some would call that hypocrisy or inconsistency, people can choose the term because I do not want to imply one, but it is certainly wrong.

Why did Liberals deny these two important pieces: one, the protection of Canadians' privacy and of our elections, and two, a basic requirement the Chief Electoral Officer recommended, which would give him the investigative powers and evidence needed to catch people who are cheating in an election sponsorship scandal?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, in fact we were both on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when the Chief Electoral Officer appeared before the committee. He came to talk to us about what should be in the bill. The Chief Electoral Officer recommended 100 changes to the Canada Elections Act. Committee members agreed to 80% of the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I would like to respond to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles about the interpretation. It seems that there may have been a mistake and that the hon. member's use of the term "carte électorale" was interpreted incorrectly.

*Government Orders**[English]*

In English, it could mean an electoral map.

[Translation]

It could also mean a voter identification card. That is also “carte” in French. I think maybe the interpreter made a mistake. That is why the answer given by the hon. member for Lethbridge was not on topic.

I am grateful to the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for raising a point of order.

We will continue to make sure that those words and sentences are interpreted correctly.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek.

● (1625)

[English]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to add a few comments to the discussion and debate on Bill C-76. It has been a long time coming. I think it is important for us to ensure we all have the chance to make comments on it as it moves forward because it will have a huge impact on democracy and how Canadians function and move forward. Therefore, I am pleased to talk about Bill C-76, which of course we call the elections modernization act. I think there are many clauses in here that do just that.

The Government of Canada of today is 100% committed to the strengthening of Canada's democratic institutions and restoring the trust of Canadians and their participation in our democratic processes. All too frequently, in every one of our elections, we end up with fewer people turning out to vote. I think that is a real disservice when we talk about democracy. We need to be encouraging more people to get out, and I think Bill C-76 will be helpful in that way. We believe the strength of our democracy depends on the participation of as many Canadians as possible, both young and old.

My daughter was a candidate in the recent City of Toronto election. Of course I was very involved in that election, especially on election day, and viewing how things were functioning. I can say that there were many people who were turned away for a variety of reasons. Seniors had much difficulty being able to get their vote in. They had three days to get in touch with someone, and then had to go down to city hall to try to facilitate their getting a chance to vote. I hope those are some of the barriers Bill C-76 will eliminate. By undoing the unfair aspects of the previous government's Fair Elections Act, we are making it easier and more convenient for all Canadians to vote. I am sure after the 2019 election we will come back with some other suggestions as to how we can again improve the turnout and make it easier for people, especially those who are disabled and seniors, to be encouraged to participate.

Clearly, we are making the electoral process more accessible to Canadians with disabilities, caregivers and members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are restoring voting rights to more than one million Canadians who live abroad, a restoration that is truly needed.

We are strengthening our laws, closing loopholes and bringing in more robust enforcement regimes to make it more difficult for the bad actors that we have out there to influence our elections. If we watch any of the U.S. channels in particular, I do not think a day goes by that the Americans are not talking about their last election and the amount of foreign influence that clearly was there. No doubt, we probably had foreign influence in ours, but not to that extent. Hopefully, with Bill C-76 we will be able to ensure that is kept to a minimum, if any. We are requiring greater transparency from third parties and political parties so that Canadians can better understand who seeks to influence their vote.

The importance of people exercising their right to vote in today's society has never been so important. A large number of youth today feel as though their voice does not matter. I hope Bill C-76 will show them that we need their participation, we need their vote, the future is theirs, and it is imperative that they get involved and exercise their vote. I was quite surprised last week to see the number of young people who, when asked if they had voted today, responded that they had not and they would not be voting, wherever I happened to be. I have never been involved in an election where so many people were saying they simply were not voting, they did not know who to vote for or they had no interest. Municipal elections are different from federal, but the fact that people would make the specific comment that they had no interest in voting, and were not going to be, I think is a very serious issue. We need to be doing everything we can to encourage people the other way, for them to realize the value of their vote and not to put democracy in danger. Their voices do count. Therefore, it is up to us to convince them of that. This misconception could not be any further from the truth.

● (1630)

When I am meeting with constituents in my riding of Humber River—Black Creek, knocking on doors, I always emphasize to the younger voters that this is about their future, not mine. This is about them and it is imperative that they participate and that their voice be heard through their ballot being cast at the polls. Bill C-76 is making it easier for that voice to be heard. The youth of today will be the shape of our future and our country of the future, a future that will be much brighter when we see more and more youth exercising their right to vote.

There is still a discussion about obligation to vote and some people ask if we should put in law that people have to vote. Canada is not at that point. I would hope we will not get to that point, but that we make sure that people understand the number of individuals around the world who die for the right to vote while here we have people saying they are not going to vote. It is not that they do not know who to vote for, they are just not interested. It is a very sad system that we have right now, at least at the municipal level.

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Our government made a commitment to Canadians in the last election and Bill C-76 delivers on that commitment. This is important to the residents of Humber River—Black Creek because when a promise is made, they expect a promise to be kept. Honesty is something that most people think all governments lack, so I am pleased to see that we are attempting to meet the commitments that we made in the last election, but not for any reason other than it is the right thing to do to make sure that our democracy is playing out properly. That is what I hope it is going to do with Bill C-76. I strive to ensure that I combat that misconception with my hard work every day and the hard work of all of my colleagues here in the House of Commons. We come here every day to make a difference in the lives of all Canadians, no matter whether they are 15 years old or 90 years old. Our work is to make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

Bill C-76 delivers on our government's commitment to protect, strengthen and improve our democratic institutions. It delivers on an important election commitment made by our government, but it also goes further and provides Elections Canada and the commissioner of Canada elections with new powers and tools to help enforce our rules, something that was very much lacking in the previous legislation. It is important for us to give the commissioner of Canada elections the powers needed to enact whatever rules are there to be enacted and to move forward.

Modernizing our elections should be a priority for all members in the chamber and I believe it is. It may be after the next election again that we bring forward amendments that will continue to strengthen democracy in Canada. Currently, one issue is that the staff of Elections Canada are ineligible for consideration for appointment as commissioner. Elections Canada offers an obvious recruiting ground for personnel who are very familiar with the issues that arise in our democracy. Bill C-76 restores Elections Canada's status as a source of candidate recruitment.

Not only in Humber River—Black Creek, but getting people to work on elections everywhere is difficult and getting people to work in the leadership as returning officers and so on has become more and more difficult. People's lives are busy and they do not have the commitment to understand how important the role is. It takes a lot of time. Returning officers are underpaid for the amount of work that is required and it comes out of pure dedication.

There are a variety of things in Bill C-76 that are very positive as we move forward to the future and I am happy to have had a few minutes to comment on it.

• (1635)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have known my colleague and friend for some years. We have been in this place for a while and have seen a couple of ups and downs. I too share one of the concerns she has raised, which is the participation of young people and the growing sense of cynicism.

I would offer her party and leader this compliment. In the last election, they tapped into that sense of desperation and fear about our elections. A great number of young people supported her and her party with a sense that the current government would be different. Clearly, that was the promise.

When the Prime Minister was a candidate, he made some significant promises around our democracy that were quite

captivating, particularly to young and progressive folks. One of them, of course, is the now infamous promise that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post. A number of my colleagues on her side got to share the experience of what that betrayal was like once the government said no.

Specifically on this, in general, a lot of people now get much of their news from social media. That is a leading way of distributing information. One of the risks to politics is the spreading of what is called misinformation and disinformation. We are combining that new power with the power of large, significant and complex databases. That is information that all parties gather on individual voters, not groups of voters, as she well knows, from the 1990s and early 2000s. The information we now have on individual voters, voting preference, voting history, age, telephone number, religious affiliations, sexual orientation, all sorts of incredibly personal information is gathered by political parties, yet there are no rules in place right now that say the parties have to keep any standards in protecting that privacy or what they do with that data. We are combining the great power of social media and being able to target individual voters.

On Bill C-76, the Chief Electoral Officer recommended strengthening privacy rules. The New Democrats put forward amendments to do that and the government rejected all of them. Why?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the great work of my colleague. Sometimes I think we have all been here a little too long, but he has done some great work. It was terrific to work with him. I look forward to maybe another four or five years in the House of Commons, working together on issues that matter to Canadians.

Yes, that is a concern. Bill C-76 attempts to strengthen that as much as possible as we move forward. However, we have the challenge of social media, protecting individual rights and privacy rights. I note the bill stipulates that parties have to keep a list of all individuals called, with their phone numbers. There is a variety of things in Bill C-76 that attempt to strengthen that.

There will always be areas we can improve on and I expect there will be other changes after the next election on ways to continue to meet the current challenges that face us all.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have risen the House a few times to talk about the 2011 election, when Guelph was targeted as a centre for robocalls and what that did to the people working on behalf of Elections Canada, whether they would volunteer again knowing that the ground was shifting under their feet.

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Looking at the strengthening of the position of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada and the ability to prosecute crimes that occur during elections, we have come a long way with Bill C-76, trying to undo the unfair elections act.

Could the hon. member comment on how important it is for us to have a strong regime with respect to the Canada Elections Act and the implementation of our elections?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, the 2011 election was very discouraging to the people who worked on the elections. Candidates were also very discouraged as a result of finding out that a lot of irregularities were happening, but not a whole lot was being done. Strengthening services for the Commissioner of Elections Canada is important in order to provide the ability to give serious penalties to people who violate and interfere with our democracy. It is too important a treasure for us. Anybody who interferes needs to receive a very stiff penalty so it does not happen again.

• (1640)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, Natural Resources; and the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, Veterans Affairs.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my great friend and colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

I am looking at the clock right now and I see that we have little more than half an hour left in this debate. It is a sad state of affairs for a bill that really covers such an important law in which every Canadian has so much vested, not the least of whom are members of the House, that we have to debate it under the yoke of time allocation.

The rush is all the making of the Liberals. We have heard repeatedly about Bill C-33, the first attempt by the Liberals at amending our election laws. That bill was introduced on November 24, 2016, and it is about as far as it got. It stayed at first reading. The member for Perth—Wellington called it a very unloved bill because it seemed to have been forgotten by the Liberal government.

Bill C-33 languished for many months and then finally on April 30 of this year, Bill C-76 was brought in, which swallowed up Bill C-33 but added a whole bunch more.

Then the sense of urgency came. The Liberals suddenly became aware of the timelines they had to deal with this. The Liberal government has a clear majority. It has commanding control over the agenda of the House. The Liberals came to power with an ambitious election agenda, and they are making us pay for their laggardness.

The bill came back to the House for report stage last week. On Thursday, October 25, the government moved time allocation. We really only had a few days to debate the bill, which started on Wednesday afternoon. On Thursday, the Dutch prime minister was here, so it was not a full day. We debated the bill on Friday

afternoon. On Monday, the government decided to debate Bill C-84 and Bill C-85. We had the votes at report stage last night. Here we are on Tuesday, the final day to debate the bill at third reading.

It makes a mockery out of the Prime Minister's promise to treat this institution with respect when he rams the bill through, especially when the amendments that were looked at in committee and at report stage were backed up by such solid evidence. The Liberals have demonstrated time and again that it is their way or the highway.

We have to place all of this within the context of the biggest promise the Liberals made with respect to electoral reform, and that was that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post. Why does this matter? When the hon. clerks at the table read out the tally of the votes, we do not approve a motion with 39% support, yet that is precisely what happens in this place. The Liberals do have a majority government, but it was elected by 39% of the people.

If we truly believe that every vote should count equally, then the House of Commons should reflect how people voted. I certainly wish the Liberals had followed through on their promise, that they had listened to the evidence that was gathered by the special committee on electoral reform and at least had progressed.

If the Liberals want to see how it is really done, they need to look no further than the province of British Columbia, where a B.C. NDP government, led by my friend Premier John Horgan, who is also a constituent, is following through with a promise.

Right now B.C. is having a referendum on electoral reform. I was happy to cast my ballot last weekend in support of proportional representation. This is a great opportunity for the province of B.C. to lead the way on electoral reform. It is a great way to show Canadians that on this issue, if they want progress, if they want a government that keeps its promise, they will vote NDP. John Horgan and the NDP are showing that.

I want to move on because I do not want to be entirely negative. There are some important things in the bill that we support. Many of the changes in Bill C-76 are just simple reversals of the Conservative bill from 2014.

For example, Bill C-76 would reinstate vouching for identity. It would restore the voter ID card. It would remove restrictions on how the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada could communicate with voters. These are all good things and we support them.

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•(1645)

On a personal note, the government has incorporated the idea behind my private member's bill, Bill C-279, which I introduced in 2016. That bill sought to limit the length of elections. I think all members, and indeed Canadians, would be very happy if we did not have to go through a 78-day marathon campaign anymore. Seriously, there needs to be a limit on the length of elections, especially with the changes the Conservatives brought in under its government. It greatly expanded how much political parties could spend every day we went past 36 days. I do not think anyone could argue in favour of Canadians needing 78 days to make their decision. Therefore, I am glad to see there is a hard limit of 50 days on the length of elections.

I am also happy to see that Elections Canada would now be able to access information from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. One of the great things I do as a member of Parliament, pretty much every month, is I get a list of new citizens who recently acquired their citizenship. I get to write certificates, congratulating them on acquiring their citizenship and welcoming them as future electors of Canada. If Elections Canada is able to update its registry in co-operation with another government department, all the better. I think every party in this place wants to see more people participate.

The early registration of teenagers, age 14 to 17, is a great step forward. One of the other things I really enjoy doing as a member of Parliament is visiting all the high schools in my riding. When we make efforts to speak to students, especially grade 11 and 12 students, they are actually a very thoughtful and engaged group. They care very much about their future. They care about climate change, about very progressive ideals. I have really valued my exchanges with them. With early registration as voters, it gives them another impetus to get the buy-in to the system so when they turn 18, they can actually go and cast their ballot.

I was fortunate enough to turn 18 in 1997, an election year, and I got to cast my ballot. I can remember doing that with a lot of pride.

Removing the ban on public education by the Chief Electoral Officer is also a great thing, as well as extending the hours of advanced polls. These are all positive measures in my view.

That is not to say that there are not problems. One of the biggest gaps, and it has been clearly identified by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who has been doing yeoman's work on this bill on behalf of the NDP, is the privacy rules covering political parties. Every political party in this place gathers a lot of information on Canadians. We know generally how many people live in a household, what their ages are, their genders and, in some cases, what their professions are.

We live in a time now where information warfare is a fact. Hacking is a fact. We need look no further than the examples of the Brexit vote and the recent election in the United States. It would be absolutely foolish of us to pretend it will not to affect Canada. Unfortunately, despite all the evidence that was heard at the procedure and House affairs committee, not only from the Privacy Commissioner but a whole host of experts, the Liberals cynically ignored this important provision. They decided not to strengthen privacy laws covering political parties. Also, nothing was really done with respect to election ads on social media and the Internet.

One of the big things is this. I remember the Liberals amended their own bill at committee to remove the requirement of political parties to keep receipts for their spending. This is the Liberals at committee amending their own bill to take that out. Last night, through report stage amendments, we tried to insert that back in, through vote no. 12. It was voted against. The Chief Electoral Officer has been calling for this since the 38th Parliament. For a party that likes to sing praises of the Chief Electoral Officer, to repeatedly ignore his recommendations and his calls to action on so many occasions makes a mockery of the Liberal statements in this place.

We also tried to move the voting day to Sunday, which I think would have encouraged more participation. On a Monday, I know everyone is entitled to get those hours off, but it sometimes does not always work out.

We tried to be constructive with the bill. Despite the many flaws that exist, we will vote to send it to the other place. However, I will be reminding Canadians of the opportunities that were lost, the opportunities that we attempted to address and the Liberals' flagrant attempts to ignore all of those constructive proposals.

•(1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the very start I recognize that the NDP members had a series of amendments they were proposing at the committee stage, and they were not alone. There were also many more amendments from the Conservative Party. As well, there were many suggestions and recommendations from the presenters, including Elections Canada.

What was really encouraging in what came out of that committee stage was that we had many amendments accepted. There were amendments from all parties, in fact. Even the Green Party had direct input in making sure there were some amendments brought forward. Today the legislation is healthier as a direct result. I realize that maybe not everything was accepted that members would have liked. Some of it, no doubt, could be very easily justified.

I just wanted to provide more of a comment than a question.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I very much accept what the hon. member said. Many amendments were moved. Some were accepted, some were not.

The problem is that we are not having enough time to debate. Report stage is already over and we are now at third reading. The Liberal government has not given this House enough time to deliberate what happened at committee. It goes right against what the Liberals themselves proposed on April 10, 2014.

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The member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, the member for Malpeque and even the member for Winnipeg North have stood in this place repeatedly to argue that time allocation measures should not be used any time this House is deliberating on our election laws.

That is the big issue I have, not so much with the amendments but with this House's ability to democratically deliberate on those measures.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was just wondering if my colleague for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford could comment on two things for us. He highlighted some of the hypocrisy of the current government. It is always good to criticize there, but how can we make it better? As well, his party is going to vote to send it to the other place.

I was wondering if my colleague would be supportive of strengthening things in this bill to keep foreign entities from undermining our democratic institutions. It is one of the things we are worried about, and it is a reality today. There are other governments that want to influence the Canadian process with big money being brought in here, and there is not enough in this bill to address that.

Also, however, with regard to by-elections, it seems the government is cherry-picking when they should be taking place. It is stalling three really important by-elections in which Canadians should have a voice.

I was wondering if my colleague could comment on those two issues.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I once substituted at the ethics committee when they were looking into Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. There are some great concerns about data harvesting and the foreign influence that goes through that. I know the ethics committee is doing some great work peeling back the layers of the onion to discover how deep the rot goes. It is something we absolutely have to be on guard against in this time and age.

I agree with the member with respect to by-elections. The Liberals, let us face it, do not have a good excuse for delaying the calling of those by-elections. It is no secret that 300,000 Canadians who would vote in those remaining by-elections are without representation in this place. Our leader announced that he was going to run on August 8. It was very clear.

We look forward to seeing the Liberals actually live up to their promises to call those by-elections, making sure those unrepresented Canadians get members of Parliament in this place. That is the right thing to do.

•(1655)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to ask my colleague for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford why he thinks the Liberals chose to not go ahead with getting receipts to prove there has been no fraud in an election, and why they took that out of the bill at the eleventh hour.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I can accurately answer that. It is a question I will be posing to my constituents, and maybe to the Liberal candidate for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford during the next election. What was his political

party so afraid of that it will not produce receipts for what it spent on advertising?

If the Chief Electoral Officer is going to have these investigative powers, it makes sense that the political parties should be compelled to not only store the receipts but hand them over to the Chief Electoral Officer. We are really talking about transparency, openness and making sure political parties play by the rules. That seems to me to be an easy fix.

I will let the Liberal candidate explain that in my riding in 2019.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand in this place and speak to the Liberals' attempt to fix the Harper Conservatives' unfair elections act. The bill we are debating today is Bill C-76.

How did we get here? The 2015 election campaign and the lead-up to it were certainly full of people's very legitimate and impassioned opposition and protests against the ransacking of the Elections Act. The dismantling of many of our electoral and democratic processes is certainly well documented. Whether it had been the New Democrats or Liberals who were elected to government, there was a very clear mandate from the electorate that the new government was to repair the Elections Act and roll back the unfair elections act that the Harper Conservatives had brought in.

What happened next? First of all, there is no other way to say it, the Liberals ragged the puck on their commitment to fulfill their election promise to make every vote count. Moving to a proportional representation system would have brought Canada in line with 90% of the democracies around the world, which do not use first past the post as a way to choose their members. Under such a new system, a party that got 39% of the vote would get 39% of the seats in this place.

I believe it was an election promise made by the Prime Minister 1,500 times. He was slow to establish the committee. I am very glad he took the advice of my New Democrat colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who proposed forming a proportional parliamentary committee. The Liberal government did not get the majority of the votes, nor did it have the majority of the seats on that committee. Also, for the first time ever, the committee included representation from members from the Bloc and the Green Party.

Nevertheless, there were 33,000 submissions from around the country, including some very innovative online submissions from people who used Twitter and other social media to get their comments and questions to the committee. There were hundreds of experts. The broad consensus was not to use the Prime Minister's preferred alternative, which was ranked ballot, but instead to move to a proportional form of voting.

Rudely and abruptly, it was pulled by the new democratic reform minister and cancelled entirely by the Prime Minister, bailing on a serious election promise.

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That was one chapter in our attempt to fulfill the government's mandate. We tried to help but the government did not take up our offer. As my colleague, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, has just pointed out, British Columbia is voting in a referendum right now on whether to make every vote count. It is being done by mail-in ballot. I hope everybody will do their research, through Fair Vote Canada and the other organizations providing information to help people make the right choice. I am certainly going to be voting yes in the mail-in referendum, and hope others do too.

As for amending the Elections Act, the government took a year to do anything about it. The government introduced a bill, then sat on it for two full years. It then brought in this most recent version of the bill, on which we have had zero debate at this point. It brought in a new version of the bill, which was again stalled over the summer. Finally, it was up for debate in the House, and the government promptly invoked closure and stifled debate on the bill at every stage. Therefore, here we are in the final moments of the debate.

Deadlines have been missed. The Chief Electoral Officer said there had to be a complete, fully adopted bill in his hands by April 30, 2018, which was six months ago. Instead, the day after the deadline, the Liberals tabled this new bill. It is not enough time to get the job done.

Here we are. This is vitally important work. We have an election less than a year away, and yet we still do not have an adopted bill. The New Democrats have proposed one amendment after another and tried to be constructive in this process. I am very discouraged that the government failed to take our advice and that of the Chief Electoral Officer in a number of important areas.

For example, to be able to investigate spending, the Chief Electoral Officer needs to be able to see receipts provided by political parties when they spend in elections. As candidates, we are required to do that. If I buy a box of Timbits, I have to show that receipt and have it available for public view. It is not so for political parties. How can that evidence be compelled in a case where an investigation is needed?

• (1700)

The Liberals originally had that in Bill C-76. They then removed it from their bill. The New Democrats brought a motion forward to bring it back in, and the Liberals voted it down. The Chief Electoral Officer says he wants this amendment, yet it is still not in this bill. This is a lost opportunity to strengthen our democracy and transparency, things the government says it is all about.

Another failure of this bill is that it does not do enough to regulate advertising on digital platforms. Between Russia, Trump and Brexit, there have been ample examples of the ability for digital platforms to interfere with election results. There was a missed generational opportunity by the government to bring in legislation that would deal with that adequately. A year from now, arguably, our election will be vulnerable to deceitful messaging and disinformation at election time.

Another failure is that this bill, in the words of the Privacy Commissioner himself, “adds nothing of substance in terms of privacy protection.”

Right now, there is no oversight for political parties and how they store and manage data. There are no privacy rules applying to political parties right now. The Privacy Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer, the BC Civil Liberties Association and witnesses testifying from our counterparts in Europe all said our election process needs data protection.

The minister herself asked Canada's spy agency for advice. They said this bill is not strong enough, yet the Liberals rejected every amendment the New Democrats brought forward. There is only an unenforceable statement that political parties are meant to put on their website, but that is certainly not enough. Every witness at committee said that the status quo is not acceptable, and that this bill failed to provide the strength we really needed in this reform.

Another disappointment is a piece that I am personally very invested in, given that it is 2018 but this House only has 25% women elected. I am proud of my own party, the NDP, because we have extra measures built in to our nomination process, and 43% of New Democrat candidates offered for election in 2015 were women or members of equity-seeking groups. As a result, our caucus is 40% women.

It is not so for the Liberals and not so for the Conservatives. They do not have the same measures. My colleague, former member of Parliament and now mayor of Vancouver Kennedy Stewart brought forward a bill proposing incentives to parties that offered the public more gender-balanced candidate slates. The government voted it down. In the past few months, when the NDP tried to insert the same measures into the bill at committee, again our members were voted down.

This is taxpayer money. For example, taxpayers paid back the Conservatives \$21 million in election spending rebates for 2015. Less of that would have gone to the Conservatives given that they only elected 17% women to their caucus. It is a great disappointment that that incentive did not move forward.

There were a few pieces that worked. I am very glad the private member's legislation by my colleague, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, was bundled into the bill. That legislation proposed a shortening of the election period, so that we do not have to go through the same suffering we did in 2015. We are glad the government did that.

We are glad this bill reinstates vouching for identity. We are glad it restores the voter ID card. However, to go back to vouching, we still have a big hole. I could be in a gym on election night with my neighbour who lives across the street but is not actually in the same poll. If I asked him to vouch for me so that I am able to vote because I do not seem to be on the voters list, that would not be possible, even though we are in the same gymnasium with the same volunteers.

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For the government to not go all the way and take all the advice it received to make this bill as strong as it could have been represents another failure in Bill C-76. It is a disappointment and, again, a generational opportunity lost.

• (1705)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the legislation provides a wonderful opportunity to modernize the Canada Elections Act. We have seen significant amendments. Elections Canada had well over 100 recommendations and more than 80% of them have been incorporated in the legislation. We have made many changes to reverse what Stephen Harper did when he was the prime minister, when he took away things like the voter information card. There is a lot of good news in this legislation.

We appreciate and recognize that the New Democrats and the Green Party will vote in favour of the legislation, and no doubt there will be ongoing discussions and debates in the future on things that we might be able to do. However, at the end of the day, I believe we have good, sound legislation. It was first introduced by the department, went through the committee process, and ultimately will pass. It is important to recognize that.

Moreover, I recognize that most parties, with the exception of the Conservative Party, would like to see this legislation enacted before the next election. Does the member not see that as a positive thing?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I find this to be another area where the Liberal government has entirely failed to use the power of its majority and the good mandate given to it by the people of Canada to go all the way and repair the damage done. I am in good company here.

Marc Maynard, the former chief electoral officer, said, “How can they pretend to impose all sorts of rules on Facebook and Google and all other social media when they are declining to have them apply to themselves?”

Teresa Scassa, the Canada research chair in information law at the University of Ottawa, called it “an almost contemptuous and entirely cosmetic quick fix designed to deflect attention from the very serious privacy issues raised by the use of personal information by political parties.”

In the all-day debate the Liberals chose to bring to this place on April 10, 2014, the member for Winnipeg North said, “This legislation”—relating to the Elections Act—“should be designated such that time allocation cannot be applied to it.” His government, under his leadership, has brought in time allocation again and again. He should be ashamed.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to wish my colleague well with her planned transition to provincial politics. She is a formidable debater in this place. I know she will be a formidable opponent to the provincial Liberals and to the Alberta NDP.

My colleague from Guelph has talked many times about the problems of robocalls in Guelph. I am sure he has discussed this with former MP, Frank Valeriote. I found the CBC story on this from 2012, which reads:

Liberal campaign in Guelph fined for robocall violations.

MP Frank Valeriote's team sent automated phone calls to voters without identifying the source.

I want to join my friend from Guelph in deploring the conduct of Frank Valeriote's campaign in that respect, and we really need to see, finally, some integrity from Liberal campaigns. If members are skeptical about this, it is a CBC story.

I want to ask my colleague for her perspective on the debate commissioner who was announced today. There was no consultation from the government on this, and yet the Liberals appointed an eminent person, a former governor general. However, the point remains that a legitimate expectation was created around consultation on that, and yet there has been no consultation.

• (1710)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, that is quite a serious development that happened just yesterday. It is expected and understood that whoever will adjudicate the election process, or in this case the debate process, is not put in place with the support and consensus of all political parties, the party in power who appoints that person may well be seen, rightly or wrongly, to be making a partisan appointment. Of course, our hands are raised today to Johnston, a good man, but the repeated commitment made by the Minister of Democratic Institutions to the House committee overseeing and reviewing the process for the leaders' debate was that “I will take this committee's advice”. The committee's advice was to adhere to that tradition of having a consensus view.

The government taxed people three-quarters of a million dollars for a process to establish the new oversight person for the leaders' debate. It failed to talk with the parties. It failed to do the process and present a consensus view. To announce it out in the front hall, to the great surprise of everyone, is a disappointment.

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

[Member spoke in Cree]

[English]

I am very happy to have the chance to speak at last on Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canadian Elections Act.

I remember meeting time and time again citizens from my riding, from my city, and more generally from my province of Manitoba in 2015 who were absolutely sick of the Harper Conservatives. They were sick of a government that was trying to take away their democratic right to vote and putting in place an ideology of winner takes all. The Harper Conservatives did everything in their power to bend the electoral laws to their ideology and ignored the concerns of others. They used voter suppression, but people stood up in true Canadian fashion to fight for their rights.

I met young people in my riding from the University of Winnipeg who went out on the day of the election to vote en masse. Even though sometimes they did not have identification, they went out of their way to get the identification to ensure that they could vote. I met homeless people who raised enough money by begging on the streets to get enough money, the \$20, to get voter identification from the province to be able to vote on that day. I met indigenous people who lined up around the street.

However, I still met people who were not able to vote and were turned away from the polls, because they were not allowed to exercise their democratic right. Other young people, other indigenous people, and some from the inner city of Winnipeg were told, unfortunately, that they did not have the proper ID and could not vote.

While some people were able to vote, others were turned away. This was voter suppression, because the Harper Conservatives were afraid of the public. They were afraid of others coming out to exercise their democratic right to vote. The Harper Conservatives spent a lot of time attacking the Chief Electoral Officer and non-ideological, non-partisan, non-political role of defending Canadians' rights to a proper democracy.

Lastly, when election time comes, it is up to Canadians to stand up for their rights and to use every chance to exercise their democratic right to vote. We all benefit from voting in our elections, and never again will a government take away our right to vote and to exercise our inalienable right to our democratic and human rights.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Thursday, October 25, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1755)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

Government Orders

(Division No. 921)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|--|--|
| Aboultaif | Albas |
| Albrecht | Alleslev |
| Allison | Arnold |
| Aubin | Barsalou-Duval |
| Beaulieu | Benson |
| Benzen | Bergen |
| Bernier | Berthold |
| Blaikie | Blaney (North Island—Powell River) |
| Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis) | Block |
| Boudrias | Boulerice |
| Boutin-Sweet | Brassard |
| Brosseau | Calkins |
| Cannings | Caron |
| Carrie | Chong |
| Choquette | Christopherson |
| Clarke | Clement |
| Cooper | Cullen |
| Davies | Deltell |
| Diotte | Doherty |
| Donnelly | Dreeschen |
| Dubé | Duvall |
| Eglinski | Falk (Provencher) |
| Fast | Finley |
| Genuis | Gill |
| Gladu | Godin |
| Gourde | Hardcastle |
| Harder | Hoback |
| Hughes | Jeneroux |
| Johns | Jolibois |
| Julian | Kelly |
| Kent | Kitchen |
| Kusie | Kwan |
| Lake | Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry) |
| Laverdière | Leitch |
| Liepert | Lloyd |
| Lobb | Lukiwski |
| MacGregor | MacKenzie |
| Maguire | Malcolmson |
| Marcil | Martel |
| Masse (Windsor West) | Mathysen |
| May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) | McCauley (Edmonton West) |
| McColeman | McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) |
| Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) | Moore |
| Motz | Nantel |
| Nater | Nicholson |
| Obhrai | O'Toole |
| Paul-Hus | Pauzé |
| Plamondon | Poillievre |
| Quach | Raïtt |
| Rankin | Rayes |
| Reid | Rempel |
| Richards | Sansoucy |
| Saroya | Schmale |
| Shields | Shipley |
| Sopuck | Sorenson |
| Stanton | Ste-Marie |
| Strahl | Stubbs |
| Sweet | Thériault |
| Tilson | Trost |
| Trudel | Van Kesteren |
| Viersen | Wagantall |
| Warawa | Warkentin |
| Waugh | Webber |
| Weir | Wong |
| Yurdiga | Zimmer — 130 |

NAYS

Members

| | |
|------------|----------------|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Amos | Anandasangaree |
| Arseneault | Arya |
| Ayoub | Badawey |
| Bagnell | Bains |
| Baylis | Beech |
| Bennett | Bibeau |
| Bittle | Blair |

Government Orders

| | |
|---|---|
| Boissonnault | Bossio |
| Bratina | Breton |
| Brison | Caesar-Chavannes |
| Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) | Chagger |
| Champagne | Chen |
| Cuzner | Dabrusin |
| Damoff | DeCoursey |
| Dhaliwal | Dhillon |
| Dubourg | Duclos |
| Duguid | Dzerowicz |
| Easter | Ehsassi |
| El-Khoury | Ellis |
| Erskine-Smith | Eyking |
| Eyolfson | Fergus |
| Fillmore | Finnigan |
| Fonseca | Fortier |
| Fragiskatos | Fraser (West Nova) |
| Fraser (Central Nova) | Gameau |
| Goldsmith-Jones | Goodale |
| Gould | Graham |
| Grewal | Hajdu |
| Hardie | Harvey |
| Hébert | Hehr |
| Hogg | Holland |
| Hussen | Hutchings |
| Iacono | Jones |
| Jordan | Kang |
| Khalid | Khera |
| Lambropoulos | Lamoureux |
| Lapointe | Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) |
| LeBlanc | Lebouthillier |
| Lighthound | Lockhart |
| Long | Longfield |
| Ludwig | MacAulay (Cardigan) |
| Maloney | Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) |
| May (Cambridge) | McCrimmon |
| McDonald | McGuinty |
| McKay | McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) |
| McLeod (Northwest Territories) | Mendès |
| Medicino | Mihychuk |
| Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs) | |
| Monsef | |
| Morneau | Morrissey |
| Murray | Nassif |
| Nault | Ng |
| O'Connell | Oliphant |
| Oliver | O'Regan |
| Ouellette | Paradis |
| Peschisolido | Peterson |
| Petitpas Taylor | Philpott |
| Picard | Poissant |
| Qualtrough | Ratansi |
| Rioux | Robillard |
| Rodriguez | Rogers |
| Romanado | Rota |
| Rudd | Ruimy |
| Rusnak | Sahota |
| Saini | Sajjan |
| Samson | Sangha |
| Sarai | Scarpaleggia |
| Schiefke | Schulte |
| Serré | Sgro |
| Shanahan | Sheehan |
| Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon) | Sidhu (Brampton South) |
| Sikand | Simms |
| Sorbara | Tabbara |
| Tan | Tassi |
| Tootoo | Trudeau |
| Vandal | Vandenbeld |
| Vaughan | Virani |
| Whalen | Wilkinson |
| Wilson-Raybould | Wrzesnewskyj |
| Yip | Young |
| Zahid — 161 | |

PAIRED

Members

Cormier

Gill — 2

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.*[Translation]*

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 922)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Amos | Anandasangaree |
| Arseneault | Arya |
| Aubin | Ayoub |
| Badawey | Bagnell |
| Bains | Baylis |
| Beech | Bennett |
| Benson | Bibeau |
| Bittle | Blaikie |
| Blair | Blaney (North Island—Powell River) |
| Boissonnault | Bossio |
| Boulerice | Boutin-Sweet |
| Bratina | Breton |
| Brison | Brosseau |
| Caesar-Chavannes | Cannings |
| Caron | Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) |
| Chagger | Champagne |
| Chen | Choquette |
| Christopherson | Cullen |
| Cuzner | Dabrusin |
| Damoff | Davies |
| DeCoursey | Dhaliwal |
| Dhillon | Donnelly |
| Dubé | Dubourg |
| Duclos | Duguid |
| Duvall | Dzerowicz |
| Easter | Ehsassi |
| El-Khoury | Ellis |
| Erskine-Smith | Eyking |
| Eyolfson | Fergus |
| Fillmore | Finnigan |
| Fonseca | Fortier |
| Fragiskatos | Fraser (West Nova) |
| Fraser (Central Nova) | Gameau |
| Goldsmith-Jones | Goodale |
| Gould | Graham |
| Grewal | Hajdu |
| Hardcastle | Hardie |
| Harvey | Hébert |
| Hehr | Hogg |
| Holland | Hughes |
| Hussen | Hutchings |
| Iacono | Johns |
| Jolibois | Jones |
| Jordan | Julian |
| Kang | Khalid |
| Khera | Kwan |

Private Members' Business

Lambropoulos
Lapointe
Laverdière
Lebouthillier
Lockhart
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
Malcolmson
Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKay
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Moore
Morrissey
Nantel
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouелlette
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Quach
Rankin
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sansoucy
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Tabbara
Tassi
Trudeau
Vandal
Vaughan
Weir
Wilkinson
Wrzesnewskyj
Young

Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc
Lighbound
Long
Ludwig
MacGregor
Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Morneau
Murray
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Poissant
Qualtrough
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Sarai
Schieffe
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sorbara
Tan
Tootoo
Trudel
Vandenbeld
Virani
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Yip
Zahid— 196

McColeman
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Nater
Obhrai
Paul-Hus
Plamondon
Raitt
Reid
Richards
Schmale
Shipley
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Stubbs
Thériault
Trost
Viersen
Warawa
Waugh
Wong
Zimmer— 95

McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Motz
Nicholson
O'Toole
Pauzé
Poilievre
Rayes
Rempel
Saroya
Shields
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Tilson
Van Kesteren
Wagantall
Warkentin
Webber
Yurdiga

PAIRED

Members

Cormier

Gill— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

RECORD SUSPENSION PROGRAM

The House resumed from October 24 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion M-161, under private members' business, in the name of the member for Saint John—Rothesay.

● (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 923*)

YEAS

Members

Aboulttaif
Albrecht
Alghabra
Allison
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Aubin
Badawey
Bains
Baylis
Beech
Benson
Bergen
Berthold
Bittle
Blair
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Bratina
Brisson

Albas
Aldag
Alleslev
Amos
Arnold
Arya
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Bennett
Benzen
Bernier
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block
Bossio
Boulerice
Brassard
Breton
Brosseau

NAYS

Members

Aboulttaif
Albrecht
Allison
Barsalou-Duval
Benzen
Bernier
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boudrias
Calkins
Chong
Clement
Deltell
Doherty
Eglinski
Fast
Genuis
Gladu
Gourde
Hoback
Kelly
Kitchen
Lake
Leitch
Lloyd
Lukiwski
Maguire
Martel

Albas
Alleslev
Arnold
Beaulieu
Bergen
Berthold
Block
Brassard
Carrie
Clarke
Cooper
Diotte
Dreeschen
Falk (Provencher)
Finley
Gill
Godin
Harder
Jeneroux
Kent
Kusie
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Liepert
Lobb
MacKenzie
Marcil
McCauley (Edmonton West)

Private Members' Business

Caesar-Chavannes
Cannings
Carrie
Chagger
Chen
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Cuzner
Damoff
DeCoursey
Dhaliwal
Diotte
Donnelly
Dubé
Duclos
Duvall
Easter
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Falk (Provencher)
Fergus
Finley
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Genuis
Gladu
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Graham
Hajdu
Harder
Harvey
Hehr
Hogg
Hughes
Hutchings
Jeneroux
Jolibois
Jordan
Kang
Kent
Khera
Kusie
Lake
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Laverdière
Lebouthillier
Liepert
Lloyd
Lockhart
Longfield
Lukiwski
MacGregor
Maguire
Maloney
Martel
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
Mathysen
May (Cambridge)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Soeurs)
Monsef
Morneau
Motz
Nantel
Nater
Ng
Obhrai
Oliphant
O'Regan
Oueltette
Paul-Hus
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor

Calkins
Caron
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Champagne
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Cullen
Dabrusin
Davies
Deltell
Dhillon
Doherty
Dreeshen
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Eglinski
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fast
Fillmore
Finnigan
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Gameau
Gill
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Hardcastle
Hardie
Hébert
Hoback
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Johns
Jones
Julian
Kelly
Khalid
Kitchen
Kwan
Lambropoulos
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc
Leitch
Lightbound
Lobb
Long
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKenzie
Malcolmson
Marcil
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McColeman
McDonald
McKay
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Moore
Morrissey
Murray
Nassif
Nault
Nicholson
O'Connell
Oliver
O'Toole
Paradis
Pauzé
Peterson
Philpott

Picard
Poilievre
Quach
Raitt
Ratansi
Reid
Richards
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schmale
Serré
Shanahan
Shields
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sopuck
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Stubbs
Tabbara
Tassi
Tilson
Trost
Trudel
Vandal
Vaughan
Virani
Warawa
Waugh
Weir
Wilkinson
Wong
Yip
Yurdiga
Zimmer — 291

Plamondon
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rankin
Rayes
Rempel
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sansoucy
Saroya
Schiefke
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Tan
Thériault
Tootoo
Trudeau
Van Kesteren
Vandenbeld
Viersen
Wagantall
Warkentin
Webber
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesniewskij
Young
Zahid

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Cormier

Gill — 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[Translation]

FILIPINO HERITAGE MONTH

The House resumed from October 25 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier this day, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 155 under private members' business in the name of the hon. member for Scarborough Centre.

● (1815)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 924)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Alghabra
Allison
Anandasangaree

Albas
Aldag
Alleslev
Amos
Arnold

Private Members' Business

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| Arseneault | Arya | Mihychuk | Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) |
| Aubin | Ayoub | Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs) | |
| Badawey | Bagnell | Monsef | |
| Bains | Barsalou-Duval | Moore | Morneau |
| Baylis | Beaulieu | Morrissey | Motz |
| Beech | Bennett | Murray | Nantel |
| Benson | Benzen | Nassif | Nater |
| Bergen | Berthold | Nault | Ng |
| Bibeau | Bittle | Nicholson | Obhrai |
| Blaikie | Blair | O'Connell | Oliphant |
| Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis) | Oliver | O'Regan |
| Block | Boissonnault | O'Toole | Ouellette |
| Bossio | Boudrias | Paradis | Paul-Hus |
| Boulerice | Boutin-Sweet | Pauzé | Peschisolido |
| Brassard | Bratina | Peterson | Petipas Taylor |
| Breton | Brisson | Philpott | Picard |
| Brosseau | Caesar-Chavannes | Plamondon | Poilievre |
| Calkins | Cannings | Poissant | Quach |
| Caron | Carrie | Qualtrough | Raitt |
| Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) | Chagger | Rankin | Ratansi |
| Champagne | Chen | Rayes | Reid |
| Chong | Choquette | Rempel | Richards |
| Christopherson | Clarke | Rioux | Robillard |
| Clement | Cooper | Rodriguez | Rogers |
| Cullen | Cuzner | Romanado | Rota |
| Dabrusin | Damoff | Rudd | Ruimy |
| Davies | DeCoursey | Rusnak | Sahota |
| Deltell | Dhaliwal | Saini | Sajjan |
| Dhillon | Diotte | Samson | Sangha |
| Doherty | Donnelly | Sansoucy | Sarai |
| Dreeschen | Dubé | Saroya | Scarpaleggia |
| Dubourg | Duclos | Schiefke | Schmale |
| Duguid | Duvall | Schulte | Serré |
| Dzerowicz | Easter | Sgro | Shanahan |
| Eglinski | Ehsassi | Sheehan | Shields |
| El-Khoury | Ellis | Shipley | Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon) |
| Erskine-Smith | Eyking | Sidhu (Brampton South) | Sikand |
| Eyolfson | Falk (Provencher) | Simms | Sopuck |
| Fast | Fergus | Sorbara | Sorenson |
| Fillmore | Finley | Stanton | Ste-Marie |
| Finnigan | Fonseca | Strahl | Stubbs |
| Fortier | Fragiskatos | Sweet | Tabbara |
| Fraser (West Nova) | Fraser (Central Nova) | Tan | Tassi |
| Garneau | Genuis | Thériault | Tilson |
| Gill | Gladu | Tootoo | Trost |
| Godin | Goldsmith-Jones | Trudeau | Trudel |
| Goodale | Gould | Van Kesteren | Vandal |
| Gourde | Graham | Vandenbeld | Vaughan |
| Grewal | Hajdu | Viersen | Virani |
| Hardcastle | Harder | Wagantall | Warawa |
| Hardie | Harvey | Warkentin | Waugh |
| Hébert | Hehr | Webber | Weir |
| Hoback | Hogg | Whalen | Wilkinson |
| Holland | Hughes | Wilson-Raybould | Wong |
| Hussen | Hutchings | Lloyd | Yip |
| Iacono | Jeneroux | Lockhart | Yurdiga |
| Johns | Jolibois | Longfield | Zimmer— 290 |
| Jones | Jordan | Lukowski | |
| Julian | Kang | MacGregor | |
| Kelly | Kent | Maguire | NAYS |
| Khalid | Khera | Maloney | |
| Kitchen | Kusie | Martel | |
| Kwan | Lake | Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) | PAIRED |
| Lambropoulos | Lamoureux | May (Cambridge) | |
| Lapointe | Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry) | McCauley (Edmonton West) | Members |
| Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) | Laverdière | McCrimmon | |
| LeBlanc | Lebouthillier | McGuinty | |
| Leitch | Liepert | McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) | Gill— 2 |
| Lightbound | Lloyd | McLeod (Northwest Territories) | |
| Lobb | Lockhart | Mendicino | |
| Long | Longfield | | |
| Ludwig | Lukowski | | |
| MacAulay (Cardigan) | MacGregor | | |
| MacKenzie | Maguire | | |
| Malcolmson | Maloney | | |
| Marcil | Martel | | |
| Masse (Windsor West) | Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) | | |
| Mathysen | May (Cambridge) | | |
| May (Saanic—Gulf Islands) | McCauley (Edmonton West) | | |
| McColeman | McCrimmon | | |
| McDonald | McGuinty | | |
| McKay | McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) | | |
| McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) | McLeod (Northwest Territories) | | |
| Mendès | Mendicino | | |

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Private Members' Business

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I tabled the certificate of nomination for the Right Hon. David Johnston to the position of debates commissioner. I misspoke and presented it pursuant to Standing Order 111.1 and it should have been pursuant to Standing Order 110 (2). As such, I would ask that the record be corrected to reflect the correct standing order.

The Speaker: It being 6:23 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1820)

[Translation]

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-376, an act to designate the month of April as Sikh heritage month, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no amendment motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise once again in the House to debate this bill. The speed at which this is being supported and moving through the stages is a sign of how much support the bill has on all sides of the House.

We have heard throughout this process, members sharing their views on why the bill must pass, the history and contribution of Sikh Canadians and the journey it has been from the days when those early Sikh pioneers arrived in Canada to the present day where this nation stands tall as a leader for equality, diversity and compassion. The very purpose of the bill is for all Canadians to fully understand our history and the significant role the Sikh community has played in it and for us to become even more of a proud multicultural country.

By passing the bill to designate the month of April as Sikh heritage month, we will ensure we bring attention to the lesser known moments and key individuals who played a role in shaping our country. That is what I want to do today. I want to share with members some of the important moments and individuals who have been part of the Sikh Canadian journey to what it is today.

The arrival of Sikhs in Canada began in 1897, as members of the Hong Kong military made their way to Canada through Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. These soldiers were celebrated with local papers printing headlines, "Turbaned Men Excite Interest". They appreciated this welcome and liked the similarity between British Columbia's climate and land to that of Punjab and made plans to immigrate here.

In 1904, Sikhs began to migrate and by 1908, almost 5,000 Sikhs moved to Canada.

By 1911, Sikhs began heading east from B.C. to Ontario. One of them was Buckam Singh, who came to Canada in 1907 at the age of 14. In 1915, he joined the Canadian forces to become one of the nine Sikhs who served in World War I. He fought in the battlefields of Flanders Fields, where he was wounded twice and treated at the hospital run by one of Canada's most famous poets, Dr. Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, who wrote *In Flanders Fields*.

This shows us the parallels between well-known Canadian history and the Sikh Canadian history. The bravery and sacrifice of soldiers like Buckam Singh is a part of the legendary contributions Canadians made in Flanders Fields, which is part of our identity today.

Unfortunately, while there was initial excitement and acceptance in the early arrival of Sikhs and a desire on the part of Sikhs to become an equal part of Canadian society and serve with their brothers, sentiments changed and laws began to be passed that would restrict Indian immigration.

In 1908, an order in council declared there must be a continuous journey to come to Canada, and it was this law that would stop the *Komagata Maru* in 1914.

This is the incident we all know. It has shown Canada transform from its darkest moment to one of our greatest moments when the current Prime Minister, the member for Papineau, offered an apology in the very House where those prejudicial laws were passed. This incident also showed the determination of Sikhs who made it their mission to become equal citizens of Canada. Many early pioneers peacefully protested and worked to stop the discrimination that was taking place.

As these issues progressed, gurdwaras began to open and play an important role within our community.

Private Members' Business

● (1825)

Gurdwaras were a place that the community could gather, find support and discuss the issues they were facing. They were also key to Sikhs retaining their identity and religion, providing them a safe place to worship, including reciting prayer, reading scripture and singing hymns. At the centre of any gurdwara is the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture and eternal guru for Sikhs. Bhai Arjan Singh brought the first Guru Granth Sahib to Canada in 1906 to a house in Port Moody.

From there, the Khalsa Diwan Society opened the first gurdwara in North America in Vancouver in 1908, as well as organizing the first Nagar Kirtan. There was a small gathering that marked this occasion and today the Nagar Kirtan held in my riding of Surrey—Newton is the biggest in the world outside of India, with over half a million people attending each and every year. As the community grew, more gurdwaras opened in Victoria, Fraser Mills and Abbotsford in 1912, followed by the Akali Singh Sikh gurdwara in 1952 and the first gurdwara in Ontario in 1965.

The growth of the community and the close-knit nature of Sikh Canadians resulted in the formation of Paldi, British Columbia, by Mayo Singh and named after his birthplace in the village of Paldi in India. This became one of the earliest towns for Punjabi settlers. It was a complete town with its own lumber mill, school and postal office, and the centre of the town was the gurdwara built in 1919.

Today, there are over 100 gurdwaras across Canada, offering not only a place of worship but also food and shelter for the public, as well as a place for the community to gather.

These early gurdwaras have become home to the history and struggles of the community and continue to stand as a reminder of how far the community has come. A historic moment for the Sikh Canadian community came when the right hon. prime minister Jean Chrétien declared the Gur Sikh Temple in Abbotsford a national historic site in 2002. It is the oldest existing Sikh gurdwara in North America and is now the only gurdwara outside of India and Pakistan that is designated a national historic site.

Through all of these early struggles and the determination of the pioneers, Sikh Canadians began to receive the recognition and equal standing in society they deserved by the late 1940s. Sikh Canadians were given full voting rights in 1947 after a 12-man delegation, including members of the Khalsa Diwan Society, presented their case to British Columbia Premier Hart. This outreach resulted in the first minor victory, with the right to vote being given to all those from the Asian and South Asian communities who had fought in World War II.

The lobbying continued with Kartar Singh, Kapoor Singh, Dr. Pandia and Mayo Singh leading a delegation to the 1946 municipalities conference in Harrison Hot Springs, British Columbia. By April 1947, all South Asian males were granted the right to vote in both provincial and federal elections. Beginning in the 1980s, the barriers to wearing Sikh articles of faith were removed and it became easier for Sikhs to practise their religion while succeeding in their careers.

● (1830)

It started with Inspector Baltej Singh Dhillon, who fought to wear his turban as part of the RCMP uniform in order to complete his dream of becoming a Mountie.

In 1993, with the election of the Hon. Gurbax Singh Malhi to the House of Commons, it changed the rules that had previously prevented members of Parliament from wearing turbans in the House of Commons.

These are just some of the key moments and individuals that need to be honoured, recognized and celebrated so we can become an even more proudly diverse society.

The history of Sikhs in Canada is a story of compassion, hard work, persistence and progress. From the first Sikh Canadians arriving in 1897, to the community becoming a large part of Canada's social, economic and political fabric, Sikhs have played an integral role in the country from business and philanthropic leaders, to hard-working Canadians who work across various sectors throughout our vast country. For example, in my riding of Surrey—Newton, over the past three years, a group of young Canadian Sikh men and women have held food and toy drives every holiday season. They have collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in food and toys for the Surrey Food Bank and the Vancouver Children's Hospital. This has inspired other groups within our city to do the same, and this will soon be the largest organized effort of giving food and toys to those less fortunate in the entire nation.

Another great example of the Sikh Canadian community giving to others is expressed through the Blood Donation by Sikh Nation campaign, that also started in Surrey—Newton. This annual blood donation campaign has saved the lives of more than 130,000 Canadians. It has now grown to include clinics across Canada, the United States, Australia and other countries worldwide.

These are some of the many examples where Canadians of Sikh heritage have played a key role from coast to coast to coast and become an equal part of the Canadian fabric and society. This is why we need to make sure that the rich history and contributions of Sikhs in Canada are not forgotten and they are remembered so that every generation knows the journey of this community and our country.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me an opportunity to address the House. I thank all members for supporting this bill.

● (1835)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing forward this initiative, and for his speech on the subject. I was planning on supporting it anyway, but if I had not been his speech certainly would have convinced me.

I want to ask him two questions. I appreciated the remarks he made about the military service that has happened through the Sikh community. It has not always historically been recognized. We know that in India, as well as here, there has always been significant representation of the Sikh community in the military service. I wonder if he wants to speak more to that point.

Private Members' Business

The second question I want to ask is about the plight of the Sikh community in Afghanistan. This is something that has been discussed in the House. I know the declining population of the Sikh community in Afghanistan is a major concern for the community. There is a significant need there. There is opportunity for private sponsorship here in Canada and engagement of the community here in Canada around that issue. I would like to hear his perspective on that, and what we can do to help that segment of the community.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his support and encouragement on this bill. I am very indebted to all members, and particularly this member, for asking this question about the military.

As I mentioned, 1897 was the first time Sikhs participated in the military in Canada, and since then, the tradition remains. We are fortunate to have the Minister of National Defence, who was a colonel in the military and served in Afghanistan.

The hon. member asked about the plight of the Sikhs in Afghanistan. In fact, that is a very compassionate issue the hon. member has raised. Mr. Bhullar, the late MLA from Alberta, is the one who brought this issue forward.

The minister responsible for immigration is working on that file, and we will make sure that Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan who need help are given a chance for a good life.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. This is very important private member's business. I wonder if there is quorum in the House.

• (1840)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for raising this. I do not see quorum at present. I would ask that the bells be rung to call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Speaker: We now have quorum.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I was not sure when you called quorum. I know that there are 20 or so Liberals here, but there were no Conservatives on the benches at the time. Does that mean—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member knows that we do not draw attention to the presence or absence of members in the chamber.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my friend from Surrey—Newton. I had the honour of seconding his bill. I appreciate very much what he has brought forward to the House to celebrate the importance of the Sikh heritage to our democracy.

Moe Sihota was the first Sikh elected to federal or provincial office anywhere. I am proud that he comes from my province of British Columbia. In 1991, he became the first Sikh minister.

Does the member agree that having Mr. Jagmeet Singh, the first Sikh and visible minority leader of a national party, in this House

would be another historic event? I wonder if the member will work with us to make sure that happens just as soon as possible.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Victoria for seconding my bill. It is not my bill. In fact, it has become a bill from everyone here.

The hon. member mentioned the leader of the NDP, Mr. Jagmeet Singh. We are very proud that he is the leader of a major party. If members were to go through my previous speeches, they would see that I mentioned him and that this is a history-creating event. The Prime Minister is working diligently, and in the coming weeks and months, we will be able to see that opportunity arise.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since being elected, I have had the honour of getting to know Canada's Sikh community very well. In particular, I have worked extensively with the community on human rights issues. When we speak of Sikh heritage, standing up for human rights is in the community's DNA.

The Sikh faith began at a time and in a place of significant pre-existing interreligious conflict, and in the context of deeply ingrained caste-based discrimination. "Caste" describes a cultural and religious system whereby people are seen as having greater or lesser dignity and value as a result of their birth. It has implications for the occupations people can undertake, but also for the fundamental way people are treated and viewed.

While most of us might take for granted the idea that people are of equal dignity regardless of who their parents are, that has not seemed obvious in many different places and times. Caste hierarchy was the assumed background of the place and time in which Sikhism emerged. From the beginning, the Sikh faith rejected the idea of caste. It advanced a profoundly countercultural assertion of universal human equality.

Sikh gurus recognized that even after being formally rejected, the caste system might live on in the subtle impressions of people, so they sought to introduce practical changes that would do away with the systemic racism of the caste system.

Langar was established, whereby Sikhs and members of other faiths would be welcome to enjoy a meal at a gurdwara at no cost. People would sit on the floor together enjoying delicious food, regardless of their background or social station. Langar operationalized this idea of social equality.

Names could also be an indicator of caste background, so the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji, assigned the last name "Singh" to all Sikh men and "Kaur" to all Sikh women. This served the important objective of obscuring caste background and promoting the practical recognition of equality and universal human dignity.

As a Christian, I see many practical parallels between the social history of Christianity and Sikhism. Both came on the scene in highly unequal societies and championed the rights of the poor and the oppressed. I feel a great deal of kinship with the Sikh community because of a shared appreciation for the role faith can play in impelling us to work for a more just society.

Private Members' Business

Equality and universal human dignity are not ideas that came to us through scientific discovery. Equality is a normative idea, not subject to experimentation and not falsifiable through the scientific method. It is a matter of indisputable history that faith, in the way it invites us to go beyond things that are knowable through reason alone, has led us to see the dignity and worth of all human beings. From its very inception, Sikhism was defined by its rejection of the caste system, the prevailing system of inequality.

When I was in India about three years ago, I had the honour of meeting with Dr. Udit Raj, a leading activist for the rights of Dalits and a member of India's Parliament with the governing BJP. Caste-based discrimination continues to be a major challenge, despite the best efforts of many from all faiths and in all parts of Indian society to combat it.

I was glad to have met Dr. Raj before visiting Sri Harmandir Sahib, or the Golden Temple, because by explaining the ongoing impact of the caste system, he helped me understand in a particular way the vital importance of Sikhism's rejection of it. It made my visit to Sri Harmandir Sahib that much more meaningful. The Golden Temple is more than just a temple. Continuing the Sikh tradition of Langar, tens of thousands of people are fed at that temple every single day. However, we do not have to go that far to get a good meal; our local gurdwara offers the same.

Early Sikhs did not just fight against caste-based discrimination, but also defended freedom of religion, even for those who were not part of their community. The ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, gave his life to defend the religious freedom of the Hindu community, then under pressure to convert to Islam. He set an example of courage and self-sacrifice, which Sikhs have continued to follow to this day.

In a time of intensifying conflict between different communities, Sikhs sought to advance freedom and justice, and have continued to do so until the present day. The Sikh experience in Canada has been defined by remarkable successes, including rich contributions in commerce, culture, philanthropy and politics.

Canada is a community of communities, a place where people can celebrate and practise their distinctiveness and recognize particular community with those who share their culture or faith, while still being part of a larger and united community that is one nation. I do not believe we should think of ourselves as a postnational state, but rather as a state that seeks unity in the midst of its diversity. Sikhs have become a vital part of our community of communities, of our cultural mosaic.

●(1845)

However, Sikhs have faced some particular challenges in Canada as well. The *Komagata Maru* incident and other cases of official discrimination come to mind, as do continuing instances where the Sikh community is falsely portrayed as violent or where minor instances of proposed religious accommodation are spuriously rejected.

The Sikh community members have a long history of standing up for their rights and the rights of others. We must always stand with them to defend religious liberty, understanding that the principle of

religious liberty is not about seeking special accommodation for one group or another, but it is about defending an idea that protects us all.

The right of a Sikh to wear a turban while working in the public service, the right of a Muslim physician to refuse to participate in or refer for euthanasia, the right of a Quaker not to join the military, the right of a Jew to receive time off work during holy days and the right of an atheist not to participate in civic prayer are not special rights. These are fundamental rights. These are not rights invented by newcomers. These are rights contained in our implied bill of rights since 1867, reaffirmed in Diefenbaker's bill of rights and in the charter.

We would never have had a country without the clear protection of the rights of minority faith communities. They are fundamental to who we are, and as Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji understood when he gave his life for Hindus, we put our own fundamental human rights on shakier footing when we fail to uphold them for anyone else.

There is a difficult history whereby Sikhs have come to be portrayed in some quarters as violent. In June of 1984, in the context of escalating tensions overseas, the Indian army invaded the Golden Temple Complex. This was called Operation Blue Star. It was aimed at rooting out militants. However, the attack left many civilians dead who simply had gone to their faith's most holy site in order to pray. After this attack, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by a Sikh bodyguard, and this was followed by a campaign of organized violence, torture and slaughter against the Sikh community in parts of India. These events had a searing impact on the Sikh community.

When I was at the Holocaust museum in Israel, our guide told us that Israelis are a post-traumatic people; that is, they live in the shadow of and are deeply impacted by this experience of violence that their community has been through. The post-traumatic aspect of Sikh identity is an important part of Sikh history, and it reinforces the community's commitment to fighting for human rights, their own and those of others.

The call for remembrance and for justice and reconciliation is always important. We do not move forward by forgetting the past. Rather, we move forward by remembering it and by seeking to learn its lessons.

On the heels of the violence of 1984, Canada experienced the largest act of terrorism in its history, the bombing of Air India Flight 182. This terrible event was linked to ongoing tensions in India, and it unfortunately furthered negative stereotypes about the Sikh community, even though many of the victims were themselves from the Sikh community.

Private Members' Business

Unfortunately, this has led at times to the confused lumping together of violent extremists with those who legitimately advocate for human rights. So let us always be clear as parliamentarians that violence has absolutely no place in this country, but people who advocate peacefully for human rights or for political change have every right to do so. The Sikh community in Canada is a model community, no more violent or extreme than the Christian community or the Jewish community. These painful events of the past are important to remember and reflect on, and we can move forward in a way that draws from the wisdom of the gurus, who taught understanding, peaceful coexistence and commitment to universal human dignity.

Today, the Sikh community members continue to be leaders in the fight for human rights, for human rights here in Canada and in other parts of the world. It has been a pleasure to work recently with different organizations to advance the cause of the persecuted Sikh and Hindu community in Afghanistan. I was pleased to join so many of my opposition colleagues last week tabling petitions supporting their cause.

The response from the Sikh community to the crisis facing their fellows in Afghanistan is quite revealing. They want to see Canada offer refuge to these incredibly vulnerable people, but they want to be part of the process by which these refugees come as private sponsors. All the government has to do is allow this process to happen. We know how successful private-sponsored refugees are in general, because they come into existing communities of love and support, which can help them integrate into Canadian life.

In the last election, Conservatives promised to create a special program to allow vulnerable religious minorities in Afghanistan to be directly sponsored to Canada. I made a statement on this issue in December of 2015, and I wrote to the Minister of Immigration again this summer. The government has had three years to take action, and nothing would make me happier than to see it take real action on this file, sooner rather than later.

I focused my remarks today specifically on issues around human rights, which is an area of great passion for me and I know for the Sikh community as well. I look forward to continuing to work with these great Canadians to advance the cause of justice and to make sure that all people, regardless of their background, are recognized by their community in the same way that they are recognized in the eyes of God: as people with intrinsic and immutable dignity and value.

●(1850)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in April of this year, for the first time in more than 100 years, the Sikh community of Victoria celebrated Vaisakhi with a parade. Over 1,000 people came out. It was full of light. It was full of colour. It was full of energy. That summarizes what the Sikh community has brought to our community.

I was so pleased to second my friend's bill when he brought it forward to recognize the contribution of the hard-working people of Sikh ancestry who live in our community. It is particularly relevant on Vancouver Island, because so many of that community came here in the early part of the 20th century to establish themselves and create a new life for their family.

In fact, we have had a community of Sikh immigrants, who first established themselves in our community of Victoria in 1904. People forget just how long they have been an integral part of our community. We have had a few gurdwaras, especially the Khalsa Diwan Sikh temple on Topaz Avenue, the Punjabi Akali Sikh temple on Graham Street and the Gurdwara Singh Sabha temple on Cecelia Road. We have a large and vibrant community, heirs to that tradition of which I spoke, people who come to make a better life for themselves in our community.

During his remarks, my friend for Surrey—Newton properly paid tribute to the history and success of this community. Through hard work, it has made such a difference in our community.

For example, he talked of some of the travails of that community, which I would also like to refer to, such as the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914. However, some of the successes also need to be celebrated. The hard work of that community has led to success in so many different fields.

I would like to pay tribute to the Jawl family, which is famous in the business community for its work in development and is celebrated for what I call a “handshake” business. A handshake from the Jawl family is all one needs to create multi-million dollar enterprises. It is revered and loved in our community for its charity as well.

I always tell the story when new Canadians are sworn in. Mr. Gordy Dodd, a gentleman of Sikh tradition from south India, came here. Mr. Dodd sat in the parking lot of his furniture store business, on a platform about 100 metres over that. He had people come and donate money to the Red Cross to help the victims of the flooding in Calgary. When I asked him why he was doing that, he said, “Because we're all Canadians and we stand together”. I am proud to call that community the Sikh community of Victoria.

I am also proud because I had the opportunity to teach Moe Sihota when he was at law school. He will not remember that. He was the first Sikh elected to a federal or provincial seat in all of Canada, when he was elected in British Columbia. He served until 2001. In 1991, he became the first Sikh cabinet minister anywhere in our country. He has made enormous contributions not only to my party, but to the people of British Columbia as well, for example, the major expansion of B.C. parks. His commitment to the environment is legendary in our community.

We have another Sikh leader who is seeking to join us in the House of Commons. His name is Jagmeet Singh. He is the first visible minority to serve as leader of any of the major parties and is of course a proud Sikh himself. I was buoyed by the comments of my hon. friends about the efforts that the government would soon make to allow him to join us in the House of Commons and continue the tradition of service for which the Sikh community is so noted. I was pleased to hear the word “days” not “months” being used by the hon. member in his remarks.

I must mention the travesty of the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914. Just as we are soon going to give a long overdue apology to the Jewish community for the MS *St. Louis* incident, this was the subject of apologies that were long overdue.

Private Members' Business

•(1855)

Imagine hundreds of people on a boat, British citizens, as part of the Empire, who were coming to establish themselves as Canadians but were unable to do so essentially due to racism against what were then called Asiatics. Rules were made in 1908 by the Canadian government to stop them from coming here. They were required to pay an enormous sum of \$200. They were required to come to Canada via a continuous journey from India, even though there were very few ways to continuously journey from India in order to get to Canada. All sorts of fraudulent hurdles were put up in order to stop them. What they have contributed since that community finally established itself is legendary.

I am so proud to stand here today and support my friend for bringing to the attention of the House the need for Sikh heritage multiculturalism to be established.

I point out that in 2005 former NDP leader Jack Layton said, "It will be a wonderful day when a motion could be adopted in the House of Commons to recognize the five Sikh symbols." Also, former NDP member the hon. Judy Wasylycia-Leis moved a motion in Parliament that year to give proper recognition and respect for Sikhism and an equal place for Sikhs in Canada. Therefore, I can say that our friend is continuing a proud tradition that our party has worked with. It is not a partisan issue. We all want to see this established.

I salute my friend for bringing this bill forward. I look forward to enthusiastically supporting it when it comes to a vote.

•(1900)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Sikhs first came to this great country in 1897. Today there are over half a million Sikhs in Canada, making up approximately 1.5% of the population.

The story of this bill began in 1897, with Risaldar Major Kesur Singh, of the British Indian Army, landing on the shores of this great land. Kesur Singh and his fellow Sikh soldiers were in awe of this land's abundance and beauty, so when they went back, they told their families and friends, and a few years later, Sikhs started to migrate and settle in Abbotsford, working in the forestry and agriculture sectors.

By 1906, there were 1,500 Sikhs in Canada. They faced many challenges: the anti-Oriental riots of 1907, a push to have them moved to British Honduras, legislation to prohibit them from owning property, and not being allowed to vote, and the list goes on.

In 1914, the *Kamagata Maru* landed in Burrard Inlet with 376 passengers, 340 of whom were Sikhs. They were ordered to leave, and when they returned, 19 were shot and killed. However, they were not to be deterred. They worked hard and pushed for the right to vote. They built communities, gurdwaras and industry.

They joined the Canadian army, beginning with Private Buckam Singh, who served in the 20th Canadian Infantry in Flanders. Private Singh was one of approximately 10 Sikh Canadians who served in the Canadian army during the Great War. He was wounded on the battlefield and sent back home to Kitchener after he contracted tuberculosis. He would later pass away and be buried there. Every

year on Remembrance Day, Sikhs in Kitchener-Waterloo go to his grave for a special ceremony.

In 1943, the Khalsa Diwan Society, the first Sikh society in Canada, sent a 12-person delegation to seek the right to vote in Canada, and by 1947, they had received that right, thanks to the society. Though many officials tried to thwart their efforts to strive, specifically the likes of William Hopkinson, and two Sikh pioneers, Bhai Bhag Singh and Bhai Battan Singh, even lost their lives to his manipulative and racist actions, the Sikh pioneers continued to push ahead.

Sikhs in Canada have always had a passion to build institutes and co-operatives to help their communities succeed but at the same time preserve and cherish their faith, language and culture. In fact, they are the most visible of visible minorities, sporting steel bracelets, turbans and beards.

Besides gurdwaras, they founded the Guru Nanak Mining and Trust Company, in 1909, in Lions Bay, West Vancouver, under the guidance of Professor Teja Singh. Today there is a Khalsa Credit Union, with almost half a billion dollars in assets, and there are more than a dozen Sikh private schools, including the Khalsa School, the Sikh Academy Elementary School, the Guru Angad Dev Elementary School and the Gobind Sarvar School, to name a few. They have built their own non-profit crematoriums, including the Riverside Funeral Home and Crematorium, to help with the funeral rites of Sikh and Hindu Canadians. They have built free kitchens, feeding thousands daily in their gurdwaras from coast to coast to coast and also through Guru Nanak's Free Kitchen on the Downtown Eastside.

This bill is about the story of my family and many like myself. In 1959, my father, Mohan Singh Sarai, immigrated to Canada, settled in Abbotsford, worked in the sawmill industry and bought a small farm. He loved this country and sponsored my mother, Amrik Kaur Sarai, in 1967. Subsequently, my whole immediate and most of my extended family made Canada home. Sarais, Bains, Randahawas, Bahais and Dosanjhs all made Canada their home. However, none of this would be possible, including me being here today, if it was not for the pioneers who first settled, who fought for basic labour and voter rights, and who cleared the path for equal opportunities for all Canadians.

Members may wonder why we need these heritage months. Why celebrate diversity and the cultures and faiths that call Canada home? It is because that is what Canada is all about. I think Canada is this way because of our indigenous peoples. Our first nations welcomed all to this great land, even though the thanks and gratitude were not always as such. They shared this abundant land's bounty and beauty, and although there have been times when Canada has not kept up to that reputation, the pendulum always swings back because of these elders and their values. Therefore, on behalf of Sikh Canadians, I want to thank all the indigenous nations of this great country who welcomed us and allowed us to be who we are and celebrate our diversity.

Private Members' Business

● (1905)

The bill will mark April as Sikh heritage month. This will mark a month which for Sikhs is so important. It will commemorate Vaisakhi, the day the Khalsa was initiated, a day on which hundreds of thousands walk the streets of Surrey, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Toronto, singing hymns, sharing food and recognizing the human race as one, the freedom to worship as we please and social justice as a human right.

The bill will commemorate the Sikhs in Canada whether it is Private Buckam Singh; or industrialists Asa Singh Johal and Suneet Singh Tuli; or farmers like Rashpal Sing Dhilon; or women like pioneers Harnaam Kaur or Justice Shergill; or policing firsts like Inspector Baltej Singh Dhillon; or judicial firsts like Wally Oppal; or political firsts like Dr. Gulzar Cheema, the Hon. Herb Dhaliwal and Moe Sihota; or journalists like Belle Puri and Simi Sara; or athletes like Arjan Bhullar, Robin Bawa and David Sidoo; or our comedians, Lilly Singh and Jus Reign. All of these are just a sprinkle of the thousands who have contributed to the beautiful fabric of this land.

It is equally imperative that we recognize many of the lawmakers who really changed the way Canada saw its immigrants and diverse cultures. Notably the Right Hon. Pierre Trudeau and the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, who implemented the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the policy of multiculturalism. If it were not for these two key bills, we would not be tabling and debating this bill today.

Let us celebrate the achievements of Sikhs in Canada and leave stories for our children.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to ask you to call quorum.

The Speaker: I will ask the clerk to count the members present.

And the count having been taken:

The Speaker: Yes, we have quorum.

The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am especially pleased to know that several of my colleagues will be able to enjoy my comments in support of the legislation designating April as Sikh heritage month.

I have already had the opportunity to express my support for this bill, which was introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Surrey—Newton, who, need I remind hon. members, is not only an engineer, but also has the title of Fellow. I congratulate him. I was there when he was recognized as such. Like the Sikh community, engineers contribute to building our society.

Since this is the second time I speak on this subject, I would simply like to reiterate that I had given the example of my colleague from Markham—Unionville, who came to Canada when he was 21. He earned \$2 an hour at the time, and his only day off during his first year here was on July 1, which was then called Dominion Day and later became Canada Day.

He is an example of someone who arrived here and became fully integrated, as have the thousands of members of the Sikh community who have come here over the past 100 years. Naturally, since they

came from Asia, they mostly settled in British Columbia. Now, they are branching out across the country.

I want to remind members that Canada has the second-largest Sikh population in the world, after India. There are nearly half a million Sikhs here in Canada. Sikhism is practised by several million people around the world but has been established in Canada for about 100 years.

As Remembrance Day, November 11, approaches, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the First World War, I want to talk about how Sikhs have always been at our side in both good and bad times.

● (1910)

[*English*]

Before that, I would also like to commend the members of the heritage committee and the chair, the member for Toronto—Danforth, for making the bill pass through committee unanimously. Indeed, while we do not see it in the news as much, not all of what happens in Ottawa is partisan. People see mostly question period and think we are always fighting with each other, but recognizing and celebrating Sikh heritage and the contributions of Canadian Sikhs is one of those issues we all agree on.

The former NDP leader, Ed Broadbent, used to say that with the configuration of this room, we tend to fight and discuss what divides us, which is probably around 20%, but we never talk about the 80% that unites us. We are all here tonight in this room to talk about something that unites us. Maybe some of my colleagues would prefer to be in another room, but I am glad they are here tonight to share with us the discussion on the bill.

Recently I was happy to see my former cabinet colleague, Jason Kenney, who is now having a very successful political career in Alberta, along with Calgary's Sikh leaders, such as Captain Kamal Singh Dullat, and the community at large host an event honouring the contribution of Canadian Sikhs to Canada's military in its many missions for good and peace throughout our history.

My colleague from Markham—Unionville related the contributions of an individual. Now we can celebrate this as part of our Canadian heritage, in this case Canadian Sikhs in the armed forces' engagements, because there is an exhibition, organized by Pardeep Singh Nagra. He is the executive director of the Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada. This exhibition is going to go to other parts of the country as well.

What an amazing initiative it is, especially at this time, when we are willing to recognize in our law the contributions of the Sikh community. Mr. Nagra and the Sikh community were involved not only in the contributions by members of their community but also in linking it to one of the defining moments in our history, the involvement of Canada in the First World War. Canadian Sikh contributions to our military go as far back as the First World War 100 years ago.

Private Members' Business

That brings me to the same story that was shared by my colleague tonight of Buckam Singh. Buckam, known on his headstone as “Bukkan”, Singh was born in Punjab, India in December 1893. He was born in a place called Mahilpur. He came to Canada in 1907 at the age of 14 and became a miner in British Columbia before moving to Toronto around 1912 or 1913. He was, as we can see, very young when he immigrated to Canada, much younger than my colleague from Markham—Unionville, who was already in his twenties.

At that time, Buckam Singh was already married, but because of harsh immigration laws, he could not bring his bride with him. In 1915, Singh enrolled in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was working as a farmhand in Rosebank, Ontario, when he was called to active service and joined the 20th Battalion. His last service was with the 28th Battalion, according to his headstone.

Singh was wounded twice in separate battles and is said to have been treated by Dr. John McCrae. This is where the Sikh community made Canadian history, with a big “H”. John McCrae wrote the poem *In Flanders Fields*. He was a lieutenant-colonel then, a soldier, a physician and a poet.

We are about to commemorate Remembrance Day and we know how special the link is between politicians and those who fight for us overseas and protect our country, values and democracy. I would like to pay tribute to Buckam. He died a short while after the war. He was sent to a hospital in England to be repatriated to Canada and while there contracted tuberculosis. He died in a Kitchener, Ontario, hospital in August 1919, less than a year after the war. He was buried in Kitchener’s Mount Hope Cemetery and was a recipient of the Victory Medal. This is just one example of how patriotic this individual was. He arrived here at an early age, as I mentioned, served his country and adopted the country with great pride.

He was treated by John McCrae, so allow me to read *In Flanders Fields*:

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

This is the first verse of this great poem, and certainly one of the greatest pieces of poetry in the world, that is very meaningful to us. There is a link now in Canada’s history between John McCrae and a Sikh hero. There are other members of the Sikh community alongside Buckam Singh who fought in the First World War, but I felt it was important to mention that this single individual, who received the Victory Medal, was treated by John McCrae.

I want to reiterate that Conservatives fully support this motion for Sikh heritage month in Canada.

• (1915)

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John’s East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted to support the member for Surrey—Newton in his Bill C-376 to designate a Sikh heritage month. In this place it is difficult sometimes to get things through the House quickly, and I have worked with the member to make sure he had an opportunity to get to third reading so quickly.

I am glad to be the last person to speak to third reading of this bill. There are only two clauses in the bill: its name, and the proposal to make April of every year Sikh heritage month. However, there is one powerful message: Sikh heritage is Canadian heritage, and we are one.

Newfoundland has a modest population of non-European immigrants who each have an outsized impact on raising our cultural awareness. The Sikh community is a perfect example of this graceful and organic process of diversity awareness, and this is the purpose of Bill C-376. It is to provide a forum and an occasion on which we can focus on the important contributions of the Sikh community to our rich Canadian diversity.

The official home of the Newfoundland Sikh Society is the gurdwara on Logy Bay Road in my riding of St. John’s East. One could mistake it for a large, white saltbox house in a traditional Newfoundland Irish colonial style but for the bright orange gables and the distinctive Rajput arch style typical of Sikh architecture. It is understated but still quietly dramatic, a perfect meld and juxtaposition of Sikh heritage and Newfoundland heritage.

The physical gurdwara is only 15 years old. It was founded in 2003. Until then, the congregation would meet in people’s homes or local halls in St. John’s or across the province, demonstrating the spiritual unity of a community that is geographically divided, like so many diaspora.

The population of Sikh Canadians in my province, like that of all Newfoundlanders, waxes and wanes with our economy. According to census data, it tripled from 300 in 2001 to almost 900 in 2011, and has since subsided. However, when I speak to Rami Wadhwa at the Sikh temple, he tells me that it maxed out at 75 families who really participate in the gurdwara.

Now there are about 50, but it will grow again because Sikhs are very welcome in our province. As he was explaining to me, some of the new Sikhs arriving and participating in Newfoundland and Labrador Sikh culture are actually from Italy. They are coming over as skilled workers and to work on farms. They are coming to Canada to become Canadian. It is great that they have a spiritual home in the gurdwara.

This bill would help us prove that Newfoundlanders welcome Sikhs. April is the Sikh new year festival of Vaisakhi, with many important milestones related to the founding of the Khalsa in 1699. It is a very appropriate month to be Sikh heritage month. With the passage of Bill C-376 here and in the Senate, we hope April will have renewed and enhanced significance as an occasion to learn about the young and vibrant teachings and culture of Sikhism, and the selfless pursuit of truth. The values of Sikhism are eternal values shared by all Canadians, like unity and equality of all humankind, selfless service, striving for justice, honesty and honest conduct, and a life devoted to these values.

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Their congregation has changed over the years in so many ways. The initial members of the congregation came in the 1960s as teachers. In the 1970s, engineers and doctors joined the community. Now we have trades and business folks who are coming to participate in the oil and gas industry and other sectors.

I know many of us have friends across the country who are Sikhs, but in Newfoundland and Labrador I have a very close friend, Dr. Jasbir Gill. Dr. Gill was born in England while her father was finishing his studies in engineering. Her mother, who was a trained teacher, was there with him. Then they moved to Goose Bay, Labrador, where he worked at the base. Although her mother was unable to get her teaching qualifications transferred from India to Canada, she ran the day care there.

I asked Jasbir to give me an important feature of Sikhism that she would like me to share, and what makes her cultural heritage so important. One thing that really struck me was when she said there is enormous support within the Sikh community for all other cultures. She talks about how the gurdwara in St. John's East encourages its members to participate and share in the spiritual life of other congregations of other faiths in the community, including the Jewish community, the Hindu temple and others.

● (1920)

It is just so wonderful to see how this melding of cultures truly embodies the spirit of what it means to be Canadian. In fact, it truly embodies what a Sikh heritage month can and should be, this opportunity to share and grow together, to learn about each other's cultures and to develop this type of respect.

There is also a very interesting new immigrant coming to my riding of St. John's East, Satnam Singh Bhamara, the seven-foot, two-inch centre for the St. John's Edge basketball team. He was recently with the Dallas Mavericks farm team. He is the first Indian-born player drafted into the NBA. We are so very excited to welcome the newest member of the Sikh community into our homes and our television sets, and to go to an Edge game at Mile One Centre to see this incredibly tall and talented player play. It is so great.

I want to congratulate the member for Surrey—Newton for all he has done. He has been so excited about this opportunity to help celebrate Sikh heritage month. He has worked with all members to make that happen. He has reached out to the community across the country to let them know about this opportunity.

I encourage all members to support this bill at third reading.

● (1925)

The Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

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, I rise today to express my concern about seasonal workers. Every year, their own government puts them in a precarious position.

Once again this winter, benefits will dry up for over 16,000 people, 40% of them in Quebec, leaving them without an income for up to four long months. Thousands of families will once again have no money coming in.

The Liberal government seems fond of half-measures, in this case a pilot project targeting just 13 economic regions. Baby steps and band-aid solutions will not fix this Canada-wide crisis.

The people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot are once again being left out in the cold because they are, once again, not covered under this pilot project.

Every year, the government fails to fully commit, and so, every year, thousands of families go many long months with no money coming in. That puts breadwinners under intense stress. They cannot feed their families because of the spring gap.

Tying employment insurance benefits to unemployment rates means that some seasonal workers have to work a lot more to receive much less in benefits. People are worried—terrified, even—about not being able to feed their families because they will no longer have an income when their EI benefits run out.

The EI spring gap is a fundamental problem that cannot be fixed with band-aid solutions. Urgent action is needed, because thousands of families are being left out in the cold and are falling through the cracks without any income for months.

Business owners in Saint-Hyacinthe tell me their concerns about these seasonal workers. Seeing his employees struggling financially, one of the owners decided to provide loans to ensure that certain employees did not lose their homes and were able to support their children. These loans enable the employees to survive, but they also mean that the employer can count on these skilled workers when seasonal work resumes.

The NDP is fighting for a fundamental reform of the EI system, which is too flawed. This system is the result of bad choices over more than 20 years of successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

The NDP, along with unions and advocacy groups for the unemployed, has been trying to convince the government to reform this system. However, the government's idea of helping Canadians is to rely on band-aid solutions, instead of taking meaningful action.

We absolutely need emergency legislation, since time is running out for all these seasonal workers facing the threat of the spring gap at the end of the winter.

To the NDP, it is unthinkable to put thousands of workers in a precarious position when a simple legislative change is all that is needed to help these seasonal workers.

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The NDP's solution to the spring gap is simple and fair: better access to EI for everyone, a universal eligibility threshold of 360 hours, and the reinstatement of five weeks of additional benefits for all seasonal workers.

A comprehensive solution must be applied to fix the spring gap once and for all. This is an urgent issue, and Band-Aid solutions only put off the problem.

No more half measures. The government must make long-term investments to overhaul the EI system.

● (1930)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to take part in this adjournment debate on employment insurance and more specifically on the topic of workers in seasonal industries.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for doing such an excellent job of defending the interests of her constituents.

[*English*]

Our government knows that some workers in seasonal industries are struggling to qualify for enough EI benefits to carry them through the off-season. It has been a challenging and stressful situation for many workers, families and communities. While EI can only ever be part of the solution, I want the member to know that our government understands and we are taking action.

In budget 2018, we addressed this problem head-on.

[*Translation*]

We offered \$10 million in immediate aid to Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to help seasonal workers.

[*English*]

Budget 2018 also allocated \$230 million to further assist these workers. Of that amount, \$189 million was used to support a new pilot project to provide up to five additional weeks of EI regular benefits to eligible seasonal claimants.

This pilot project is being implemented in 13 targeted EI economic regions impacted by the effects of recurrent, seasonal income gaps.

[*Translation*]

The pilot project will help cover lost income and provide tens of thousands of people and families with the support they need, when they need it most.

[*English*]

We are also making available \$41 million to all provinces and territories through their labour market development agreements.

This funding will enable provinces and territories to provide skills training and employment supports for workers in seasonal industries, such as employment counselling, job search assistance and training, which could include income supports.

These agreements provide flexibility for jurisdictions to tailor interventions to the needs of their local labour markets.

These are just some examples of the significant changes that our government has made to modernize the EI system and reduce the number of workers left without an unemployment safety net.

We have also revised the eligibility threshold for people entering or re-entering the workforce. We have reduced the waiting period and made working while on claim a permanent part of the EI program and also extended it to maternity and sickness benefits.

Together, these initiatives will have a significant and a positive impact on workers in seasonal industries. We are not finished. More work is ahead.

I thank the House for the chance to address this issue.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Liberal government has abandoned our constituents. Once again, the Liberal government has broken its promises. Once again, it is all words and no action.

EI eligibility is still under 40%. It is high time that the Liberal government understood that it is the jobs that are seasonal, not the workers.

Again, the government talks about training and pilot projects. Workers in New Brunswick and eastern Quebec keep expressing anger. Hundreds of them gathered again last month.

Considering the urgency of the situation, when will the government take action and provide a solution for all seasonal workers in Canada by undertaking a real overhaul of the EI system?

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I met with workers and industries and community leaders in Bathurst, New Brunswick this summer to review the challenges that are specific to different regions as we address this issue.

While we have taken several steps to invest millions of new dollars into the program to assist workers right across the country in these industries that are seasonal in nature, we also note that a one-size-fits-all solution simply will not work and will create other problems within the sector.

Let me assure the member that workers in seasonal employment are an important part of Canada's growing economy. The changes that we are making to the EI system are addressing these serious challenges faced by workers and their communities.

[*Translation*]

Our government is committed to improving employment insurance in order to better meet the needs of workers and employers.

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Our government is committed to making sure we find a solution now and into the future. We continue to work on the EI file to make it fairer for Canadians from coast to coast to coast and in particular, for workers in seasonal industries.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to again address the issue of helping Canada's military, RCMP veterans, and their families who struggle with PTSD.

As I noted in my original question, New Democrats acknowledge and welcome more research funding for PTSD diagnosis and treatment and the opening of new operational stress injury clinics. Moreover, the limited progress being made in hiring front-line service workers needs to be addressed.

Nevertheless, the poor service problems plaguing Veterans Affairs Canada remain. In some cases, these problems are getting worse. In a nutshell, that is the real problem. More money is being allocated to solving the problems of veterans with PTSD and other challenges, but the results are not improving.

However, members do not have to take my word for it. If we look at the government's own service standards at Veterans Affairs Canada, they tell the entire story. As of today, the government is meeting just 12 of its 24 self-identified service standards that it promised to meet for veterans and their families. I stress that these standards are self-identified by the current Liberal government.

I think it is important to highlight some of these failures to give the House an idea as to how the government is failing veterans, particularly those suffering from PTSD.

The very first service standard posted on the department's website, and arguably the most important standard, deals with the first point of contact responding to a veteran's call for help. The Liberals' self-identified service standard in this case is pretty straightforward. The expectation is that a veteran, family member or other Canadian who calls the department's national contact centre network can expect their call to be answered by an analyst within two minutes. The service standard for the government is that it will answer 80% of these calls within two minutes. However, as of today, the department is able to answer just 66% of these calls for help in under two minutes.

Imagine a veteran wounded in combat, suffering from PTSD, and possibly in crisis, reaching out for help and being told by a computer that their call is important, and having to wait two, three, four or even 10 minutes to speak with a human working at Veterans Affairs. That may not seem like a big deal to some, but if one is even remotely aware of the symptoms endured by those suffering from PTSD, one would know that this level of service is completely unacceptable.

Looking at the department's excellent website resource on the symptoms of PTSD, we will see that those suffering from PTSD might experience a lack of enthusiasm and difficulties with motivation, excessive worry, feelings of restlessness and being on edge, anger and irritability, and concentration problems. We all know

how it feels when we are put on hold for 10 minutes listening to elevator music when we have an urgent issue. Imagine how a veteran suffering with PTSD feels when, perhaps after years of hesitation before finally becoming motivated enough to call their government for help, they are put in some automated queue for what must seem like an eternity.

What about that backlog of 29,000-plus disability benefit claims that are waiting to be processed for those military and police personnel transitioning into civilian life?

There are also another 10 service standards that are not being met by the government, but time does not allow me to detail them all. However, I can assure members that these are numerous and significant, and have a dramatic and negative impact on the health and well-being of veterans afflicted with PTSD and their families who also carry this burden.

What about service dogs for veterans who suffer from PTSD? The government's own sponsored research has shown that these companions can and do alleviate many of the symptoms of PTSD. However, for some reason, the government refuses to provide dogs to those veterans who could benefit so much from them.

•(1935)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Our government is committed to ensuring that veterans and their families have access to the mental health care services and support they need. We are here for them.

Veterans Affairs Canada funds a network of 11 operational stress injury clinics across the country, as well as satellite clinic service sites closer to where veterans live. These clinics give veterans access to multidisciplinary teams of mental health care professionals who conduct assessments and provide specialized treatment.

Are wait times of two minutes, five minutes or 10 minutes acceptable? When a veteran calls, staff must answer as quickly as possible and provide the best service possible, and that is what we are committed to doing.

The minister also works with a national network of about 4,000 mental health care professionals who have the qualifications required to deliver mental health care services to veterans who need them. What is more, Veterans Affairs Canada offers a 24-hour toll-free help line so that veterans and their families can get help by telephone.

Earlier this year, we announced the creation of a centre of excellence on PTSD and related mental health conditions. The Royal Ottawa Health Care Group already has vast experience in mental health and veterans' health and is the centre of excellence's main partner.

We trust our partners to improve the system. Is the system perfect? No. Do we want to improve it? Yes. Much work remains to be done. By focusing on research, education and awareness, the centre will provide important information to front-line health care providers about mental health problems faced by veterans and their families.

The Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada know that some members of the Canadian Armed Forces released for medical reasons experience delays in receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. That is no secret.

Over the past three years, Veterans Affairs Canada has had a 32% increase in disability claims and a 60% increase in initial applications. As I have already said, that is a good thing even if it represents a larger workload, because it means that more people know what benefits they are eligible for and are applying for them.

Veterans Affairs is now triaging disability benefit claims so that veterans who are applying for mental health support can access their benefits as quickly as possible. In some cases, applications can be further expedited for people at risk. Our record shows that 96% of properly completed benefit claims are approved.

In addition, in order to improve service delivery within Veterans Affairs Canada, we are investing more than \$42 million over two years beginning this fiscal year. When millions of dollars are being invested, it takes time to hire staff and get them on the front line.

We will continue to improve the services and support available to our men and women in uniform, as well as their families.

● (1940)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, I would like to close with a personal story as to why we ask these questions and why we press the government to improve services for veterans with PTSD.

Corporal Lionel Desmond was an injured Afghan veteran medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces through its

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much discussed transitional organization, the Joint Personnel Support Unit. After struggling for some time with his demons as a veteran, Lionel succumbed to them in the most terrible way, sadly taking three members of his family with him.

We owe it to Lionel, Shanna, Aaliyah and Brenda to ensure that their suffering is not in vain. We definitely owe it to Lionel's sister, Cassandra Desmond, who is one of the strongest people one will ever meet. After suffering tragedy and loss on a scale unimaginable to most Canadians, she presses forward and is fighting for change.

It was an honour to meet Cassandra. New Democrats and all members of Parliament are here working and talking about PTSD because of her and her determination.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, we find such situations extremely troubling. We are doing everything in our power to speed up the process and offer the best possible service.

Our government supports a continuum of mental health services to help veterans and their families. There are operational stress injury clinics and professional counsellors, as well as a help centre that offers support free of charge on a 24/7 basis.

Last year, Veterans Affairs Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Minister of National Defence launched a joint suicide prevention strategy for CAF members and veterans.

If we can educate veterans as soon as possible, perhaps even during their service, that would improve the situation. Is it perfect? No. A lot of work remains to be done, and we are here to meet their needs.

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[Translation]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:44 p.m.)

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| Mr. Lamoureux | 23050 |
| Mr. Genuis | 23050 |
| Mr. Ouellette | 23050 |
| Amendment negatived | 23052 |
| (Bill read the third time and passed) | 23053 |
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| Motion | 23053 |
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| Motion agreed to | 23056 |
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| Mr. Dhaliwal | 23056 |
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| Mr. Genuis | 23057 |
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| Mr. Genuis | 23058 |
| Mr. Rankin | 23060 |
| Mr. Sarai | 23061 |
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