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(HANSARD)

Friday, February 22, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 22, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-77, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

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

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): (Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be here today in support of Bill C-77, an act to amend the National Defence Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts.

I want to first acknowledge the hard work that has gone into shaping this bill, including the study undertaken by members of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

I am pleased to say that due to the care and dedication to improving our military justice system by our Canadian Armed Forces members, the final bill enjoys support from all parties.

This bill was drafted with the same care for our people in mind, because as I have said before, our people are at the heart of everything we do. They make extraordinary sacrifices every single

day in service to our country, and we hold them to a high standard of conduct in all they do, whether at home or abroad. They deserve a military justice system that promotes discipline, efficiency and morale within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Through Bill C-77, we are bringing important changes to our current framework that will allow us to provide this type of support to anyone going through the military justice system.

Many members are already familiar with the proposed changes and the improvements they would make to enshrine victims rights in the system; reform the summary trial process to ensure that minor breaches of military discipline were dealt with in a non-penal, non-criminal process; seek harsher punishments for service offences and harsher sanctions for service infractions motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on gender identity or expression; and ensure that the specific circumstances of indigenous offenders were considered when imposing a sentence.

The changes we are proposing are long overdue and necessary. We recognize that we need to continually improve our military justice system. These changes align with the mandate given to me by our Prime Minister to make the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces workplaces free from harassment and discrimination, and they follow closely our government's action outside the Canadian Armed Forces to make sure that Canada is a safe and welcoming place for all Canadians and people living in Canada.

This legislation would build on our government's commitment to the values of fairness and equality. These values are also key tenets of Bill C-65, which makes workplaces in the federal sphere and in Parliament free from harassment and discrimination. This received royal assent last October.

Bill C-77 would help Canadians prevent incidents of harassment, enable them to respond to events that do occur, and most importantly, support victims, survivors and employers.

Our government is also making strides to ensure fairness and equality for LGBTQ2 Canadians. Since our Prime Minister's formal apology to the LGBTQ2 Canadians for decades of institutional discrimination and harassment, we have taken steps to compensate those affected. Administration of a settlement agreement between the Government of Canada and current and former members of our Canadian Armed Forces is under way.

Government Orders

This past fall we announced a new Canada pride citation that each member of the class will be eligible to receive. This citation is an acknowledgement of historical injustices experienced by LGBTQ2 federal public servants, RCMP and Canadian Armed Forces members to commemorate their resilience, bravery and sacrifice.

Finally, this legislation would continue our government's efforts to strengthen fairness and equality for indigenous peoples living in Canada as we work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to implement its calls to action to repair and renew this important relationship.

We should all be proud to be part of a government working to ensure fairness and equality for all Canadians. It is work that goes a long way toward making Canada a country where everyone is treated equally. It is the same dedication to fairness and equality that motivated the creation of this legislation and that continues to motivate us as we work to finalize and enshrine these amendments in law.

I would now like to talk about our proposed changes to the National Defence Act and our hopes for how they would improve our current military justice system.

• (1010)

One of the most important changes would be the addition of a declaration of victims rights in the National Defence Act, which would improve support for victims. This declaration would mirror the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights found in the civilian criminal justice system. It would strengthen how the Canadian Armed Forces supports victims across the military justice system. It would enshrine rights for victims of service offences and enhance the support provided to victims as they navigate the court martial process.

Through Bill C-77, we would be legislating for victims rights, which include the right to information, the right to protection, the right to participation and the right to restitution. Through these expanded rights, victims would be able to access all information to which they were entitled. They would be entitled to security and privacy at all times in the military justice system. They would have the right to present a victim impact statement and to share their views about decisions that affect their rights. They would also be able to ask a court martial to consider ordering restitution for damages or losses when that value could be calculated. In addition, to ensure that victims were able to exercise these rights, they would be entitled to the support of the victims declaration of victims rights to enhance the kind of support we could offer victims through the military justice system.

These would be important changes, and I am proud to be bringing them to the House today.

The second set of changes we are proposing concerns how the military justice system handles minor breaches of military discipline. We are proposing reforms to the current summary trial process, which would create a new process called "summary hearings". These summary hearings would make the system more efficient and would treat minor breaches of military discipline in a fair and timely manner. The new process would be non-penal and non-criminal.

Through these proposed changes, a new category of minor breaches of military discipline, called "service infractions", would be

created. These service infractions would not trigger a criminal record. This change would allow the Canadian Armed Forces to handle minor breaches of military discipline in a fair, simpler and faster manner, which is extremely important. It would demonstrate trust and confidence in our military leaders, who could address minor breaches of discipline at the base, wing or unit level, and it would help maintain operational readiness and preserve morale across the Canadian Armed Forces.

Through Bill C-77, we would also work to address the issue of gender-based prejudice and hatred in the Canadian Armed Forces. The bill would work similarly to the Criminal Code. It proposes harsher sentences for service offences and harsher sanctions for service infractions motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on gender expression or identity.

The Canadian Armed Forces has zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind, and we are committed to eliminating these types of biases in all our military ranks. We have a responsibility to make sure that all Canadian Armed Forces members feel welcome and accepted. We know that we have not always supported our LGBTQ2 members as well as they have deserved. This amendment reflects this commitment and would help the forces continue to make progress in promoting inclusivity.

We have made a significant amendment to mirror the Criminal Code provision relating to the sentencing of indigenous offenders. For indigenous people found guilty of service offences, the personal history and circumstances of indigenous offenders would be considered during sentencing. All available punishments deemed appropriate given the harm done would be considered, with particular attention to the circumstances of indigenous offenders. This sentencing principle also acknowledges historic wrongs that still negatively affect indigenous peoples living in Canada today.

As our Prime Minister has said on many occasions, no relationship is more important to our government and to Canada than the one we have with indigenous people.

Indigenous women and men play an important role in the Canadian Armed Forces. There are nearly 2,500 indigenous members in the regular and reserve forces, and it is our responsibility to ensure that they are well supported throughout their entire military careers.

• (1015)

These proposed changes to the National Defence Act are key to supporting our women and men in uniform. Canadian Armed Forces members need and deserve a military justice system that is transparent, fair and equitable, and a military justice system that helps keep the Canadian Armed Forces fair and inclusive for all Canadians and people living in Canada.

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Our people are at the heart of everything we do. They are the reason we work hard to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces is welcoming and inclusive for all of our members, including women. The reason we introduced Operation Honour was to eliminate sexual misconduct from the Canadian Armed Forces and to change military culture to ensure it is a respectful workplace of choice for all people living in Canada.

The support provided to Canadian Armed Forces members through initiatives like these cannot be overstated. Through Bill C-77, we are making sure that military justice reflects Canadian values, eliminates discrimination and ensures victims have a voice throughout the legal process.

The members of the Standing Committee on National Defence heard from a variety of witnesses in order to get a full picture of how the passing of the bill would affect our members, including the judge advocate general of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Barreau du Québec and senior military leadership, as well as former members of the forces and their families.

Again, I want to thank all those who worked hard to move the bill forward. Their hard work has led to several amendments, some of which have been incorporated and will make the bill stronger.

I also want to specifically recognize the important conversations surrounding mental health and self-harm that came up during the recent study at the Standing Committee on National Defence. During its study of the bill, members of the committee raised concerns about a provision in the National Defence Act that makes it a service offence for military members to wilfully injure themselves with the intent to render themselves unfit for service.

We take the well-being of our women and men in uniform very seriously. That is why we are investing \$17.5 million in a centre of excellence focused on the prevention, assessment and treatment of PTSD and related mental health conditions for military members and veterans. That is why we have over 400 full-time mental health workers and we intend to hire more. That is why we included the total health and wellness strategy in our defence policy. That is why we launched the joint suicide prevention strategy with Veterans Affairs last year.

Our government recognizes that military service places unique demands on our brave women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces. As such, I have invited the committee to undertake a study on mental health and self-harm in the Canadian Armed Forces, which will allow us to thoughtfully and thoroughly consider these issues. I look forward to working with committee members to develop a better understanding of these issues and to come up with solutions that will benefit all of our women and men in uniform.

It is a pleasure to see this proposed legislation progress to third reading and to stand in the House today in support of all members of our Canadian Armed Forces. They deserve a military justice system that maintains discipline, efficiency and morale in the Canadian Armed Forces while respecting our Canadian values. They deserve a military justice system that provides fair and equal treatment, regardless of race, orientation or gender.

A lot of discussion has occurred and hopefully we can quickly pass the bill. Once again, I want to thank all members for their input into the bill.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have always appreciated the minister's service to this country in his role as a veteran, a former lieutenant-colonel in the Canadian Army and a police officer. He has always stood up for the rule of law and has made sure that the bill we have before us today reflects his own personal commitment.

It has come to light in recent days that a crime may have been committed within the Liberal cabinet under subsection 139(2) of the Criminal Code, which notes that no one should bring any undue pressure upon someone to change the outcome of a criminal case. It has been said, as reported in the media this week, that cabinet members witnessed this undue pressure. As the minister is a former police officer, would he want to report that crime?

• (1020)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for acknowledging my service.

When I look at my position and the work I do to make sure we are serving our women and men, I think all parliamentarians take a role in this. I thank the member for his work on the committee, looking at how we can improve the criminal justice system. As he well knows, it is very important to support our victims and the bill would do just that.

It is very important to make sure the military criminal justice system is more efficient. One of the improvements we have seen out of this, which is one thing I can bring back to my experience, is that it allows for much more efficiency. It takes it from a summary trial system and puts it into a summary hearing system that allows commanding officers and the leadership to be able to move much faster and move these more serious offences into a proper court martial system.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of National Defence, who is also the Minister of Veterans Affairs, for being here today. I would also like to congratulate him on his new post as veterans affairs minister. Of course, I will be encouraging the minister to work with his cabinet and government as they get their business sorted with respect to appointing a full-time Minister of Veterans Affairs, as he knows very well how complicated the issues are that are facing our veterans.

Today New Democrats are supporting the bill. We know that it would add greater protections for victims in the military justice system, which we are missing, and aligns the military justice system with the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. We are very happy to see this come forward.

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The minister well knows that, even with the changes being brought forward in Bill C-77, it is still seen as an offence under the military justice system to commit self-harm. I know the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke has raised repeatedly that those who come forward seeking help within the military could in turn be disciplined for self-harm. The minister cited calling upon a committee to look at this. However, he had an opportunity to include it in the bill right now and to protect and create safeguards for those who are committing self-harm.

What safeguards are the Liberals putting forward to address the real need for mental health supports in the military that ensure services are delivered free of punishment and disciplinary action?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, the member brings up a very important point. I want to assure the member that when it comes to supporting veterans, our government is committed to this cause, but I will not go through the number of investments and the work that has been done. However, I appreciate the support from the member opposite for the bill.

The other issue the member brought up regarding the challenges of mental health is an extremely important one and we listened. We want to make sure we solve this problem. We want to tackle it in a manner that actually shows results. This is about making sure we eliminate the stigma for people to come forward and making sure we can provide the right supports. For example, we have even looked at things like universality of service and all of those various challenges.

I have spoken to many family members regarding this to ensure we have their input. However, on the aspect that has been brought forward, we want to make sure we achieve results. What we are trying to do as part of the bill is different. It is about removing the stigma for those victims who are having mental health challenges. That is something we are committed to. We have put a number of initiatives forward and the entire Canadian Armed Forces chain of command is committed to this.

• (1025)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I must say that I value and appreciate the work the minister has done, not only on this piece of legislation but in all aspects of the department.

With respect to the legislation we have before us, it is very much a modernization of military justice. I love the aspect of victims rights being incorporated into the legislation. Could the minister share with us some of the work that has been done to put forward the legislation? I know many people from within the department and different stakeholders have had opportunities to provide input. Could he reflect on the many components that have ultimately led us to getting the legislation to where it is today?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, when it comes to the military, and especially the military justice system, Canadians expect it to reflect the criminal justice system that is there for everybody. Right now, the victims rights bill, Bill C-77, would bring it line with what Canadians expect. It would make sure victims' rights are taken into account as well as taking into account the viewpoints from the key stakeholders, who are the family members who have been

affected by challenges of the past. It would make sure their experiences are taken into account.

Just yesterday, I had a phone conversation with a mother who lost her son to suicide. As the bill passes, we want to make sure they know we have not forgotten about stakeholders' input and want to get their insights. It is more than just about parliamentarians having a say. It is about making sure Canadians who have been impacted by this have a say and we take that into account.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on the conversation we are having around self-harm and the fact that it remains a crime within the military. I appreciate the minister's comments about wanting the supports for mental health. Those need to be there as well.

However, I remind the minister that if self-harm continues to be a crime within the military code, then there is stigma attached to it and people will not come forward to get the help they need, no matter how much mental health support there is. Secondly, for those families and friends who have a family member or friend who has committed suicide, the stigma is there for them as well not to talk about it. We are doing more harm than good when we do not acknowledge that.

One of the biggest challenges for people getting mental health services is the stigma attached to it. I really encourage the minister to do all he can as soon as possible to remove that real barrier to people getting help.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her passion on this issue. We both agree on wanting to achieve the same objective of making sure people who are having this challenge are getting the right support. We are putting the right resources to it and making sure we are creating a system that allows for this. I assure members we are doing that.

I look forward to continuing this conversation to ensure we evolve our support in this manner. At the end of the day, looking after our women and men in the Canadian Armed Forces is our number one priority. Canadians and the government, regardless of who is in government, ask them to do some challenging things in training and in operations. We owe it to them to make sure they are well looked after, and we are moving in that direction.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand to speak at third reading of Bill C-77, the amendments to the National Defence Act to add some new guidelines and strengths within the military justice system. The Conservatives have been calling for this for some time.

The Conservatives are committed to standing up for the rights of victims and ensuring that victims have a more effective voice in the criminal justice system. It was our previous Conservative government that enacted the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. We support enshrining those rights for victims in our military justice system. That is why, in the last Parliament, we introduced Bill C-71. That really is the foundation that Bill C-77, which we are debating today, is based upon.

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The Conservative Party will always stand up for the rights of victims, and that is why we are supportive of seeing Bill C-77 passed and enacted.

We have to ensure we restore the rights of victims and ensure they are at the heart of our justice system. That is why the Victims Bill of Rights would now be mirrored in military law, once it is passed through Senate.

I hope that some of the questions I still have about the bill, as well as some of the questions we just heard about self-harm, may be addressed when the bill goes for further study and debate over in the other place.

I am the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence. At committee we heard from numerous witnesses. Those who support victims were very loud in their support of the legislation. It would give the victims: enhanced access to information through the appointment of a victim liaison officer, which is welcomed by victims in the Canadian Armed Forces; enhanced protection for those victims through new safety, security and privacy provisions, so victims do not have to be concerned about their information being used inappropriately through a violation of their privacy; enhanced participation by allowing victims to read impact statements at the time of sentencing of those who committed a crime against them; and, when possible, enhanced restitution through the court martial process consideration to provide restitution for the order of the losses to those who were victimized.

Our previous Conservative government took significant steps to protect Canadians and to stand up for victims of crime. We understand that the highest priority for any government must be to ensure the safety of its citizens, including those who are serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. It is a responsibility of government. As a Conservative government, we took that seriously. I am glad to see the minister has taken it seriously with the amendments in Bill C-77.

Putting the rights of victims back at the heart of the justice system is important and it is crucial to ensure fairness, to ensure that our justice system is compassionate and that it provides a balance, both to the rights of the victims and the rights of those convicted. It is about courtesy, compassion and respect, and that has to be included at every stage of the justice process, whether it is in civilian courts or military courts.

Our previous Conservative government was committed to reversing that trend and keeping our streets and communities safe for Canadians and their families. We had taken concrete steps to see that offenders accounted for their actions.

All of us on this side of the House were proud of our previous government's record, a record that includes the Safe Streets and Communities Act, the reform of not criminally responsible legislation, laws against sexual exploitation and, of course, cyber intimidation and bullying.

We, as Conservatives, believe that for far too long the criminal justice system was about the rights of criminals. We believe the victims have to be placed at the very heart of the justice system. They deserve, and should have, the right to information, the right to protection, the right to participation and, where possible, the right to restitution. That is encompassed in the Canadian Victims Bill of

Rights, which is landmark legislation that will be reflected now in the National Defence Act as it applies to our military.

● (1030)

Many people wonder why we have a dual system, one for civilians and one for our military members. I would like to use a quote that came from Maurice de Saxe, who used to be the marshal general of France in 1732. In writing about the science of warfare, he said:

...military discipline...is the soul of armies. If it is not established with wisdom and maintained with unshakeable resolution you will have no soldiers. Regiments and armies will only be contemptible, armed mobs, more dangerous to their own country than to the enemy...

We have witnessed that in modern times in other countries around the world. That is why in 1950 the National Defence Act was enacted to establish a military justice system.

We already have what I consider the best of the best who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. Because they are the best of the best and because they are given the order to use lethal force when necessary in defending Canada and Canadians and those who cannot defend themselves around the world, they have to be held to a higher standard. We need to have a military justice system in place that reflects the law of the land in Canada, but still hold to that same standard, values and principles when they are deployed abroad.

As the minister already pointed out, some of the changes in Bill C-77 build upon the code of service conduct and Operation Honour in particular. We want to ensure we have effective ways to stomp out sexual misconduct, to eliminate harassment within the Canadian Armed Forces and to deal with intolerance.

The Gladue decision of the Supreme Court a number of years ago has been put into the decision-making process through the court martial system as well as through the summary hearings that have been put in place. We want to ensure that the ongoing defence of parallel military justice systems that has been supported by the Supreme Court of Canada continues.

In the *Généreux* case in 1992, the *MacKay* case and more recently in the *Moriarty* case of 2015, they have consistently held up that the National Defence Act and the criminal justice system is for the maintenance of discipline, efficiency and morale of the Canadian Armed Forces. It stands by section 11(f) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is that there is an exemption given to members of the Canadian Armed Forces and to the chain of command to carry out military justice on a parallel track.

I raised concerns at committee and when the bill was at second reading about the recent Court Martial Appeals Court decision in the *Beaudry* case, in which the judge advocate general requested to have that stand at this point in time so they could take that case to the Supreme Court and have it pass a decision on it. Again, we continue to see some people who do not believe the military should have its own justice system and that cases should be tried in civilian court except when they are deployed.

Overall, we need to continue to have that chain of command, the enforcement of the Queen's rules and orders and that those regulations are reflective of some of the concerns that were brought up at committee.

Government Orders

A number of very powerful witnesses appeared at committee. One person was Jean-Guy Perron, a retired colonel, He was a JAG officer and also sat as a justice on the court martial court. We also had compelling testimony given by the Barreau du Québec. It raised a number of concerns where there could be charter challenges down the road if we did not get this right.

One thing that was very evident was that the change of summary trial to summary hearing may reduce the burden of proof. Right now, the burden of proof is the same as it is in civil court, which is that it has to be beyond a reasonable doubt. That has been modified somewhat and the accused could face even more difficulty going forward.

• (1035)

I will quote retired Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Guy Perron. He said:

Although a summary infraction is not an offence under the NDA and a summary hearing is not a court martial or a service tribunal; the failure “without lawful excuse, the proof of which lies on the person, to appear” as ordered, or to remain in attendance before an officer conducting a summary hearing, as a person charged with having committed a service infraction can lead to an accusation under s. 118.1 (Failure to appear or to attend), a trial by court martial and possibly a criminal conviction.

This is all in relationship to the summary hearings process. He went on to say:

Would “minor sanctions” be identical or quite similar to “minor punishments”? Most probably and, if so, the punishments of confinement to ship or barracks and extra work and drill raise concerns...COs can confine to ship or barracks for up to 21 days...This deprivation of liberty can be very strict and would be similar to conditional sentence of imprisonment (“house arrest”).

Since that would now be considered imprisonment through a summary hearing without actually having a court martial process, would the rights of that individual be violated by not having the right to a fair trial because it has been dealt with through the chain of command at a summary hearing?

Essentially, he is saying that house arrest or confinement to barracks is full incarceration as put by the Supreme Court of Canada.

I mentioned burden of proof earlier. Bill C-77 keeps the same sentencing objectives and principles as found in a criminal proceeding, most probably the same procedure for summary hearings as presently exists for summary trials in chapter 108 of the Queen's Regulations and Orders, and increases the punishment power, such as higher finds, of an officer conducting the hearing, while reducing the threshold of conviction from beyond a reasonable doubt to a balance of probabilities.

We had a lot of debate on the difference between “beyond a reasonable doubt” and “a balance of probabilities”. I feel somewhat confident that the JAG officers who were present did a good job of explaining the difference and that through the regulations of Bill C-77, when we get to enacting those, coming through the gazetting process, we should be able to mitigate the charter challenge risk and ensure that the rights of those who have been charged will be considered appropriately.

Perron goes on to say:

Under C-77, the accused is liable to be sentenced to a more severe punishment... based on a lower threshold of conviction. The summary hearing under C-77 offers less protections to the accused than what was present in C-71 and what is actually present in the summary trial process.

Therefore, I stress for the minister that now that we heard a very similar concern raised by the Barreau du Québec along with Mr. Perron, we need to incorporate those concerns in the regulation process. We had assurances at committee that this would be done. We brought forward amendments that were not accepted at that stage on how we dealt with it. However, I was glad to see at least one of our amendments that would clarify the rank structure on who could do a summary hearing and who would review which officers, or NCOs or other enlisted members.

The one thing, which we have already discussed, is that we never did get to fully debate paragraph 98(c), which deals with self-harm. It was ruled out of order by the chair, but I want to thank the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for bringing it forward. We had Sheila Fynes and her family at committee. They lost their son Corporal Stuart Langridge to suicide in 2008. He served in Bosnia and in Afghanistan. They feel very passionate that paragraph 98(c) of the National Defence Act, which deals with self-harm, adds to the stigmatization, such that those who want to hurt themselves will not come forward for help because they could be charged under the National Defence Act and at the very least be put in front of a summary hearing or could get a full court martial.

• (1040)

We were assured by all the witnesses that this section of the National Defence Act is rarely ever used.

For those who are concerned about those who malign themselves, those who literally go out and shoot themselves in the foot so they do not have to be deployed or who purposely sprain an ankle so they do not have to go on an exercise and carry an 80-pound rucksack and march for 40 miles over the next day, those who try to avoid service, avoid exercises, who do not want to go into theatre, there are plenty of other avenues under the National Defence Act to hold those people to account and bring them to justice for not following orders.

However, when it comes down to the mental health of our servicemen and women who are suffering with PTSD, who are dealing with anxiety and have been in theatre and have witnessed some horrific abuses and atrocities and violations against humanity, those individuals need help, and the last thing we want to do is stigmatize it and send the message that they will be charged under paragraph 98(c) of the National Defence Act for self-harm.

I hope the minister will take this forward and consider it and find a way to bring it quickly back to the House in a different bill, if that is possible. I am sure he would get unanimous consent at all three stages to delete that section of the act. Since it was found to be outside the scope of Bill C-77, I would suggest that we find a different avenue to do it and that we do it as quickly as possible and as compassionately as possible and in a way that will more than help those who struggle with the thought of suicide to step forward.

Government Orders

We have an incredible Canadian Armed Forces. One thing that we recommended through the defence policy review a few years ago, which is reflected in the Liberal defence policy now, is that the number one source of pride within the Canadian Armed Forces is their personnel, and we want to ensure that we give them the tools to do their job. Whether they serve in the Canadian Army, the Royal Canadian Navy or the Royal Canadian Air Force, these brave men and women do incredible work to keep us safe here at home. They stand on guard 24/7. Written on the wall in NORAD, whether down in Colorado Springs or at its Canadian operations in Winnipeg, is a motto that says, “We Have The Watch”, and they are on the watch 24/7.

We often forget that there are all sorts of threats coming at us, whether airborne, seaborne or even potentially on the ground, and because we have troops deployed across this country and around the world, we are safer here at home because they are standing on the wall in places like Latvia, Mali and Ukraine, along with many other locations. They are ensuring that we can continue on with our business, oblivious to what is going on in the world and to potential threats such as cyber-hacking, knocking down our financial systems or our energy sector and blocking off our naval routes to ship our goods back and forth over the sea. Our economy, our safety and our prosperity are built upon us as Canadians, but more importantly, they are defended by those who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces.

On behalf of all Conservative members and all members of the House, I thank them for serving, because they keep us, the true north, strong and free.

• (1045)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the member say very clearly that we need to restore the rights of victims, and I did listen very carefully.

Given the reality of PTSD and mental health issues among Canadian military personnel and the failure of the Liberal government to strike paragraph 98(c), which makes self-harm a disciplinary offence that could mean life imprisonment for a victim of PTSD who attempts suicide, will the member continue to support NDP efforts to remove paragraph 98(c)? Will he support the private member's bill, Bill C-426, that seeks to finally do the right thing and remove paragraph 98(c)?

• (1050)

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, I appreciate the hard work the NDP defence critic, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, has done on this issue. I have talked to Sheila Fynes and to other family members and members of the Canadian Armed Forces who believe that paragraph 98(c) needs to be removed.

I know there is some concern to ensure that we balance those who would potentially harm themselves to stay out of service, whether on exercise or going into theatre—those who literally shoot themselves in the foot—versus those who are stigmatized because they need the help because of their mental health issues, such as PTSD and other operational stress injuries.

I will look at the member's private member's bill. I will work alongside any member in the House on how we can strengthen the

military justice system while we destigmatize those who are dealing with the problem of self-harm.

What it comes down to is that we should work quickly and perhaps even task the Standing Committee on National Defence on how we could balance the concern of making sure those who are trying to avoid service are held to account versus those who are trying to hurt themselves and would commit suicide because they are dealing with operational stress injuries. I am here to work with anyone who wants to carry that forward.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the proof is in budgets and the proof is in investing dollars in supports that are needed.

The previous government was cutting services, cutting Veterans Affairs offices and cutting mental health supports. Would the member across the way agree that investments in mental health, such as the new mental health centres of excellence that we have opened and the restoring of the support offices, are a good way to head, and that we need to put budget money forward to support our veterans and our military personnel?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I would draw the member's attention to the PBO report this week, which showed that the Liberals failed and broke their promise to bring back pensions for life. They missed it by about \$20 billion. They are not even close.

Those who are the most injured as veterans will receive \$300,000 less under the Liberals. The people who need the most help are getting less. That is not a record the member should be standing up and bragging about. Veterans across the country are incredibly upset with the broken promises from the Prime Minister and the government. It reflects that all we saw was electioneering. We did not see any compassion when it actually came to services for our veterans.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to bounce off what the member for Guelph just asked.

When I sat on the finance committee, we actually saw changes to the pensions for life program come through the omnibus bill. It went to the finance committee. We had a very limited number of witnesses to question about this issue. There were questions about the proposal for pensions for life. For example, a female service member would receive an amount substantially different from what a male would receive, based on how long they would live, so I am very concerned that the government is treating people differently.

Does the member have any concerns that this piece of legislation would treat members differently within our armed forces when they are facing the justice system?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Kelowna for his input, his hard work on the finance committee and for standing up for veterans. It is something we have always done and will continue to do.

Statements by Members

This legislation balances off the rights of the victim along with the rights of those who have been accused of conducting criminal activity, violating the code of service conduct or violating the Queen's Regulations and Orders. They would have the chance to appeal some of these decisions. They would always be treated fairly and with respect by the chain of command and by the Judge Advocate General.

Some of the concerns I raised were about making sure the burden of proof is dealt with through regulation. That issue has to be taken into consideration because it was raised by expert witnesses on the legal system. As well, we have to ensure things are put in place to protect those who are accused, just as we already now have the rights of the victims embedded into the National Defence Act.

• (1055)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, but my colleague from London—Fanshawe said earlier that in Bill C-77, committing self-harm is still seen as an offence under military justice. I appreciate the member's comments, but the direct question was whether he and his party would support the striking of this paragraph and removing it as an offence. I want to give the member another opportunity to answer that question.

He talked about the great work of the NDP defence critic, but did not really answer the question, so I would like to provide another opportunity. Will he support the move to strike this paragraph?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend for that question. To be very clear, paragraph 98(c) should be eliminated. We need to make sure that those who malign themselves or malign others to avoid service—that is, not necessarily to self-harm but to harm themselves in order to stop being deployed, as an example—need to be dealt with in another part of the legislation. Maybe it could be through strengthening paragraphs 98(a) and 98(b).

It could be a two-tiered system. Paragraph 98(c), which is part of the problem with self-harm and the stigmatization that we see around mental health and suicide within the Canadian Armed Forces, needs to be eliminated. We had the chance to delete that clause, and unfortunately it was ruled out of order.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the components of this piece of legislation deals with hate crimes or a variation of hate crimes. In Toronto, there was a very high-profile case in which reservists assaulted a homeless man—in fact, murdered a homeless man—after coming off duty at a local armoury. The armed forces are drawn from all corners of the country, and they are no better or worse than another group of people.

I am not meaning to suggest that there is a systemic problem in the armed forces, but I did not hear the member opposite address the issues of what happens when there is homophobia. When LGBTQ or two-spirited individuals are either within the armed forces or even in proximity to the armed forces and when their rights are not respected properly by members of the armed forces, there are penalties and provisions to hold people accountable and to protect those communities. Does the member opposite agree with those provisions and support them?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, the member did not listen very closely to my speech then, because I said in my speech that changes within Bill C-77 would increase the standards under the code of service conduct. Operation Honour would be better able to stomp out sexual misconduct and intolerance, whether it is racism, whether it is homophobia, whether it is violations against people based upon their sexual orientation, and it will also stomp out harassment. Bill C-77 would work all of that into the National Defence Act. It would provide greater power to the military justice system to take action in that area and support those in the chain of command as they execute Operation Honour.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will inform the member that unfortunately I will have to interrupt him. He will be able to continue his speech after question period.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a huge honour to rise on Bill C-77. It is an honour to be here on behalf of the NDP defence critic, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, who has worked very diligently with the government and other political parties to advance this bill expeditiously so we can move forward with protections for our military personnel.

It is a pleasure to rise on this bill today. As the veterans affairs critic for the NDP, I have had an opportunity to meet many veterans and know how vital it is to have the right tools in place for individuals in service and to ensure that their long-term well-being is being taken care of after they put down their uniforms. Our men and women in service deserve to have a fair and impartial justice system working for them, and I believe that Bill C-77 takes many of the right steps in that direction.

While I am happy to support this bill, along with my fellow NDP colleagues, I cannot help but be frustrated by the lack of urgency in the process of getting this bill to where it is now.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have 18 and a half minutes left after question period to finish his speech.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

GARRY MCLEAN

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an inspiring and courageous man has joined his ancestors in the spirit world this week. Garry McLean represented generations of indigenous people. Despite unimaginable adversity, he remained resilient, kind and determined to draw strength from his experiences and make us all better people.

No one who ever had the pleasure of meeting Garry can ever forget his amazing smile and his gentle nature. He dedicated his life to making sure that Canada atoned for its treatment of indigenous people. On December 6 of last year, Garry announced, with our government, an agreement in principle to address the harms of federally run day schools. He led that fight. Although he is no longer in this world, the important work he started will continue.

I say goodbye to Garry. *Meegwetch.*

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL IMPAIRED DRIVING PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to draw attention to the second National Impaired Driving Prevention Week, which takes place from March 18 to 24. In February 2018, the House voted in favour of Motion No. 148, which recognized the importance of educating Canadians about the consequences of impaired driving.

As this week of education approaches, my thoughts are with Thomas Ratté, who died on March 23, 2018, at the age of 17 while walking along the side of the road with friends. He had the misfortune of being the one hit by a drunk driver. It is the hope of his uncle, Éric Dion, that this week will do more than recognize the problem and will actually encourage all Canadians to do some collective soul-searching.

I hope that my remarks today will result in the reintroduction of the legislation that was proposed here in the House of Commons in April 2018 to strengthen our impaired driving laws. Let's be a responsible Parliament and work together to make Canadians understand that life hangs by a slender thread and that impaired driving can ruin it in a heartbeat.

* * *

[*English*]

JOHN ABEL

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, John Abel was many things: town councillor, deputy mayor, musician, community volunteer, father, brother, husband and friend. He was a friend to many. He was a friend to me.

On December 6, we lost him far too soon. At age 64, he was full of life and had much more to give, and he had a long track record of giving. He gave of his time and he gave of his talents, and talented he was. He enjoyed playing the guitar and singing. He loved the Aurora Winter Blues Festival.

Many organizations benefited from his generosity, including the Aurora Seniors Centre, the Aurora Cultural Centre and the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame. He coached baseball, hockey and soccer. It was a rare day in Aurora if we did not see John Abel supporting a local group or an important cause, such as accessibility. His final act of generosity saw him donate his lungs.

To his wife of 32 years, Tracy, and to his children Devon and Eric, I send my deepest sympathies and condolences. I also send my appreciation for sharing John with all of us. Aurora will never be the same without him.

Statements by Members

We miss John. May he rest in peace.

* * *

PAT CHEFURKA AWARD

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, it was my great pleasure to award the first annual Pat Chefurka Award on February 11 at the annual general meeting of the London—Fanshawe NDP. Pat was a proud New Democrat, a trail-blazing feminist and a relentless advocate for social justice who left us just over a year ago.

I cannot think of a better recipient of this honour than trailblazer Dirka Prout, a successful geotechnical engineer and the first Afro-Canadian female president of the London North Centre NDP. Dirka is a mentor for young women of colour who knows that until all of us have made it, none of us have.

In the spirit of Rosemary Brown and Pat Chefurka, Dirka is seeking the NDP nomination to challenge the member for London North Centre in the next federal election. I know without a doubt that she will represent her constituency well, and I look forward to watching her rise.

I congratulate Dirka. This is just the beginning.

* * *

●(1105)

HURON UNIVERSITY

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, established in 1863, Huron University College is the founding college of Western University. It is a historic institution. However, history can only carry universities so far. That is why in 2016, after Huron hired Dr. Barry Craig, its 17th president, a new strategic vision was implemented.

Huron is now the only undergraduate university in Canada to offer elite yet accessible education that unites liberal arts with leadership, all built upon an ethical core. From reshaped programming that integrates social responsibility, ethical leadership and community engagement to a curriculum that pairs the traditional advantages of liberal arts with the skills of business and management, Huron is challenging students to combine in-class studies with community service, community-based learning, mentorships and internships.

I thank Dr. Craig, the faculty, staff and students for their leadership. Huron is truly creating leaders with heart who care about the world and those around them. Also, my fiancée is an alumnus and would have killed me if I did not mention that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMY

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians in every riding in Quebec, including Mirabel, and especially Lac-Saint-Jean, Jonquière and Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, will be paying the price for the Prime Minister's mistakes.

Statements by Members

The Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region still has a negative migration rate. The new free trade deal is going to hurt dairy farmers. The tariffs on steel and aluminum are still in place. The softwood lumber dispute has not been resolved. Resolute Forest Products says it paid out \$103 million U.S. at the border in 2018. The finance minister's reform is a threat to forestry co-operatives. Ottawa's standard for the protection of woodland caribou, which is based on old surveys, is jeopardizing \$600 million in economic activity and 9,000 jobs in Quebec. Above all, the government's spending is out of control, and its deficits will go on forever.

There is no doubt that the Prime Minister is going to raise Canadians' taxes and make their lives harder.

The people of Mirabel, Lac-Saint-Jean and Canada as a whole will get the opportunity to choose a government that is dynamic and honest by voting for the Conservative Party this fall.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to highlight and congratulate an exceptional organization in my riding, Conavi Medical. Conavi is the developer and manufacturer of leading-edge medical technologies used for minimally invasive cardiac procedures.

I was happy to announce funding of \$3.9 million, on behalf of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, for Conavi. This investment will allow the company to expand its existing facilities by 8,000 square feet, create 60 new high-skilled full-time jobs and provide an expansion of opportunities here and abroad.

With our government's support, Conavi is improving health outcomes for patients worldwide and is continuing Canada's strong record of health innovation. I am proud of our government's investment in my riding and wish Conavi continued success both here and abroad.

* * *

[Translation]

PAUL GÉRIN-LAJOIE

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Paul Gérin-Lajoie made an invaluable contribution to Quebec and to my community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

As minister of education, he made it his mission to educate the province. He followed that up by taking on the challenge of helping the most vulnerable citizens. As the provincial member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, he worked to build a strong, united and proud community for the benefit of future generations.

On February 25, thanks to the Vaudreuil—Soulanges regional museum, the Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation, the Trois-Lacs school board, the regional county municipality of Vaudreuil-Soulanges, the City of Vaudreuil-Dorion and the community TV station Csur La Télé, our community will get to celebrate the memory of this great man. Members of the public will be invited to participate in an all-

ages dictation test and watch a documentary on the life of Paul Gérin-Lajoie.

I want to thank the organizers of this event for their hard work to honour the legacy of Paul Gérin-Lajoie.

* * *

•(1110)

[English]

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, in January I travelled the Trans Mountain pipeline route from Edmonton to Burnaby. My goal was to share the untold stories of how this project is an opportunity for all Canadians. The following are just a few examples of what I heard.

Bruce Wilkinson, in Valemount, talked about the company's critical support of chinook habitat. All the mayors of the interior of B.C. voiced a desire to see shovels in the ground. Chief LeBourdais expressed his desire for equity partnership and satisfaction with first nations' environmental concerns being addressed. Almost without exception, they suggested that for environmental and supply chain management, rail is not the best option for transportation. We must get this pipeline built.

I invite everyone to visit my Facebook site and watch the two episodes of *Opportunity for all Canadians Tour*.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week I was in my constituency and I met three Canadians who shared with me some issues that matter to them.

The first was Mohamed, a cab driver. He told me how grateful he is for the Canada child benefit, because now he can afford after-school programs for his three kids.

The second was Michael, who was just moving into an affordable housing complex. He had not had a place to live for five years. He was excited to be building his life and was excited for the other people who will benefit from the 500 new affordable units in Calgary funded under the national housing strategy.

Third, I met a grade 6 student, Jackson, who told me that climate change is real and that we need to do something about it. He agreed that putting a price on pollution was the best way forward.

Those conversations show that real people are experiencing real change in their lives, right in my constituency of Calgary Centre.

* * *

VOLUNTEERISM IN KANATA-CARLETON

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I stand here today to say “thank you”.

[Translation]

I want to thank everyone who volunteers.

[English]

Thanks to all of the workers who have made such a difference in our communities. They worked hard to make the recent winter festivals and the Family Day weekend so memorable.

We celebrated Chinese New Year at the Beaverbrook library. We celebrated winter fun with the community associations of Katimavik-Hazeldean, Kanata Lakes, Arcadia, Fitzroy Harbour and Dunrobin. Royal Canadian Legion Branch 638 Kanata hosted an afternoon of family games. Royal Canadian Legion Branch 616 West Carleton hosted the Old Sled Run, which had over 100 vintage snowmobiles hit the trails.

None of these events could have happened without the amazing group of community volunteers who work so hard to make winter a little more enjoyable for all.

We thank all of the volunteers who make a difference. They rock.

* * *

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, Durham region in Canada is now the place for innovation in our country.

Nothing shows that more than student, Hamayal Choudhry, an engineering student at the UOIT. He beat out, with his partner, 40,000 students from 33 countries to win the Microsoft Imagine Cup. Their design of a smart prosthetic arm shows great progress for amputees and especially our veterans.

Down the road at Durham College, they are winning accolades for their AI hub, where teachers and students are bringing artificial intelligence to bear on health, financial and aerospace industries, building efficiencies and jobs.

From education to commercialization, if people go to a Drake concert to hear his sweet beats anywhere in the world this year, those speakers were designed and built in Port Perry, Ontario, by Adamson Systems Engineering.

We are very proud of the innovation going on in Durham. Come to Durham and invest in our people. The sky is the limit.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for Black History Month, I celebrate the Scott family of Cloverdale.

Henry Houston Scott was born in Texas in 1854, nearly a decade before slavery was abolished in the U.S. Henry likely was a former slave but received a homestead grant in Oklahoma after marrying in 1880.

Henry and his wife, Amy, emigrated to Canada with the youngest three of their 10 children in 1912, settling on the rich farm lands of the Clover Valley. The Scotts cleared a rough seven-acre parcel of land and became well-known farmers.

Being one of very few black families in the Cloverdale area, the family unfortunately faced both adversity and prejudice. Despite

Statements by Members

these challenges, the Scott family contributed a lot to the Cloverdale area. One of Henry's sons, Jesse, integrated into a winning B.C. senior championship baseball team, the Ioco team in 1921. Henry himself was a cobbler whose shoe repair store still stands today. The Scott family had Bose Road, now 64 Avenue, cleared between 176 Street and Highland Avenue, now 181A Street.

In the spring, we can still see the blossoms of their old orchard that represents the Scott family's endeavours to build their new life in Canada.

* * *

• (1115)

[Translation]

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF SAINT-CYRILLE-DE-WENDOVER

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to mark the 150th anniversary of the municipality of Saint-Cyrille-de-Wendover. On February 2, I was very pleased to be at the kick-off to the celebrations at the parish church, an event that included performances by Brigitte Boisjoli and the Gospangels choir. The community is looking forward to many exciting activities this year, including the Boucle biking challenge, part of the Grand défi Pierre Lavoie, which will go right through downtown Saint-Cyrille.

I would also like to salute the outstanding work of the municipal council, especially Mayor Hélène Laroche and councillors Pierre Lavigne and Sylvain Baron, as well as the entire organizing committee.

I also want to thank historian Claude Verrier, a native of Saint-Cyrille, who volunteered his time for the project. I invite everyone in Drummond and the surrounding area to join us in celebrating the 150th anniversary of Saint-Cyrille-de-Wendover.

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[English]

FINANCE

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government is coming apart at the seams, mired in scandal amid accusations and resignations, yet the day-to-day struggles of millions of Canadians continue.

The Prime Minister promised that 2019 would be the year he balanced his first budget. It is no surprise that the Prime Minister has failed and he has no intention of balancing a budget, ever.

Soon the Prime Minister will bring forward in his fourth straight deficit budget. Permanent Liberal deficits will mean future taxes at a time when Canadians simply cannot afford them. Half of Canadians say they barely get by each month, when they should be getting ahead.

Oral Questions

Rather than paying for costly Liberal failures, Canadians should keep more of what they earn. Canadians need a serious government, one that is focused on Canadians, not its own internal chaos. Conservatives offer Canadians a better choice in 2019: a Conservative government that can balance budgets, lower taxes and allow well-paying jobs to be created so that Canadians can get ahead.

* * *

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Monday, February 11, I had the pleasure of attending the International Day of Women and Girls in Science at Laurentian University.

[Translation]

Participants were invited to a symposium on women and girls in science and the opportunities available to them.

[English]

This was a great event to have in Sudbury. We had multiple amazing women who were guest speakers at the event, such as Nadia Myktyczuk, a professor at Laurentian University; Theresa Nyabeze, an engineer at Vale; and Emily Jago, who is an ambassador for Fast and Female. This is just to name a few of the many successful women who inspire us every day.

[Translation]

We have made a lot of progress toward achieving gender parity in the workplace, but we still have a lot of work to do. In 2018, women's participation rate in Canada's labour force was 61% compared to 70% for men.

[English]

Let us continue to inspire girls in STEM disciplines and work toward gender parity in the workforce.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Clerk of the Privy Council admitted that at a September 17 meeting the former attorney general told the Prime Minister that she had decided not to overturn the prosecutor's decision and give SNC-Lavalin a deal to avoid trial. That was the course of justice. However, the Prime Minister sent his top bureaucrat and then separately his top adviser to change that decision and alter the course of justice.

When she refused, she was fired. Why?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday, also at justice committee the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed, "At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take."

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, he said, "No pressure, we'll fire you if you don't do what we say, but no pressure. The decision is entirely yours".

Here is the chronology we now know. The former attorney general told the Prime Minister on September 17 that she would not push for a special deal for SNC-Lavalin, yet he sent his top adviser on December 5 and his top bureaucrat on December 19 to change her mind. When she did not, she was moved out of the position.

Why did the government and the Prime Minister attempt to change the course of justice in this case?

● (1120)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the justice committee has been working together with members on both sides to have witnesses appear. Members on both sides are asking questions. Witnesses are answering those questions.

The member chooses to continue speculating and drawing his own conclusions. On this side, we have confidence in the work of members of the committee. We are the government that increased resources for committees so that they could do this important work. It is fascinating to me that the member seems to have no regard for the work of the committee, because it is doing that work. He was there asking for witnesses to appear and now that they are, he seems to be undermining them.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am simply drawing facts from that very committee.

We know the Prime Minister found out from his Attorney General that she would not give SNC-Lavalin a special deal. That set in place the course of justice, yet the Prime Minister then sent his top adviser to meet with her at the Chateau Laurier lounge and then his top bureaucrat to call her over the phone to try to change that course of justice. When she refused, he removed her from her position.

Why did the Prime Minister attempt to defeat the course of justice in this case?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is not evidence. That is the member's speculation. That is the member drawing his own conclusions and this is exactly why Canadians are finding it challenging.

Canadians should have confidence in their institutions and that is why we will not undermine the work of committees. We will not undermine the work of officers of Parliament. We respect the independent judicial system because Canadians should have and can have confidence in the independent bodies. Canadians should know that members of Parliament are asking tough questions to witnesses. Witnesses are appearing and answering those questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that heckling is not permitted and to wait their turn to be called in order to speak.

Oral Questions

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, on September 4, 2018, the office of the director of public prosecutions informed SNC-Lavalin that it would be pursuing criminal charges. On September 17, 2018, the former attorney general told the Prime Minister that she would not intervene to influence the decision of the director of public prosecutions. That should have been the end of it, but it was not.

We now know that the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister tried to interfere on several occasions to get the former attorney general to intervene in the judicial process.

How can it be argued that their actions do not constitute obstruction of justice and are not a crime?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said, the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights are doing their job. They have called in witnesses, and the witnesses arrived yesterday. I believe the committee meetings will continue next week.

Let us look at the facts. The director of the Public Prosecution Service has confirmed that, in each and every case, prosecutors exercise their discretion independently. The deputy minister of justice confirmed that there is no direct communication in any—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, as long as we are looking at the facts, let me also remind the House that section 139 of the Criminal Code states that every one who wilfully attempts in any manner to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice in a judicial proceeding is guilty of a crime. The law is clear, and it is unacceptable that the Clerk of the Privy Council tried to get the former attorney general to intervene in the judicial process.

When will they realize that their actions are an obstruction of justice and a crime?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, again, yesterday at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the clerk also confirmed that the Prime Minister clearly said at every opportunity that the decision was the justice minister's to make.

It has to be said that the Conservatives keep speaking out of both sides of their mouths. In French they claim they have no intention of jeopardizing jobs at SNC-Lavalin, as that hon. member said, but in English, the hon. member for Carleton said he wanted to shut down this company and was not afraid to say so.

Their constant doublespeak has to stop.

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, when the former attorney general was fired, she emphasized the need for an independent judicial system. Why?

When the Prime Minister's chief adviser Gerry Butts resigned, he highlighted the former attorney general. Why?

When the former attorney general stood in the House this week, she asked to be allowed to speak her truth. Why?

Why will the Prime Minister not let her speak her truth and let Canadians get to the bottom of all this?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member full well knows, matters of solicitor-client privilege are exceptionally complex, particularly in this sort of case. We are working to try to find a way such that the former attorney general can in fact speak. We are doing our level best to do that.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, there were 50 meetings between executives of a company at the highest levels of the Liberal government, and an engineering company meeting on what? Justice issues. That is time the Prime Minister could have spent finding real solutions to our housing crisis, fighting to make medication more inexpensive for Canadians and helping the people in the country who are only \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills.

When the Liberal government has rich friends knocking at the door, boy does it find time to meet them. However, when Canadians need help, they are told to wait. Why will Liberals not just come clean and tell us who they are really working for?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians can have confidence that the government will always fight for Canadians. Canadians can have confidence in their institutions.

I find it fascinating that the member seems to forget that the company actually met with his leader, the leader of the NDP. No differently, the company met with the leader of the Conservatives.

What I also find fascinating, as he provides his commentary, is that yesterday he was on a panel, with other members of the committee, and he was saying, "Why don't you have confidence in the members of the justice committee?" We do. Let them do their work.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, families, young people and seniors are struggling to pay their bills. They have to contend with the high cost of housing, health care and day care. They are wondering why the Prime Minister is not working hard to make life easier for them instead of bending backwards to give the rich a free ride.

When rich executives ask for help, the Liberals jump to attention; when ordinary Canadians need help, they are told to wait.

Why are there two sets of rules, one for the rich and another for the rest of us?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are indeed two sets of rules: one that increased taxes for the richest 1% in 2016, which the NDP opposed, and another that lowered taxes for the middle class. There is also the rule about not sending cheques to millionaire parents who do not need the money and enhancing the Canada child benefit for nine in 10 families, which was implemented in July 2016. Unfortunately, the NDP also did not support this “rule” to help middle-class families.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, if the Liberal government truly cared about protecting workers and jobs, why was it not there for Sears, Rona and Davie shipyard workers? Where was the government?

The Liberals' track record speaks for itself. They help rich corporate executives, and the workers have to fend for themselves. The Liberal government has two sets of rules: one set for the wealthy and one set for everyone else.

Why do the Liberals not stand up for our workers who have been left behind, instead of helping their buddies skirt the law?

Mr. Rémi Massé (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government believes that Canadians who have lived quiet, dedicated lives deserve peace of mind in retirement. I would like to point out that our government has created more than 800,000 jobs through the platform it has implemented over the past three years. Canada's unemployment rate is among the lowest in decades, and our government continues to help create good jobs for Canadians, for families, so that they can feel secure and safe.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, on September 4, the director of public prosecution refused to offer a deferred prosecution agreement to SNC-Lavalin. On September 17, the attorney general said that she would not reverse that decision. During the next several months, a concerted effort was made by the Prime Minister and his senior officials to make her change her mind.

The Criminal Code is clear: “Every one who wilfully attempts, in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence”. With everything we now know, how is this not obstruction of justice by the Prime Minister?

● (1130)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us look at the record.

Just last week, the director of public prosecution service confirmed that prosecutors in every case “exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration.”

Yesterday, the deputy minister of justice confirmed that there was no direct communication in any specific case between the PMO and

the DPP. The Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that at every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that the decision was for the minister of justice to take.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, well, let us look at the record.

Section 139(2) of the Criminal Code says, “Every one who wilfully attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence”. The Clerk of the Privy Council admitted that he, the Prime Minister's staff and the Prime Minister himself all attempted to influence the outcome of the SNC trial. That is a criminal offence. When will the Liberals admit that?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will quote once again. Just last week, the director of the public prosecution service confirmed that prosecutors in every case “exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration.”

Yesterday, when asked at justice committee if it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister and officials to discuss the matter with the Attorney General, the Attorney General confirmed those kinds of conversations would be appropriate.

I encourage members opposite to stop speculating. The justice committee is doing its work. It is bringing forward witnesses. It is working hard. Let us let it do its work.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal saga continues.

Here are the facts. On September 4, the office of the director of public prosecutions informed SNC-Lavalin that it would be moving forward with the case. On September 17, the former attorney general told the Prime Minister she would not interfere in the criminal trial. Yesterday, the Clerk of the Privy Council admitted that the Prime Minister tried to interfere in the process several times. That is a crime.

When will the Liberals admit it?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again, I encourage all members and all Canadians to really listen to what the witnesses who appeared before the committee said, but we need to look at the facts.

The director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that, in this and every other case, prosecutors exercise their discretion independently. The deputy minister of justice confirmed that there was no direct communication in any specific case between the PMO and the DPP.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians want to know. The Prime Minister has problems with his exes. His ex-attorney general wants to tell “her” truth. His ex-senior adviser does not want to talk. Pressure exerted by the PMO on the ex-attorney general violates section 139 of the Criminal Code.

Oral Questions

When will the Liberals realize that this is obstruction of justice? This is a crime. This is a scandal.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is important that Canadians have confidence in their institutions. That is exactly why members from both sides who sit on the justice committee worked together to call witnesses. They came to committee, the members were able to ask them questions and they answered them. We have confidence in the members' work on the justice committee. I think they must do their work.

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Criminal Code states that any attempt to obstruct a judicial proceeding is a crime.

On September 4, SNC-Lavalin learned that its criminal trial would go forward. On September 17, the former AG told the PM that she would not interfere in that trial. Now we have learned that three months later, the PM's principal secretary and the Clerk of the Privy Council continued to have discussions with her about interfering.

Is it ignorance or arrogance that keeps the Liberals from realizing just how much this looks like obstruction of justice?

• (1135)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have stated for the record, and I will do it again, that the Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that at every opportunity, verbally and in writing, in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was a decision for the minister of justice to take.

We take seriously the responsibility of standing up for jobs and growing the economy. We will always defend and uphold the principles of judicial independence and the rule of law.

This matter is being looked at by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the justice committee. We will work with them. We think they should get to do their work independently of the chamber.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, section 139(2) of the Criminal Code states, "Every one who wilfully attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence".

The Clerk of the Privy Council admitted that he, the Prime Minister's staff and the Prime Minister himself all attempted to influence the outcome of the SNC-Lavalin trial. That is a criminal offence. When will the Liberals admit that?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have said that we on this side of the aisle, the Liberal Party, support the work of the committee. We support the independence of committees. That is exactly why as a government, we have increased the resources of committees because they need to do that important work. The matter is being looked at by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the justice committee.

When it comes to officers of Parliament, we respect their independence and we believe they should do the important work. We respect the independence of the judicial system.

A clear difference between the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party is that we will not undermine our institutions, like those members choose to continue doing.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Madam Speaker, people in Pelican Narrows are suffering from a lack of affordable and accessible housing. The community has 266 new housing requests but only the funding to complete three, and that does not include the requests for home renovations.

While the Liberals brag about their housing strategy, people in Pelican Narrows are still waiting for a place to call home. They cannot and should not wait any longer.

Will the Liberals stop waiting and immediately invest in housing for the people of Pelican Narrows?

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government recognizes the unacceptable gaps in housing on reserve and in indigenous communities.

After decades of neglect and underfunding by the Conservative government, our government is taking action. For first nations housing on reserve alone, we have committed more than \$1 billion, with more than 15,000 housing units being built and renovated.

We have also rolled out distinctions-based housing for indigenous communities: \$600 million for first nations, \$500 million for Métis and \$400 million for Inuit.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals do not seem to understand that reconciliation means housing is a human right. This week they announced funding that represented less than 2% of their national housing strategy to tackle the homelessness crisis of indigenous people in urban centres.

Experts have been clear: We need way more than that to address this urgent housing crisis and to solve the fundamental causes of homelessness in urban areas. One in 15 indigenous peoples living in cities is homeless.

When will the Liberal government step up with a real plan to address this crisis?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the very difficult circumstances many Canadians, and certainly many indigenous Canadians, find themselves in when it comes to finding an affordable place to call home is something of great concern to this government and has been since the very start of our mandate. That is why in budget 2016, for the first time in 17 years, we increased the budget to fight homelessness in Canada and doubled it.

Oral Questions

That is not the end of the story. Just a few months ago, we announced the first ever national housing strategy, which is going to change the way in which indigenous Canadians across all of Canada will be able to access a safe and affordable place to call home.

* * *

• (1140)

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, according to the Criminal Code, everyone who “wilfully attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice” in a judicial proceeding is guilty of a crime. We now know that the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister’s top adviser attempted to force the former attorney general to interfere in the criminal trial of SNC-Lavalin after she told the Prime Minister she would not. The Prime Minister is complicit in these actions. When will the Liberals admit their crime?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, he is one of the newer members on that side, and already he is speculating, just like the rest of them.

The member should be encouraged to let the justice committee do its important work. The justice committee has members from both sides on it. They are working together to bring witnesses to that committee. Witnesses are appearing. Members are asking tough questions, and they are getting answers. We on this side have confidence in the work committees do in this place, and we will continue to do that, but we should let the record show that just last week, the director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan interference.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Criminal Code is clear that everyone who “attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence”.

The public prosecutor informed SNC-Lavalin that it would be proceeding with a criminal trial. The former attorney general said she would not interfere. We know that the PMO, the Clerk of the Privy Council and even the Prime Minister attempted, on several occasions, to get the former attorney general to interfere in the trial. Is that not obstruction of justice?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope Canadians are noticing that the Conservatives continue asking the exact same question, and when I am providing the answer, they start yelling so they can never hear the answer, and then they continue getting up and asking the same question, so I will answer it again, and maybe they will listen.

Just last week, the director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors, in every case, exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration. Yesterday the deputy minister of justice confirmed that there was no direct communication in any specific case between the PMO and the DPP.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Once again, the Conservatives do not listen. They continue speaking when I have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, on September 4, 2018, SNC-Lavalin was informed that the trial would proceed. On September 17, 2018, the former attorney general decided not to interfere in this matter, but we know that government actors attempted to intervene.

Section 139 of the Criminal Code states that every one who wilfully attempts in any manner to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence.

When will the Liberals realize that this is obstruction of justice?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, now we are being asked the same question in French. We are proud to be a bilingual country.

Let us look at the facts. The director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case exercise their discretion independently. The deputy minister of justice confirmed that there was no direct communication in any specific case between the Prime Minister’s Office and the DPP. The Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that, at every opportunity, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was a decision for the Minister of Justice to take.

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know the Liberals are very uncomfortable with this very inconvenient truth.

Let me repeat that subsection 139(2) of the Criminal Code says that everyone who “wilfully attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence”.

We know that the Clerk of the Privy Council, the Prime Minister and Gerry Butts wilfully attempted to have the former Attorney General interfere in the trial. That is a criminal offence. Will the justice minister admit that this constitutes a crime?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member was here under 10 years of Stephen Harper when they undermined the work of committees. What is clear is that the Conservatives have chosen a new leader, but their approach to democracy remains exactly the same, and Canadians are noticing.

We on this side have increased resources to committees, because we respect our institutions. Canadians should have confidence in their institutions, and that is what we will continue to do.

When it comes to officers of Parliament, this side will always respect their work. When it comes to the independent judicial system, we will encourage it to do its work. When it comes to the work of committees, like the justice committee, they are doing their work. Let us let them do their work.

• (1145)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Once again, I remind members not to chat or heckle while someone else has the floor. I am sure they want to hear the answers.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, for 20 years, many countries have tried to amend an international treaty to stop developed countries from shipping garbage to developing nations, but Canada has refused to agree. The Liberal government talks about increasing recycling, but it is clear that it is not taking responsibility for where our garbage ends up. One hundred and three containers of Canadian trash have been rotting in the Philippines for four years. These containers are full of, not recycling, but diapers, food waste and discarded electronics.

When will the minister end this international embarrassment and prevent Canada from shipping its garbage to developing countries?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our country is strongly committed to collaborating with the Philippines government to resolve this issue and is aware of the court decision ordering the importer to ship the material back to Canada. Currently, a joint technical working group is being established, consisting of officials from both countries, to examine the full spectrum of issues related to the removal of the waste.

In 2016, we actually amended our own regulations on hazardous waste shipments to prevent this kind of event from happening again. We are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that the material is processed in a more environmentally sustainable way.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, for eight months, Trump has been holding businesses hostage by imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum exports. Meanwhile, Russia asked for lower tariffs and got them. We are wondering what the Liberals are doing on this file.

In my riding, SNOC, Tuba and Norbec are being hard hit by the Liberals' NAFTA 2.0.

It is having an impact on local businesses, workers and their families.

What do the Liberals have to say to those people?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Madam Speaker, the illegal and unjustified U.S. tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum must be lifted. U.S. lawmakers have asked Ambassador Lighthizer to lift those tariffs. This weekend, the minister raised the issue with members of the U.S. Congress, including Nancy Pelosi, who confirmed that our counter-measures are having an impact. Our plan is working. Recently, Republican

Oral Questions

Kevin Brady indicated that the tariffs would have to be lifted before Congress considers the new NAFTA.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a recent article in The Globe and Mail made it clear that Canadian economists are virtually unanimous in the view that a price on pollution reduces greenhouse gas emissions at the lowest possible cost to the economy. They also went on to identify another fact: "Under the federal policy that begins this spring, roughly 80 per cent of households will receive rebates that actually exceed the amount they will pay".

Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment please clarify why Conservative politicians, not just these Conservative politicians but others as well, are misrepresenting academic research and vastly overstating the costs for average Canadians?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Pontiac for his advocacy on the climate and environment files over these past few years.

The fact is that climate change is real, and we have an opportunity and an obligation to do something about it. The opposition has been spending a lot of time misleading Canadians about our climate plan, because, quite frankly, it does not have one of its own to talk about. We made a commitment to Canadians that we were going to take climate change seriously and do it in a way that makes life more affordable. We have established a plan that is going to put more money in the pockets of eight out of 10 families in jurisdictions where this plan applies. We are working with Canadians on the best ways to cut pollution, and we are going to take no lessons from the opposition, which has no plan on how to contribute to the fight against climate change.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, subsection 139(2) of the Criminal Code says, "Every one who wilfully attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence". We now know that the Prime Minister arranged for the Clerk of the Privy Council and his principal secretary to get the former attorney general to interfere in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. This was a sustained effort to avoid a trial.

How are the actions of the Prime Minister not criminal?

Oral Questions

•(1150)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we on this side will always defend and uphold the principles of judicial independence and the rule of law. We know that this matter is being looked at by both the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the justice committee.

Once again, we know that this matter is being looked at by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the justice committee.

We have confidence in our institutions. We have confidence in officers of Parliament. We have confidence in the independence of the judicial system. We believe that they should be able to do their work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have listened carefully to the Liberals' comments from the beginning of this saga.

We now know, and these are clear facts, that the Prime Minister's Office, the Clerk of the Privy Council and even the Prime Minister tried on several occasions to get the former attorney general to intervene in the case against SNC-Lavalin.

Section 139 of the Criminal Code clearly states every one who wilfully attempts in any manner to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice in a judicial proceeding commits a criminal offence.

When will the Prime Minister finally admit that he wilfully tried to obstruct the course of justice?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said in the other official language but I will repeat once again, this matter is being looked at by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the justice committee. The member should listen closely, because I have been giving the same answer since the beginning of question period.

We know that the justice committee has called in witnesses. We know that members on both sides are asking questions, and the witnesses are answering them.

The commissioner and the committee must do their work, and we encourage them to do so.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, on September 4, the office of the public prosecutor informed SNC-Lavalin that it would be moving forward with the criminal trial. On September 17, the former attorney general told the Prime Minister that she would not interfere in the criminal trial. That should have been the end. However, after that meeting, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's principal secretary tried to get the former attorney general to interfere in the trial.

When will the Prime Minister realize that this obstruction of justice is a criminal offence?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just last week, the

director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors, in every case, exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration.

Yesterday the deputy minister of justice confirmed that there was “no direct communication, in any specific case, between the PMO and the DPP.” The Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, section 139(2) of the Criminal Code says everyone who “wilfully attempts in any manner...to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence”.

The Clerk of the Privy Council has confessed that he, the Prime Minister's staff, and the Prime Minister himself have all attempted to influence the course of the SNC-Lavalin trial.

If the Liberals believe they have done nothing wrong, why was the former attorney general fired, and why did Gerry Butts resign?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when it comes to the Prime Minister's former principal secretary, he has issued a public letter. He has made that letter available for all Canadians to read and hear his reasons.

When it comes to the justice committee, the justice committee has asked for witnesses to appear. Members on both sides of the aisle have worked together to have those witnesses appear. We know that witnesses are appearing. Members are asking questions.

We think the committee should do its important work. Members opposite choose to speculate. We are a fact-based government. We will let the facts speak for themselves.

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HOUSING

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Madam Speaker, with the high cost of student loans, day care and rent, many young Canadians are finding it extremely difficult to achieve the dream of home ownership.

Through a series of rule changes by the former Conservative government, the maximum term for insured mortgages went from 40 years to 25 years. Instead of making it easier for first-time homebuyers, Liberals further tightened mortgage rules.

This is the same old story: While they make life easier for corporate friends, Liberals are shutting out young families from owning their own homes. Will the Liberal government put young families first and commit to introducing a 30-year term on insured mortgages?

•(1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for many Canadians, investing in a home is the biggest investment of their lives.

Oral Questions

We know how important it is to their financial well-being for that investment to be protected. That is why we took measures to limit the risks in the housing market and make it easier to access long-term financing.

Since taking office, we have been focused on giving more tools to middle-class families and young people and more money to those who need it most to help them achieve financial balance, stability, and prosperity.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, this week, nine men were executed in Egypt after a grossly unfair trial.

[*English*]

These executions reflect the serious worsening of the human rights situation in Egypt, where the government is cracking down on human rights activists, journalists, members of the LGBTQ community and basically anyone who dares to publicly criticize Egypt's military dictatorship.

When will the minister break her silence and exert pressure on Egyptian authorities to uphold human rights and the rule of law?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada is concerned by the escalation of tensions in Egypt. We have been alarmed by the reaction of security forces during recent peaceful demonstrations and the recent arrests of activists and politicians. We call on all parties in Egypt to exercise restraint, denounce hateful speech and engage in peaceful dialogue.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I just finished a tour of the Trans Mountain pipeline, and I heard disappointment from so many people. Construction camps were abandoned. We have massive piles of pipe just waiting to be installed. First nations entrepreneurs are losing money, and planned projects have been put on hold because of the Prime Minister's mistakes. After we paid \$4.6 billion, one billion dollars over the sticker price, my constituents need reassurance that there will be shovels in the ground before October 2019. Running out the clock is not an option.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government has been steadfast in its commitment to do the hard work necessary to move forward in the right way on TMX by following the guidance from the Federal Court of Appeal. Today the National Energy Board will release its reconsideration report, and that marks an important milestone. We continue to do the work in consulting with first nations, ensuring that where accommodations are possible and reasonable, we will do so. At this moment, we have around eight teams on the ground, meeting with the communities. As well, we have had over 80 meetings with the communities as we move forward with this project in the right way.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, last weekend hundreds of workers gathered on the Prairies in support of new construction for new pipelines. They are fed up with Liberal excuses. They gathered because they do not want to hear any more Liberal excuses, they do not want the procrastination to continue, and they cannot afford the Prime Minister's mistakes.

If the Liberals will not listen to us about killing their anti-pipeline bill, Bill C-69, will they at least listen to the tens of thousands of energy workers who want this bill killed and stopped immediately?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are following the clear path provided by the Federal Court of Appeal in order to move in the right way, through meaningful consultations. The report was clear that we need to do a better job in consulting indigenous peoples, something that the Conservatives ignored for 10 years, and we need to account for the impact on marine shipping. That is the path that we are taking. We are taking the time to get this right and we are not cutting corners like the Conservatives did.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, every single week an energy company is laying off hundreds of workers or leaving the country altogether, and every week we get inaction and platitudes by the Prime Minister.

This week, Steelhead LNG shelved its pipeline in B.C. and Devon Energy announced it is selling its Canadian assets and exiting the country. Why, when it comes to 120,000 unemployed energy workers or a convoy of Canadians who come to Ottawa to fight for their jobs, will this Prime Minister not lift a finger? Why will he not fight for everyone?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, after 10 years of inaction under Stephen Harper, 99% of our oil exports were still sold to the United States. The Conservatives' approach failed, and they are doubling down on that approach with their disregard for the courts, with no plan to protect the environment and coastal communities and with no plan to meaningfully engage in a two-way dialogue with indigenous peoples.

They disregard the courts. We are following the path that has been provided by the Federal Court of Appeal and we are going to do so in the right way.

* * *

●(1200)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, February 12 was International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers. It is a day to remember that we must protect children from the risk of participating in the horrors of armed conflict.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of National Defence update the House on the progress our government is making on Roméo Dallaire's initiative to prevent the use of child soldiers and our re-engagement with the United Nations?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member of Parliament for Laval—Les Îles for his hard work.

In 2017, we launched the Vancouver principles on peacekeeping and the prevention of the recruitment and the use of child soldiers, developed alongside the Roméo Dallaire child soldiers initiative.

Earlier this month, I attended a workshop with more than 120 member states and international partners that will provide practical advice on how to train forces on peacekeeping operations and how to best support them when they come home.

The Vancouver principles, which have the support of 71 states, are a clear example of how our government is re-engaging with the United Nations and promoting peace and security around the world.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed what veterans knew and the Prime Minister denied. The pension for life scheme falls so short of what veterans were promised that it is reprehensible to Canadians. The report sent a shudder throughout the veterans community by revealing our most severely and permanently injured will receive, on average, \$300,000 less under the Liberal pension scam.

Why must Canada's most vulnerable injured soldiers and their families pay for the Prime Minister's mistakes?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring our veterans receive the benefits and support that they deserve. The needs of Canada's veterans have changed significantly over the past 100 years since the Pension Act was introduced, and our support needs to change with it.

Thanks to our government's \$10-billion investments, all veterans today, including the most vulnerable, are better off than they were under the Harper Conservatives.

* * *

[Translation]

SPORTS

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope that all members of the House saw the report last week indicating that in the past 20 years, more than 600 people, in 30 different sports, have been abused.

[English]

Now is the time that we need to stand up as a country, united in ending abuse, discrimination and harassment in sport.

[Translation]

Could the Minister of Science and Sport update the House on what our government is doing to stop this problem that affects so many Canadians?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. This has been my priority since I became Minister of Sport.

[English]

Last June, we announced strong measures to end abuse, discrimination and harassment in sport. Last week, sport ministers from across the country signed a declaration that will create a systemic culture shift in sport, and yesterday I announced the development of a universal code of conduct that our sport partners, such as CAAWS, said that they were thrilled to see.

[Translation]

We must put an end to abuse.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, today SNC-Lavalin reported billions in losses and said this was attributable to the dispute with Saudi Arabia. The company and senior Liberal officials ramped up their lobbying efforts last year, at the same time that the government was having its Twitter dispute with Saudi Arabia.

Did the Liberals bow to corporate pressure because their foreign policy failures were leading to billions in losses?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that the company is doing business right around the world and, in conducting that business, employing many thousands of Canadians. It is very important economic development.

We also know that we have embarked on a very aggressive trade diversification strategy. We meet with companies around the world to take the best advantage of that. We believe that Canada is better positioned now to be a leader in international trade than it ever has been before.

● (1205)

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Madam Speaker, the misconduct of a Canadian company abroad has recently created some political controversy. More than a year ago, the government announced a Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise to investigate such conduct. Unfortunately, no ombudsperson has been appointed. When asked yesterday, the minister said that the appointment will be announced soon.

Can the government commit to appoint an ombudsperson before the House rises this spring?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that the protection of human rights abroad and Canada's commitment within its corporate community to behave with the absolute best of ethical standards are values that all members of the House share. We also know that we are going to appoint the first-ever ombudsperson for corporate social responsibility, and as I said yesterday, that appointment will be announced soon.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, developing public transportation in Quebec is a pain in the behind, and it is the federal government's fault.

Quebec City cannot build its tramway because Ottawa decided on its own which infrastructure projects it would fund. There is no way to get money from other programs, since Ottawa still imposes conditions. It has money, it collects half of our taxes, but the second criterion in paragraph 4 has not been met.

Why does the government not transfer the infrastructure money to Quebec in a lump sum?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to remind my hon. Bloc Québécois colleague that the agreement with Quebec on public transportation provides for \$5.2 billion to be transferred to Quebec. This is 26.2% of the total amount, even though the population of Quebec represents 23.23%. This is the largest transfer per capita. Quebec has significant needs in terms of public transportation. We are committed to Quebec, when it comes to federal funding.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, public transit is a perfect example of how little the federal government understands about Quebec's actual needs. From Saguenay to Longueuil to Trois-Rivières, every one of our cities has infrastructure needs, but federal investment is proportional to ridership on existing public transit networks. The problem is that if the service is not available, there are no riders. There has to be a bus for people to get on.

Why won't the federal government just transfer the infrastructure money to Quebec? Afterwards, we can figure things out for ourselves.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we have said many times and as we have told Mayor Labeaume, we will contribute to the Quebec City tramway. We have offered Quebec over \$1 billion for the project. We are still waiting for an answer from the government. In the meantime, we will keep supporting priorities on behalf of Quebecers.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the uncertainty surrounding the government's intentions for the SNC-Lavalin file is having real consequences. Today, the company

Routine Proceedings

reported a \$1.6-billion loss in the last quarter. At this rate, a fire sale or layoffs cannot be far behind.

The government urgently needs to take action.

A remediation agreement would punish the culprits, instead of collectively penalizing workers who have done absolutely nothing wrong.

When is the government going to start negotiations? Is it waiting until thousands of people lose their jobs?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

As she knows, yesterday, I reiterated in the House and elsewhere that this is a delicate issue. As Attorney General of Canada, I cannot comment on a subject that could have an impact on a matter that is before the courts, as this one is.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1210)

[English]

PETITIONS

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of constituents in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk who are concerned about the lack of funding to help international women and girls living in extreme poverty attend school.

This petition calls upon the government to increase Canada's funding to combat extreme poverty and to help these women and girls get an education.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am presenting a petition in support of protecting the Thames River system. These petitioners wish to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Conservative government stripped environmental regulations covered in the navigable waters act, leaving hundreds of rivers, including the Thames, vulnerable. It is ecologically diverse and a very special heritage river.

Unfortunately, the Liberals, despite their promise to reinstate environmental protections, failed to do so. Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the government to support my bill, Bill C-355, which would commit the government to prioritize the protection of the Thames River by amending the Navigation Protection Act.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is not the first time I have presented on this issue. I have a large number of signatures from constituents who believe that there are better options nowadays than animal testing for cosmetics. They are looking to see some changes in that area.

Government Orders

VISION CARE

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to table a petition from people in Saskatoon and Saskatchewan. The petitioners are calling on the government to create a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care. They are calling to our attention that certain populations are at a greater risk for eye health care issues: children, seniors and indigenous people.

Petitioners are asking the government to commit to acknowledging eye health and vision care as a growing public issue and to respond to it, particularly with Canada's vulnerable population. That would benefit all Canadians through the reduction of vision impairment resulting from preventable conditions and the modification of known risk factors.

PLASTICS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to once again table a petition on behalf of coastal British Columbians who are calling on the Government of Canada to create a national strategy to combat plastic from our waterways and aquifers. As we know, there is a garbage truck of plastics entering our water every minute globally. We have the largest coastline in the world.

These coastal people would like the government to follow through with its unanimous support of Motion No. 151, and create a national strategy as soon as possible so that we can take urgent action to combat this huge global crisis around plastic pollution in our waterways.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wish to apologize for going some 20 seconds over during my S.O. 31 when I was speaking yesterday.

I also want to apologize to the people of my community because I did not finish that sentence, which was, "Our gratitude and thanks to Adele Yu, Cici Liang, Moti Bali and so many volunteers for the leadership and vision they provided and contributed to Canadian values and celebrating what it is to be Canadian."

I wanted to add that and extend my apologies.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the member that we accept apologies. However, the additional information is not part of a point of order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1215)

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-77, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni has 18 and a half minutes left.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a huge honour to rise on Bill C-77. As the veterans affairs critic for the NDP, I have met many veterans, many of whom have served in our military, and I have been witness to the struggles many of them have faced. I want to ensure that we put the right tools in place for the individuals who have served our country, to ensure their long-term well-being is in good order in return for their service in uniform.

Our servicemen and servicewomen deserve to have a fair and impartial justice system that is working for them. I believe Bill C-77 takes many of the right steps in that direction. That is why I am happy to be supporting the bill, along with my NDP colleagues.

However, I cannot express how frustrated we are by the lack of urgency in getting this bill to where it is now. Bill C-15 was passed in 2013 and the enforcement of that bill just came into force last year, five years later. Here we are now in 2019, looking to continue the job we started in 2013. I very much hope these important changes do not take another five years to enact and implement, because our men and women in uniform deserve better than delay after delay.

The fundamental principles that are being debated in the bill are still working from the excellent framework provided to us by Antonio Lamer in 2003. I think we have seen today that all parties in this place are working to get the bill passed quickly, which we are grateful for. Partisanship has not been at fault for slowing this process down. It has been a lack of political urgency by previous governments. I feel strongly that we need to do better.

Here we are again in 2019, once again under the gun to get the bill passed before the next election. Canadians deserve better than to have the legislation die on the vine.

I do not want to mislead anyone that Bill C-77 has our full support. There are still steps that need to be taken to improve our military justice system. New Democrats have brought forward an amendment to the bill through our great defence critic, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, which would have struck paragraph 98(c) from the military code of service discipline. It has to do with the effects of self-harm. In my mind, and in the minds of most Canadians, the stigma and attitudes toward mental health are changing for the better, and this section looks to me like a relic from another time.

Government Orders

The committee heard that officials throughout the military are taking significant steps to address the mental health needs of their service people. Tragically, we have seen the impacts that inaction on this important issue has had on our servicemen and servicewomen in the last number of years. Therefore, while I have no doubt that we are taking a better and more compassionate approach to mental health issues, it is important to highlight that paragraph 98(c) is now out of place. As long as people can still see it on the books, they will still potentially be scared to bring forward their struggles and challenges. Those who are in the most vulnerable position need to have that avenue to seek help.

In discussion with my colleague, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, he spoke about how his amendment, which would have removed this clause, was at first well received by the committee. Soon, the Liberals on the committee changed their tune. They felt it should be a different study. Once they had their marching orders, the chair said the member's amendment was ineligible.

While I feel like most members in the House recognize the importance and independence of our committees, as we have seen at the justice committee over the last few days, the Liberals are ready to give up on that independence once they receive their marching orders from a minister's office or the PMO. It sounds to me that a similar situation occurred in the removal of my colleague's amendment to the bill.

• (1220)

We heard some very compelling evidence regarding this amendment, which should be heard as the bill returns to the House. As Sheila Fynes explained at committee:

...it is disturbing that even today, under paragraph 98(c), a service member could face life imprisonment for an attempted suicide. It would be more appropriate to consider self-harm under such circumstances as being symptomatic of a serious and urgent mental health concern, and signalling the need for appropriate and immediate medical intervention.

That speaks for itself. This is obviously undue punishment for a member who is suffering. We need to reach out and look after these members.

She went on to add, “There is no benefit to leaving paragraph 98 (c) in the National Defence Act, nor is there a downside to removing it. In my heart, I believe it is morally responsible.” This is from the testimony she gave on November 1, 2018.

Retired Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Guy Perron, who took a much more conservative approach, added:

Including yourself, but if we focus on the other person, which I think you were leading up to, we have numerous other offences—assaults, attempted murder, name it—that would penalize you for the action you've committed toward the other individual that are captured in a way by paragraph 98(c), so we could reach the same result.

I am proud to say that I know the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke and he will not be giving up on this fight easily. I look forward to having the opportunity to support his private member's bill, Bill C-426. If we are truly committed to ending the stigma around mental health and wellness, we need to commit ourselves not only to improving our services but also to ending the systems that reinforce these wrongly held beliefs.

This is the most important step the bill takes with respect to the compassionate treatment of victims and their families. It is imperative that these individuals have strong protections and that the military justice system supports them in a compassionate way throughout the legal process.

Bill C-77 would harmonize the military justice system with the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights so that victims in the military justice system would have many of the same resources that victims in our civilian courts have. This would include keeping victims informed regarding the progress of cases, which I know can be an incredible relief. By nature, lawyers keep everything close to their chests, and not knowing what is going to happen next is a significant source of anxiety for victims and their families.

The other addition that would be most significant for victims is the appointment of a victims liaison officer to be assigned to support them through the process. We often ask our military personnel to do some of the most difficult and dangerous tasks for our country. Tools like a victims liaison officer are needed to show that we have our servicemen's and servicewomen's backs when they are suffering.

Another area in which the bill takes a positive step is reconciliation. I had the pleasure of working on the veterans affairs committee's report as the committee's standing vice-chair. The report is entitled “Indigenous Veterans: From Memories of Injustice to Lasting Recognition”. While the report lays out some very important steps forward, it is also a stark reminder that indigenous members of our military have not always been treated equally or fairly.

• (1225)

As the Supreme Court determined in 1999 with the Gladue decision, it is appropriate to take Canada's colonial legacy into account for sentencing. I am glad to see that Bill C-77 will extend that decision from our civilian courts to our military ones. Our military justice system often deals with serious offences, and it is imperative that every important factor is considered when these decisions are made.

While I am proud of the additional victims' rights, which will be added in Bill C-77, the bill also takes steps to make the military justice system more fair and impartial for all parties involved. Regardless of which side of the justice system people find themselves, it is vital that they have confidence that the system is arriving at a fair and impartial decision. While this can be all the more difficult in the trying situations that our military members often find themselves in, it is our duty to provide the tools and resources for fair trials to occur. By expanding the rights of an accused individual to go to trial by court martial rather than by their commanding officer, we will be better able to protect Canadians' constitutional rights.

I believe my colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke put it in the most simple terms:

Members of the Canadian Armed Forces are held to a high standard of discipline, therefore, their judicial system should also reflect that high standard. Those who risk their lives for our country should not be denied their charter rights when facing trial.

I would also like to read a quote from Tim Dunne, a columnist with The Chronicle Herald, in regard to this very same topic. He says:

Government Orders

Until Bill C-77 is passed, commanding and designated officers with little legal training presiding at summary trials are not required to prepare a transcript of the proceedings, so there is no provision for appeal; there is no requirement to apply rules of evidence to assure a fair trial; an accused can be compelled to testify against himself or herself, so there is no constitutional right to protection against self-incrimination; adverse inferences can be drawn from the silences of the accused; and the accused cannot be represented by a lawyer.

As I conclude my thoughts, I want to once again say how important it is to ensure we are able to enact the changes outlined in Bill C-77 in a timely manner. It has been years since we have known that these steps needed to be taken, but we have delayed. In that time many Canadians have proudly worn a uniform. We owe it to those members and their families to ensure that our military justice system is more supportive to victims and fairer to everyone.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his work and awareness on veterans' issues. He touched upon much of that in his remarks.

I would break it down even further, beyond legislation, beyond debate, and ask the member whether the most important thing we need to restore with our veterans is trust. We can have debates in the House, but the government is not living up to promises it made to our veterans, whether on wait times, pensions, military or a range of issues.

The government is not meeting what was promised, even when the defence minister, now acting also acting as veterans minister, makes that promise beside the Prime Minister, wearing his military medals. That erosion of trust is the biggest crisis facing our veterans right now, confirmed once again by the Parliamentary Budget Officer this week.

Does the member have any suggestions on how the government, and now this double-hatted minister, could start restoring the trust they have eroded?

• (1230)

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his service to our country and for his work on veterans affairs. As a former minister, he knows full well how complicated the veterans affairs file is. It is not something we can do on the side of our desk and think we will get the job done. There are over 700,000 veterans in our country. The Minister of National Defence is leading the largest department in our country. For him to think he is just going to do this on the corner of his desk is an absolute insult.

The government needs to prioritize getting a capable minister in place. The Liberals have failed to live up to their promises. They are only meeting half of their own government-set service standards. They are literally in a place of chaos. It is a mess at Veterans Affairs. Veterans are falling through the cracks. The PBO report yesterday was just another example of the Liberals' broken promises. In fact, I would argue that the Liberals need to apologize to veterans for their broken promise.

The PBO report outlined this as the member knows. The member has been great advocate for Sean Bruyca and he has been calling on the government to apologize to him. He was vilified yesterday by the truth that Mr. Bruyca was speaking. The government owes him an apology and it needs to hire a full-time veterans affairs minister.

If our military members who are serving right now see how they are being treated as veterans, what an insult that is. This is certainly not the way to inspire and motivate the people who put their lives on the line.

I appreciate the member's advocacy. I want to call on the government to do the right thing and appoint a minister immediately. Let us get to work.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his remarks. I was especially moved by what he said about the work of our committees. I have tremendous respect for the work done by the parliamentary committees, which should, emphasis on "should", enable us to improve the bills that are being studied. We are here to listen to the experts, and the witnesses show up fully prepared and armed with well-researched arguments.

My colleague mentioned all the tactics that were used in committee to obstruct the amendment seeking to strike paragraph 98(c) from the National Defence Act. Witnesses said that a soldier could face life imprisonment for an attempted suicide and that it would be more appropriate to consider self-harm as being symptomatic of a serious and urgent mental health concern, signalling the need for appropriate and immediate medical intervention.

What did my colleague think about the various tactics that were used in committee to stop the repeal of this paragraph?

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague and the work she does. She always brings forward thoughtful comments, looking out for the best interests of Canadians. I appreciate her comments with respect to committees.

We are not just seeing it at the justice committee, where the whip from the PMO gives direction not to advance important issues for Canadians. We even saw it at the veterans affairs committee on Wednesday when my good friend, the critic from the Conservative Party and the other vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, put forward a motion to have the defence minister, who is now the veterans affairs minister as well, come and testify at committee to go over the estimates so they would be scrutinized before they were tabled in the House next week. We were told weeks ago that this would happen. Instead, the members of the committee would not give unanimous consent to even debate the motion to invite the defence minister.

This is not serving Canadians. It is not in the best interests of Canadians. The government is asking for over \$300 million without it being scrutinized. This is an absolute failure to the veterans who were serving, and to Canadians. It is not fair with respect to how we manage taxpayer dollars, without that absolute scrutiny and trust.

Government Orders

I am sure the minister would be able to speak to those important issues, but committees need to be separate and should not have that influence from the PMO in giving that direction.

• (1235)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to get to know the member opposite, not terribly well but well enough to know that he is sincere. Therefore, I will not say he is being disingenuous today, but he did neglect to mention in his speech the fact that the Minister of National Defence did invite the standing committee on defence to look at the issue of suicide and self-harm.

It is important to examine the provision the member called attention to, but it was called out of order by the chair of the committee, which does happen from time to time within committees. Committees are the masters of their own destiny, as we always say. We on this side of the House recognize that unlike those members on the other side when Mr. Harper's office controlled committees. I am on the Standing Committee on Finance and I have worked on foreign affairs. There is no control of committees. They are independent.

The recommendations from that committee will form an important basis for the government's approach going forward on this issue.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, my colleague is right. We brought forward a really important motion and the Liberals deemed it out of order. They would not even hear it. We are talking about our service members. We are talking about them committing self-harm and the Liberals would not even let our motion be heard at committee. They are trying to ram the bill through, but of course it took them years to bring it forward.

One of the most important elements is to protect our service people. When someone is in trouble and is committing self-harm, clearly that person needs mental health and medical support. For the chair of committee to not even let the amendment be heard is absolutely shameful.

This is exactly what we are talking about, committees not being able to do their own business, the PMO and ministerial direction being given to committees and committees not being able to do the business of protecting the most important people, those who are putting their lives on the line for us.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for the very fine work he does in veterans affairs.

In addition to Sheila Fynes, who said that section 98(c) did constitute a barrier to servicemen and women who were asking for mental health support, the judge advocate general also testified that section 98(c), though rarely used, was a problem and if used as a disciplinary measure, would cause harm.

The minister cited the fact that he was concerned about self-inflicted wounds being used as an excuse. Is a self-inflicted wound not indicative of a serious mental health issue?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I have a huge amount of respect for my colleague. I have huge footsteps to fill with her leadership as the veterans critic for the NDP.

We do not have to imagine that veterans are falling through the cracks, those who commit self-harm and who desperately need help. They are falling through the cracks. There are several examples of military members who have taken their lives instead of coming forward and getting the help they need.

This is a very important issue. We need to fix this right now.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am going to be sharing my time with the member for London North Centre.

It is a pleasure to be here to speak to the bill, especially when I am from an area in Cape Breton that has had one of the highest contributions per capita in world wars and conflicts. We still have a big contingency coming out of Cape Breton. As well, in my riding we have the largest population of first nations people in eastern Canada. It is an honour for me to rise today to address and discuss the indigenous sentencing provision within the changes proposed to the National Defence Act in Bill C-77.

As the Prime Minister often says, no relationship is more important than the one the Government of Canada has with its first nations people. That is why our government has put an unprecedented focus on reconciliation and on renewing nation-to-nation relationships with first nations, Inuit and Métis people.

Our efforts to renew these nation-to-nation relationships are based on recognition and implementation of rights, some respect, some co-operation and some partnerships. Indigenous people have proudly served this country each time we have called them up in our armed forces. Throughout their service they have brought their unique and important perspective to the Canadian Armed Forces. We have seen them in action both here and abroad.

Indigenous people have served honourably in the forces as far back as the First World War. During that defining moment of our national history, many indigenous personnel brought valuable and unique skills to our Canadian Armed Forces.

The Second World War saw thousands of indigenous people answer the call of duty for Canada. They took on new roles during this conflict, including that of code talkers, which was a highly sought skill. The code talkers used their native Cree language to encrypt sensitive radio messages so they could not be understood if intercepted by the enemy.

This upcoming spring will see the celebration of the landing in Normandy 75 years ago. Five years ago, I had the honour of going to Normandy for the 70th celebration. Of course, many Canadians landed there and many Canadians gave up their lives, including many Cape Bretoners. I went to gravesites where I saw the names of first nations people from Cape Breton who gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom in Europe.

We know the contributions there, and they continue. More recently, indigenous Canadian Armed Forces members have served in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and other UN-led humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. They have risked their lives defending the Canadian values of peace, freedom and democracy overseas, sometimes overcoming significant cultural challenges in order to do so.

Government Orders

Their contribution is notable, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. If we want to continue to build on this long and proud history, we must demonstrate our respect for indigenous Canadian Armed Forces members. It is not enough to simply state it; we must show it in meaningful action.

It is no secret that indigenous people in Canada have faced very difficult histories. Sadly, it is part of our history that we acknowledge and a wrong that our government seeks to right. That is why we are proposing changes to the National Defence Act in Bill C-77 to mandate consideration of the circumstances of indigenous offenders during their sentencing.

The proposed changes would mirror the provisions set forth in the Criminal Code, which mandate that indigenous offenders' history and circumstances be taken into consideration during the sentencing phase of their trial. Many of them have had totally different ways through life than the rest of us, and that has to be taken into consideration. This information would then inform the judge's decision about the appropriate sentence to be imposed on the indigenous offender.

• (1240)

The proposed legislation will expand on the principle that in all cases the sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender, and should be the least severe sentence required to maintain the discipline, efficiency and morale of the Canadian Forces.

All available punishments other than imprisonment and detention that are reasonable in the circumstances and consistent with the harm done to the victims or the community should be considered for all offenders, with particular attention to the circumstances of the indigenous offender.

Amending the National Defence Act to mandate the consideration of the circumstances of indigenous offenders during the sentencing is just one of the ways the Canadian Armed Forces is supporting reconciliation efforts.

The Canadian Armed Forces has also put a focus on outreach and engagement with indigenous Canadian Armed Forces members. Through unique special programs, it will continue to provide indigenous peoples with an opportunity to learn more about employment opportunities in the Canadian Armed Forces, opportunities to hone their skills and develop new ones. It has a number of programs in place to do just that.

It has indigenous leadership training programs. It also has six-week summer programs that combine military training with indigenous cultural awareness. This is very important, and we see it right across the country. Some of the programs I would mention are the Bold Eagle program in Alberta, the Raven program in British Columbia, the Black Bear program in New Brunswick and the Carcajou program in Quebec, which was introduced just last fall.

Combining indigenous culture and military training allows applicants to develop new skills and abilities while enriching the Canadian Armed Forces with their talents and perspectives.

I would like to talk a bit about the Canadian Rangers. The Canadian Rangers show how the unique skills developed in those

six-week programs are put to use in the Canadian Armed Forces. Although the Canadian Rangers program is not strictly indigenous, approximately 27% of the Canadian Rangers self-identify as indigenous, a higher percentage than any other component of the Canadian Armed Forces. That is pretty impressive. They are a unique subcomponent of the Canadian Armed Forces, providing a military presence in very sparsely settled areas, such as up north, along the coast and in other isolated areas right across our great country.

These Canadian Rangers are Canada's eyes and ears in these areas. Their intimate knowledge of these areas proves to be integral to northern surveillance, and they regularly provide support to operations such as ground search and rescue, which is very important, as we have seen over the last few years. Increasingly, those regions are a key crossroads where international trade, climate change and global security intersect. That is why we are making sure they have the equipment they need to do their job. As outlined in Canada's defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged", we will enhance and expand the training of Canadian Rangers while strengthening their capabilities within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Just last summer the Canadian Armed Forces announced the delivery of brand new C-19 rifles for the Canadian Rangers in Yellowknife at 1 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group headquarters. The C-19s are replacing the old No. 4 Lee-Enfield rifle that has been the mainstay of the Canadian Rangers for decades.

Why are we changing these rifles for the Canadian Rangers? The new rifles have been developed to support their work as reservists in the north. It is very important that they perform well in conditions well below freezing, and they feature a design that proudly bears the crest of the Canadian Rangers.

The Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence value the many contributions of indigenous Canadian Armed Forces members. Indigenous Canadians have bravely served in the Canadian Armed Forces—

• (1245)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, the member's time is up, but I am sure he will be able to add anything he has left over during the questions and comments period, or someone might suggest that he finish it.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): I am not going to do that, Madam Speaker.

I realize that the Liberal member spent a lot of time talking about indigenous members and the way the Canadian Armed Forces is trying to be more inclusive in bringing members of the Canadian Armed Forces through the recruitment process. I would like to get the member's ideas on how the Canadian Armed Forces can improve recruitment measures. I know that the programs we are running, such as bold eagle and black bear, have been very well received and well participated in out on the Prairies. Recruitment from those who have participated in those programs has been about 30%.

Government Orders

Could the member talk about how we could actually increase recruitment? Could the member also comment on how the Gladue decision of the Supreme Court has been incorporated into Bill C-77 to ensure that indigenous members of the Canadian Armed Forces are treated fairly?

• (1250)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Madam Speaker, the hon. member asks how we can help indigenous people in the armed forces, help them feel more comfortable and help them feel that they are part of the team. I see it right back in Cape Breton, where, as I said, we have the largest population in eastern Canada of first nations people. We see them starting as cadets. We see them in the reserves. We also have to show them respect and show that if things go a little sideways for them, we can help them through it.

Could we do more? Yes, we could. However, it starts at a very young age. The role models who have gone before them have done a great service. That is where I see it happening.

I know that this program I am talking about today is more or less to help them when they get into serious situations. We all can do our part. Also, we have to make sure that we can tell them—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We do have to allow for other questions, so maybe the member will be able to finish his train of thought with the next answer.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for London North Centre.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was sad to learn recently that my hon. colleague is not running in the next election. I think he was elected in 2000, if I am not mistaken, nearly 20 years ago. I can tell members, as a newer member of Parliament, only elected in 2015, that he is one of the most respected members of our caucus, particularly among those who are new to this game, if I can put it that way. Sometimes it seems like a game when I hear the members opposite.

The member has seen a lot over the course of his career over the past nearly 20 years. Could he comment on the evolution of issues around indigenous folks and LGBTQ2 folks, particularly with reference to the military as well as in general terms? Bill C-77 incorporates a lot of those issues, and it is progress that I am not sure we would have seen even five years ago.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Madam Speaker, I only have so much time, but it was alluded to that this might be my last year, after 19 years.

I will let the House know that some of my most disappointing moments and most proud moments were in dealing with our Veterans Affairs office in Cape Breton. When the previous Conservative government closed that office, it was a major blow for our veterans and for indigenous veterans. One of my most proud moments was when the Prime Minister came back and reopened that office. I see every day veterans going in there and getting the services they need face to face.

Cape Breton has one of the highest contributions of people to the military services, and they deserve that service. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I have to say that one of my proudest moments was when we opened those Veterans Affairs offices, especially in Cape Breton.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill C-77.

In November of 2017, the Prime Minister rose in the House to issue a formal apology to members of Canada's LGBTQ2 community for historic injustices inflicted upon them in this country.

Today I am proud to rise in this chamber to speak about the steps our government continues to take, through Bill C-77, to protect this community. First, I wish to offer some historical context so that we can all understand why this aspect of Bill C-77 is so fundamentally important.

Canada has a history of policies, practices and federal legislation that led to the oppression of and discrimination against LGBTQ2 people in our country. Consenting adults were charged, prosecuted, persecuted and punished for engaging in same-sex relationships. From the 1950s and for nearly 40 years straight, the Government of Canada undertook a systemic campaign to persecute employees who were, or were suspected of, being members of the LGBTQ2 community. Instead of being respected and appreciated for their public service, they were fired, discharged or bullied into resigning through a campaign that became known as "the purge". It is a shame on our history.

In the Canadian Armed Forces, treatment of LGBTQ2 members was no better. From 1967 until 1992, the Canadian Armed Forces policy on homosexuals was contained in Canadian Forces administrative order 19-20, an order that reflected the government's policy of the time.

The CFAO and other discriminatory policies prohibited the recruitment or retention of homosexuals in the public service, the RCMP and the military. During that dark period, Canadian Armed Forces members were spied on, interrogated and persecuted by their brothers and sisters in arms and those who led them, and by the very institutions to which they had dedicated their lives, namely, this Parliament.

Friends were encouraged to spy on one another and turn on each other for the grave crime of doing nothing more than loving who they loved. They were treated with terrible indignity and then they were forced out of the Canadian Armed Forces and stripped of their ranks, their life's work and their futures as members of the military. Most notable of all is that so many members of the LGBTQ2 community chose to hide their true identities so that they could serve the country, despite its great intolerance and rejection of them.

We ask members of our Canadian Armed Forces to put service before self. So many in the LGBTQ2 community have modelled that ethos, demonstrating incredible selflessness and tremendous bravery along the way. Today, we are working hard to make reparations for the harms that were inflicted on members of this community.

Government Orders

An LGBTQ2 class action final settlement agreement includes recognition measures, broad-based reconciliation and memorialization of measures for the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP members and other government employees affected by discriminatory policies. It also includes measures for individual compensation.

Upon request by affected members, a Canada Pride Citation and a letter of apology will be awarded to them by the Canadian Armed Forces. Also, upon request by an affected member, a note may also be added to the file of any former member who was investigated, sanctioned or released to make it clear that the release was the result of wrongful policy by the government or the forces.

We know that no apology or reparation can undo the damage by these abhorrent policies. However, it does not discharge us from the fundamental responsibility to do everything in our power to turn things around and make sure such injustices are never committed again in our country.

Today, LGBTQ2 Canadian Armed Forces members have the same rights as any other Canadian Armed Forces members to work in a harassment-free workplace and to be treated with dignity and respect. Since taking office, we have taken concrete and sincere steps to end harassment in federal workplaces.

Going forward, we are going to ensure our approach to harassment is victim-centric and that those who experience harassment have the support they need. Our mission here is nothing less than culture change. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to get this right.

• (1255)

The defence policy “Strong, Secure, Engaged” reaffirms the Canadian Armed Forces commitment to increasing and promoting diversity and inclusion among its personnel. Many policies and initiatives have indeed been implemented to make this commitment a reality. The defence team has appointed diversity champions, for example. They have also worked towards integrating gender-based analysis-plus into all defence activities, from the design and implementation of programs and services that support our personnel, to equipment procurement and operational planning.

In January of last year, the forces implemented a positive space initiative in support of LGBTQ2 members. The intention is to foster the creation of a safe and inclusive work environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It is a volunteer and peer-based support group for all LGBTQ2 community members and allies to allow them to create networks and seek information and assistance from positive space ambassadors.

The promotion of diversity and inclusion is a core institutional value that is supported through leadership, communications and activities at all bases, wings and across the organization. The defence team has been working through initiatives, like the positive space initiative, to help create inclusive work environments that really value everyone involved, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Many of those efforts mirror those that have been made by our government more broadly, and this is where we circle back to the bill before us today. In June 2017, our government added gender identity

and gender expression as prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act. Bill C-77 will bring the military justice system into alignment with aspects of the civilian criminal justice system, specifically section 718.2 of the Criminal Code.

Let me be clear about what these changes mean. Bill C-77 calls for increased sentences for service offences and increased sanctions for service infractions when there is evidence that they are motivated by bias, hate or prejudice based on gender expression or identity. Targeting people for their gender expression or identity is especially egregious. There is simply no room in Canada for that kind of hatred. We are proud that Bill C-77 reflects that fundamental value.

This focus on deterring crimes based in hate for those whose gender expression or identity differ from our own is just one more step in significant progress the forces has made in changing its culture to one of greater inclusivity and diversity. These changes will help the Canadian Armed Forces ensure it remains an institution based on honour, honesty and integrity. In that sense, the gender expression and identity clause of Bill C-77 is very much aligned with the military ethos as well.

In closing, I am proud of the work the Government of Canada has done to right historic wrongs against the LGBTQ2 community, something that folks in London have called for for a long time. I am glad to see our government put these changes into place. I am proud of the work the Canadian Armed Forces is doing to build a diverse and inclusive military for all Canadians. I am proud to stand today to highlight a small but essential inclusion in Bill C-77, which makes clear our steadfast belief that there is no room in Canada or in our military for such discrimination ever again.

• (1300)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the member for London North Centre, for his commitment to our armed forces and particularly those LGBTQ2 members.

As somebody who has served as a civilian peacekeeper in both Bosnia and Kosovo, my life, every single day, depended on the NATO forces and the Canadian Forces that were there to protect me. When we have our armed forces put themselves in harm's way for us, we need to make sure that if they come home injured they will get the support they need, both physically and mentally.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the \$17 million that our government is providing to the Royal Ottawa Hospital to create a centre of excellence for military members and their families, and veterans. Could he elaborate on how important it is to provide those mental health supports?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is modest and she will not tell us this, but this is an individual member of Parliament who has committed her life to democracy and activism, both in this country and abroad. We are very fortunate to have her in the House. I work with her on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and that committee is strengthened because of her presence.

The centre for excellence is something the member advocated for. As an Ottawa-based member of Parliament, she is very proud of it, as she should be. As a country, we need to come together on a non-partisan basis to make sure that these issues around PTSD and other mental health challenges faced by our veterans are dealt with in a meaningful way. The centre of excellence is doing that work. I am proud to see that our government invested no less than \$17 million towards the centre to make that happen.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments on standing up for those in the Canadian Armed Forces who are dealing with operational stress injuries, like PTSD. One of the things we have to do is destigmatize issues of mental health, especially for those who serve as our first responders.

We brought forward an amendment at committee that was unfortunately ruled out of order. It would have deleted paragraph 98(c) from the National Defence Act, which deals with self-harm. Under it, those who attempt suicide could actually be charged with a criminal offence and be court-martialled in the military justice system.

Would the member support finding an expeditious way to remove 98(c) on self-harm and make sure those who right now are too afraid to step forward with mental health issues because they are concerned they might be charged under the National Defence Act with malingering or self-harm get help? They are crying for help and we should do everything to make sure the rules, regulations and legislation get this right.

• (1305)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, I am not a member of the committee so I was not there for those conversations. It is my understanding, however, that the amendment to paragraph 98(c) was ruled out of order for a very understandable reason. Making that change went outside the scope of the committee's work, which happens on a regular basis in committees. The chair, in an objective way, ruled it out of order. That also happens on a regular basis for a variety of reasons.

If it was left there, then it would be problematic. However, our government takes issues around mental health very seriously. We have thought about it and the Minister of Defence has invited the Standing Committee on National Defence to put forward recommendations on how to address the specific issues around suicide and self-harm that the member points to.

In addition, we just talked about the centre of excellence, but that, and many other measures we have taken, are concrete evidence to me of how seriously the government takes advocating for the mental health of our veterans, past, present and future.

BILL C-77—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to third reading stage of Bill C-77, an act to amend the National Defence Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts.

Government Orders

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown 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.

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

BILL C-83—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to report stage and third reading stage of Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown 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.

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CANADA—MADAGASCAR TAX CONVENTION ACT, 2018

BILL S-6—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to second reading stage of Bill S-6, an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown 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.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-77, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House as the official opposition's national defence critic to once again speak to Bill C-77. I sit on the Standing Committee on National Defence with the members for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman and Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, who have a great deal of experience. Members will no doubt recall that I addressed them on the same subject on October 1, 2018.

Bill C-77 seeks to make changes to Canada's military justice system, which was created in 1950 and has undergone a number of legislative amendments over the years, more specifically in 1998, 2001, 2008 and 2013.

Government Orders

While the court martial system is similar to Canada's criminal justice system in terms of its independence and the burden of proof, courts martial are distinctly military. However, as my colleagues know, decisions at a court martial may be appealed before Canada's civilian courts, if necessary.

The existence of Canada's military justice system has been recognized over the years, particularly in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which makes reference to it. In a recent decision of the Supreme Court, in 2015, the judiciary upheld the requirement for the separate system by indicating that the existence of a parallel system of military law is deeply entrenched in our history and supported by compelling principles. The court martial system should help make the armed forces better at conducting operations and contributing to the maintenance of discipline, efficiency and morale. I examined Bill C-77 with that in mind.

As I pointed out last October, this bill is very similar to Bill C-71 that had been introduced by our Conservative government. The purpose of our bill was to bring our military justice system in line with the Criminal Code of Canada. Some of our proposed changes included writing the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights into the National Defence Act, limiting summary trials to six months and clarifying which cases would be eligible for a summary trial. Bill C-77, which is before us today, proposes the same changes.

Before I venture into a certain part of the bill that we see as problematic, I would like to strongly reiterate that the Conservatives will always protect victims of crime and make sure that they are treated fairly in the Canadian criminal justice system. In fact, it was our Conservative government that created the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. Of course we will support integrating it into Canada's military justice system. That was precisely our main reason for introducing Bill C-71.

The Liberal government does not want to admit now that it copied us with Bill C-77, but the Liberals know perfectly well what they are doing. I do not blame them, for this is the right thing to do. However, it would be nice if my colleagues on the government side would act in good faith and recognize the excellent work we did on victims' rights under the previous Conservative government.

• (1310)

Honestly, that is the least they could do. The government should be non-partisan about this.

Overall, Bill C-77 is not a bad bill. However, there is something that bothers me about this bill and that is clause 25, dealing with division 5, which amends sections 162.1 to 164.2 of the National Defence Act.

This part is very different from what we had proposed in our Bill C-71. In Bill C-77, the burden of proof shifts from “beyond a reasonable doubt” to “on a balance of probabilities”.

This obviously does not afford the same level of protection to our men and women in uniform who are going into a summary hearing. Imposing criminal penalties by making decisions on a balance of probabilities rather than according to the principle of reasonable doubt opens the door to challenges under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, the parallel system of military justice is supported by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Unfortunately, the Liberal government did not support the amendment moved by my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. This amendment could have easily resolved the problem by changing “on a balance of probabilities” to “beyond a reasonable doubt”.

Now that Bill C-77 is expected to move to the next stage, I hope that the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence will propose amendments to that effect.

In committee, retired Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Guy Perron and the Quebec bar expressed doubts that the balance of probabilities could violate the rights enshrined in the charter.

The Conservatives support our Canadian justice system as set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution. However, we do not support a parallel justice system that violates our rights and freedoms.

This is one of the reasons why the report of the Standing Committee on National Defence approved on division some amendments to the bill.

In conclusion, I think members should remember that Bill C-77 is largely a copy of the Conservatives' Bill C-71. I would be happy to see the Liberals simply acknowledge the excellent work we did for victims rights and for them to acknowledge that they are just picking up where we left off by seeking to add a victims bill of rights to the military justice system.

• (1315)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is important for us to recognize that a great deal of effort went into making sure that we had the right legislation.

The member made reference to the Conservative legislation. One of the biggest shortcomings in that legislation was that it did not have an indigenous factor, and that is a very important—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The parliamentary secretary's mike was not working, but the problem has been fixed and we are back in session.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, one of the significant differences within this legislation that the government has taken into consideration is the indigenous factor when individuals from indigenous communities make the determination as to becoming a part of the Canadian Forces. Special consideration is being given in that situation. That is a totally new aspect and was not a part of Stephen Harper's legislation.

When we talk about reconciliation and about establishing and enhancing the relationship between indigenous people and government and its many different agencies, including our military and so forth, we need to take into consideration things of that nature.

Does the Conservative Party support that completely new component, which Stephen Harper did not include in his legislation?

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, of course we support that.

I want to come back to something. The Liberal government does not want to admit that it is simply copying Bill C-77. They know full well that is what they are doing. I cannot blame them because that was the thing to do.

However, it would be nice if my colleagues in the government showed some good faith and acknowledged the excellent work we did on victims' rights under the previous government. Honestly, it is the least they could do and would be a good show of non-partisanship on their side of the House. The bill is almost a carbon copy of Bill C-77 introduced by the Conservative government.

I might ask why it took so long to introduce it in the House.

•(1320)

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, for his great work on this bill. He is the associate shadow minister for national defence, and he sits on the national defence committee.

He heard a lot of testimony. In his speech, he raised the concern that no amendments were accepted by the government on the proposed new burden of proof and the balance of probabilities in the summary hearing process, which may be a charter right violation. We received some assurances from the JAG that it would work to put in place the right regulations to ensure that the balance of probabilities would be fair and charter compliant.

At committee, we heard from the Quebec bar and from retired court martial judge Lieutenant-Colonel Perron. Could my colleague speak to the testimony they brought to committee concerning how the proposed new burden of proof may violate the charter rights of those who have been convicted?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

It was extremely important. What retired Lieutenant-Colonel Perron said was extremely important.

Another thing people need to know is that the Conservatives will always protect victims of crime and ensure that they are treated more fairly in the Canadian justice system

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is nice to see that there is support for this legislation.

I have no problem acknowledging that the previous government did work on this file. I agree that we have been able to add components to the bill. It is nice to hear that there was work done at committee. More rigorous debate is always something we need to consider.

Would the member agree that this legislation should be sent to the Senate as early as possible? If so, why not send it to the Senate today?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, we appreciate that.

The bill will take its course. We look forward to the next stages.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I like the question posed by the government House leader.

This is not the only legislation. We also had Bill S-6. The Conservative Party is saying that it welcomes and likes the bill and that it will vote for it, but it seems that with every piece of legislation it likes, it would like to have virtually endless debate.

Could the member opposite tell me why even when opposition members support legislation and want us to pass it, they feel obligated to continue talking about it endlessly?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, we have to make sure that everything is going to work well and that everything is taken into consideration.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, I just want to ask the member opposite about the reason he just gave. The bill went through the process. It went through first reading and second reading. The committee did its work. Today, we are not seeing very many members asking questions.

We are the only two people asking questions, because we know that everyone has had a chance to speak and share their thoughts.

We know that the small number of changes recommended by the opposition could be considered by the senators. I think that if we give them a chance to do this work, we could move this file forward for the sake of all veterans, the people we work hard for in this chamber.

I hope my hon. colleague will pause for a moment and consider that the way to move democracy forward is to move this bill forward.

Why can he not consider other opinions? Why must he only listen to the Conservatives?

•(1325)

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, I think that the process is great. We need to make sure everything is done right. We need to look at all the available options so that the best possible decisions can be made.

As time goes on, we will see how the bill evolves over the course of the following stage.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for his rigorous analysis of an important bill. He does exceptional work in the House and I am very proud that he is standing up in particular for the interests of Bagotville military personnel, especially those in the air force.

Private Members' Business

I would like to ask my colleague a very simple question.

Could this bill have been better drafted so as to better serve Quebeckers in the military?

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, I believe that we can always do better.

So far, we are rather satisfied. We will see how things go.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Brandon—Souris. I do want to remind him that I will have to interrupt him, and he will be able to carry over his speech to the next time that this matter is before the House.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, the bill before us today, Bill C-77, aims to help protect victims of military offences by providing needed updates to the current military justice system.

Updating the judicial system of the Canadian Armed Forces can be a daunting task. Those in the service commit their lives to defend Canada, Canadian values and beliefs. Whether on foreign soil or here at home, they must regularly deal with high-tension situations. Their decisions and reactions can often be the difference between life and death, war and peace. The importance of their work cannot be overstated and, as such, they hold themselves to a higher standard.

The armed forces judicial system is in place to maintain discipline and structure. Following the chain of command is an essential pillar of the military. In this separate judicial system, the offenders are held directly accountable to their commanding officers. While the military justice system is separate from the civilian one, it still operates under the auspices of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This separate system is constitutional and has been upheld by the Supreme Court.

I represent CFB Shilo, the military base in Brandon—Souris, which is a very important part of our community. Many of us have family, friends and neighbours who serve at the base. It houses the 1st Regiment, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery and 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. The base is the home station of the Royal Canadian Artillery. It is also home to the component of the Western Area Training Centre, 742 Signals Squadron Detachment Shilo and 11 CF Health Services Centre. Other supported units include 26 Field Regiment and the RCA Brandon's Reserve Unit.

Westman is proud to be home to our brave men and women in uniform. They are an essential and prominent part of our community and have been for many years, if not decades. Many develop strong ties and settle here when they complete their service and return to civilian life.

Bill C-77 seeks to align the military's justice system with the Criminal Code of Canada. I am pleased to see that this bill has built upon Bill C-71, presented by our former Conservative government, and seeks to enshrine the rights for victims in the National Defence Act.

Created in 1950, after World War II, the National Defence Act was put in place to protect our men and women in uniform. As we all know, legislation is constantly in flux, always seeking progress. As

such, this act has been modified numerous times since its inception. This bill should be our next step in improving the National Defence Act.

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, the time is up and we need to move on to Private Members' Business. However, the good news on this Friday is that the member will have 16 and a half minutes the next time this matter comes before the House.

It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

The House resumed from November 22, 2018, consideration of the motion.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak to Motion No. 194, instructing a committee to undertake a study of the important issue of precarious employment. The motion calls for the committee to be instructed to undertake a study on precarious employment in Canada, along with other instructions. For example, it is instructed to:

...develop a definition of precarious employment, including specific indicators, as well as examine current data and options to expand available data...

We will obviously support this motion, even though the committee, which is independent, could have decided on its own to study precarious employment. It is nonetheless distressing to see the Liberals call on an already busy committee to conduct a study. At this point in the session, after nearly three and a half years of Liberal governance, we will not have much time for this study, even though precarious employment is a very serious issue that affects all segments of society, and in particular young people, or millennials. It is disappointing that after three years, the Prime Minister, who designated himself as youth minister, has not yet taken any clear and decisive action to address this issue.

As many reports have shown, precarious employment in Canada creates serious inequality. The oxfam, for example, showed that inequality is growing steadily. In recent decades, inequality has gotten worse, not better, around the world and here in Canada. We need to pay attention to this phenomenon. The trend began when Conservative and Liberal governments' neo-liberal policies stripped workers of their rights and benefits through privatization, down-loading the risk of such ventures onto workers.

Private Members' Business

As the end of its mandate looms, the Liberal government has made it clear that it does not intend to take action. It chose to study a well-understood phenomenon rather than act quickly to ease the pressure on workers. Instead of taking action, they want to do yet another study. The NDP has already done a cross-Canada tour, speaking of which, I would like to thank our member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, who did great work across the country. She held meetings and round tables. Everywhere she went, she met millennials and people whose work is precarious. Recommendations were made and definitions were proposed, so the prospect of yet another study is a little disappointing, considering that the government could act on this right now.

Even though it is important that the government gather as much information as possible on workers in precarious employment, universities and union representatives have already answered most of these questions, as I was saying. Very little new information can come out of this study. The NDP has already criss-crossed the country as part of a national forum called “The Precarious Generation: Millennials Fight Back”. We want tangible solutions now.

The rise in precarious employment clearly shows that the status quo is no longer tenable. Too many Canadians, even those who work full time, have a hard time breaking the cycle of poverty. It is not normal that people who work four or five days a week have a hard time making ends meet. Most new jobs are part time, low-paying and with hardly any benefits. That is why it is time to lead by example by offering a federal minimum wage of \$15 an hour and ensuring pay equity.

● (1335)

Every time I tell the people of Drummond that we still do not have pay equity legislation in this country, they simply cannot believe it—yet it is true. The Prime Minister, a self-described feminist, said that he would do everything he could to achieve gender equality. However, he has been in power for three and a half years now, and we still do not have federal pay equity legislation. It is positively scandalous and unacceptable.

In addition, we also need to put an end to unpaid internships. That would be very helpful. While we are at it, we also need to regulate employment agencies, which are growing in number and sometimes resort to unfair practices, while limiting the use of temporary, part-time employees to fill full-time positions.

It is also important to support local and social enterprises and good jobs through a federal procurement policy that relies on local suppliers and generates local spinoffs. A few weeks ago, I attended a meeting of the UPA Centre-du-Québec. I was told that they are very worried about what is happening, especially with regard to the new Canada food guide, which does not mention local food. I told the people at UPA that they were right, and that we were lacking something that is key. It is all well and good to have the Canada food guide, but what we do not have is a national strategy for local food. That is very important.

If we change our eating habits but start buying and consuming food from other places, we are no further ahead. In Canada, Quebec and Drummond, we have access to good foods that provide excellent

nutrition and are healthy choices. Buying locally would give our local economy a boost and also generate good jobs.

Many millennials do not have a private insurance plan. Only 38% of Canadians have access to EI benefits, and many of them are at risk of losing their precarious employment. It is time to reform the EI system, starting with sickness benefits. That system is currently making life even more difficult for Canadians. It is terrible.

Nearly 50% of those who claim federal sickness benefits are unable to go back to work at the end of their 15 weeks of benefits. That means that nearly 50% of those who receive EI sickness benefits are left without a cent after 15 weeks, even though they are still sick. They already have to deal with the stress of getting treatment and going to all of the necessary medical appointments, and then they are left without a cent after 15 weeks.

Let us not forget that, unfortunately, nearly one in two Canadians are diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. How long does it take to recover from cancer treatment? It can take up to 52 weeks, on average. There is a big difference between 15 and 52 weeks.

Sickness benefits are the only type of EI benefits that have never been brought up to date, and they were implemented in 1971. I was not even born yet. My daughter, who was born in 2002, always tells me that the year 2000 seems like a long time ago, so I cannot imagine what she would think of this.

I still have a lot to say, but I am short on time. I will therefore close by saying that we are proposing a period of 50 weeks of sickness benefits because 15 weeks to heal is not enough.

● (1340)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to offer support for the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie's motion, Motion No. 194, and I would like to thank him for bringing this issue to the floor for debate.

Canadians have worked hard to achieve the lowest unemployment rate in over 40 years. However, this number can only tell us so much about the employment situation in Canada. While good jobs are being created by Canadian businesses every day, there are still hard-working people who put in a full day's work but receive barely part-time compensation.

Our government has worked hard to support Canadian labour and the right of association. Immediately after the election, our government passed Bill C-4 and Bill C-5. These bills restored fairness and balance to labour relations by repealing legislation that undermined and weakened labour rights in our country. However, there is much more to do to ensure working Canadians receive fair treatment and fair compensation.

This motion speaks to a serious and growing problem across Canada that if left unaddressed could lead to serious labour issues. That is why this motion is so important. An in-depth study on precarious employment in Canada can provide the government with a blueprint to tackle this issue head-on.

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As was pointed out earlier by the member for Sault Ste. Marie when speaking to this motion, precarious employment is tricky to nail down. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that a fifth of professionals are in some form of precarious work. Furthermore, the survey found that professionals in precarious employment are more likely to have a post-graduate degree than professionals who are in non-precarious work. Professional women are also more likely than their male counterparts to be in precarious situations, with women accounting for 60% of all professionals in a precarious work circumstance. Clearly, precarious work does not fit neatly into the norms of the traditional work environment and traditional work definitions.

These statistics offer far more questions than answers, questions that the HUMA committee can begin to unravel. While we do not know all that we would like to know, the root of this problem clearly lies in our rapidly changing economy. Thankfully, government has already started to address some of the stress points in this changing economy.

To provide young people the skills and networking opportunities necessary to find meaningful employment, our government invested \$221 million in Mitacs, for example. This program creates 10,000 paid internships per year, providing the experience young people need to succeed. This program, coupled with the \$73-million investment in the student work-integrated learning program, means nearly 60,000 Canadian students will benefit from a paid internship over the next five years.

The Government of Canada has also partnered with Ryerson University to create Canada's largest work-integrated learning, recruitment and reporting platform, known as "Magnet". Magnet combines a network of employers, post-secondary institutions, industry associations and community partners to match skills with employment opportunities.

On February 14, the hon. Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour as well as the Minister of Finance announced plans for a new future skills centre and future skills council. To support this initiative, the Government of Canada is investing \$225 million over four years and \$75 million per year thereafter in future skills development.

However, it is not enough to prevent people from becoming precariously employed. We need to develop pathways for precarious workers to acquire skills that are in demand. In budget 2017, the government initiated a three-year pilot project to help adults who want to return to school, with an investment of \$287 million over three years. It is clear, as the national and international economies change, that Canada and Canadians must put an emphasis on lifelong learning and skills development.

• (1345)

The disruption in the labour market calls for a flexible and forward-thinking policy. For this policy to be effective, we need a two-pronged approach. The first begins with Motion No. 194 to identify and narrow down the indicators of precarious employment. As the motion calls for, we need to dig into the data to come to a more complete understanding of what exactly precarious employment is both in terms of who it is affecting and in terms of its larger role in the Canadian economy.

The second part of this plan depends on a suite of flexible and proactive programs to lead young people to opportunities for quality employment. The plan must also offer those in precarious work situations a route to new opportunities or new skills and new training that will allow them to find fair, meaningful and reliable employment.

Yesterday the finance minister echoed the Prime Minister's comment that the global economy is changing faster than it ever has before, and it is moving slower now than it ever will in the future. If Canadians are to prosper and find security for themselves and their families in a changing global economy, we need to understand how these shifts will affect workers and Canadians.

As indicated in the speech by the member for Sault Ste. Marie and his motion, Canadians affected by precarious employment do not fit neatly into one or two industries or demographics.

Our government has taken steps to strengthen union rights to association and to provide access to education and skills training programs. However, precarious employment is unlike other forms of work and demands a more thorough examination by Parliament. Understanding the indicators of precarious employment will help federal, provincial and municipal governments address under-compensated workers.

When we tolerate full-time work turning into part-time pay with no benefits, we run a serious risk of losing ground that workers and Canadians will struggle with over the next generation.

As legislators, we have a responsibility to act in the best interests of Canadians, which is why I will be supporting Motion No. 194. I urge all members to also support Motion No. 194.

I would like to thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for bringing this motion to the floor for debate.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Motion No. 194, a private member's motion requesting the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to undertake a study on precarious employment in Canada.

Before I go to my speech, I want to mention that we had a lot of discussions over the last of couple of days, especially during question period, about the sanctity and independence of committees. It seems that more and more, especially at the HUMA committee, we are having members of the government put through motions on the floor to basically force the committee to do these types of studies. I would encourage members to try to bring their motions to the committee so that it has the opportunity to practise its own independence and we can study the things all of us agree on.

Even though we agree with this subject, a lot of the work that the motion is asking us to do has already been done before. There have been numerous government studies on precarious employment. I believe we will be repeating ourselves a lot over the next couple of weeks. That being said, I will get off my soapbox and get to my speech.

This private member's motion is asking the committee to “develop a definition of precarious employment, including specific indicators, as well as examine current data and options to expand available data”. It also asks us to “identify the role that precarious employment plays in the economy and in the federally regulated private sector and the impact it has on the lives of [regular] Canadians.”

The area I want to focus on first is the request for the committee to develop a definition of precarious employment. I assume this is asking us to better understand the causes and the effects, as well as to conduct any analysis on the topic, including the scope of what is encompassed in precarious employment and what is excepted under that definition, whatever it may be.

However, there are many definitions that already exist of precarious employment, which brings me back to my point that we will be going over roads already well travelled as we do this study.

According to the International Labour Organization, precarious employment simply refers to an inadequacy of rights and protection at work. This can apply to informal work, but also to several types of formal work, including subcontracting, temporary contracts, interim work, certain types of self-employment and involuntary part-time work. These types of employment are more precarious because they are associated with reduced financial security stemming from lower wages, less access to benefits, such as private pension plans and complementary health insurance, and greater uncertainty about future employment income.

Since the 1980s, temporary and contract work and self-employment have grown faster than permanent, full-time employment. Many of the jobs being created are defined by insecurity and uncertainty. By contrast, secure employment offers benefits and a possible better-defined career path. However, over the last few decades, it has become much more difficult to find.

For example, through a study of the Library of Parliament, it is estimated between 27% and 45% of all Canadian workers do not have what we traditionally think of as full-time work. It is a surprisingly large number that at times almost half of Canadians would not be employed in areas that we would traditionally consider to be stable, full-time jobs. Moreover, a large proportion of these non-standard jobs, as high as 25% of the paid workforce, would be considered precarious. That is a big number when almost a quarter of Canadians are working in a sector or job situation that would be defined as precarious.

I would like to turn back to what we are experiencing in Alberta right now, where we have some of the highest unemployment in the country. A lot of that stems from an inability to get resource projects and critical infrastructure built. Those unemployment numbers are really misleading.

• (1350)

Although we have the highest unemployment in the country outside of Atlantic Canada, those numbers are likely higher than what is reported by Statistics Canada. So many of these people who have been out of work are small business owners, contractors, such as pipe-fitters, welders, geologists, physicists, those types of self-employed contractors who have made their living for decades in the

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energy sector in Alberta, but now find themselves in a very precarious position. That position is likely unemployed.

I have certainly heard from many of my constituents who have not been working for more than two years. In Alberta we are very used to the booms and busts of the energy sector, but this is the first time in my lifetime, in my memory, that I have seen it so dire, where we do not have that light at the end of the tunnel. It seems that every force is working against us, provincial and federal governments that do not support the energy sector.

As part of this study, it is important we expand the definition of precarious employment to include those people who have their own businesses, who are self-employed, who are contractors and that those numbers be included in Statistics Canada's unemployment numbers. That would give us a much more accurate picture of what is going on, not only in western Canada but certainly in other places across the country.

Another reason we see such a high number of Canadians working in precarious employment is the significant and rapid changes in technology. This is being driven by the digital revolution, where many Canadians are finding jobs that simply did not exist six months or six years ago. When I was in college, it was never thought of, let alone dreamed of. These jobs are tied with opportunities around the world. Through the Internet, we are connected to every corner of this globe. There are other demographic changes and these are creating new job opportunities, but also new challenges when it comes to employment opportunities.

In particular, these transformations are contributing to the increase in non-standard forms of employment, such as self-employment, temporary contract work and independent contracting. Non-standard forms of employment offer valuable flexibility to some workers and reduce barriers to employment to those excluded from the labour market.

Non-standard forms of employment should be encouraging Canadians to start their own businesses. We have always encouraged Canadians to do this. Our small business owners are responsible for more than 90% of the jobs created in our country. Small business owners are the foundation of our economy. We want to ensure we encourage them to be successful and give them an atmosphere and policies to ensure they are successful.

As part of the rapid changes in technology and how we do business, not only in Canada but around the world, workers are also exposed to new risks. For example, gig or crowd workers are given contracts for specific tasks and thus have very little job security. They also tend to have little access to social protection.

Non-standard employment is certainly not a new phenomenon, however, we do see a difference in the types of jobs, the social demands and a technological change. With well-paying skilled labour jobs in our natural resource sector disappearing because of poor Liberal policies, Canadians are forced to turn to employment alternatives just to make ends meet.

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I want to tell a quick story about one particular small business owner in my constituency, who has a welding company that builds storage tanks and works on drilling rigs in the energy sector. He employed 10 other subcontract welders. Over the last two years, the owner has had to lay off all of his welders and is now trying to find a job outside of his own small business. Those 10 welders as well as this small business owner are not included in the unemployment numbers. He had what is termed as precarious employment before, but now, because of the job crisis in Alberta, his job truly is precarious.

As vice-chair of the HUMA committee, I will be supporting the member's motion. I welcome the opportunity to study precarious employment and the consultations that have been done already.

• (1355)

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege and an honour to rise to speak in the second hour of debate on my private member's motion, Motion No. 194.

Since the first hour of debate at the end of November, I have learned even more about Canadians' thoughts on precarious employment. I have heard from constituents who not only shared their personal stories but also their unique points of view on defining precarious employment. In late November, I had the opportunity to be part of a discussion hosted by the Pearson Centre's Year 4 Conference, where precarious employment was acknowledged across a broad range of industries and organizations. This diversity of experiences and different points of view is at the heart of why Canada requires a standard definition on precarious employment and its specific indicators.

In order to develop effective public policy, we must first have a clear, defined and consistent definition of precarious employment in Canada. Given that it is a priority of our government to make evidence-based policies that reflect the needs of Canadians, it becomes necessary to study and consult, to build a strong foundation of knowledge, so that we can truly understand and define precarious employment in Canada. It is important we work from a national, accepted definition of precarious employment, which applies specific indicators, in order to ensure continuity across this great nation.

I want to take this time to thank my colleagues who spoke to my motion and provided various points of view. I thank the member for Perth—Wellington, a current member of the HUMA committee, for his useful views on a potential direction for the study. I thank the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski for her continued work on this topic, the member for Guelph for adding substantive information to this debate, and the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who did an excellent job speaking to my motion in his first English speech in the chamber during the first hour of debate. We may not agree on everything but we do agree a study is critical.

I would like to thank the speakers today who did a wonderful job in supporting my motion on precarious employment. I thank the member for Newmarket—Aurora. I thank the member for Foothills for his input. I look forward to his contributions as the vice-chair of the HUMA committee. I thank the member for Drummond for his remarks as well.

I was very humbled, bringing this forward, by the reactions I received from various people across the nation and from my own constituents. In particular, I would like to especially thank Ms. Jones, whose story I shared in the first hour of debate on my motion. I also want to thank and acknowledge various organizations in my riding that advocate for better employment options for individuals, as well as organizations that support families and a great number of people, organizations such as the Centre for Social Justice and Good Works, St. Vincent Place, the United Way of Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma District, Employment Solutions and the Sault Community Career Centre. Their work is so incredibly important to our local communities.

Unfortunately, too many Canadians are facing difficult circumstances and have too few options. My constituents work hard, Canadians work hard, and they deserve some stability for themselves and their families.

As I mentioned during the first hour of debate on Motion No. 194, there is a vast amount of research available on different aspects of precarious employment and what all this research shows us is that no one is immune to the effects of precarious work. This point bears repeating because any Canadian, no matter age, experience, socio-economic level, education or sector, can very easily find themselves in a position of precarious employment.

I respectfully call on all members of the House to offer their full support to Motion No. 194 so that we can better serve all working Canadians and their families.

• (1400)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

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[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 27, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

● (1405)

[*English*]

It being 2:06 p.m. the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:06 p.m.)

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