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(HANSARD)

Friday, February 8, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 8, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[English]

CANADA-ISRAEL FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-85, An Act to amend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, as reported from the committee.

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

Hon. Bardish Chagger (for the Minister of International Trade Diversification) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (for the Minister of International Trade Diversification) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today I rise on behalf of my colleague, the Minister of International Trade Diversification, to speak to Bill C-85. The bill calls on the government to take all necessary legislative steps to ratify the modernized Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, or CIFTA, something I encourage all members to support.

CIFTA is now a modern, forward-looking trade agreement that would better serve the sophisticated Canada-Israel trade relationship, while providing a framework to ensure the benefits of trade are more widely shared. Our government has said from day one that trade and open markets are vital for Canada's economic prosperity. Canada is a trading nation. We know that increased trade creates more and better-paying jobs. In fact, Canada is one of the most open G7 countries, rating second for trade and first for foreign direct investment as shares of GDP. Canadian exports of goods and services were equivalent to just over one-third of our GDP.

On trade diversification, the government is pursuing an ambitious trade diversification agenda, one that will make Canada the most

globally connected economy in the world. Allow me to provide a few examples of this.

In October, Canada ratified the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or CPTPP, with a speed reflecting the importance of this deal to farmers, ranchers, entrepreneurs and workers in all industries across Canada. This historic trade agreement came into force on December 30, 2018, and now Canadian businesses will have preferential access to over 500 million consumers, resulting in long-term gains for Canada in excess of \$4.2 billion.

In September, we marked the one-year milestone of provisional application of the trade agreement with the European Union, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement or CETA. In this past year, Canadians added \$1.6 billion in increased export to Europe and saw a 20% growth in container traffic at the Port of Montreal. We can just imagine the opportunities for Montrealers, Quebecers and Canadians once this agreement is also passed.

We are also updating existing trade agreements with important partners to better match the realities of the 21st-century economy. We have a new agreement with Ukraine in place since 2017 and on Tuesday, a modernized and inclusive agreement with Chile came into force. The Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement distinguishes Canada as the first G20 country to adopt a gender chapter in a free trade agreement.

We are modernizing the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement in the legislation before us today to enhance our relationship with this historical ally.

Finally, the government is actively pursuing opportunities in other important and fast-growing markets and making inroads. Canada is in FTA negotiations with its partners in the Americas, namely the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur, and is exploring possible FTA negotiations with ASEAN. Taken together, Canada has 14 FTAs in force covering 51 countries, connecting our businesses to 1.5 billion of the world's consumers.

While market access is vital, it alone does not create jobs and prosperity for Canadians. Our businesses need the right tools to actively pursue international opportunities, especially in markets covered by our trade agreements. That is why the fall economic statement proposed an export diversification strategy to grow Canada's overseas exports by 50% by 2025, with more assistance for small and medium-sized businesses to help them explore new export opportunities.

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The trade diversification strategy will focus on three key priorities: first, investing in infrastructure to support trade; second, providing Canadian businesses with the resources to execute their export plans; and finally, enhancing trade services for Canadian exporters. We know that when we diversify our markets abroad we create well-paying jobs at home for the middle class and those working hard to join it.

Our efforts signal to the world that trade matters, that rules matter and that we will not be drawn into a world of protectionism. We firmly believe our international trade relationships are mutually beneficial. This is demonstrated in the modernized CIFTA, the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement before us today.

● (1010)

Since CIFTA first came into force over two decades ago, two-way merchandise trade between Canada and Israel has more than tripled, totalling \$1.7 billion last year. This is a testament to how FTAs help advance trade, yet there is room to grow and deepen the commercial relationship. Israel's economy has significant potential and offers diverse commercial opportunities for Canadian businesses given its well-educated population, solid industrial and scientific base and productive natural resource sectors, in particular agriculture and agri-tech.

By providing expanded market access and more predictable trading conditions, the modernized CIFTA would enable Canadian companies to take meaningful advantage of these opportunities. That is why Bill C-85 before us today is so important. Allow me to elaborate further on this point by turning to how this tangibly translates into real benefits for Canadian businesses.

Canada and Israel agreed in 2014 to modernize CIFTA, which, at the time, was a goods-only trade agreement. The result of those negotiations is an agreement that updates four of the original chapters, including dispute settlement to bring CIFTA up to the standard of a more recent trade agreement. It adds nine new chapters, including intellectual property and e-commerce. We have negotiated rules that are designed to help address non-tariff barriers, contribute to facilitating trade and reduce some of the costs to companies for doing business.

We also have improved the terms of market access for Canadian companies. Once enforced, close to 100% of all current Canadian agriculture, agri-food and seafood exports to Israel will benefit from some form of preferential tariff treatment, up from the current level of 90%. Meaningful market access for Canada's agriculture and agri-food processors was a key interest in these negotiations and the government delivered, including unlimited duty-free access on sweetened and dried cranberries, baked goods and pet food.

These important tariff outcomes for the agriculture and agri-food sector place Canada on a more level playing field with exporters from the United States and the European Union, which are our key competitors in this sector. They also give Canadian companies a leg-up on competitors in other countries that do not have a free trade agreement with Israel. In exchange, Canada agreed to eliminate tariffs on certain targeted Israeli agriculture and agri-food imports, such as certain fish and nuts, some tropical fruit and certain oils.

I want to reassure all hon. members and all Canadians that a modernized Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, like its predecessor, fully respects Canada's supply management system. I am pleased that the negotiated outcome has the support of key Canadian agriculture stakeholders, including Pulse Canada, the Canola Council of Canada, the Canadian Vintners Association and companies including the processing of potatoes, cranberries, soybeans and pet food. These are only a few of the opportunities the modernized CIFTA provides.

I would like to now speak to an important aspect of the government's trade agenda that aims to ensure these opportunities are more widely shared among Canadians.

An important aspect of the modernized CIFTA is its forward-looking framework that includes new chapters on trade and gender, small and medium-sized enterprises, labour and environment, as well as a new provision on corporate social responsibility. This modernized agreement also provides institutional mechanisms to monitor or address human rights-related matters in the context of the trade agreement, including references and provisions relating to workers' rights and working conditions, responsible business conduct, transparency and anti-corruption. In this regard, this modernized agreement is a new forward-thinking partnership that reflects who we are as vibrant, diverse, open and democratic societies and as in the original CIFTA, just as with all Canada's FTAs, this modernized CIFTA can be terminated by either party unilaterally at any time for any reason.

Some inclusive trade highlights are the new chapters on trade and gender and on small and medium-sized enterprises. Both provide a framework for parties to work together to help ensure women and small and medium-sized enterprises can more fully benefit from the opportunities created by this modernized CIFTA. Each chapter establishes a bilateral committee to oversee activities, including co-operation and promotion activities that provide information and enhance the ability of women and small and medium-sized enterprises to benefit from the opportunities created by this modernized CIFTA.

● (1015)

The new gender chapter acknowledges the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in economic and trade issues to ensure that economic growth can benefit everyone. This chapter has it. This chapter builds on the work accomplished in Canada's first gender chapter, which was negotiated through the modernized Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement. Only the third chapter of its kind, it is also the first such chapter negotiated by Israel. CIFTA's gender chapter, for the first time ever, will include a measure of enforceability through dispute resolution.

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The new corporate social responsibility article affirms Canada and Israel's commitment to encourage the use of voluntary CSR standards by enterprises, with specific reference to the government-backed OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, to which Israel and Canada are both parties.

The modernized agreement contains a new chapter on labour that commits both parties to enforce their laws in this area, which must respect the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The new labour chapter provides protections for occupational health and safety, acceptable minimum employment standards and non-discrimination for migrant workers.

Allow me to draw to the attention of all hon. members that the successful negotiation of a high-quality labour chapter with Israel was a significant step in modernizing CIFTA. It is the first such chapter negotiated by Israel in a free trade agreement. The United States-Israel Free Trade Agreement does not include labour provisions. The EU-Israel association agreement, the legal basis for EU trade relations with Israel, makes only a few references to labour, with no enforceable obligations.

The modernized CIFTA is also the first time Israel has negotiated a chapter on the environment in a free trade agreement. The new environment chapter contains robust commitments, including to maintain high levels of environmental protection as we intensify our trade relationship. Importantly, both Canada and Israel commit to not lowering our levels of protection in order to attract trade or investment.

Our two countries, Canada and Israel, have a deep history. Canada's strong friendship and partnership with Israel spans more than 70 years and stretches back even further to the arrival of the earliest Jewish settlers in Canada more than 250 years ago, the first of successive waves of immigrants who would leave lasting and indelible impressions on the fabric of our Canadian society, economy and political landscape.

Today there are more than 350,000 Canadians of Jewish faith and heritage in Canada who are an important source of information and support in the political and commercial spheres for both Canada and Israel. There are also approximately 20,000 Canadians currently living and working in Israel. The Minister of International Trade Diversification had the opportunity to meet with some of these individuals during his visit to Israel last year.

For those in the House today who may not know, Israel has a long-standing reputation for technological prowess and a well-developed scientific and educational base. We know this very well in the riding of Waterloo. We see room to expand and build partnerships in these sectors and in many other areas.

When our Minister of International Trade Diversification was in Tel Aviv last September, he announced a pilot program to facilitate new cybersecurity solutions for the energy sector that will consider Israeli options to address the needs of Canadian natural gas delivery companies.

There are also great prospects for forging increased partnerships in the areas of joint research and development. Canadian and Israeli firms have joined forces to develop an ultraviolet water monitoring

system that would ensure the safety of drinking water, and there are even more possibilities on the horizon that will change countless lives in communities around the world. Our government firmly believes that these kinds of global partnerships are needed now more than ever.

In conclusion, Canada represents just 0.5% of the world's population, but we account for five times more in global trade. Our continued competitiveness depends on businesses, including small and medium enterprises, pursuing trade opportunities and that we support them in doing so.

Successful trade provides for good employment opportunities. With one in six Canadian jobs linked directly to exports, our government is deeply committed to growing trade and expanding opportunities for all Canadians.

• (1020)

I therefore urge all hon. members to support Bill C-85 to enable Canada to do its part to bring the modernized Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement into force on a timely basis and to support Canadian companies as they seek to benefit from the opportunities it offers.

This legislation should be passed today so that the Senate can also do its due diligence. I thank members for their work in helping this legislation move forward rapidly.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about this trade agreement and the relationship with Israel. For the last couple of years, the Liberal government has had the opportunity to participate with the Jordanians, the Palestinians and the Israelis on a critical project, the Red Sea to Dead Sea project, which will bring all those sides together and be one more road to peace. It is an environmental project that will bring fresh water to the Palestinian Authority and will also stem the tide of an environmental disaster that is happening in the Dead Sea. I wonder if she could speak to that.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we believe that it is important that we build upon this important relationship between Canada and Israel. We recognize the importance of doing more work. I acknowledged that in my speech.

Bill C-85 is really about providing Canadian businesses with opportunities to grow and expand, creating more better-paying middle-class jobs and helping those fighting hard to join the middle class. We will continue to work hard for them.

We believe that trade is mutually beneficial for both countries, and that is why we believe that this modernized CIFTA should move forward rapidly. I agree with the member that we can always do more work, and I hope we can do that work together.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for her speech.

I would like to remind the House that in December 2016, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2334, which condemns:

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...all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, including, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions...

This is a resolution adopted by the United Nations Security Council, so Canada obviously needs to abide by it.

With regard to the free trade agreement, why did the Liberal government reject the NDP amendment about labelling products originating from illegal Israeli settlements in order to distinguish between companies on the territory of the State of Israel and companies on the Palestinian territory that has been illegally occupied since 1967?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-85 modernizes that agreement.

[*English*]

This agreement has been in place for over two decades. This is an opportunity for us to modernize this agreement. That is why we see chapters in this agreement that other countries have not put forward.

We see for the first time in the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement that Israel has brought forward a chapter on gender. We see a chapter on the environment. It is important that we have trade that works for all Canadians and all Israelis. We will continue to ensure that this modernized agreement benefits more Canadians and more businesses so that more Canadian businesses can grow and succeed.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her exceptional speech. She shared so many great points with the House this morning. Canadians can see how the economy is prospering because of our government's hard work in establishing strong trade deals.

These are great opportunities for businesses in our communities. I sent a letter to all the businesses in Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook sharing with them some of the key points in the last three trade deals signed and the one today, which is an expansion. I am communicating with businesses to see how I can work with them to help them scale up and increase global investment.

I would like my colleague to share how some businesses in her community could take advantage of some of these exceptional additions to this Canada-Israel trade deal.

• (1025)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the member has been working really hard to ensure that businesses in his community recognize and understand the important work the government is doing. We know that our small and medium-sized businesses can only grow through export and trade. That is why these FTAs are essential to creating better and more middle-class jobs for those working hard to join the middle class.

In my riding of Waterloo, I work with our small businesses. Small businesses in every community across the country are the backbone of the Canadian economy. The Minister of Finance brought forward a trade diversification strategy so that we can give this information to small businesses so they recognize that there are opportunities for

them to expand into new markets. It is our communities and Canadians that benefit at the end of the day.

I would like to commend the member for his hard work and exceptional leadership in helping this file move forward.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a previous exchange, the government House leader did not fully answer my colleague's question. It is great that we have those labour and human rights provisions in the trade agreement, but with respect, the question was about a UN resolution that calls upon states to distinguish, in all their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories that have been occupied since 1967.

The question was very clear. Why is the Liberal government failing to distinguish between products made in the State of Israel and products made in the occupied territories, where there are illegal Israeli settlements, as required by Canadian government policy?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I believe it is clear that today we are debating the economic opportunities for Canadians and small businesses when it comes to free trade agreements. That is what this modernized agreement between Canada and Israel does.

There is a previous agreement that has been around for over 20 years. Today we have been able to bring forward modernized legislation that we hope moves forward rapidly. It takes into account e-commerce and the changing economic opportunities that we want to ensure Canadians and small businesses have. It also brings forward progressive elements on gender, small and medium enterprises, corporate social responsibility, labour and the environment, which I hope the member appreciates.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader is fully aware, given that she sits beside the Prime Minister, that from day one, the government has been focused on Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be part of it and on having good, solid policies that will make a difference.

In her speech, she noted the aggressive trade approach the government has taken over the last three years. We believe that through trade, we will generate opportunities. Could she provide her thoughts on the idea that the job creation we have witnessed over the last few years is the direct result of working with Canadians, and in large part, of reaching out to markets beyond Canada, which is a trading nation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I work closely with the hon. member, and I can say that the citizens of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and of Canada, are well served by his fruitful and enlightened questions and the information he provides in debate in the House and within communities.

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I agree that Canada is a trading nation. We have to ensure that we provide more opportunities for our businesses to grow. Taken together, Canada has 14 FTAs in force, covering 51 countries, that connect our businesses to 1.5 billion of the world's consumers.

This is about knowing that Canada is a trading nation and about how we can open up market access for Canadian businesses so that they can grow. When Canadian businesses grow, they create more jobs in their communities. When they create those jobs, Canadians are better off.

That is why we believe that by making investments in Canadians and in small businesses, we will see a more prosperous economy. We will continue to ensure that we do that work, because it is in the best interest of all Canadians.

• (1030)

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-85. It is a great honour to speak in this brand new chamber for the first time. As always, I am grateful for the opportunity.

At the outset, let me begin by thanking the Speaker of the Knesset, Yuli Edelstein, for his hospitality and outstanding efforts in encouraging all members of the Knesset to get involved in building relationships with other nations, particularly Canada. I know my colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence will agree that Speaker Edelstein exemplifies statesmanship in our time. He is also a man who has endured unbelievable hardship, suffering in the gulags in the U.S.S.R. as one of the last refuseniks.

Canada and Israel are the greatest of friends and the most natural of allies. Since its founding in 1948, Canada supported Israel in its right to live in peace and security in one of the least stable regions of the world.

There may be no better friend to Canada than Israel, with which we are bound together by a shared belief in freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This renewed agreement is not only another step forward for Canada and Israel economically, but also with respect to our ever-important diplomatic alliance and personal friendships.

It was in May 1961, under Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, that Canadians first warmly welcomed Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to our country. It is fitting that in 2014 another Conservative prime minister was the first Canadian to be invited to speak at a session in the Knesset.

In that speech, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper emphasized the fundamental relationship that was so important. He stated, “Canada supports Israel because it is right to do so. This is a very Canadian trait, to do something for no reason other than it is right even when no immediate reward for, or threat to, ourselves is evident.”

Canadians are proud to do what is right, regardless of reward or threat, because that is the Canadian thing to do. That is why our Conservative government sought to actively support the people of Israel and the Jewish diaspora domestically and in the international arena. Indeed, from 2006 to 2015, the Canada-Israel relationship grew stronger than ever.

In November 2010, Canada hosted, in Ottawa, the conference on combatting anti-Semitism, which was an important international discussion, with representatives from over 50 countries, on addressing rising anti-Semitism in the world. Part of that discussion on anti-Semitism includes ensuring that we do our part to ensure that the atrocities that were committed against Jewish people during the Holocaust are never forgotten.

Our government pushed forward on fighting anti-Semitism and educating Canadians about the horrors that the international Jewish community had faced. We partnered with B'nai Brith to develop the national task force on holocaust research, remembrance and education.

It was former Conservative member Tim Uppal who brought forward the National Holocaust Monument Act as a reminder to Canadians and all those who visit our capital.

However, as the House acknowledged last year, Canada is not innocent when it comes to anti-Semitism. The MS *St. Louis* remains a dark chapter in our history, when Jewish refugees arrived in Canada after being turned away in Cuba, the United States and South America. We turned them back to Europe, many to face their death in Nazi concentration camps. As far as the Government of Canada at the time was concerned, none was too many.

In January 2011, alongside the Canadian Jewish Congress, former minister of immigration, Jason Kenney, revealed the Wheel of Conscience at Pier 21 in Halifax to commemorate the tragic journey of the *St. Louis*. The Wheel of Conscience serves to remind Canadians of the underlying attitudes that led to the *St. Louis* being turned away. The polished stainless steel wheel incorporates four interlocking gears, each bearing a word to represent factors of exclusion: anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism and hatred. The back of the wheel bears the passenger list of the *St. Louis*, including the names of those who died at the hands of the Nazis upon their return to Europe.

Let that monument be a reminder of how far we have come. Truly, as a country, we have gone from darkness to light, thankfully.

The tragic events surrounding the *St. Louis* are just one reminder of how important it is for Canada to work with Israel to support the Jewish people's homeland and ensure it remains a vibrant and prosperous country that lives in peace with its neighbours, and, just as important, how important education and dialogue are to ensuring the horrific events of the Holocaust never happen again.

• (1035)

However, supporting the Jewish community means much more than recognizing the failures of the past. It also means moving forward in a way that supports its right to self-determination and to its homeland, and our government made landmark steps towards ensuring that the Jewish state would be able to continue to find prosperity and provide a safe home for its people in an increasingly complicated and dangerous world.

In 2009, our government cut funding to UNRWA, whose ties to Hamas and anti-Israel activities that threatened the lives Israelis and Palestinians alike were unacceptable.

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In 2012, our Conservative government signed a new agreement on energy co-operation with Israel that advanced the interests of Canada's energy sector. This agreement also increased collaboration on renewable energy and improving practices for responsible development and reducing environmental impacts.

In 2014, our Conservative government signed the Canada-Israel Memorandum of Understanding, which laid the groundwork for greater economic and diplomatic co-operation to ensure new levels of growth, prosperity and security for our two countries. This framework, which was laid out in 2014, led to a new Canada-Israel air transport agreement to the benefit of Canadians and Israelis alike. It also, of course, led to this modernized free trade agreement that sits before us today, an agreement that was negotiated almost entirely by our Conservative government.

In January, 2014, our government and the Israel government agreed to a partnership to help launch the grand challenges Israel initiative, which promoted global health innovation and fostered scientific and technological innovations to solve health problems in a developing world.

In June, 2015, we announced the Canada-Israel health research initiative to fund up to 30 research projects with a focus on neurosciences and neurological disease.

In January that same year, our government signed the Canada-Israel Joint Declaration of Solidarity and Friendship to outline the path forward for our two countries. Canada committed to supporting Israel's right to live in peace with its neighbours, and we committed to fight any international efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel, and we kept our promise.

Time and again, our previous Conservative government stood up for the right of Israel to exist and to defend itself. While tyrannical regimes in Iran, Syria and other countries sought to delegitimize and dismantle the state, the international community repeatedly sought to unfairly single out Israel as well. Our government rejected what could only be described as targeting of the Jewish state.

Ultimately, if we wish to be a country that promotes democracy, human rights, innovation, freedom, those values that are so important to us as Canadians, then we must continue to forge closer ties with and support nations that embody those same values. This free trade agreement is a significant step forward in continuing our support for our friends in Israel and in promoting those values we share.

We cannot risk abstaining from votes at the United Nations either. These votes unfairly single out and target Israel. Motions from any country in any form that seek solely to undermine Israel's legitimacy and ignore the atrocities being committed by other countries cannot go ignored and must be challenged.

I have been involved in Canada-Israel Interparliamentary Friendship Group since I was first elected to this place. I served as the chair from 2011 to 2015, and I continue to be an active participant in the ongoing dialogue between our Parliament and the Knesset as a vice-chair.

In our many meetings, we have heard and discussed the important role that Canada has played internationally and how much our allies

appreciate our efforts, but also how important it is for Canada to remain vigilant.

• (1040)

I have also been fortunate enough to travel to Israel on several occasions, including with former Prime Minister Harper, former Governor General David Johnston, with parliamentary delegations and on personal voyages. Across all of those journeys, it is the people of Israel throughout history; from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who travelled from Ur, the Chaldeans, which is now today's Iraq, and came to the promised land; to Joseph, who saved Israel by going to Egypt and ensuring the famine did not consume his brothers and his father; to Moses, who led Israelis into freedom from their bondage of slavery; to Joshua, King David, the prophets; to the Maccabees, and we celebrate Hanukkah today because the Maccabees were proud enough and strong enough to take back the temple that was being desecrated; to those who kept the Jewish flame alive throughout the years of anti-Semitism; to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust; to David Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir; and to the Israelis today that has remained resilient against all odds and hardship. This amazes me the most.

I would like to highlight one more quote from Prime Minister Harper's address at the Knesset. He spoke about the story of Israel:

It is a story, essentially, of a people whose response to suffering has been to move beyond resentment and build a most extraordinary society. A vibrant democracy. A freedom-loving country with an independent and rights-affirming judiciary. An innovative, world-leading "start-up" nation.

If that is not the kind of country we want to grow our ties with, a country that believes in the rule of law and human rights, a country that is innovative, a country that serves as the only stable democracy in the region, then I do not know what country we should align ourselves with.

However, we also must address the domestic impacts of this agreement.

In light of the ongoing trade disputes with the United States, the potential fallout from China during this extradition dispute and the uncertainty in the European Union with Brexit, Canada must continue to look for new opportunities to get our goods to foreign markets.

Our caucus supports free trade. We are a party of free trade. We support a more competitive and prosperous Canada. Free trade is crucial to promoting competitiveness at home and getting Canadian goods to foreign markets.

Being the representative from a region that has been hit particularly hard by steel tariffs put in place by the American administration, I have heard from so many about the need to diversify our trading practices, and this renewed Canada-Israel agreement is a good start.

Between 2006 and 2015, our Conservative government secured access to over 50 countries, and this renewal initiative with Israel was a Conservative one that the government launched in 2014.

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Our government negotiated the vast majority of this deal. I would like to thank the hon. member for Abbotsford, who worked tirelessly to finalize not only this agreement, but also the trans-Pacific partnership and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with the European Union, as well as the various other agreements that he was largely responsible for.

Our Conservative government negotiated an updated dispute settlement mechanism, which brought in new levels of efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. It was our government that negotiated reduced tariffs and new market access for Canadian goods, including agricultural and seafood products. We negotiated a new chapter on the environment to ensure that both countries pursued greater environmental protection alongside more liberalized trade.

New electronic commerce and intellectual property chapters, again negotiated by our Conservative government, commit both countries to not introduce barriers to commerce and to protect intellectual property rights.

New standards for food safety protect the health of Canadians and our food supply, while new labour standards ensure international norms are respected and workers in both countries are treated fairly.

Finally, initiatives to reduce red tape and barriers to trade will empower Canadian businesses to grow in Israel and for Canadians to benefit from greater access to Israeli goods.

Obviously our side is glad to see this important legislation, which we negotiated, finally coming through the House so it can be implemented, but quite frankly, it has taken too long for the Liberals to finally wake up and begin reacting to the many threats that our country faces.

As I have already said, free trade is an important aspect of ensuring our international competitiveness, but the Liberals are still forcing reckless and anti-competitive taxes and regulation down the throats of Canadians.

Under the Liberals, small businesses, which the Prime Minister believes are tax cheats, have seen their taxes go up and up, and the Prime Minister's new carbon tax is making it even harder for Canadian businesses to compete internationally against competitors in countries where the governments want to see their economy and their businesses grow and thrive.

Ultimately though, despite the poor economic path that the Prime Minister and the finance minister are taking us down, implementing this trade agreement, a final remnant of our Conservative government, will be an important and helpful step for both Canada and Israel.

I look forward to voting in favour of Bill C-85 and continuing to support a strong economic relationship with Canada and Israel.

• (1045)

I must reiterate that this trade agreement is so much more than an economic arrangement. This agreement is particularly important at this time when a new wave of anti-Semitism, weakly disguised under the veil of a supposed legitimate criticism of Israel, is emerging in Canada and across the world.

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, as well as the so-called Israeli Apartheid Week, are based at their very core in anti-Semitic and racist undertones that seek to do nothing more than spark hatred against Jews in their homeland. I have seen this locally in the city of Hamilton, on the campuses at McMaster University, and it is very troubling.

This agreement is a statement by the Parliament of Canada that in this time of rising anti-Semitism, Canadians will not tolerate the actions of groups that promote hate and prejudice. It is one more denouncement of the efforts of those who seek to undermine our allies and their citizens. It is a rejection of the terror that groups like Hamas and Hezbollah seek to instill in the Jewish people and it is repudiation of the tyrannical regimes that finance them. It is a rejection of the efforts of those on the West Bank that would litter children's curricula in schools with hatred towards Jews. It is an indictment against those who would name soccer fields and recreational centres after terrorists and suicide bombers.

Most importantly, it is a declaration of the bond between the Canadian and Israeli peoples, the friendship that has done so much for our countries.

Finally, in Solomon's Book of Wisdom, in the book of Proverbs, at 17:17 it says, "Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble."

To my friends in Israel and the diaspora here in Canada, through fire and water we will stand together.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague proudly mentioned that the Stephen Harper government cut its entire funding to the United Nations agency for relief for Palestine refugees. Currently, U.S. President Donald Trump, a friend of Conservatives, also cut funding to the same agency. I am so proud that our government has restored funding to UNRWA, with specific help directed toward refugee women and children.

I ask the hon. member why he is so against funding for refugee women and children.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I need to put on the record here is that I feel very bad for the innocent Palestinian people who suffer every day under tyrannical regimes like Hamas and for those people who suffer under the corruption of the Palestinian Authority. I feel very bad for them and I hope for a peaceful solution to the situation that remains in the Middle East.

In respect to the UNRWA funding, Canada has a responsibility to make sure that we do everything possible not to fund or promote hate. What we discovered was that not only was UNRWA allowing curriculum into schools for young people to continue to have anti-Semitism flow into their minds, but also, in the case of Hamas in Gaza, that there was irrefutable evidence that they are actually housing the capability for Hamas to attack Israel.

I have been to Sderot. I have seen what happens after a decade and more of thousands of missiles from Hamas raining down on innocent Israeli heads. Believe me when I say that we need to do everything we can to make sure that we end that tyrannical regime and its capability to wreak havoc and terror, not only on the Israelis but on its own people.

Government Orders

• (1050)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has always given lip service to corporate responsibility standards. This new CIFTA includes a commitment to encourage the use of voluntary corporate social responsibility standards.

Does the member agree that it should not be voluntary, that we should behave as we say to the world that we will behave, and that the government should have a plan to ensure that companies that may be profiting from human rights violations do not receive benefits under this agreement or any agreement?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, with regard to corporate social responsibility, in fact it was the Conservative government that established the office of the CSR. I absolutely agree that it should be strengthened.

My understanding is that the present government is heading down that road. I have not seen any results yet. However, I agree that Canadian companies in foreign lands that mine or conduct whatever business they may do should be abiding by standards that would be typical here in Canada. I look forward to seeing some effort by the Liberal government to make that happen.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague shared some key information about the history and relationship between Canada and Israel. I thought he did a really good job, but I am concerned that he did not talk about issues that are very, very important to Canadians in this deal.

There are new chapters, and I wish he had touched on those. The first one is the gender piece. It is new. Our government brought forward something that was lagging 20 years behind, and here is an opportunity to put that in place. I wish he had spoken on that piece. Maybe he can add to it.

As well, there is the aspect of small and medium-sized businesses. Normally when there are trade deals, we focus on large companies. What about the medium-sized and small businesses? These are very important chapters in this deal. I wish he would make reference to that as well in his answers.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I applaud any effort we can make to be more inclusive with any trade agreement, whether for women, minorities or those who are marginalized.

Also, in respect to small and medium-sized businesses, I remember being in Jordan at a business round table. I thought it was going to be a round table, but it actually required a conference room in the hotel in Jordan. I was shocked at how many small and medium-sized Canadian entrepreneurs were present at that time in Jordan and Israel. It continues to be that way, so if there is any way we can encourage small business, I would be glad to do that.

One of the things that concerns me in this regard is that three members of the Liberal caucus either voted no—that was the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler—or did not even show up for the vote for this very important deal, those being the member for Madawaska—Restigouche and the member for Nepean. I wonder why there is a problem in their caucus with this free trade agreement.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague and friend for his long-

time passion and work on the Canada-Israel file. He has been there many times and has worked very hard, so I commend him for that.

We know this agreement began in 1997. In 2014, negotiations to update the agreement began under then prime minister Harper and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. In fact, former prime minister Harper is in Israel now and continues to work on Israel issues.

The Conservative Party has a record of strong trade agreements and has brought over 50 countries into free trade agreements.

This agreement was successfully concluded in 2015, but here we are in 2019. Four years after an agreement and renegotiation are concluded seems like a very long time, and it is probably not a very high priority by the Liberal government to see this thing completely through.

Could the member comment on the long period of time that will have gone by before this is concluded?

• (1055)

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, to have a delay of this many years when most of the heavy lifting was already done is appalling, particularly when we have so much instability with our trading partners.

Let me touch on something domestically, since my colleague has opened this up. We continue to have these steel tariffs in place. My concern with the Liberal government presently is that it does not understand the magnitude of the effect. It has given some funding to steel mills, which is great. In fact, one of them is ArcelorMittal Dofasco in Hamilton. However, what it does not understand is the downstream effect this is having.

I will tell a story of a medium-sized business, whose owner came into my office. He had spent \$60 million on an expansion just two years previously to be able to service his American clients. When he came into my office, the tariffs had lasted so long that he had actually had to cut his business to the United States. He had already paid over \$2 million in tariffs and could not sustain that expense.

If there are any business people on the other side of the bench, they will know that once a business has lost a customer, it is hard as heck to get that customer back. This is the kind of thing the Liberal government continues to put in the way of our businesses, and it needs to take the removal of these tariffs seriously and work with the American administration to get them removed.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague is a member of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. I would therefore like to know what he thinks about the fact that this bill on free trade between Canada and Israel encourages the voluntary adoption of corporate social responsibility standards. It seems to me that something like that should not be voluntary and that the Government of Canada should have a plan to ensure that businesses that are violating human rights do not benefit from this type of agreement.

Does he not agree?

[English]

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has said it will bring in a corporate social responsibility ombudsperson. I have not seen the results of that yet. We need to strengthen that regime.

There was testimony at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and there is a willingness within the Canadian companies outside of Canada doing business to comply with that. A few companies are causing a bad reputation for the broader spectrum, and that is definitely something that needs to happen.

Something was brought up earlier with regard to Palestinians, the West Bank and Israeli businesses. One of the things we have to communicate to people is the need to make sure that Israeli businesses continue to be able to hire and bring in Palestinians from the West Bank without the crazy pressure from this Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement that does not understand that they actually employ and allow Palestinians to prosper, to have jobs that are not in the Palestinian Authority.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

VOYAGEUR FESTIVAL

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the organizers of the Festival du Voyageur encourage everyone to come out and celebrate the festival's bicentennial from February 15 to 24.

For the past 50 years, the festival has been the best place to celebrate winter and beat this cold weather we have had recently.

[English]

Every year the francophone community in Manitoba invites people to experience the spirit of Festival du Voyageur.

[Translation]

The francophone community invites everyone to warm up to winter by participating in the world's biggest kitchen party and becoming a "HéHo" hero.

On February 15, I will be delighted to join the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Tourism in kicking off our wonderful winter festival.

● (1100)

[English]

From February 15 to 24, people should not hibernate, but celebrate and join us in the heart of Winnipeg for western Canada's largest winter festival, Festival du Voyageur. "Hey, ho!"

* * *

[Translation]

MARCEL R. PLAMONDON

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the loss of any leader always leaves a great void.

I rise today to pay tribute to Marcel R. Plamondon, a man who was integral to the development of the city of Saint-Raymond and our beautiful riding, Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. He passed away on February 5, 2019.

He served as the member for Portneuf in the National Assembly and was the founding president of our community television station, the president of the Caisse d'entraide économique de Portneuf, the president of the Insurance Brokers Association of Quebec, and a member of the Tribunal d'appel en matière de protection du territoire agricole.

In a tête-à-tête I once had with him, he told me that it is important for elected officials to stay connected to the people. I follow that advice every day.

I want to extend my deepest condolences to his wife, Aline Girard; his children, Pierre, Vincent, Marielle and Patrick; his grandchildren, Marie-Christine, Xavier, Charles, Pénélope, Marianne, Elisabeth, Félix, Loïc and Miko; and his great-grandchildren, Livia and Louis-Alexandre. They have every reason to be proud of their patriarch.

Mr. Plamondon, thank you for everything you did for our beautiful region.

* * *

[English]

THOMAS MCGRATH

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise with a heavy heart to speak on a different topic than planned, one that has rocked our community.

Tom McGrath, a pillar of the St. John's community, died suddenly last night. Just last year, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McGrath was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal at Rideau Hall for his 40 years of leadership with the 2415 Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps Gonzaga.

The high school at which he taught for many years before becoming principal and president of St. Bon's school, one of the oldest educational institutions in our province, and the Minister of Indigenous Services' alma mater, is just two blocks from my home.

Statements by Members

He was one of the nicest people. From the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which he championed, to the thousands of students and cadets he taught and mentored over the years, our community is heartbroken at his passing. Tom was also a good Liberal, but as Twitter can attest, there is an overwhelming outpouring of support for Tom, his family and his legacy from all political stripes.

May Tom rest in peace. He will be sorely missed.

* * *

[Translation]

MONTREAL CLIMATE COALITION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 23, the Montreal Climate Coalition will be celebrating its fourth anniversary. The coalition actively encourages everyone to take bold and concrete steps to become carbon neutral.

Considering the findings in the latest IPCC report, grassroots initiatives like this one are absolutely crucial. Essentially, we have 12 years to avoid irreparable damage to our ecosystems, our communities and our economy.

There is ample evidence that Quebeckers and Canadians want a greener future, a green new deal. They want to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

The City of Montreal is targeting an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The Montreal Climate Coalition is calling for concrete, ambitious, feasible measures, a transition to clean energy and production and consumption practices that generate less carbon. The NDP shares those goals, and we will continue to fight for them leading up to the election.

* * *

[English]

PARK BENCH PLAYERS

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Park Bench Players from Antigonish, Nova Scotia, are an award-winning theatre troupe that have received national recognition for their incredible efforts to reduce the stigma around individuals living with mental illness. They are educating the community and our country about the distinction between mental illness, mental wellness and mental health.

Every cast member lives with chronic mental illness, and their best-known play *With a Little Help from my Friend* is based on their own lived experiences. The production is funny, heartwarming and eye-opening. One cast member, who lives with schizophrenia, described the impact of taking part in the production on his life when he told me that he no longer feels invisible in his own community and that makes him feel good.

Their extraordinary effort demonstrates that many people living with mental illness can live full and joyful lives while they contribute to their communities and engage in dialogues of national importance.

In January, the Town of Antigonish announced it will be installing a new bench on Main Street with a plaque dedicated to the Park Bench Players. I thank every member of the cast, from the

bottom of my heart, for sharing their stories of hope, courage and resilience. Together, we can erase the stigma.

* * *

MICHAEL FERGUSON

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with an extremely heavy heart to pay tribute to the late Michael Ferguson, the 14th Auditor General of Canada. It has been an honour as chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to have had the opportunity to work closely with this remarkable and highly respected gentleman.

Our committee truly treasured and appreciated the calibre of his reports, his candour, his passion and his dedication to holding government departments and agencies accountable for their spending and for meeting the objectives of their programs and policies.

This past week, many accolades have been bestowed on Michael in the House and all across the country. As my colleague from Hamilton Centre pointed out, our Auditor General was recognized internationally and held in high esteem. Knowing Michael Ferguson professionally, this admirable recognition for such an exemplary life of public service was expected.

What really touched me was having the opportunity yesterday, at his celebration of life, to have but a small glimpse into the personal life of Michael Ferguson. He was truly loved by his wife Georgina, sons Malcolm and Geoffrey, his brothers and other family members, and many, many friends. To them, I send my deepest sympathies. To my dear friend, I say, "Until we meet again".

* * *

●(1105)

[Translation]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2017, more than 69,000 Canadians were involved in accidents caused by impaired driving. Every accident involving alcohol or drugs is one accident too many.

[English]

While I am incredibly proud of the ambitious measures our government introduced to curb impaired driving accidents, including Bill C-46 that will reduce significantly DUI-related deaths in Canada, I am even prouder to be representing leaders in my community, like Tina Adams who joins us in Ottawa today, who are working to keep our roads safe.

Statements by Members

In 2015, Tina was hit by an impaired driver while jogging on the streets of Hudson. After years of recovery and 19 operations, Tina is turning this incredibly challenging experience into an opportunity to give back to our community. She is now sharing her story in schools and before the end of this year, may even be joined by the driver convicted in the accident to talk about the experience and to highlight to the next generation the real consequences of impaired driving.

On behalf of the entire House, I want to thank her for her leadership and for helping to keep our community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges and so many others safe for all.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SAINT-EUSTACHE KIWANIS CLUB

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Saint-Eustache Kiwanis Club is hosting its famous Choco-Vin fundraiser this evening.

This fine-dining experience is one of the events the Kiwanis club organizes to raise money to support our community. Choco-Vin brings together nearly 300 people to enjoy a delectable meal of chocolate and wine. It is going to be absolutely delicious.

In past years, the club has raised \$35,000 annually at this event. The wonderful thing about the Kiwanis club is its values of mutual support and solidarity. Its mission is to benefit the community in as many ways as it can.

Through its fundraising activities, the club has raised nearly \$80,000 that will go back into the community to help young people, seniors and everyone in the Lower Laurentians community.

This year, the Kiwanis club is celebrating its 50th anniversary. It is a pillar in the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

I congratulate its members and thank them for their tremendous work.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for far too long the Liberal government has put the wants of criminals ahead of victims' rights.

I want to read some headlines from around B.C.: “Five people dead in the Lower Mainland gang war”, “Surrey man 'targeted for murder’”, “17-year-old shot after confrontation” and “SkyTrain shooting: Suspect arrested in 'scary' pre-dawn raid”.

The residents of Fleetwood—Port Kells and all British Columbians deserve safe communities. They deserve better government. After four long years of this weak-on-crime Liberal government, we finally have an opportunity to restore balance to our public safety and justice systems.

On Monday, October 21, all Canadians can stop paying for Liberal mistakes and choose Conservative leadership for safe communities.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF WOMEN'S SHELTER

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark a special anniversary in Etobicoke—Lakeshore. For 40 years, Women's Habitat has provided valuable support and a safe refuge to women and children who are fleeing violence.

Entering a shelter cannot be an easy step to take, but is the right choice for women and their children in order to remove themselves from abusive situations. Women's Habitat makes that choice easier by providing the support that survivors need in order to rebuild their lives. On top of providing a safe haven, the Women's Habitat program offers women training and key daily-living tools, such as nutrition counselling and cooking schools, that survivors need to move forward with their lives and live lives that are happier and healthier.

I would like to recognize and thank the staff, the board of directors and the volunteers for their commitment and dedication. I wish them success in the years ahead as they continue to provide this vital service in our community, helping women and children rebuild their lives.

* * *

● (1110)

WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE OF 1919

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Winnipeg's downtown. It was all about fighting for a living wage, working conditions and collective bargaining. The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 was historic as it laid the groundwork for the union movement that we have today. Our unions today advocate for workers and for strong socially progressive policies. They have made a real difference in the lives of every Canadian from coast to coast.

I am calling upon people to recognize, 100 years ago, the Winnipeg General Strike, maybe do a bit of a Google search or watch the movie, *Stand!* This is an opportunity to appreciate the fine work that our union movement has done for all Canadians over the last 100 years.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE PEOPLE OF PONTIAC

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting the riding of Pontiac. As part of my trip I went to Maniwaki, where I participated in a round table with members of the chamber of commerce. I then had the opportunity to meet with people in the community.

Statements by Members

I must say that I really enjoyed my visit, and the people of Maniwaki gave me a warm welcome. Throughout the day we kept hearing that people were disappointed in the collapse of the softwood lumber industry and in the current government's lack of interest in finding solutions to simulate the local economy.

At Tim Hortons and at the mall, people wanted to talk about filing a single tax return. Everyone thinks that it is an excellent idea and that it would make things easier for them and save them money. The people of Pontiac do not understand why the Liberal government is so stubborn. They expect the government to make life easier for them and leave more money in their pockets.

I want to thank the people of Pontiac for their warm welcome, and I promise them that a Conservative government will listen to them.

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RTL LONGUEUIL AND AGROPUR

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise today to congratulate two businesses in my riding of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine that have just been recognized as being among Canada's best employers.

Not only did RTL Longueuil and Agropur capture a spot on Forbes Magazine's list of top 300 employers, but they also made the top 100.

These two exceptional businesses recognize that happy employees are productive employees. Congratulations to the management teams of RTL and Agropur for creating a healthy and stimulating professional environment and a great place to work.

* * *

[English]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' annual report on the cost of child care in Canadian cities is out, and it is not good.

Since 2017, child care costs have risen faster than the rate of inflation in 61 Canadian cities, and in some cases the wait-lists for infant care are longer than the nine months it takes to create an infant. Child care is the second-largest expense for families, after paying the rent or mortgage.

It is especially distressing since the solution lies right before us in the province of Quebec, where in all age categories the cost of child care to families living there is less than \$200 per month. If we cannot make child care fully accessible by making it free, we can at least know that set-fee child care programs like the ones used in Quebec, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island make child care more affordable for families.

An NDP government will ensure safe, accessible, affordable child care right across Canada, after the next election.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not understand the damage being

caused by his mistakes. He cannot or will not balance the budget. He cannot or will not follow his own ethics rules. Now he has increased taxes and created new taxes so Canadians pay more for his mistakes.

The Prime Minister now says that low-income Canadians do not benefit from tax cuts, because they do not pay taxes. Under the failing Prime Minister, they are paying higher payroll taxes and a new carbon tax that is making life less affordable at a time when Canadians can least afford it.

Our leader understands the struggles Canadians face. He has faced them himself. He has earned everything he has. He cares about Canadians getting ahead and not just getting by.

It is time for a Conservative government that manages spending properly and lowers taxes. Rather than pay for a Liberal failure, Canadians can choose a Conservative government and leadership to get ahead.

* * *

•(1115)

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week marked the beginning of the spring festival or lunar new year. I am pleased to join with the many Canadians who are celebrating the lunar new year, which offers a great occasion to acknowledge the important role of Chinese-Canadian communities in my riding of Oakville and across the country. From coast to coast to coast, Chinese Canadians are helping build a stronger, more inclusive Canada.

This year, we celebrate the Year of the Pig, an animal symbolizing wealth and good fortune. During this time of new beginnings, I encourage everyone to reflect on the successes of the past year and look toward new opportunities.

Over the past week, I have joined in the celebrations with the Oakville Chinese network Society, the Oakville Jiu-Jiu Senior Association, and I wish the best of luck to the Halton Region Chinese Canadian Association for its gala tomorrow evening. I look forward to celebrating with the Oakville Chinese Residents Association later this weekend.

I wish everyone a year filled with peace, happiness, good health and great prosperity.

Gong hey fat choy. Gong xi fa cai.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***JUSTICE**

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, The Globe and Mail alleges that the Prime Minister's Office interfered in order to try to get charges dropped in a massive fraud and bribery case. The corporation in question discussed law enforcement and justice with the Prime Minister's Office 14 times, including with PMO boss Gerald Butts.

Did Mr. Butts ever discuss with SNC-Lavalin lobbyists the idea of giving the company a deal to avoid criminal prosecution?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been directed or pressured by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

The Attorney General of Canada is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to the government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest. He takes those responsibilities very seriously.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told his caucus that any word coming from Gerald Butts should be considered as coming directly from the Prime Minister.

The Globe and Mail reports, "In December, Mr. Butts spoke to [the former attorney general] about the SNC-Lavalin remediation case, according to [the Prime Minister's] deputy communications director." Apparently, it did not go well. A month later, the Prime Minister fired his attorney general.

What did Mr. Butts say to the former attorney general in that conversation?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone else in the Prime Minister's Office, and let me reiterate that, or anyone else in the Prime Minister's Office, to make any decision on this or any other matter.

The Attorney General of Canada is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to the entire Government of Canada. He has the responsibility to act in the public interest and that responsibility is one he takes very seriously.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question.

Gerald Butts is the boss at the PMO. The Prime Minister has told his caucus that anything that comes from Gerald Butts comes from the Prime Minister. In December, Mr. Butts talked about SNC-Lavalin's charges with the former attorney general.

Again my question is very clear. What exactly did Gerald Butts say to the former attorney general in that December conversation?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office, including the individual just mentioned by the member for Carleton, to make any decision on this or any other matter.

The Attorney General is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to the government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest. The Attorney General takes this issue very seriously.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one day after the Globe and Mail broke the scandal involving the Prime Minister's Office potential interference in a criminal case, Canadians have not been reassured by what the government is telling them. The government is playing with words. Canadians want the facts.

The question we are asking and will continue to ask until Canadians get an answer is very simple: Did the Prime Minister's Office have discussions with the former attorney general about SNC-Lavalin, yes or no?

• (1120)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. At no point has the current Minister of Justice or his predecessor been directed or pressured by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make a decision on this or any other matter. The Attorney General of Canada is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to the government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest. He takes his responsibilities very seriously.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary, and I commend him on his French, but he did not answer my question.

My question was perfectly simple, especially since the Globe and Mail published an added detail today. It seems that the Prime Minister's principal secretary, the infamous Gerald Butts, had a conversation with the former attorney general of Canada in December, and a month later, she got the boot from that important post.

I will repeat the question that is on all Canadians' minds and that they want a clear answer to. Were there discussions between the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general regarding the SNC-Lavalin scandal? Yes or no?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague opposite. I work very hard to stand up for both official languages in the House.

Oral Questions

At no point has the Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not invent the expression, but he was right when he said that sunlight is the best disinfectant. However, when faced with evidence of a serious potential obstruction of justice, the Liberals can only deny and delay.

A well-connected multinational company lobbies the Liberal government more than 50 times, shovels to it more than \$100,000 in illegal donations and then gets changes to the Criminal Code to help it get out from under corruption and fraud charges. When the former AG does not bend to the will of the Prime Minister, she is fired.

The Liberals should be working with us to get to the bottom of this mess. Instead, we get non-answers and resistance. Therefore, I have a very specific question for my friends. Will they support our call for an ethics investigation into this scandal, yes or no?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been abundantly clear. At no point has the Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

The Attorney General is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to the Government of Canada, with a responsibility to act always in the public interest. He takes those responsibilities seriously.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it does not matter what question we ask them, the Liberals give us the exact same answer back. By refusing to agree with even the most simple and obvious requests for answers, the Liberals look even more guilty.

Let us remind Canadians what we are talking about. Obstruction of justice is the crime of wilfully interfering with the process of justice by influencing or threatening a legal officer or a legal process. It comes with a 10-year jail sentence. What we are talking about is the most serious form of corruption and political criminality. This is why people are cynical about politics. This is why people do not trust government.

Again, I ask a simple question. Will the Liberals help us get the answers we need and support our call for an investigation into this mess?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate for the House that at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone else in his office to make a decision on this or any other matter. As the Prime Minister said very clearly yesterday to the journalists gathered, the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail article are false.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let's not pretend that we have never seen rich corporations buy off politicians with illegal contributions. After decades of Liberal governments in Ottawa, we have been down that road before.

Whether we are talking about KPMG, Kinder Morgan or SNC-Lavalin, it is the same old story. When it comes time to lend a hand to their millionaire friends, the Liberals take their marching orders from the powerful.

If the Liberals think they have absolutely nothing to hide, why do they not ask the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to investigate and shed some light on this scandal?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no time was the current Minister of Justice or his predecessor pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or his office to make any decision on this or any other matter. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, these allegations are false.

•(1125)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget implementation bill, the Liberals amended the Criminal Code. Companies accused of corruption can pursue out-of-court settlements, thus ensuring their continued eligibility for lucrative federal contracts.

Which company has been accused of corruption in other countries many times over? SNC-Lavalin. Which company talked to the Prime Minister's Office 14 times? SNC-Lavalin.

The Liberals are corporate puppets. Will the people ever find out just how much sway SNC-Lavalin holds over the Liberal government?

[English]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the remediation agreements the member opposite is referencing are something that were widely consulted upon by the Government of Canada. That process was led by PSPC. That consultation concluded during the year 2017. There was an announcement made in the budget. There was a press release. There was a study done at committee.

The government has been entirely transparent with respect to amendments we have made to the laws of Canada with respect to remediation.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, former Liberal Ontario attorney general Michael Bryant has made his opinion known as to how serious these allegations are and the impacts they are having on our democracy and the judicial system.

We found out this morning from The Globe and Mail that the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr. Butts, spoke to Ms. Wilson-Raybould about the SNC-Lavalin remediation case, according to the Prime Minister's deputy communications director.

Oral Questions

The question is simple and requires a straightforward answer for Canadians. Did the Prime Minister's Office discuss a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general, yes or no?

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind hon. members not to use the family names of other hon. members.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to be crystal clear, the principal secretary, like many others, is a member of the Prime Minister's Office.

What I said is that the Minister of Justice and the previous minister of justice have not been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone else in the Prime Minister's Office to take any decision on this or any other matter.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): The questions we are asking, Mr. Speaker, are crystal clear. We are asking a very simple question that has not been answered. It was not answered yesterday and it has not been answered today. I am going to ask again, crystal clearly.

Did the Prime Minister's Office discuss a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former Attorney General, yes or no?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make a decision in this or on any other matter.

As the Prime Minister stated clearly yesterday, the allegations contained in the original article in The Globe and Mail are false.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after she was shown the door, the former attorney general of Canada stated that the justice system must be free from any political interference, that she must always be ready to speak the truth and that anything less than the whole truth is unacceptable.

Did the Prime Minister's Office discuss a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general of Canada, yes or no?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or his predecessor been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in his office to make a decision on this or any other matter.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question.

Given that the Attorney General of Canada has unique responsibilities in relation to upholding the rule of law and the administration of justice, and that our justice system must be free of any political interference and maintain the highest level of public confidence, that position should never be tainted by partisanship and must always be absolutely transparent.

The question is simple. Did the Prime Minister's Office discuss a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

I absolutely agree with my colleague across the way that the Attorney General of Canada is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to the government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest, as the hon. member points out. The Attorney General takes those responsibilities very seriously.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, that was not the question.

The former attorney general said very clearly, "It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference", yet we know from the lobbyists commissioner that over a dozen times, SNC-Lavalin met with members of the Prime Minister's Office, including principal secretary Gerry Butts.

The Prime Minister says that sunshine is the best disinfectant, so let us shine some sunlight on this issue. Did the Prime Minister's Office discuss a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general, yes or no?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to be crystal clear, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office, including all employees therein, to make any decision on this or any other matter.

The Attorney General is the chief law officer of the Crown, providing legal advice to the government. He takes that responsibility very seriously.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that clearly was not the question. We are not talking about directing or influence. We are talking about discussions.

The former attorney general was clear that "It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference".

The Canadian public is not confident in the Prime Minister or that parliamentary secretary's answer. Was there any discussion of a special deal between the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general about SNC-Lavalin, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point, N-O point, has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or members of his cabinet.

I take issue with the member opposite. The member opposite has construed this as not being about pressure or direction. That is exactly what is at issue here. That is exactly what I am saying on the record. There was no pressure and no direction given by the Prime Minister or members of his cabinet on this or any other matter.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was over 20 years ago that the Liberals committed to introducing a universal drug plan, but they failed to act. In the meantime, Mr. Lorenzen, in my riding, has paid over \$25,000 for prescription medication following a surgery.

The Liberals lack the political will to get the job done. Enough with the studies. Enough with the expert panels. Enough with the rhetoric. Will the Liberals please tell Mr. Lorenzen, indeed all Canadians, if they are ready to end the empty promises and implement a fully public, national and universal pharmacare plan?

Mr. John Oliver (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree that Canadians are paying too much for their prescription medicines, but unlike the NDP, we are doing our homework. When it comes to something as big and important as pharmacare, we want to get it right. Unlike the NDP, we want to know how much something costs before we implement it.

What the NDP unveiled yesterday is not a plan. They cannot call something a plan when it has nothing about costing or how it will be implemented. Unlike the NDP, we do not do a nation-building policy of pharmacare on the back of a napkin. This is an issue far too serious for half-baked, no-detail plans.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is more Liberal obfuscation.

Canada needs a federal child care program. CCPA's "Development Milestones" report reveals that the distressingly high cost of child care burdens Canadian families. Child care costs are 10 times higher in Toronto than in Montreal. In fact, universal child care in Quebec pays for itself. It has actually created revenue.

What will it take for the Liberal government to smarten up and implement a national child care program for all Canadian families so everyone wins?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be able to answer this question, because we know that investments in affordable and quality child care make a big impact on improving workforce and labour force participation by women in particular, on making ends meet easier, on improving poverty reduction outcomes,

on making gender equality more real in Canada and on investing in the development of our children.

The good news is that we have announced a \$7.5 billion investment, for the first time ever, in our daycare centres and early learning and child care. We are looking forward to implementing that over the next 10 years.

* * *

● (1135)

JUSTICE

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the attorney general's responsibilities include upholding the rule of law and speaking truth to power. It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference.

Yesterday the Prime Minister's Office was accused of trying to interfere with a criminal prosecution against SNC-Lavalin. In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general. A month later, she was fired.

What was said in that meeting?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

It does indeed warm my heart to now hear two Conservative colleagues talking about how important the rule of law is. I wish they would have recognized those kinds of concepts when they were openly criticizing Beverley McLachlin when she served as Chief Justice of Canada.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, something stinks. The Prime Minister's answers are vague and evasive.

The former attorney general spoke truth to power, and she paid the price. In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general, and a month later, she was fired. What was said at that meeting?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice and the former minister of justice have not been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's cabinet on this or any other matter.

As the Prime Minister said very clearly yesterday in front of a media scrum, the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail article are false.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that my colleague listen to the question so that he can give a real answer.

This is worrisome. Yesterday the Globe and Mail published an article alleging that the Prime Minister's Office had interfered in a criminal proceeding.

What about the principle of impartiality in our justice system? What about the principles of ethics and transparency?

In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general, who was then dismissed a month later.

My question is simple. What was said at that meeting?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, at no point was the current Minister of Justice or his predecessor pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or his office to make a decision on this or any other matter.

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. That carefully crafted answer falls short of what Canadians expect.

As the former attorney general said, “The role of the Attorney General of Canada carries with it unique responsibilities to uphold the rule of law and the administration of justice, and as such demands a measure of principled independence.”

Apparently the Prime Minister thinks otherwise. In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general. A month later, she was fired. What was said in that meeting?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point has the current minister or his predecessor been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or members of his office to make any decision in this or any other matter.

Absolutely, the member opposite has it right. The attorney general is the chief law officer of the Crown. Absolutely, they provide legal advice to government and they have a responsibility to act in the public interest. That is something the minister takes very seriously.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every question feels like *Groundhog Day*.

The RCM of Vaudreuil-Soulanges asked the National Energy Board, the NEB, to provide a list of compliance issues and information on monitoring carried out in relation to Enbridge's line 9B. The NEB declined to answer.

I also tried to get this information by submitting a written question. Here is what I got in response:

...producing and validating a comprehensive response to this question is not possible in the time allotted and could lead to the disclosure of incomplete and misleading information.

Do the NEB and the Liberals have something to hide?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pipeline regulation is the responsibility of the National Energy Board.

Anyone with questions or concerns about pipeline safety should contact the NEB.

* * *

● (1140)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, shoreline erosion is not a new phenomenon, but the situation is getting worse.

Some of my constituents are now concerned that their houses might literally fall into the St. Lawrence.

Municipalities like Saint-Ignace have long been calling on the federal government to invest in maintaining retaining walls along the St. Lawrence and enforcing speed limits on the waterway. This problem is real, and people want the federal government to take action now.

Will the Liberals do what needs to be done and take concrete steps to address this urgent problem?

[English]

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand how important our transportation corridors are for getting goods across Canada to market and also for connecting people with other Canadians.

When it comes to individual issues like this one, we are happy to work with all members to ensure that not only do our transportation corridors stay open but that our communities stay protected. I am happy to follow up with the member.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Armed Forces offer people unique opportunities to challenge themselves and develop skills that will serve them well their whole lives.

[English]

Members of the reserve forces live and work in their home communities and safeguard them, such as when natural disasters occur.

Oral Questions

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence inform the House how the government is partnering with communities to support our reservists and allow them to serve at home and abroad without the stress of repercussions in their full-time civilian roles?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mississauga—Lakeshore for his question.

Our government supports our active and reserve military personnel.

[English]

We enhanced job protection legislation with new provisions for military training leave and job protection when serving on deployment.

[Translation]

I was in New Brunswick this week to congratulate the businesses and educators in our region who support our reservists and make it possible for them to serve.

[English]

I thank the Canadian Forces Liaison Council and its partners for promoting the transferable skills of reservists for civilian jobs and for helping them balance their civilian lives while gaining valuable military experience that sets them up for success.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect Canada's attorney general to be independent and non-partisan. The former attorney general knows this. In her words, "It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference".

All of these carefully crafted and legally vetted answers regarding the PMO interfering in a criminal investigation and the firing of the former attorney general are not sufficient. In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general. A month later, she was fired. Who said what in that meeting?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said several times in this chamber today, at no point whatsoever were the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office to make a decision on this or any other matter.

I have been patient, but at least half a dozen times members opposite have said that the former minister was fired in the context of accepting the honour of taking on serving Canada's veterans. In terms of the men and women who have fought for this country and served so valiantly, that is actually an inappropriate statement to be making in the House and it should be addressed.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary still has not answered the

question. I want to quote the former attorney general. She stated that "it has always been my view that the attorney-general of Canada must be non-partisan, more transparent in the principles that are the basis of decisions, and, in this respect, always willing to speak truth to power." Shockingly, now it appears the Prime Minister fired the former attorney general for speaking truth to power.

In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general. A month later, she was fired. What was said in that meeting?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, neither the current Minister of Justice nor the former minister of justice has been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office to take a decision on this or any other matter.

As the Prime Minister was very clear yesterday with the journalists gathered in Vaughan, Ontario, the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail article are false.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not quite the answer that we needed, but the reports about the PMO's interference in a criminal prosecution are shocking.

In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general. A month later, she was demoted. What was said in that meeting? Canadians need to know.

● (1145)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of Justice and his predecessor have neither been pressured nor directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office to make a decision on this or any other matter.

Clearly, the Attorney General is the chief law officer of the Crown and provides legal advice to government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest. The minister takes this responsibility very seriously.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again no surprise, that was not the answer to the question that was asked.

These reports of PMO interference in a criminal prosecution are deeply troubling. It is no wonder the Prime Minister fired his former attorney general when she called for principled independence and transparency. She said, "It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference". The pillars of ethics, principles and transparency have been absent from the government.

In December, Gerald Butts discussed a special deal for SNC-Lavalin with the former attorney general. A month later, she was fired. What was said in that meeting?

Oral Questions

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at absolutely no point has the previous minister or the current minister been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister himself or any members of his office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

As the Prime Minister said clearly yesterday to the gathered journalists, the allegations contained in the original media article are false.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Forces continue to lose more than one member per month to death by suicide, yet one of the barriers to serving members getting the help that they need is the fact that self-harm remains a disciplinary offence in the military code of conduct.

Since the Liberal members ruled my amendment to fix this out of order at committee hearings on Bill C-77, let me ask the minister.

Will the government now support removing self-harm as a disciplinary offence by agreeing to support my private member's bill, Bill C-426, and expedite its passage through the House?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, our government is committed to the care, health and well-being of our military personnel and their families.

We recognize that we need to continually adapt the way we care for people with mental illness. That is exactly why the minister has asked the Standing Committee on National Defence to examine the issue of suicide and self-harm within the Canadian Armed Forces with a view to making recommendations to the government for dealing with these challenges.

Looking after our soldiers, our veterans and their families is a priority for our government. These men and women are always at the centre of everything we do.

* * *

[*English*]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a 60% increase in rejections of disability tax credit applications. The Liberals are not delivering the services needed by thousands of people with severe and prolonged impairments. The disability savings they qualified for as far back as 10 years ago are also being clawed back. Nearly 80% of appeals win and it makes us wonder if this is intentional. The Liberals take care of their friends on Bay Street and people with disabilities are being ripped off.

Will the Liberal government fix this problem now?

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that living with a disability can have a significant impact on the lives of those affected and their loved ones. That is why we

have put in place measures to make the disability tax credit more accessible by, for example, reducing the complexity of the form and allowing nurse practitioners to certify the forms of their patients.

Our government reinstated the disability advisory committee, which was abolished under the Harper Conservatives, to give people with disabilities a strong voice in advising the agency. We look forward to receiving the committee's recommendations.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals introduced the accountability-destroying, \$7-billion vote 40 Liberal slush fund on the pretense that it would better align government spending. Now the PBO has once again reported that this measure has been an abject failure. The Liberals killed spending oversight in an election year so that they could spend on what they wanted with zero accountability.

Will the new Treasury Board president listen to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and eliminate the vote 40 Liberal slush fund?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has always been guided by the view that parliamentarians have the right to know where public funds are going and how they are being spent.

For the very first time, parliamentarians have at their disposal a detailed reconciliation between the budget and the main estimates. They never had that before. That means when they are studying the main estimates, parliamentarians will now be able to study a document that is relevant and complete for that year. This is a major improvement over previous years, when the main estimates were rendered obsolete soon after they were tabled because they did not reconcile with the budget.

* * *

● (1150)

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, eight-year-old Liam and nine-year-old Mia Tarabichi were kidnapped. They were taken to a foreign country. The Prime Minister has done nothing to bring them home. The only hope of ever having these children brought home to their mom Shelley is if the Prime Minister calls the President and the Prime Minister of Lebanon and asks for them to intervene. These two Canadian children need to be home here in Canada with their mom.

Why has the Prime Minister not called President Aoun and Prime Minister Hariri?

Oral Questions

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts go out to the family at the centre of an abduction of Canadian children to Lebanon. Canadian consular officials are in direct contact with the family and are providing consular assistance and advice. Due to the provisions of the Privacy Act, no further information can be disclosed at this time.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seriously, that answer is shameful. Two Canadian children were kidnapped and taken to a foreign country, and that is the answer we get. In Shelley's own words, the only person who can do something is the Prime Minister, who so far has not cared enough to do anything for his own citizens. She says, "What do I have to do to be heard, become a donor?"

Why will the Prime Minister not just pick up the phone and bring Liam and Mia home?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, consular officials are in direct contact with the family. There is a whole host of security issues that surround such cases, and to further talk about the details in public may put lives in jeopardy.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Kim Rudd (Northumberland—Peterborough South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pulp and paper industry has changed dramatically over the past two decades.

[English]

Between 1990 and 2012, the industry has led the way in reducing pollution by more than 60%. The industry will play a key role in fighting pollution, driving innovation, creating jobs and advancing indigenous reconciliation.

[Translation]

While stressing the importance of the future of Canadian industry, can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources give us an update on the pulp and paper industry?

[English]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her great efforts in French.

[Translation]

I thank the hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South for promoting such an important file.

[English]

Our government understands the importance of the forestry sector and is providing \$867 million through the softwood lumber action plan due to unfair duties levied by the U.S.

[Translation]

I also attended the most recent PaperWeek conference in Montreal, where I met with industry professionals to exchange ideas and discuss new technologies.

[English]

We will take steps to ensure the pulp and paper industry and the forest sector at large continue to thrive.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former attorney general has been asked, point blank, if the Prime Minister's Office pressured her to make a deal letting SNC-Lavalin off bribery and corruption charges. Her answer was, "No comment".

The Prime Minister has the ability to waive attorney-client privilege and let her speak the truth. Will the Prime Minister let the former attorney general speak?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as regards the previous minister of justice and the current Minister of Justice, there has been absolutely no pressure or direction exercised upon either of those two individuals by the Prime Minister himself or by anyone in his cabinet, on this or any other matter.

The allegations contained in the media articles that surfaced yesterday are false, as the Prime Minister stated clearly to journalists in Vaughan.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every community in Canada has to deal with the challenge of helping people living in homelessness. Canada's first-ever national housing strategy included a significant increase in funds for fighting homelessness. Last November, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development announced that reaching home, the redesigned federal homelessness program, will be launching on April 1 of this year. The date is almost upon us.

Could the minister update the House on reaching home's implementation?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his hard work in favour of the families and children in his community.

Our government committed to working for the most vulnerable of all Canadians. That is because one homeless Canadian on the streets is one too many in our country. That is why reaching home, the new homelessness program, is going to increase the number of communities that will benefit from funding from the federal government. That is why I am calling upon all these communities to apply for additional funding. That is why, by working together, we can make sure we reduce homelessness by at least 50%.

Oral Questions

•(1155)

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, our leader travelled to Willowdale to hear from families and small business owners who are struggling to get by under the current Liberal government's policies. There, he met pharmacist Mr. Tamer Farag, who voiced his concerns about how the Prime Minister's tax changes are costing him and his community.

We know the Prime Minister cannot relate to these stories because he has never had to balance a budget or meet a payroll, but in the rest of Canada, people are paying for his mistakes with their hard-earned money. When will the Prime Minister give hard-working Canadians, like Mr. Farag, a break?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Hébert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and Export Promotion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is working hard to help SMEs and especially to make it easier for them to do business.

On January 1, 2019, we lowered the small business tax rate to 9%, allowing small businesses to keep \$7,500 more. We also asked credit card companies to lower their rates, which translates into an extra \$7,500 over five years. We promised small businesses that we would work for them, and that is what we will keep doing.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Simon Maril (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister indicated that he would have talks with Quebec concerning immigration. The talks did not last long.

The ink on Quebec's bill is not even dry and the government is already saying no. Last week, he refused to discuss knowledge of French as a condition for citizenship. This week, he is refusing to discuss knowledge of French as a condition in earlier steps in the immigration process. French is not a shameful disease.

Why is the government refusing to discuss this? Why is it showing such contempt?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immigration plays a key role in the Canadian economy and enriches our communities.

The Governments of Canada and Quebec have been collaborating for decades under the Canada-Quebec accord, and we intend to continue this important collaboration. We have concerns about the bill, but it is too early to comment on specifics.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, members will recall that the government refused to seriously discuss the immigration levels in Quebec on the pretext of addressing a labour shortage.

Today, Quebec is legislating to deal with the labour shortage in the regions as quickly as possible, but Ottawa said no without any meetings or discussions.

If the government believes that the labour shortage in the regions is a problem, why does it want to prevent Quebec from legislating in that regard?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immigration plays a key role in the Canadian economy and enriches our communities.

The Governments of Canada and Quebec have been collaborating for decades under the Canada-Quebec accord, and we intend to continue this important collaboration. We have concerns about the bill, but it is too early to comment on specifics.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Prime Minister said “no”. He closed the door.

Quebec's immigration bill was tabled only yesterday. It will be debated by the National Assembly and the public, which is only natural because that is how democracy works.

However, this morning, the government decided that it could not care less about that process and that, whatever happens, it will say “no”.

Does the government realize that, by so doing, it is attacking the sovereignty of the National Assembly and its capacity to pass effective legislation?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we realize the importance of immigration to address labour market shortages and enhance Quebec's economy. The Governments of Canada and Quebec have always collaborated for decades under the Canada-Quebec accord, and we intend to continue this important collaboration.

Of course, we have some concerns about this bill, but we will be reviewing it with interest. We have to continue to work with the Government of Quebec to ensure we have an immigration system that continues to work for the best interests of Canadians and Quebecers.

* * *

•(1200)

JUSTICE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, all through question period today, we have asked a very simple question of the attorney general and of his parliamentary secretary. We still have not had an answer.

We know that Gerald Butts met with the former attorney general to discuss the SNC-Lavalin issue. The very simple question for the attorney general is this. Did that discussion include a special deal for the SNC-Lavalin company, yes or no?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too have sat here attentively during the full hour of question period. I will say, again, that at no point were the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

As I have reiterated, the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail article, as the Prime Minister stated yesterday, are false.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of the following five reports: The Annual Report of the Implementation Committee Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, dated April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016; the Tla'amin Nation Annual Treaty Implementation Report, 2016/2017; the Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement Annual Report, 2014-2015; the Annual Report of the Implementation Committee Sahtu Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017; and finally, the 2014-15 Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement Annual Report.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled "Indigenous Veterans: From Memories of Injustice to Lasting Recognition".

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

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from folks in my community who want to protect the Thames River system.

The petitioners want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Conservative government stripped environmental regulations covered in the Navigable Waters Protection Act, leaving hundreds of rivers vulnerable, rivers like the Thames. The Liberals promised they would reinstate those environmental protections, but they failed.

The petitioners ask the government to support my bill, Bill C-355, which commits the government to prioritizing the protection of the Thames River by amending the Navigation Protection Act.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, on behalf of 95 constituents of Battle River—Crowfoot, to present a petition that calls upon the House of Commons to permit Christians to exercise their religious belief and conscience rights, both in their private and public acts, without coercion, constraint, or discrimination.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first comes from constituents along the coastal area of my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. It is with respect to the interim protocol for the use of Southern B.C. Anchorages. This interim protocol has basically transformed the waters around my riding into a long-term industrial parking lot for freighters.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to provide urgently needed protection for the southern Gulf Islands' fragile and currently stressed ecosystems and socio-economics by suspending the interim protocol for the use of Southern B.C. Anchorages immediately and consulting further on a new protocol that discontinues the use of the southern Gulf Islands of B.C. as a parking lot for freighters.

● (1205)

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the Canadian government not to spend billions of dollars on a pipeline. It states that it disregards the right of indigenous peoples to say "no" to projects that affect their territories and resources; that expanding the pipeline would increase our greenhouse gas emissions and make it impossible for us to meet our global climate targets; and therefore, the federal government must cease the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and instead invest in clean, renewable energy sources.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I submit a petition with several hundred names from my riding in Edmonton West.

The petitioners ask the government to move quickly on Bill C-350 and Bill S-240, which would prevent Canadians from going abroad to obtain organs that have been obtained without consent.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Simon Marcil (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to raise a question of privilege.

Yesterday, the Crown answered a question that was not addressed to it, which is a breach of the privileges of the House.

During oral question period, my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île asked a question to the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the member for Mount Royal. Unfortunately, the member for Mount Royal left his seat, so the Speaker was not able to call on him.

If you look at the video of yesterday's proceedings, just after 3 p. m., you can clearly see the member scurrying away after my colleague asked his question. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship then answered my colleague.

Bosc and Gagnon says the following on page 512:

Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to Chairs of committees.

This is what my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île did. He asked a question about the agenda, or the business, of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

At the last second, and given the uproar caused by the erratic behaviour of the member for Mount Royal, the Chair recognized someone else. In the end, the parliamentary secretary to a minister of the Crown answered the question by my colleague and friend from La Pointe-de-l'Île.

It would be completely unacceptable for the Prime Minister to rise in the House and rule on the question of privilege I am raising. That would seriously call into question the independence, authority and dignity of the House. In other words, it would call into question the privileges of the House.

This is a legitimate question. A minister of the Crown is not qualified to answer a question related to the business of a committee, basically, its arm's length relationship to the government. Parliament and parliamentary committees are not servants of the government. By ignoring this fundamental constitutional principle, the government is in breach of the privileges of this House.

I therefore believe that the parliamentary privileges of my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île have been breached, as have the privileges of the House.

Government Orders

I believe this situation warrants redress. I therefore raise it to you for consideration, Mr. Speaker, and propose the following solution to address it. I think it would be reasonable for the Chair to recognize the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île for a supplementary question upon our return after the break. He could then ask his question again and you could give the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights an opportunity to respond.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Mirabel for his intervention. We will certainly take the time to examine his arguments.

I do appreciate the research he did in preparing his arguments. We will take the hon. member's question of privilege under consideration.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1210)

[English]

CANADA-ISRAEL FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-85, An Act to amend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-85, an act to amend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act and to make related amendments to other acts.

As New Democrats have pointed out in previous debates on this bill, we have serious concerns about the lack of human rights protections contained in the act, particularly relating to the rights of Palestinians in territories occupied by Israel. The NDP tried to address these concerns at committee, but all amendments were voted down.

That said, we are not opposed to a free trade agreement with Israel. New Democrats are in favour of international trade agreements that respect human rights, the rights of workers, the environment and all of our international obligations. In fact, we supported the bill at second reading and had proposed amendments that would have made Bill C-85 a truly progressive free trade agreement, the very sort of agreement the current government claims, with great bluster and swagger, to support, but never actually seems to sign.

Other parties like to say that the NDP does not support free trade and has never supported a free trade agreement. My response is that the NDP supports and actively encourages trade agreements that are fair and responsible, trade agreements that respect human rights, the rights of workers, the environment and all of our international obligations. Canada has yet to sign such an agreement, and if one judges by actions and interactions, is not particularly interested in doing so just yet.

Government Orders

I am quite proud of the amendments we proposed at committee for this bill. We brought forward amendments on human rights, gender rights, indigenous rights and labour rights—reasonable and achievable amendments, as proven by the advances made by the European Union in the update of its free trade agreement with Israel—to ensure that relations between Canada and Israel are based on respect for human rights and international law.

Our amendments, first and foremost, ensure this fundamental concept. They would ensure that the government undertakes an annual gender-based analysis and gender impact assessment that would be applied to the entire agreement, as well as enforceable corporate social responsibility and the standards and principles set out in the United Nations document entitled “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights”.

As well, we brought amendments to ensure the provisions of the agreement would respect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and that the rights of workers are protected through mandatory mechanisms laid out in the International Labour Organization's Decent Work Agenda, which lays out four pillars contained in the sustainable development goals. One mandatory mechanism is the creation of an independent labour secretariat with the power to oversee a dispute settlement process.

Another amendment was to ensure the creation of a framework for transnational bargaining to allow unions to represent workers in Canada and Israel.

Likewise, we brought forward amendments on environmental protections. These were brought forward in order to ensure a high level of environmental protection through comprehensive and legally binding commitments that meet Canada's obligations under the Paris Agreement reached on December 12, 2015, and to protect against bulk water exports and ensure that water is not labelled as a commodity, which is profoundly important.

We also tabled amendments to include a gender impact assessment, along with an economic impact analysis, a detailed job analysis and an analysis on the impacts of the act on human rights in both countries, including the occupied Palestinian territories.

As members can see, these are basic common sense proposals that are designed to ensure that everyone, and not just our multinationals, benefits from the agreement.

• (1215)

As our party's critic for international human rights, I am gravely concerned about the impact these trade agreements have on human rights in the nations involved. Economic objectives, unfortunately, conflict with human rights obligations in many scenarios.

Canada, for instance, has free trade agreements with a number of countries with appalling human rights records, such as Honduras; Mexico, a country whose very state apparatus has come perilously close to collapsing due to corruption by and conflict with the largest narcotics trafficking enterprises in the world; and Colombia, where over 400 human rights defenders have been murdered over the last three years.

As for this Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, I am deeply concerned about the lack of human rights protections in the bill and the lack of recognition of the rights of Palestinians living in their sovereign territories occupied by Israel.

Canadians expect their government to sign trade deals that respect human rights, international law and our foreign affairs policies. This legislation does not conform to these expectations. Without these protections, the Canadian government is not respecting Canada's commitment to a peaceful and just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The European Union at least pushed for and received a human rights clause in its free trade agreement with Israel. Notably, since 2015, the EU, a member of the World Trade Organization, has required that products from the occupied territories be labelled as such. While the Israel government has opposed these measures, it has not challenged them at the World Trade Organization. This is important, as Canadians are concerned that Israeli wine, for instance, lacks proper labelling as to whether grapes were produced in the occupied territories.

In July of 2017, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ruled that wines made in the occupied West Bank could not be labelled as products of Israel. After the ruling, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario directed its vendors to pull the products from their shelves. The CFIA emphasized that Canada does not recognize the occupied territories as part of Israel and that labelling products produced there as made in Israel was misleading for consumers and in violation of Canada's Food and Drugs Act.

After a strong backlash, the CFIA said, “We did not fully consider the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement”, which applies to the territory where the customs laws of Israel are applied. This is not acceptable.

This updated iteration of this free trade agreement was a perfect opportunity for us to address and specifically articulate this problem. Let me explain. This trade agreement appears to fail to distinguish between the State of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The European Union has, since 2015, as mentioned, required products from the occupied territories to be labelled as such, yet article 1.4.1(b) of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement stipulates instead that the agreement applies to “the territory where its customs laws are applied”.

Under the terms of the 1994 Paris protocol, Israel and Palestine are part of a customs union under which Israel collects duties on goods destined for the Palestinian territories. However, the existence of a customs union does not change the fact that the West Bank, where illegal Israeli settlements have proliferated, remains occupied territory. Bill C-85 appears to cover the products made in Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

Government Orders

●(1220)

Neither Canada nor the United Nations recognizes these settlements as part of Israel. These settlements are illegal. They clearly violate the fourth Geneva convention, which prohibits the settlement of territories acquired by war and the movement of indigenous people in those territories, among other things.

In fact, there is virtual global unanimity that the territories seized and occupied by Israel since 1967, which are the West Bank, Golan Heights and Gaza, are not part of Israel. Indeed, those territories are a fraction of the land awarded to the Palestinian people by the United Nations partition of 1947.

As stated, Palestinians have been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. That is 51 years. The Canadian government's own policy does not recognize permanent Israeli control over these territories, and stipulates that Israeli settlements, occupation and control violate the fourth Geneva convention and many Security Council resolutions.

As stated as recently as 2016 at the United Nations Security Council:

[The Security Council] Reaffirms that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace;

It also goes on to call upon all states, including Canada, “to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967”. I would suggest to you that a trade instrument that respects international law would distinguish between the occupied territory and the State of Israel because a trade agreement is a relevant dealing.

I am gravely concerned that this agreement fails our international commitment. It fails its own international commitment to be a respected covenant of trade with another sovereign power. It puts us afoul of international law. Products made in the occupied territories in Palestine must be labelled as such. To fail to do so amounts to a countenance of illegal annexation of territory.

More broadly, I wish to speak for the millions of Canadians who want to see peace in this region and the creation of the secure and sovereign states of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace.

Israel has not complied with its obligations under the Geneva convention. Over time, it has steadily and consistently increased its illegal settlements in Palestine.

In the end, most Canadians wish for a safe, secure, sovereign Israel and Palestine, living in peace and friendship and in mutual cooperation. We all want to see increased commercial, political, social and cultural relations with Israel. However, we also want to see these very same relationship benefits extended to the Palestinians. Trade agreements are important legal instruments that play an important role, along with diplomacy, in ensuring that internationally recognized human rights standards and laws are adhered to and maintained.

●(1225)

They absolutely must themselves comply with these laws and norms. The Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement is not merely the technical construct of an economic relationship, with chapters and chapters on the exchange of goods and services and some voluntary feel-good promises; this is a political treatise that has profound influence on people. It is reckless to sign a free trade agreement that disregards the issue of occupied territory. This only exacerbates the situation, and for what?

I mentioned earlier that the NDP is in support of trade agreements that uphold our international commitments, human rights, the sustainable development goals, indigenous rights and gender rights, and that align with our own foreign policies. However, I would like to point out that a year on from the signing of CETA, our exports have decreased. It makes us question again a trade agreement that undermines human rights, that undermines social responsibility. Why would we sign a trade agreement with Israel that does not respect the position of Palestinian territory? It is reckless because it exacerbates the situation, and why? What is it all for?

We have other free trade agreements that were followed by a decrease in exports to the countries we have signed with. We have signed 14 trade agreements, and exports have decreased to those countries. There is a major fundamental issue, a major fundamental approach to the trade agreements that we have to address. There are underlying issues that have to be examined, and bolder steps have to be taken so that we align not only with our own foreign policies but with international law.

We covet a seat on the United Nations Security Council, and this is a perfect opportunity for this country to step up when it is updating this free trade agreement. In being so bold as to update it, we do not have to forge a path on our own. The European Union has articulated exactly the kinds of amendments that we see as putting us in alignment with our international commitments and our own domestic foreign policies that have been laid out.

We have fundamental issues that need to be addressed with the types of trade agreements that we are creating and signing, and if they are not actually creating opportunities for Canadians businesses, then that is a springboard. It is a definite impetus for us to delve in and see what is fundamentally wrong with these agreements. This is a perfect opportunity for the Government of Canada to change the trajectory.

Enough with the voluntary guidelines for corporate social responsibility. There need to be real, enforceable rules. We could have negotiated stronger language, just as the European Union did with Israel. We could take at least the astute step that the EU has taken on labelling the origin of a product for where it came from: occupied territory. Why mince words? Why not assert international law and human rights? Why not insist on it?

Government Orders

It is disappointing that with this iteration of the CIFTA, a valuable opportunity has been discarded with regard to Israel and Palestine. Canada's trade policy does not align with its foreign policy. The latter acknowledges the importance of international law and the fact that the settlements violate this law. By including settlement products in the provisions of the CIFTA, such treatment de facto legitimizes the settlements, encourages their economic growth and contributes to their permanence. In any free trade agreement, the question should always be "*cui bono?*": who benefits?

• (1230)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a great deal this morning. Trade is perceived as a positive thing overall. Canada is a trading nation. Over the last three years, we have had a government that recognizes the true value of expanding trade, which really helps Canada's middle class. The healthier the economy is, the healthier our middle class will be. There is no doubt that trade plays a very critical role in terms of Canada's future.

Would the member across the way not at the very least acknowledge that the way in which Canada can enhance and secure markets in the future is by having these formal trade agreements? To a certain degree there is always room for improvement. However, gaining that access is so critical, and that is something the government has strived to do over the last three years.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect our government to sign free trade agreements that respect human rights and that are in line with our own domestic foreign policies.

Therefore, we know that it is achievable. It is being articulated in other documents and other laws. When we have trade agreements, it is certainly reasonable to expect that we will align with the international laws that we recognize, and that we will use these international law instruments and our own domestic laws so that corporate social responsibility, for example, is not voluntary, or that human rights are not voluntary. As they are set out in this agreement, they actually fall short of what we have been achieving.

Therefore, it is not a trade agreement that has all of the promise to be as beneficial as we have seen in the past. We are not learning from the past right now. We have examples where our exports have decreased and where we have seen an increase in human rights strife and labour strife. We could be moving forward with very articulate examples on how to do this properly.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the discussion today about the free trade agreement.

The Conservatives have worked with trade agreements and signed many of those in the past years. The opportunity is in the signing of an agreement. In the constituency I am from, sometimes we find that when an agreement is signed, there may be opportunities, but maybe markets have changed, maybe the types of things grown are more advantageous in this particular agreement. Sometimes it changes. The cycles of economics and products produced go up and down. To use that, we can say that some things have gone down. The economics change.

However, signing an agreement makes opportunities possible.

Settlement is another thing. I know of "contested settlements" but not "illegal settlements". That is another terminology that has been thrown out today. There are "contested" but they are not "illegal" settlements.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get into a debate about that. This is accepted international law, which we recognize with the Geneva conventions. We are using the proper language that Canada uses as a sovereign nation that is represented at the United Nations, and is now seeking a seat on the Security Council, incidentally. I would hope that we are not going to muddle the language, the legal language that is being used and put forth.

What I would say about our trade agreement that is moving forward with Canada and Israel is that we had a perfect example of revisiting these changes as were mentioned. This is why we go in and update, and why we are adaptable as nations. Not just the bureaucrats but the politicians, the governments, the decision-makers have to be responsive. We have an example of being responsive. We could have done exactly what the European Union did in achieving their iteration of this trade agreement.

It is very unfortunate that we did not take a more forceful stand to do that.

• (1235)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh for demonstrating to the House how it is possible to have a conversation about Israel and Palestine in a respectful and calm manner that is free from the hyperbole that we so often see attached to this issue.

The member very clearly explained how Canada's foreign and trade policies often take very divergent paths. When we speak about foreign policy, we are great at talking about our respect for human rights, labour rights and so on, yet we are exporting arms to Saudi Arabia, which is guilty of war crimes in Yemen. She talked about Colombia, which has seen the murder of hundreds of labour rights activists. We have signed the CPTPP, of which Vietnam has questionable labour rights practices and the Sultan of Brunei rewards homosexuality with some of the worst criminal sanctions imaginable, yet we have decided to form trade policies with those two countries. That is the divergent path.

Where was the so-called progressive wing of the Liberal Party when some of our closest allies in the European Union have already recognized that it is not right and proper to trade products that were produced in the occupied territories, which is in line with the government's own policy at the United Nations? Why was the Liberal Party missing in action with the very simple question about how our foreign policy diverges from our trade policy?

Government Orders

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for laying out and articulating in a very responsible way the conundrum we have with this type of agreement. Why is there such a conflict? We should be aligned. We do have examples of ways that we can be responsible and in line with our own policies. There are so many human rights abuses internationally and it puts pressure on us as a country. We are called to address some of these issues. We are called to answer for the human suffering in a lot of cases.

If we all aspire to have these conversations, to articulate what we expect to see in these agreements and to know that it is achievable, we have to make that commitment. It is extremely frustrating to watch how the progress is made and then hear people use terminology that something is “contested” or that it is recognized as international common law because they collect tariffs. Whenever we split hairs like this, the problem exacerbates. We have examples.

It is a privilege to trade with a country like Canada. We have vast and varied products, resources and services. We have talent. We are unique, bold and beautiful. We have it all and we are a country with a respectful reputation. It is a privilege to trade with us. If we held our heads high when we were going into these negotiations and had that same level of expectation for our trade agreements, we would not be having this debate today.

* * *

● (1240)

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ACT

BILL C-91—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with deep regret that I inform the House an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2), with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage. I really do hope we find a better way forward.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA-ISRAEL FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-85, An Act to amend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for St. John's East.

[*English*]

I am very proud to stand for the first time officially to give a speech in this new chamber. It is remarkable to see what the

engineers and all the other people who have contributed to this success have been able to achieve.

I am proud to speak to C-85, an act to amend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act. This is not a new trade deal. This trade deal has existed for 20 years, and it has been very successful. We have seen trade revenues triple through this deal. They are now at \$1.7 billion.

That trade deal was focused only on goods being traded. We were able to upgrade it back in 2017. It was agreed that we should modernize it and add chapters to it. That is what we did, and we signed off on it in 2018.

The updated pieces are extremely important. One is on dispute resolution. As members know, it is important that when two or more trading partners move forward on a trade deal, if there are any disputes, we need to have a process in place to ensure that we can find solutions and continue to trade. This is what we were able to add as an updated piece.

We also were able to eliminate or reduce heavily the tariffs on products and increase the number of products in this deal. The rules of origin in the supply chain are quite complex, but we were able to make some headway in that area as well, which is very important.

One new chapter is about e-commerce. I do not know if anyone in this chamber remembers much about online 20 years ago, but there were not too many people doing anything online then. Young people are probably not really aware of that as much as we are. However, 20 years ago, there was no online chapter, of course, and it is an important one for us.

The second one is on intellectual property, which is another very important piece. When we do research and development, we want companies to invest, and we want to make sure that those investments are going to continue. For that to happen, we have to have policies and copyrights that are guaranteed. That is an added piece.

We also added pieces on the protection of the environment, which is extremely important to our government. Two more chapters on labour law were also added.

The pieces I want to touch on the most are the progressive elements in this trade deal, such as gender equality. We have been talking about this in our trade deals for the last two years. Just bringing the perspective of a woman to decision-making at that level is very important, and we need to have more of it. This deal allows it to happen not just in Canada but in Israel as well. We know that this will also help the workforce, because we do not have enough people to fill all the jobs that are required as we continue to prosper.

With regard to small and medium-sized enterprises, when we talk about trade deals, we are often thinking about the big companies trading internationally or globally. What we have done here is recognize the importance of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises so that they can be big players in this trade deal as well. We have been able to achieve that.

Government Orders

We have also been able to move on corporate social responsibility. I know that some people have criticized that as being voluntary, but it brings people to the table. Then we can start to really have some good discussions to make things better. Having good corporate citizens is extremely important.

• (1245)

I have to speak about all these trade deals that our government has been able to accomplish. I listen to the Conservatives and they talk about having worked on such and such a trade deal, but they did not get the job done. We have enhanced and improved them, we got the job done and we are delivering. That is what is important.

We need to keep in mind that Canada is a trading nation. Sixty per cent of our GDP comes from trade, so we need to trade. If we look at CETA, which we signed over a year ago, it is very impressive. We have access now to half a billion people more. We have already seen an increase in the first year of 3.1%, which represents over \$1 billion extra. That is important. Ninety-eight per cent of tariffs are off the products going across borders. It was 25% before and now it is 98% plus. It is almost 100%, and some are 100%. It is very impressive as well.

We have seen the elimination of tariffs in certain areas, of course in Nova Scotia, on food and seafood and many other industries, including agriculture. Those are very important industries for Nova Scotia and for Canada.

Let us talk about another half a billion people being added with our deal on CPTPP with Asia. It is a new market, adding potential products leaving Canada and going to those 11 countries in all. The sectors include fisheries, forestry, agriculture, metal, etc.

Is there a theme here? Absolutely. It is a major theme because all these negotiations are for new agreements, which are putting Canada in another place internationally. It is extremely important. We are punching well over our weight and it is because of this progressive government. It is because of how we negotiate, which is extremely important. I will talk about negotiation in the very near future.

We are the only country that has trade agreements with all seven G7 nations. As well, we are the only country that has a free trade deal with the Americas, Europe and Asia. Therefore, we are doing extremely well.

What is important is what we do with those trade deals. It is the responsibility of all of us, the 338 members here, to ensure our business community and our people are well aware of these opportunities. We need to communicate those, which is why I have sent a letter to all 1,200 businesses in my riding. I have started communication on how I can help them to scale up. Let us work together to make it better.

Let us talk the new NAFTA that Canada has signed, and is a great agreement. We have some added features, for example, lower duties for online shopping. We have strengthened labour rights, which is very important. We have protected against possible auto tariffs, a Canada exemption.

I want to talk about Trump. Everybody says that Trump is a pretty good negotiator. I do not think he is a very good negotiator nor do Canadians. There are three big reasons why.

First, he said that there would be no deal unless there was a sunset clause, to renegotiate in five years or it was dead. We said that this was not going to happen, that we would never sign that deal. Guess what. He did.

Then he said that he would not have any deal while supply management was in place. The U.S. wanted to flood the Canadian market. We said absolutely not, no trade deals without it. Guess what. There were no trade deals again.

Finally, he was tweeting out, no trade deal unless we changed the dispute settlement, unless we traded the dispute resolution. Why? Because he lost every time we went to dispute settlement. He wanted the Americans to control the tribunal. Did he win? No, he did not. Did we win? Yes, we did.

Therefore, Canada actually got the best deal, with the Liberal Party. That is the difference between our party and the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party, from the time we started talking about the trade deal last year, was saying not to worry about it, to sign it. The Conservatives said that they had prepared it and we should sign it. We do not sign what is not good. We are there to ensure every Canadian will benefit from this, that the middle class will benefit from this. I am very happy with this agreement.

• (1250)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's bluster, and most of the last part of his remarks was bluster.

I am surprised he even started talking about the Prime Minister's approach to trade. When he went to the trans-Pacific partnership meetings, he stood up Australia and Japan, angering them. Now Australia is taking us to court at the WTO.

That member went on about the new NAFTA. A Conservative government would never allow for there to be a supra-committee that would discuss our bank monetary policy, which is in there. It also limits Canada's ability to trade with non-market countries without any definition.

The Prime Minister is hurting us abroad. I do not even need to touch on India, which is a key ally and a potential trading partner, a relationship that the Prime Minister has wrecked.

That bluster needs to come back down to earth and that member should start talking about Canadian interests first, not alienating our partners, not giving away our sovereignty.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, when I think of Trump, I am almost forced to start thinking about the Conservative Party of Canada. Those members would have signed anything. Now that we have great deal, they are trying to pick here and there to see if there are any issues.

Government Orders

Is the member going to vote in favour of this deal? Absolutely. Did he vote in favour of the CETA deal? Absolutely. Did he vote in favour of CPTPP? Absolutely. Why? Because it is a great deal for Canadians, a great deal for the middle class and a great deal for the Conservative Party as well. We made it happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): I thank my colleague, Mr. Speaker. His energy and passion are an inspiration to us all. I want to talk to him about a very specific problem.

Last spring I had the opportunity to visit Palestine with several federal MPs, including colleagues from the Liberal Party. It was extremely shocking. Millions of people are living under military occupation. Here, we have no idea what frustrations and disturbances this can cause in people's daily lives. Entire villages are bulldozed, and some families' homes are destroyed. These people are forcefully displaced, and why? Simply so that illegal colonies can slowly take possession of Palestinian territory.

A number of international organizations, such as the European Union, are demanding that products manufactured in illegal colonies be labelled. That way, consumers who do not want to support an illegal military occupation can know whether a product was manufactured in Israel or an illegal colony. The NDP has called for this before. We proposed amendments in committee to include this measure in the bill.

Why does the Liberal government refuse to demand labelling of products from illegal Israeli colonies?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He complimented me on my energetic speeches, and I would like to return the compliment.

We should not seek to undo what is working. That is something we need to keep in mind every time we negotiate an agreement. Certain values are very dear to Canadians, and we will ensure those values are honoured. The same is true of the other party. Sometimes we do not succeed, but there are steps we can take to find common ground during these discussions.

Canada and Israel have been partners for 70 years. We should be proud to be carrying on this good work.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to speak today on the motion before the House. It calls on the government to take the necessary legislative steps to ratify the modernized Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, or CIFTA. I encourage the entire House to support it.

CIFTA is now a modern, forward-looking trade agreement that will better serve the sophisticated Canada-Israel trade relationship, while seeking to ensure that benefits are more widely shared by both Canadians and Israelis.

Our government has said from day one that trade and open markets are vital for Canada's economic prosperity. Earlier, the member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook elaborated on that.

Canada is a trading nation, and we know that increased trade means more and better-paying jobs for Canadians.

Why modernize CIFTA if we have already been doing so well? Canada and Israel already enjoy a rich and fruitful commercial relationship. Since CIFTA came into force over two decades ago, two-way merchandise trade between Canada and Israel has more than tripled, totalling \$1.7 billion last year. However, as there was room to grow and deepen the commercial relationship, we made changes.

Israel's economy has significant potential and offers diverse commercial opportunities for Canadian businesses, given its well-educated population, solid industrial and scientific base and productive natural resources sectors. By providing expanded market access and more predictable trading conditions, the modernized CIFTA will enable Canadian companies to take meaningful advantage of these opportunities. This is why Bill C-85 is so important.

Israel is a good partner in trade, and we should capitalize on these additional opportunities for business. I will elaborate further on this point by turning to how this agreement will tangibly translate into real benefits for Canadian businesses.

Once the agreement is in force, close to 100% of all current Canadian agriculture, agri-food and seafood exports to Israel will benefit from some form of preferential tariff treatment. This is up from the current level of 90%. That is great for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the fishery, and also for people in the agri-food sector. This will generate benefits for Canadian companies in areas such as agriculture and agri-food, including products such as cranberries, baked goods, pet food, wine, fruit and fish and seafood.

Meaningful market access for Canadian agriculture and agri-food processors was a key interest in these negotiations, and the Government of Canada delivered by obtaining unlimited duty-free access for sweetened and dried cranberries, which currently have a 12% tariff; baked goods, which are currently tariffed up to 8%; and pet food, which currently has a tariff of 4%. These important tariff outcomes for the agriculture and agri-food sector place Canada on a more level playing field with exporters from the United States and the European Union, which are key competitors in this sector as we try to build our trading relationship with Israel.

This agreement will also give Canadian companies a leg up on competitors in other countries that do not have a free trade agreement with Israel. In exchange, Canada agreed to eliminate tariffs on certain targeted Israeli agriculture and agri-food imports, such as certain fish, certain nuts, some tropical fruits and certain oils.

Government Orders

I am pleased that the negotiated outcome has the support of key Canadian agricultural stakeholders, including Pulse Canada, the Canola Council of Canada, the Canadian Vintners Association and companies involved in the processing of potatoes, cranberries, soybeans and pet food. I am sure my colleagues from Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick will appreciate that as well.

In Newfoundland, there is a little-known winery in Whitbourne called Rodrigues Winery. It is in area of the province that is shared by the member for Avalon and the member for Bonavista—Burin—Trinity. There, kosher-certified berry wines are produced, and they appear on shelves in Israel. Agreements like these benefit companies like Rodrigues Winery by providing access to the market in Israel and by keeping the trade relationship between our countries strong.

This modernized agreement and the benefits it provides will be an important tool for a sector that makes a tremendous contribution to the Canadian economy from coast to coast. Successful trade provides for good employment opportunities, and with one in six Canadian jobs linked directly to exports, we are deeply committed to growing trade with this nation and expanding the pie for all Canadians.

Interestingly, for online retailers and service providers, including those in my riding, such as Eclipse Stores, the agreement also includes commitments by Canada and Israel not to levy customs duties or other charges on digital products that are transmitted electronically.

When I first saw this note, I had some concerns about the relevant paragraphs, so I sought some advice from the department regarding what this meant and how it might affect the playing field between local and foreign retailers. I was assured that paragraph 2 in article 9.2 outlines that the moratorium on customs duties applied to digital products transmitted electronically does not preclude a party from imposing internal taxes or other internal charges, such as value-added taxes. I know that is important to some of my constituents.

• (1300)

These are a few opportunities that the modernized CIFTA would provide.

I would like to speak on some of the more important aspects of the government's trade agenda, which aims to ensure that these opportunities are more widely shared among Canadians. This is our inclusive trade partnership agenda.

A priority for this government is our inclusive approach to trade. Simply put, we believe that everyone should benefit from and participate in the opportunities that come from increased trade and investment. We demonstrated that with the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with the European Union and with the CPTPP, and we are also demonstrating it with this modernized agreement.

The modernized CIFTA incorporates several key inclusive trade elements. These features will help to ensure that economic gains complement important Canadian values and priorities, such as support for environmental protection and labour rights.

I appreciate some of the comments from members on the other side of the House from the New Democratic Party, who raised some

issues about extending these benefits further. However, I believe we strike a good negotiated solution in the Canada-Israel relationship.

These trade elements also help to ensure everyone benefits from and can participate in the opportunities that flow from the agreement. The addition of these inclusive and forward-thinking trade elements signals a commitment from both Canada and Israel to create the right conditions for trade in our modern economies.

There are also additional resources for business. In order for the benefits of free trade agreements to be fully realized, Canadian businesses need to be aware of the agreements and the benefits they offer. Accordingly, the Prime Minister of Canada has mandated the Minister of International Trade Diversification to provide support to Canadian businesses to take advantage of the opportunities that flow after trade agreements are signed, including by drawing on resources from across government and from public and private sector partners. In this regard, Global Affairs Canada has mobilized a free trade agreement promotion task force that is undertaking a comprehensive outreach and training program within the business community. Work on these leading agreements is scheduled to take place across Canada in early 2019 so that the task force can focus on the CETA with the European Union, the CPTPP and the implementing legislation that is currently before Parliament.

In addition, Canadian companies can access the free services and export advice provided by the trade commissioner service, the TCS. The TCS helps Canadian companies export by preparing businesses for international markets. I encourage all members of Parliament to encourage businesses that are exporting to take advantage of this service.

Online resources, such as the step-by-step guide to exporting, have also been developed to ensure that Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises from across the country can benefit.

In conclusion, trade is, at the end of the day, about the relationships between people, the opportunity to share in our common prosperity and to work together to create larger, more interesting markets. Canada's strong friendship and partnership with Israel spans 70 years and stretches back even farther, 250 years, to the arrival of the first Jewish settlers to Canada, the first of successive waves of immigrants who would leave lasting and indelible impressions on the fabric of our Canadian society, economy and political landscape.

Today there are more than 350,000 Canadians of Jewish faith and heritage in Canada. They are an important source of information and support in the political and commercial spheres for both Canada and Israel, and they are also good friends. There are also approximately 20,000 Canadians currently living and working in Israel. Such deep ties are important for many reasons. Strong trade relationships depend on people-to-people relationships, which Canada and Israel have in abundance, and they also create peace.

Government Orders

In St. John's East, I grew up just five doors down from our synagogue. People might not realize St. John's has a synagogue, but it does. It once had a very strong and thriving Jewish community, and now it has a strong but smaller one, since, like many other Newfoundlanders, many people have moved away.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

My grade nine French teacher, Ms. Frankel-Slama, was one of the best French teachers I ever had, and she is Jewish.

I also want to mention my roommate, Jono Kalles, who organized cultural exchanges between Canada and Israel for many years. I never had the opportunity to go to Israel or Palestine with him, but I have heard other MPs say they had a chance to go so they could make their own contribution to maintaining good relations between our countries.

[*English*]

I would encourage all members to support Bill C-85 to help us accomplish that and a great deal more in the years to come.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the importance of the Canada-Israel relationship. Indeed, since 1997 and the trade agreement put in place between the two, our trade has tripled.

I have had the pleasure of going to Israel in the past. Israel is one of our closest partners in the region and is the only democracy in the region. Actually, I am looking forward to going to Israel tomorrow. Over the break week, we will be doing some work in Israel and meeting with different people.

Israel has one of the best educated populations in the world, a strong industrial base, scientific institutions and natural resources. Because of that, certainly there are opportunities for Canada and for Israel. That is the way trade agreements work. Israel can export some of its industry here, and we can export there.

The member also mentioned agriculture, which is a big part of my constituency. We are always looking for free trade agreements that give our agriculture access. It is another reason this agreement is so important.

Although we support this, we wish it could have been completed a little sooner. We finished and concluded some of the negotiations in 2015. I am not throwing this at the member, but in good spirit, maybe my friend could comment on the four years in between.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, we have wonderful ties with Israel. Of course, negotiated relationships between countries happen over a long period of time. It is important to always remember that different parties are going to be able to accomplish different things with different countries at different times. When I was in Europe in October of 2016, it seemed to me that the time was right for a Liberal Party to help improve the relationship with Europe.

From the member's comments, it sounds like when the Conservatives were in office, they had a very good opportunity to work closely with Israel to help bring this relationship forward. Inter-country relationships happen over decades, and hopefully over centuries. I thank my hon. colleague for the work his party did to bring us to this stage.

I am sure that if the member had allowed some of our other legislation to get through the House more quickly, we could have dealt with this legislation more quickly. However, I am glad to hear that two parties are in favour of it now and that the relationship can be strengthened. I know that we were close in getting the third party there, but as our Prime Minister likes to say, better is always possible.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. I congratulate him on his French, which is improving every week.

The Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement is over 20 years old, as mentioned earlier. At first it was an agreement on merchandise trade only.

I would like to know what kind of prosperity this new agreement will bring to the hon. member's riding in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned in my speech, many companies sell their fisheries and agricultural products around the world. I am thinking of Rodrigues Winery in Whitbourne. This winery is not in my riding, but is located nearby in the riding of the member for Avalon. It sells kosher-certified berry wines.

It is not just for those products that we are expanding our business opportunities in Israel. We are also buying Israeli goods. Our two countries are establishing new partnerships, corporations and businesses thanks to these new relationships.

There are many ways to do this, directly through the sale of goods or by strengthening ties between the people and businesses of both our countries.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to join the debate. This is my first opportunity to rise and give a full speech in this new chamber.

It is not a secret that the former Conservative government was a strong believer in trade. Indeed, no Canadian prime minister in recent history successfully concluded as many trade deals as occurred under Mr. Harper. Obviously, that includes much of the current trade agreement with Israel we are here to debate today.

Before I begin my comments, I would like to share a few things about my riding. Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola is a large and very diverse riding. Yes, we have large urban areas, with West Kelowna and parts of Kelowna, but there are also vast rural areas in my riding. Ranching, mining, forestry, fruit growing, and of course, winemaking are just some of the activities my riding is well known for.

Government Orders

The exciting thing is that more trade deals have been created. This opens new markets and creates new opportunities. I can say firsthand that it is rewarding to meet with producers or growers who share with me that prosperous new ventures have been created for them courtesy of new trade deals. This is occurring increasingly. That is why I am excited about and supportive of this new, updated trade deal with Israel and the opportunities it will create.

Let us not forget that trade is a two-way street. There will be new trade opportunities in Israel as well as in Canada. Therefore, rather than talking about the trade agreement itself, let us look at a few of these new opportunities for a moment.

The first question to ask is what is in it for Israel. It is a great question. Did members know that, currently, one of the top exports from Israel to Canada is electronic items? These days many believe that electronics are largely made solely in China, when in fact, Israel has a thriving electronics sector. Optical, photo, technical and medical equipment is a leading export from Israel to Canada.

Other major exports include machinery, plastics, stone, precious stones and pharmaceutical products. This is on top of edible fruits, nuts, citrus peel and melons. This is all part of a fairly diversified group of products and commodities.

From the Canadian perspective, what do we export to Israel? Industrial machinery is one of our largest exports, followed closely by aircraft and aircraft parts. We also export to Israel our fair share of electronic items and scientific and precision instruments.

We also have emerging agricultural trade. Our top agricultural exports are wheat, corn and lentils. I have spoken with many people from Israel who are always delighted to share with me how much they enjoy chickpeas from some of our prairie provinces, with Canada being the leading source of that staple. In addition, Canada's fish and seafood exports to Israel include fish fats and oils, scallops, mussels and lobsters.

From a provincial perspective, Quebec, Ontario, Atlantic Canada, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. all currently have some level of trade activity with Israel. This was built on the previous agreement and the work Mr. Harper did to bring our two countries together. This new version of the trade deal will only increase that further.

I have to pause here for a moment. In my view, as much as this is a mutually beneficial opportunity for Canada and Israel, I feel I must point out the obvious. This deal, once ratified, will make it easier for a winery in the Okanagan to directly sell to a customer in Israel than to one in Ontario. It will be easier for an Okanagan winery to ship to Tokyo, Texas or Tel Aviv than to Toronto or Alberta.

That we, as a Canadian people, continue to ignore internal trade barriers should trouble all of us, on all sides of this House. I do not want to make this a partisan issue, but we really need to start making some progress on internal trade.

●(1315)

Getting back to the agreement with Israel, I will close by indicating that I strongly support this agreement. I am always excited for the opportunity that new markets create for producers and for small business owners in my riding and elsewhere in Canada. We

know that when Canadians can compete, when they have the chance to compete on the world stage, we can produce world-class results and win.

I will be strongly supporting Bill C-85. I would like to thank all members in this place for their contributions to the great Canadian success story of trade on the international front.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his speech and for laying out the areas that he finds troubling with regard to economic health. As he probably knows, the NDP put forth some amendments that would address other troubling aspects, such as human rights issues.

I am wondering if the member and the Conservatives supported those amendments.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I would gladly answer the question if I knew the answer. I did not follow the discussions at committee. I would best leave it for members to decide what they can infer from Hansard.

That being said, the NDP continues to talk about human rights and issues germane to the region of the Middle East. It is important that we always keep the perspective that where we can improve situations and conditions for all people, we should do our fair share and speak up on it.

However, the NDP continues to support flip-flopping back and forth with different positions on Venezuela, which is in a crisis situation. The New Democrats go after people for discussing opening up stronger ties between Canada and Israel, an existing agreement. I wish the NDP would actually focus on the big challenges of the day, in terms of human rights in Venezuela, and not continually switch positions, depending on where the political winds are blowing.

I will say again, members should always be concerned about human rights. We should strive to work together to rise as humanity towards a sense of dignity of persons in all places. It is a little rich for the NDP to constantly be nitpicking on one issue when it is totally out of line when it comes to the Venezuelan people and their rights.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always nice when we see some similarities between the Conservatives and the Liberals. We could say the Conservatives voted against the middle-class tax cuts and they voted against the tax increase to Canada's wealthiest and so forth, but today, as I have heard from many Conservative members, they are talking very positively about trade. That is something that has been fairly consistent between Liberal and Conservative governments.

We could argue on another day about who has actually signed more trade agreements. History will show that it is the Liberals, but we will save that argument for another day.

Government Orders

I have a question for my colleague across the way. Would he not concur that when we talk about the importance of trade, and Canada is a trading nation, we need to have that trade? Having these revised agreements and new trade agreements, what we are really doing is giving more strength to those sectors that get involved in international trade. That, thereby, generates jobs and a healthier economy in Canada. That means it is better for Canada's middle class. Would the member not agree?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his leading question. Sometimes when he speaks, I think there is a greater distance than more than two and a half sword lengths. In fact, sometimes I think he is asking questions from Disneyland, most likely from Fantasyland. Some of the things he has said are just not kosher with reality.

On the flip side, we have great opportunities in this country. We have a long relationship with Israel, but let us also note that this newly revised agreement will also include services and Canada will actually enjoy a surplus. There is about a \$60-million surplus that we have received, where our Canadians get a chance to go and travel to Israel and share their Canadian know-how.

Who benefits the most from that? Sharing cultures is always important, but it is our young people who oftentimes get sent on overseas contracts to work in different areas. They benefit not only culturally from that and economically, but from creating better ties. Let us be mindful that when we trade, we create bonds, and eventually that is how we create a more peaceful world.

In closing, I will offer an olive branch to the member opposite and say that trade is good for all sides concerned.

• (1320)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech. First of all, as far as the New Democratic Party's question, I think Canadians need to know that before any free trade agreement is ever signed, regardless of which party is in, human rights is one of the main essentials, where we recognize certain human rights. There indeed have been some foreign free trade agreements that have not proceeded because of that.

However, what I liked about my colleague's speech was that he went through, province by province, showing how with this small democracy but a very important partner in trade and ally with Canada, how every part of our country exports to that country. Indeed, we are an exporting nation. Whether we grow it or take it out of the ground, we are an exporting nation.

I think the member spent a little too much time on his riding and the wine. I say that tongue-in-cheek because he is always representing his constituency. I want to thank him for laying out so clearly how agreements like this benefit Canadians and Canadian business.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, it is always helpful to hear various views in this place and again, I heard a number of times in this debate that Canada is a small and open economy and needs to be out there winning. I would hope all parties would say that when Canadians get out there and compete, we can succeed. That is something in which we should take great pride.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to question some assertions made by my colleague from Winnipeg North. I know he has a lot of experience in both his provincial and the federal levels and he has a good sense of history. This is why I want to remind everyone that in 1988, it was the first time that Canada had an opportunity to accept or refuse a trade deal. It is very sad for me to remind my hon. colleague that at that time the Liberal Party totally opposed the free trade agreement. Thankfully, Canadians were wiser than the Liberal Party and I hope that nine months from now, it will be the same case.

However, to the hon. member, why should Canada support such a great trade deal?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Conservative member for continuing to talk about the importance of free trade for the country and for the whole world.

[*English*]

The use of trade builds bridges. It also creates economic growth, so that we can start to work on societies and make them stronger. I want to thank the member for the nice question and again ask this place to continue to work on it within our own country in terms of internal trade.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, on the first trip I made to Israel, one of the things that really stuck in my mind was the incubator projects. They were almost like greenhouses, where they brought people together to come up with innovation and new ideas that they would be able to develop in their country and then export around the world.

I was challenged by the way they would bring people in, scientists or those in electronics or innovation, and how then they would commercialize it and send it out around the world.

The member talked about health care and the delivery of medical devices. Why is that so important to Canada? How is a free trade agreement going to benefit us in that area of health care?

• (1325)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, most people would join me in saying just let me go, but I certainly appreciate the member of Parliament's question.

There are a number of Canadian firms that are developing next-stage technology. There is a huge number in digital health where there may be some extra collaborations. Let us be mindful that innovations that have come from Israel, whether it be desalination or other agricultural processes, do get imported and the practices are utilized here in Canada, but also the innovations we have in Canada can go there. Again, it is not just trade and economic growth. There are opportunities for the extension of quality of life, by sharing what we know.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent to see the clock as 1:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: It is the pleasure of the House to see the clock as 1:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

FEDERAL COURTS ACT

(Bill C-331. On the Order: Private Members' Bills:)

December 14, 2016—Mr. Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby)—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of Bill C-331, An Act to amend the Federal Courts Act (international promotion and protection of human rights).

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby is not present to move the order as announced in today's Notice Paper. Accordingly, the item will be dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

It being 1:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 19, at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 24(1) and 28.

(The House adjourned at 1:28 p.m.)

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