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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 9, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 9, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 66 of the Official Languages Act, to lay upon the table the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, covering the period from April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 93rd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House, and I would like to move concurrence in the report now.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

CHILDREN'S WELFARE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present, on behalf of Elizabeth Fry Society activists across the country, a petition with several hundred names from New Brunswick.

The petitioners, joining thousands of other Canadians, request that the Government of Canada recognize the barriers that exist within their own direct payment system. The federal government currently discriminates against children who are in irregular family situations, irregular meaning their parents may be homeless or incarcerated. They may be being raised by extended members of the family.

The petitioners from Elizabeth Fry Society request, which celebrates its anniversary this week, that discrimination end when it comes to the Canada child benefit and all special allowances for all children.

As my colleagues know, the Elizabeth Fry Society does good work across the country. I am very happy to present this petition that would end discrimination against children in all its forms in federal government services.

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning with a petition signed by residents throughout Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to halt any plans to purchase the Trans Mountain pipeline, and I know we do not speak to the substance. Clearly, this petition speaks to an issue that has been resolved. I can imagine the petitioners would hope that we do not proceed with any expansion.

Routine Proceedings

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today outlining that Iranian authorities have been condemned for the arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and murder of Iranian Canadians, including imprisoning web developer Saeed Malekpour, in violation of international human rights law, which expressly prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, as mandated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to, jointly with the Prime Minister, personally and publicly call for the release of Saeed Malekpour, a permanent resident of Canada, who is in his 10th year of unjust imprisonment for his courage and determination to make technology more accessible and promote freedom of expression and democratic values.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a petition to save our seed.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to enshrine in legislation the inalienable rights of farmers and other Canadians to freely save, reuse, select, exchange and sell seeds. In addition, they call upon the Government of Canada to refrain from making any regulations under the Plant Breeders' Rights Act that would further erode farmers' rights and/or add to farmers' costs by restricting or eliminating the farmers' privilege.

CHILDREN'S WELFARE

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a petition from the Elizabeth Fry Society.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to end discrimination in the supports the federal government provides to children so they are not discriminated against for the situation they are being raised in and to ensure that all children have access to the Canada child benefit, the children's special allowances and any other programs like these.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources has granted permit approval to expand the landfill managed by the New England Waste Services of Vermont in Coventry, Vermont. Right next door, Lake Memphremagog supplies drinking water to 175,000 Canadians.

In this first petition, the people of Brome—Missisquoi are calling on the Minister of Foreign Affairs to ask the International Joint Commission to conduct an environmental impact assessment of the plan to expand the landfill in Coventry, Vermont by 51 acres.

• (1010)

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition, the people of Brome—Missisquoi are calling on the Minister of Foreign Affairs to begin the process of amending the Boundary Waters Treaty concluded between Canada and the United

States in 1990 to include environmental standards to protect the waters in both countries. I introduced a bill to that effect last week.

[*English*]

CHILDREN'S WELFARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce a petition initiated by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Canada, which does fantastic work on behalf of women and children across the country.

The petitioners points out that many children are excluded from receiving the Canada child benefit and children's special allowances, as they are in informal care arrangements and their caregivers are ineligible to claim the tax deduction for children. They therefore cannot establish entitlement. Many children whose parents are incarcerated, homeless or suffer from addiction are not receiving the funds they ought to. In many cases, ironically, these are some of the most needy children in Canada.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure that all children receive all benefits they are entitled to from all government programs, without discrimination based on their family arrangement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition from the Elizabeth Fry Society on children's rights in Canada. Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits all forms of discrimination against children, regardless of their family situation.

Unfortunately, Canada is not currently abiding by the convention. Sometimes the help provided by the Canada child benefit and other federal government programs does not get to the children who so desperately need it because of their family situation. The Elizabeth Fry Society is calling on us to remedy that.

[*English*]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from Elizabeth Fry Society advocates, who support the call to ensure that all children benefit from special protection measures and assistance in ensuring the rights of highly mobile children, recognizing Canada's obligation as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many children are excluded from receiving the Canada child benefit and the children's special allowances.

The petitioners therefore call on the government to ensure that all children receive, without discrimination in any form, benefit from special protection measures and assistance.

I want to thank the Elizabeth Fry for its good work and for drawing the attention of the House to this petition.

Government Orders

Does the member support, and is he willing to speak to his fellows on that side of the House about supporting, amendments that have been brought forward by a number of members in this place on behalf of witnesses who appeared before committee and indigenous people who wrote to the government? They include requiring that the indigenous languages commissioner be indigenous, enshrining the United Nations declaration as a legally binding provision in the bill, adding specific reference to the sixties scoop and taking specific measures to respect the language rights of the Inuit.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, that is a very long question. There is a lot in there to unpack.

Obviously, I believe this bill does reflect the will of the House when we put forward our ideals and our values in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The federal government went to the United Nations in 2016, 2017 and 2018 to highlight once again Canada's support for the absolute acceptance of UNDRIP.

We are now at third reading. We have heard from a number of witnesses already on this bill. It is time to move forward, though. It is time to make sure this legislation passes, because if we continue to debate and debate, these languages will die. They are dying.

I was speaking with people from New Zealand, and only 10% of Maori are actually speaking the Maori language in New Zealand. That was an absolute disaster, but they started rebuilding the language, working together as a society, indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and trying to come up with a path forward. Today, the language is spoken even in Parliament, and even non-Maori people speak the language and can do introductions.

I hope that one day all MPs will be able to at least do an introduction in the Cree language:

[Member spoke in Cree as follows:]

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[Cree text interpreted as follows:]

"Hello. I greet you. I am glad to see you all."

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.):

[Member spoke in Cree as follows:]

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[Cree text interpreted as follows:]

Mr. Speaker, I want to know about this bill, about the youth, if the youth are affected.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:

[Member spoke in Cree as follows:]

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[Cree text interpreted as follows:]

Mr. Speaker, that is good.

There is a lot of suicide, and it affects our communities. If the youth know their identity, it helps with their character.

[English]

•(1035)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague across the way for not only talking about indigenous languages but showing us in practice how certain ideas can be conveyed in indigenous languages that he knows.

I know many of us are involved in learning other languages, whether that be French, English or other languages. I wonder if the member could share a bit about the reality that maybe certain ideas are easier to convey in some languages than in others, that there is certain knowledge or experience inherently embedded in the way people might express themselves in one language that is different in another, and therefore that the preservation of indigenous languages is a way of preserving, through those languages, certain ideas, certain values, certain experiences that maybe do not come across as clearly in other languages.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, at 22, when I was in the Canadian Armed Forces, I was fortunate to be transferred to the Valcartier military base. At the time, I did not speak a word of French. I am from Alberta. My attitude toward the language of Molière was far from positive. It is sad but true.

I decided to learn French with the Royal 22nd Regiment in Valcartier, which I salute, and our comrades in battle, the 5th Field Ambulance. Within four months, I was fully bilingual because I did not use a word of English. For me, as an Albertan, it was a way to bring the two solitudes together. However, there are other people in Canada, the indigenous peoples.

Learning French opened up a whole new world for me. Being able to express myself in any language—my mother tongue, French or English—is extremely important to me. I learned that people in Quebec have a slightly different way of thinking than people in Alberta. We are all Canadians and we are all human beings, but we have a different take on some things. Communities work together in Quebec, whereas in Alberta, we tend to be more individualistic; we like to show that we can control our environment.

In my view, language is what commands our thoughts, in a way, and that is extremely important to our cultures. We must also provide that advantage to indigenous peoples, for they have a right to live according to their culture. When they take part in ceremonies, they communicate with their ancestors through their culture and their thoughts. They deserve to have that connection with the past. Maybe one day they will be able to speak Cree at work, at the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Montreal or Caisse Desjardins.

Government Orders

At least they can speak their languages at home and hear them on APTN, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. These people helped build Canada, a country that should be admired by all humanity. No other country on earth does this. We do have our problems and things that need improvement, but Canada is still the most wonderful country in the world.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of brevity, I will only say that I agree with most of what the hon. member just said. As a footnote, New Zealand has very strong policies in place for preserving the Maori language. It has reserved places in the House of Commons for Maori representatives, and thanks to proportional representation, it now has an equivalent number of Maori representatives in its Parliament to the proportion of Maori in the general population.

• (1040)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, yes, it is quite an incredible thing. For me, though, this bill really provides a sense of hope for many of my constituents and it is going to be building on to the future. This is really about reconciliation for me.

I understand there are seats reserved for Maori. In certain parliaments, such as the Parliament of Taiwan, there are also seats reserved for indigenous peoples. At the same time, I know I was elected simply based on my own merits. It is a large debate in our society whether we should reserve seats within what we call the “Liberal democracies”, whether people should have certain rights, different rights, or how those rights all work together.

In Canada, we seem to have come to a consensus surrounding the place of indigenous peoples, but also people who have arrived here in the last 400 years, whether they are French or English. We can all work together.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak in support of Bill C-91 and, in that context as well, to make some broader comments about the federal government's relationship with indigenous peoples.

During his 1981 inaugural address, former United States president Ronald Reagan said the following: “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.”

Looking at the history of Crown-indigenous relations and the challenges indigenous peoples face in Canada today, it is quite clear that so many of the particular challenges faced by indigenous peoples in our time as well stem from government intervention, the intervention of government in their lives in a way that does not respect their rights as individuals and, by extension, does not respect their identity and culture.

These types of interventions, big government interventions that deny the primacy of culture, that reject parental authority and familial autonomy, and that believe that governments and special interests, as opposed to property owners and local people, should control resource development, have caused significant challenges for many indigenous communities.

While some would seek to construct a false antagonism between Conservatives and indigenous communities, we recognize that it is the fundamentally Conservative principle that families and communities are more important than the state that could have paved, and could still pave, the path to meaningful reconciliation.

On the terrible history of residential schools, these schools were rooted in the idea that government should control the education system and use it to impose values and practices that are contrary to the teachings of parents and communities. That idea was wrong. It was deeply wrong of various non-state actors to collaborate in the implementation of this policy, and all of those collaborators have apologized, along with the government.

However, we should not forget that the root of this evil policy was that the state thought that it should and could interfere in the familial lives of indigenous peoples to impose an education system that was contrary to their beliefs and values. Approaches that deny the necessary involvement of parents in the education of their children, advanced out of paternalistic notions that government functionaries can raise children better than parents, are always wrong and always deeply damaging. We should certainly endeavour never to repeat the mistake of cutting parents out of decision-making about their children's education.

Today, we are discussing, in particular, the issue of indigenous languages. As I said, I and the rest of our Conservative caucus are very much in support of this legislation. We are very supportive of the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, and we recognize the need for governments to play a constructive role to undo the damage, often damage done by governments in the past.

It should be clear to anyone who has learned a second language that language is more than a neutral medium for exchanging information. Languages have certain assumptions embedded in their structure about what is true and important, which makes certain ideas easier to convey in some languages than in others. People who speak a particular language also understand the cultural logic embedded in that language and can access different information and traditions through that language.

The preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages help indigenous people and all Canadians benefit from a deeper understanding and appreciation of the ideas, history, culture and values of different indigenous nations. The preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages help to preserve and revitalize indigenous traditional knowledge, knowledge that benefits indigenous people and all Canadians.

I want to make a few comments here about traditional knowledge, because it is a very important concept, frequently invoked but rarely explored. We can think of two distinct ways of knowing about things: empirical ways of knowing and traditional ways of knowing.

Empirical ways of knowing involve testing and comparison. For example, if people want to find out if eating a certain compound reduces the risk of cancer, they might conduct a study whereby they have a group of people consume the compound on a regular basis, and another, comparable group not eat the compound. They would eventually compare the outcomes for the groups and see if one group contracted cancer at a higher rate than the other.

Government Orders

This would be an empirical test, and it would provide good and clear information, as long as the comparative groups were large enough and the researchers were careful to control for other factors. Empirical tests are great, although they can be costly and time-consuming. Assessing impacts over time in an empirical way obviously takes a lot of time.

Traditional ways of knowing are also driven by data, but the data used is the experience of generations past. A particular culture might teach that certain practices are good for one's health. Perhaps this is because, over thousands of years of tradition, that culture has observed how people do much better or worse in certain circumstances. Traditional knowledge and wisdom generally come from observation over time and over generations, but without a clearly defined, or at least well-remembered, research design.

• (1045)

Of course, traditional knowledge can, in certain cases, be wrong if people develop that knowledge by drawing the wrong conclusions from their observations, but it is also the case that empirical researchers can err by drawing the wrong conclusions from their observations. Empirical research is sometimes contradicted by subsequent empirical research, just as traditional knowledge may in certain instances be contradicted by empirical research and traditional knowledge may be contradicted by other traditional knowledge.

However, it would be foolish, as some might propose, to discard or ignore traditional knowledge. It is valid and reasonable to draw at least tentative conclusions based on the experience and observation of others, including one's ancestors.

Indigenous communities in Canada have traditional knowledge about this land, about culture, about family and values, about life and dignity and about many other things. Language is often the mechanism by which that traditional knowledge is passed on.

It is also worth observing that it is not just indigenous communities here in Canada but all cultures and traditions that bring with them elements of traditional knowledge. The majority culture in the west has unfortunately become deeply skeptical of its own traditional knowledge.

Edmund Burke, the great English philosopher and politician, spoke of how we receive the goods of civilization from our parents and we pass them on to our progeny, and that we should thus be cautious in the innovations we undertake as a way to ensure that we are not unknowingly taking apart the substructure that holds together our prosperity and happiness. Burke talks, in different words, about the importance of our considering traditional knowledge in the decisions we make.

If a person buys a new house and sees that it has a pillar in a place that is not aesthetically pleasing, should this person immediately knock down the pillar or first ascertain whether the pillar is necessary for preserving the structure of the house? I would tell people not to knock down the pillar unless and until they can be certain that it is no longer needed. If they are certain it is not necessary, then it can be removed. However, if they are not certain, it is better to leave it in place, assuming that the pillar reflects the best

intentions of the previous owner and knowledge the owner had about the house, knowledge the new buyer does not possess.

A person's empirical knowledge might eventually supersede deference to the status quo, but in the absence of clear, empirical evidence, a person would probably be wise to defer to the status quo in the meantime.

We see issues involving empirical knowledge and traditional knowledge in many different policy areas. One such area, for example, is the regulation of complementary or natural health products. Many are concerned that the government may seek to regulate these products in the same way that it regulates pharmaceutical products, even requiring the same types and levels of testing, but this policy ignores the possible benefit of traditional knowledge, the fact that people have been successful at using certain products for thousands of years to treat certain ailments and that this can be a valid basis for people to make choices themselves about the self-care products they choose to use.

People who do not like this approach are free to only consume things that have been demonstrated, through double-blind studies, to improve health. However, most Canadians would be open to trying complementary health products alongside conventional treatments if the benefits of those products had some traditional knowledge pointing in their favour. Trying such products is precisely a way in which more data can be gathered about the impacts of certain products, with traditional knowledge and science both developed through continuing experimentation and observation.

I have written to the chair of the health committee to ask the committee to undertake a study on the health impacts of uninsured self-care products and services because I think this is an area that requires greater engagement and study from Parliament. This is just one area among many where we should take the idea of traditional knowledge seriously and recognize that it is complementary to, not antagonistic to, empirical knowledge.

Coming back to the issue of Crown-indigenous relations, I note that the horror of Canada's experience with residential schools is precisely an example of traditional knowledge about the critical nature of the bond between parents and children being ignored in favour of radical and capricious schemes to remake the world in a different way.

The architects of the residential school experience, we should note, did not just ignore the value of indigenous traditional knowledge, but also ignored the traditional knowledge of our own society. This is traditional knowledge about the vital importance of the link between parents and children.

I wrote the following recently in a column for the Post Millennial:

The idea that parents are the primary educators of their children, that human dignity is universal and immutable, that good societies are characterized by ordered liberty rooted in a shared conception of the common good, that people ought to live in accordance with the cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, courage and temperance, that productive work is essential for well being, that human rights are universal and stem from natural law—all of these and much more are part of the traditional knowledge of our civilization.

Unlike traditional knowledge in the scientific domain, traditional knowledge in the domain of politics and morality cannot be put under a microscope—but perhaps that makes the contributions of traditional knowledge in these areas that much more important.

Government Orders

• (1050)

This legislation, Bill C-91, through its work on language, seeks to preserve, through language, indigenous traditional knowledge, so I hope we will also bring to our subsequent debates in this place a greater understanding and appreciation for traditional knowledge in general and for the need to include it and reference it in our conversations.

Also in the area of Crown-indigenous relations, I would like to make a few remarks about the impact of natural resource development on indigenous communities.

The ability of indigenous communities to preserve and revitalize their languages, their traditions and their communities in general requires some degree of opportunity. Natural resource development is not an end in and of itself, but it can provide the capital for indigenous communities to make greater investments into things that matter more, such as family, community, culture and language. For that reason, many indigenous communities believe in resource development because it allows them to get ahead and achieve the objectives they identify for themselves. It allows them to do so without leaving their communities and moving to the city.

Our legal frameworks are supposed to recognize the importance of affected indigenous communities having a meaningful say in decisions about resource development. Unfortunately, the government has a track record of imposing anti-development policies on indigenous communities, in clear contravention of its legal obligations. This hurts these communities economically and weakens their ability to preserve their culture and language. This is yet another example of how inappropriate government intervention in the lives of indigenous peoples undermines their ability to preserve their identity and culture.

I can show the House clearly how the Prime Minister is failing to meet his legal obligations to indigenous peoples in this respect.

The natural resource committee was conducting a study on best practices for indigenous consultation. On January 31 of this year, I had an opportunity to question public servants about our obligations and our actions when it comes to that consultation.

This is what I asked:

Is there a duty to consult indigenous communities when those communities have put time, resources and money into a project going forward and then a government policy stops that progress from being put forward? Is there a duty to consult if indigenous communities are trying to move forward the development of a project and the government puts in place policies to stop that progress? Is there a duty to consult in that case?

Terence Hubbard, the director general at NRCan, replied with the following:

...the Crown's duty to consult is triggered any time it's taking a decision that could impact on an aboriginal community's rights and interests.

I followed up with this:

Okay. It seems pretty obvious, then, that policies like the offshore drilling moratorium in the Arctic, like Bill C-69, like Bill C-48, like the tanker exclusion zone, would have a significant impact on indigenous communities and on their ability to provide for their own communities through economic development, which they may well have planned, and in many cases did plan, in advance of the introduction of those policies.

Let me drill down on a few of those examples.

What consultation happened by the government before the imposition of the tanker exclusion zone? I'm talking about before Bill C-48 was actually proposed, when the Prime Minister first came into office and introduced the tanker exclusion zone.

From the responses to my questions, it became clear that none of the departments represented in that hearing, none of the leading public servants who were involved in overseeing how the federal government consults with indigenous peoples, knew about anything to do with indigenous consultations around the tanker exclusion zone. Almost certainly those consultations did not happen.

While I was in the Arctic with the foreign affairs committee last fall, we spoke to many different indigenous communities about issues around cultural preservation, traditional knowledge and natural resource development. We were told on a number of occasions about concerns regarding anti-development policies coming from the government and their impact on the capacity of indigenous communities to prosper and use their resources to protect their culture in other ways they see fit. We were told in particular that the government's approach to consulting northern communities before imposing an offshore drilling ban in the Arctic was to phone local premiers 45 minutes before the announcement. There was no meaningful consultation on an offshore drilling ban. Instead, the announcement was made by the Prime Minister, along with Barrack Obama.

This showed flagrant disrespect for indigenous communities and for the way in which their ability to prosper and develop impacts their ability to preserve their culture.

These conversations we had in the Arctic and other places made it clear that the Prime Minister has absolutely no interest in consulting with indigenous communities before imposing anti-energy policies that affect their recognized right to pursue growth and opportunity within their communities.

• (1055)

Of course, some indigenous people, some indigenous leaders and some indigenous nations oppose certain resource development projects, and their perspectives should be incorporated into meaningful consultation processes that do not give any one community a veto over projects that impact multiple communities.

The Crown duty to consult does not just exist for pro-energy policy; it also exists for anti-energy policy, policies that deny indigenous communities the opportunity to proceed with plans to build up their own self-sufficiency and to fund projects that relate to cultural revitalization.

The government, it is clear, does not actually care about consulting indigenous communities, given its record. It simply wants to use consultation as an excuse to hold up resource development in certain cases, while completely ignoring indigenous communities when it wants to pursue an agenda that is different from what those communities want. For the government, consultation means deciding what it wants first and then finding people who agree with it to help legitimize a decision that has already been made. This is not in keeping with the spirit of reconciliation or even with the law around the duty to consult.

Government Orders

A Conservative government led by our leader would show real respect for indigenous people by ensuring meaningful engagement in communities, even in cases where there are differences of opinion. We will support the economic aspirations of indigenous communities, as well as their linguistic, cultural and social aspirations, because we understand that a culture is more important than politics. We will reflect our Conservative values in our approach to this critical area, recognizing that big, interfering government has held indigenous people back for too long.

The government must indeed be a constructive partner, but above all else, the government must always ensure that it is not getting in the way. Getting in the way has happened far too often in the past, and it continues, but it must come to an end.

We desire, in all of Canada, to see strong communities, strong families and strong, resilient individuals. I am very pleased to be supporting Bill C-91 and I look forward to the work that can be done to build on it in the future through the government working in partnership with indigenous communities, through the government getting out of the way of indigenous communities and supporting their own efforts to thrive, to preserve and revitalize their culture, and to strengthen their economies and their communities in so many other ways.

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

[Member spoke in Cree as follows:]

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[Cree text interpreted as follows:]

This bill is very important to my constituents.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I believe personally that this legislation provides a great deal of hope to many of my constituents. It is a very important aspect of reconciliation.

When my colleague across the way thinks of reconciliation, specifically with Bill C-91, would he not agree that this is a significant step forward on reconciliation?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I will just repeat some of what I said, which is that I and our caucus are very supportive of this legislation. We understand the importance of language as more than just a neutral medium of exchange, but rather as something that entails within it cultural experiences and values that are best understood and conveyed within the context of those languages.

The work of preserving language is important as an end in and of itself, but it also is important for preserving knowledge and experience to benefit the next generation of indigenous Canadians.

It also benefits all of us. It gives all of us an opportunity to learn from the knowledge that comes through these languages.

● (1100)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was happy to hear that the member understands the importance of language to indigenous communities

across the country as the core of their culture and the core of reconciliation.

We have 70-some indigenous languages across Canada. Most of them are in British Columbia, where it is very diverse. In the Okanagan, where I live, the Syilx people speak Nsyilxcen. There are only 50 fluent speakers of Nsyilxcen left. It is at risk of extinction, as are three-quarters of indigenous languages in Canada.

Reversing that trend is at the heart of reconciliation, and it takes money. The NDP is very much in favour of legislation to benefit indigenous language knowledge across Canada, but we see one big flaw in this legislation: There is no long-term funding. The Syilx people have a fluency training program, one of only three in Canada, whereby they are desperately trying to teach young people fluency in the language. This takes time and money, and yet there is no funding in this legislation for that kind of work. That work is at the heart of this whole idea of retaining these languages and retaining indigenous cultures across Canada.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it might sound like a bit of a quibble, but I am not convinced that language is at the core of culture. Often values are at the core of culture, but language is an important mechanism by which those things are passed on. It is an important distinction I wanted to make.

To the member's comment about funding, cost obviously has to be considered, and it is important for a government to be engaged in supporting these processes. We can look at two different ways in which these types of important programs and activities can be supported. One is the engagement of government, which is definitely an element, and another is the way in which we can allow and support economic development to take place within these communities. This would give them the resources to invest in projects around language and other areas.

I am not saying it is one or the other, but it is both. Supporting economic development is a key part of the picture. There are certainly many indigenous communities in my province that have been able to benefit from a natural resource development, and that has given them greater resources and greater capacity to undertake cultural preservation activities.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the as-ever thoughtful approach of my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan on this issue. We may disagree around some of the aspects of his speech, but he is clearly very thoughtful about issues of reconciliation.

However, when the member's leader was before the Assembly of First Nations and was asked what the Conservative platform is going to look like and what his party thinks about reconciliation, as I recall, the answer was, “You'll have to wait. We haven't finished figuring that out yet.”

I wonder if my hon. colleague can shed any light on how the Conservative Party thinks we can advance the essential quest for justice and reconciliation.

Government Orders

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, if I can just clarify the aspect in terms of our leader's interactions with indigenous leaders, I am very pleased that he is very actively engaged, meeting with indigenous leaders across the country, listening to them and sharing aspects of his vision for the country.

The leader of the Green Party knows that there is a process by which political parties communicate their general values, inclinations, principles and certain policy issues, and there is a certain timing in which specific aspects of those programs are laid out. One does not necessarily publish the details of one's platform six or 12 months out from the time at which people will be making a choice on it.

In terms of the specifics of Conservative values with respect to reconciliation, I talked about many of them in my speech today. We strongly believe in the importance of partnering with indigenous communities and supporting reconciliation. We see in Conservative values this idea of the importance of culture, of family having primacy over politics and the need for governments to be partners with but also to get out of the way of communities.

That is perhaps the kind of discussion they are more likely to hear from Conservative parties in general, and it is the right approach when we see how, historically, the problem for many indigenous communities has been that they have been held back by government policy that has been overly interventionist and overly paternalistic. Those values will be a good guide for us as we move forward with greater detail and greater specifics.

• (1105)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was an honour for me to rise earlier to ask a question and be responded to in the Cree language. We are obviously supporting this bill on indigenous languages. However, it is not enough to have the language; the language needs to be heard and understood. I sometimes feel like the government is not always hearing and understanding.

In my colleague's speech, he mentioned one or two examples of that. Could he expand on them?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent work in this area and so many others in this place.

On the issue of the government listening to Canadians in general, and particularly in the context of listening to indigenous communities, I spoke about the issue of resource development and how the government does not want to listen to the voices of many indigenous leaders who have been sounding the alarm about, for instance, Bill C-48 and Bill C-69. This is legislation that would make it virtually impossible for certain kinds of resource development projects to go forward in the future, which would undermine this incredible opportunity for prosperity for many indigenous nations.

Along with many on the far left, the government wants to elevate the voices of some people in the indigenous community while ignoring the voices of others. Our consultation approach needs to listen to everybody. We need to make sure those who maybe do not share my particular views on resource development are still very much heard and listened to as part of a meaningful consultation process in which the outcome is not predetermined.

However, I also think that process cannot give any one actor within it a veto over moving forward. It must listen to all of those voices, including those who are in favour of development. This is one of many areas, related in particular to the conversation around Crown-indigenous relations, where the government is unfortunately failing to listen.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the government and the Government House Leader for allowing me some time to speak to this legislation even though they know I am not speaking in support of it. I do appreciate the opportunity.

I think it is important that my voice be heard. I am the only Inuk in the House who can speak freely and vote with my conscience. I cannot in all good conscience support this legislation, because it excludes the Inuit language.

When I voted against Bill C-91 at second reading, I said I would bring forward an amendment, and I did. The minister said in the House that he was open to amendments and was hoping to find one that would work. I spoke with him personally about the intent of my amendment, and he seemed disposed to it.

It was a pretty innocuous amendment. ITK, which has spoken out and come out strongly against this legislation, would not have supported my amendment. Its members felt that the legislation did not go far enough, that it was not strong enough. They worked with my colleagues in the NDP to bring forward other amendments at committee.

In my discussions with the minister, he indicated to me that part of the problem with the amendments and what ITK was looking for with the legislation was that it did not fit the mandate and the scope of the legislation. I was very careful to draft my amendment to make sure that it fit within the scope and the mandate of the legislation.

Having sat on the other side, I understand that we are limited as to what we can and cannot do by the mandate that we have. I was very cognizant of that in bringing forward that amendment. My amendment simply left the door open for the minister to have the ability to work with Inuit for the inclusion of our language.

We have often heard the Prime Minister and ministers in the House claim that when it comes to committees, members are independent. We hear that they are not told how to vote at committee. I now know that is not the case. At this committee, we have the same old same old. All the Liberal members voted my amendment down, as they were told. In fact, they voted down every single opposition amendment.

I may be a little naive, but I am of the belief that committees of the House are supposed to be where all members, regardless of party affiliation, can work together to make improvements to legislation. Believe me, this legislation needs improving.

To vote down amendments without regard or consideration, simply because one is a Liberal and others are not, is childish politics. It has no place in our democracy.

Government Orders

In Nunavut, we govern by consensus. We have no political divisions. All members work together for the good of the people. We could use more of that in this place. Bill C-91 would be a better piece of legislation for it.

Last week, I asked the Prime Minister why, in the budget, he was funding ITK directly and bypassing the Government of Nunavut to deal with our housing and health care crises, even though the Government of Nunavut is the service provider. He got pretty hot under the collar. He was very agitated when he said, “I will make no apologies for a distinctions-based approach”.

That is exactly the approach that ITK thought was being used when developing this legislation. However, it has become very clear that the government never had any intention of using it, and this is one of the major problems that ITK has with it.

In those comments, the Prime Minister seemed to be saying that for the budget he was taking a nation-to-nation approach with Inuit. Well, he cannot have it both ways, nation building with Inuit in one bill and excluding us on another.

• (1110)

This is very important legislation and long overdue. The preservation of languages is important to all cultures. Now, for the first time, we are recognizing indigenous languages, ensuring they are protected from extinction, just not all of them.

For that reason, because Inuit languages are not included in the legislation, I cannot support it. I look forward to any comments or questions from members.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his testimony.

He may have given a speech, but he was also testifying to what he experienced at this committee, when he saw the amendments being rejected and this government showing its paternalistic approach. I regret that a member has to wonder whether he is naive for thinking that committee members should normally be able to make independent decisions without being controlled by the government.

Does he think that the government is rushing a bit at the end of its term to do something significant, after realizing that it did nothing for four years about something that was supposedly important to its mandate? Does he think the government figures that even if the bill is not perfect, it is good enough?

What does my colleague think about that?

• (1115)

[*English*]

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for the government as to the timing of the legislation, but I have heard it was trying to bring forward other pieces of legislation that were derailed. The Liberals felt they needed to bring something forward, so this was brought forward. ITK and NTI feel that this was rushed and that more time could have been taken to ensure it was done appropriately and better.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon.

member's recognition that it is important we hear a diversity of voices in this place. As I have always said, we will ensure that members have the opportunity to raise their comments and concerns so we can do better as we move forward.

I heard the member for Kitchener—Conestoga use unparliamentary terminology. I would appreciate if he would not put words in my mouth and tell me what I think or what I believe.

I would like to remind the hon. member, who gave such an eloquent speech, that amendments from the opposition were accepted at committee.

The legislation being debated today has been amended from its original form. I would like some acknowledgement that the legislation does put financial obligation on the government of the day. That means a new government would have to change the legislation, because there is an obligation on the government of the day to now fund languages.

I agree that languages have been taken away for far too long. We need to ensure we strengthen them. I am proud of my first language and I would not be who I am today. We have done a disservice when it comes to our relationship with indigenous peoples. This is not the end all and be all, but it definitely is a step in the right direction. We have a lot more work to do.

Would the member agree that we need to work better together, that this is a step and that we could find a path to find a better way forward for communities so we strengthen those relationships?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I agree with the principle of the legislation. The member is saying that we need to work together to continually improve things. I provided the Liberals an opportunity to do that and they chose to defeat the amendment.

I spoke with the minister. I was very cognizant to bring forward an amendment that fit within the scope and the mandate of what he had to work with. It would have given him the ability to open that door to work with Inuit. The Liberals chose to defeat that.

It was a lost opportunity. I wish the Liberals would have taken that opportunity. Bill C-91 would have been better for it.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question, but in preface to that, I want to address the comment made about my comments to the member for Waterloo. I was simply saying that when the input is requested, the Liberals listen with their ears, but then they shut it down. All I said was, “They shut it down”.

I would ask my colleague if in fact my understanding is true. Amendments were made in committee, but all of them were shut down by the majority Liberal members of that committee. I simply want to confirm that this is factual.

• (1120)

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Mr. Speaker, to my recollection, that is the case. However, as the government House leader pointed out, some amendments were accepted. I would have to go back and check. When I was in attendance, all the ones that were brought forward by opposition at committee were defeated. However, I am not 100% sure if that is the exhaustive list of them.

Government Orders

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to set the record straight.

During the deliberations at committee, a number of amendments were accepted from different parties. At every stage, the member for Nunavut was invited to take part. As a government, we made every accommodation for that participation to take place. However, he was not at all of the proceedings. Therefore, the member may not have been privy to some of the amendments that did pass, but they are on the record. The bill we passed at second reading, and which is before us today, is different. It is amended. We are debating the bill as amended.

I would ask the member this. How was Inuktitut excluded from the legislation? I am a little perplexed with the claim that the language was currently excluded. With respect to the framework, it is there. Every indigenous language is included in the legislation, which directly addresses the issues of every indigenous language currently spoken.

Also, how do clauses 8 and 9 allow the government to work with the provinces and territories?

I would like the member's comments on those two questions.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, all the amendments that were brought forward when I was at committee were defeated. However, I did take the minister's word that he was looking for a solution and he would come up with an amendment that would keep everybody happy. It would be a compromise. It did not seem to be the case with my amendment.

The member has said that we are dealing with an amended bill, but none of the amendments deal with any of the issues that were raised by ITK or NTI. They stated publicly that the legislation was in no way co-developed with Inuit. As the member for Nunavut representing the largest population of Inuit in Canada, I cannot support the legislation because of the concerns they have raised, which were apparently ignored by the government.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague for what I think is a very principled position.

I think all of us in the House really want to see indigenous languages preserved, protected and enhanced across the whole country. However, we in this party share those concerns that the legislation before us mystifyingly leaves out Inuit languages. In a bill that is supposed to include indigenous languages, it would not require the indigenous languages commissioner to even be indigenous, makes no reference to UNDRIP and has some significant, serious flaws. Therefore, we will join with him in opposing the bill, quite reluctantly. Of course, we would like to see indigenous language legislation passed.

How is it possible for a federal government to bring forward legislation to this place to deal with indigenous languages and exclude the Inuit languages?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, the president of ITK and the president of NTI spoke publicly against the

legislation because of that exclusion. As I mentioned at the onset of the development of Bill C-91, they were led to believe it would be a distinctions-based approach to developing the legislation. It seems that now that we have it, it is not.

One of the things I tried to bring forward with my amendment, which was a soft amendment and it would have been a very friendly, easy amendment to accept, would have allowed the minister to have the door open to work with Inuit, if he chose to do so. It was not a "shall", and it was not a "must"; it was a "may".

I am kind of baffled as to why that amendment was defeated. It in no way committed a government, the current government or any government in the future, to any type of direction or commitment, which is something that cannot be done. I was very careful to put forward that amendment in a way that allowed the government to move forward and have the ability to recognize the wishes of Inuit in the legislation.

●(1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona. I will try to stay constructive and positive, but I have to say that this government's holier-than-thou attitude annoys me to no end. It is exasperating. The Liberals seem to believe they are above all comments and constructive feedback. They think they know everything, and that is incredibly irritating. We can always sense it in their tone. I have never felt this way before. In the last Parliament, under the Conservatives, I never sensed this level of arrogance. "We know best", the Liberals say. It is so infuriating.

I sit on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, and this is an issue that is close to my heart. I have here 17 NDP amendments, which obviously were not adopted, and I can confirm that the amendment my colleague mentioned earlier was extremely constructive and opened up doors. Unfortunately, the Liberals think they have all the answers when it comes to drafting bills. They were like that with the SNC-Lavalin affair as well, when they added that little line to the omnibus bill. That was an inspired move. The Liberals must be kicking themselves, because all of Quebec is now complaining about it.

I cannot talk about Bill C-91 without talking about my experience as a member of this House. I represent the people of Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, so of course I want to stand up for the interests of my constituents, for aerospace and for our social fabric. More importantly, I want to find solutions to address the fact that one-third of the children in Longueuil—Saint-Hubert are living in poverty. It is a shocking figure, and no one ever talks about it.

I want to talk about my election in 2011. When I was elected, I was an ordinary citizen from Longueuil who did not have a clear understanding of the issues facing first nations. When I arrived here, my main concerns were defending Quebec's distinct culture and fighting climate change. Quite frankly, first nations were not on my list of priorities. On top of that, I did not know very much about the topic.

Government Orders

Many will recall the leadership race that happened so quickly following Jack Layton's death, and my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, was one of the candidates. At that point, many people in Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, including myself, discovered an ambassador for the Cree Nation. Today that member is one of the people scratching their heads, wondering whether this bill on indigenous languages lives up to the expectations.

When I became acquainted with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, I saw how hard he had worked, especially on the peace of the braves agreement and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I saw how diligently he had to work to solve such issues. I also realized that what was needed was a compassionate approach, not a theoretical one.

This man, whom I consider a friend, taught me that this privileged relationship, as the Liberal Party often calls it, needs to be cultivated. Every time we deal with indigenous languages in committee, I am struck by the heart-wrenching testimony that shows this goes well beyond a theory that language is important. We saw people who were suffering because their past and their roots had been erased, and their personalities and cultures had been bleached white by a centralizing government.

As the representative for the people of Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, I was shocked to see just how many open wounds the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was trying to heal. The commission attempted to set out a path for reconciliation.

• (1130)

We came to committee with this in mind, with the goal of working together congenially and collaboratively.

I mentioned the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou today because his outstanding bill seeking to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Bill C-262, has stalled in the Senate. This is a very important bill because it would redefine our relationship with indigenous peoples, with those who are at the very core of this country, but partisan politics are holding it up in the Senate.

I will not call out those involved in the Senate, but it is quite shameful. Things need to get moving. They could use a little nudge to get things going and see them through. This bill would ensure that the government respects the rights of our indigenous peoples and that these rights would be enshrined in all of our bills.

Bill C-91 is by all accounts fundamental and extremely important to the reconciliation process. I understand perfectly just how valuable language is, and how culture is primarily carried through language. It is essential to everything. The situation looks precarious. During one of my visits to Kahnawake, Mr. Norton told me that the Mohawk language is in jeopardy. He said that he was committed to supporting the process. He wants to encourage people to take interest in this issue. Teaching people who are interested in learning these languages again will take several months or years. I therefore understand how important this is.

Also, I was very pleased that my colleagues from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River supported me during the work on this bill and the study in committee. It is a sensitive topic that requires careful consideration. These are not routine laws. These laws have emotional consequences and will shape our relationship with these nations and the preservation of their culture.

People on the ground obviously saw and grasped the importance of this bill. They understood that public officials had tried to draft legislation that would meet their needs. I will try not to use provocative language. I will try not to make us out to be saintly know-it-alls. I just did it, but I apologize. I will try to put this delicately. If this bill is so important to the Liberal government, why are we only talking about it with five weeks left in the parliamentary session? Why is that? Is there a valid reason to explain why this bill was delayed until the very end of the parliamentary session?

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is busy. The committee constantly deals with issues related to the cultural resilience of Quebec, first nations or the Innu people. Let me use a metaphor to describe what is going on here. The Liberals were thinking about where they stood. They realized that the parliamentary session was drawing to a close, and they decided that, given their meagre legislative agenda, they were not too busy to introduce some new bills. They figured it would be nice to do something about this issue. They thought they would look really stupid if they went four years without doing anything about it, so they threw a bill together at the last minute.

As my colleague rightly said, a major player, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, says it is not satisfied and was not consulted. This bill is being shoved down their throats. It is tragic to see this holier-than-thou government pretending it has not just been sitting on its hands this whole time. Sadly, that is what happened.

• (1135)

This is critically important bill. It is unfortunate that it had to be rammed through since it still has many flaws and is far from perfect.

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the observation from the member opposite about the extraordinary privilege one has as a member of Parliament and perhaps the shame one has as a Canadian that our approach to first nations communities and indigenous peoples across this country is made better by our presence in the House of Commons, as opposed to being a qualification to get here to begin with. This is in fact truth and reconciliation in action, as we can see here today with the various languages being spoken on the floor.

On this bill in particular, and in reference to the member for Iqaluit, one of the challenges we have with the horrid colonial past this country has unfortunately emerged from and hopefully is changing is that even inside of things like UNDRIP, there are competing interests that have been driven by colonialism.

Government Orders

For example, in some regions of this country, the Inuit will claim land and territorial rights, but other communities—perhaps the Dene, in some circumstances I can think of specifically—will say they have a claim there as well. The challenge with linking language and geography, in particular with reference to indigenous communities, is that those claims are equal, competing and not necessarily easily or quickly resolvable.

The challenge with the ITK position was that it sought to establish language rights on a geographic basis as opposed to a human basis, and that was the challenge we were dealing with.

I am curious to have the member opposite look at it from that perspective and reflect on his comments. We have to improve the situation, but we also have to come back to almost immediately fixing it once again, because when we link language to geography, we may exclude the more harmed person within the colonial experience.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his appreciation for everything one discovers about indigenous, Innu and Métis issues when one becomes a member of Parliament. That having been said, I certainly do not want to understate the complexity of the task. It is true that it is very complex.

However, the fact remains that it is very frustrating for the members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to all of a sudden be told that this is a government priority that is way behind schedule and that the committee needs to conduct a pre-study of the bill. We did that with as open an attitude as possible, but the government did not really co-operate.

I understand that this is a complex issue. There is no doubt about that. That being said, we need to all work together. The Liberals may have tried to work as much as possible with all those involved, but they certainly did not try to work with us.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, *lim'limpt*. I would also like to say *lim'limpt* to my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert. *Lim'limpt* is the word for “thank you” in the language of Nsyilxcen, the language of the Syilx people where I come from in the Okanagan Valley.

There are plenty of people who know more in Nsyilxcen words than I do, but there are only 50 people on the planet who can speak Nsyilxcen in a fluent manner. The Syilx people are working hard to raise that level of fluency, but it takes time, money and effort. They have a fluency program, one of only three in Canada, I believe, that are aimed at bringing up fluency in languages that are near extinction.

He mentioned Kahnawake; the Mohawk language is one. Squamish, near Vancouver, is another. They need ongoing funding. We cannot wait.

The Conservatives mentioned that we just have to raise the economic works that go on in these communities so that they can afford it, but we need funding now. We need funding on an ongoing basis. That is one of the things the NDP finds completely lacking in this bill.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I admire the fact that he is able to speak the language of some of his constituents. It is a language that is all the more important because it is on the verge of extinction.

He is absolutely right. I should even have talked about how no money has been set aside to ensure the sustainability of such a program. Members will also recall that many people are rightly opposed to the fact that the commissioner in question is not required, by definition, to come from an indigenous community. My colleague is right to point out how important that is, since there are only 50 people left who speak the language. That is outrageous, and it is all happening right before our eyes.

We have a number of institutes that deal with archeology and studying the past, but if we do not want our indigenous languages to become a thing of the past, then we need to ensure their survival.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the start I would like to acknowledge that this House rests on the ancestral lands of the Algonquin people.

It just occurred to me, in listening to the discussion here, that we do not only have the tragedy of the disappearing of our languages. My ancestors came to Newfoundland around 1610 and had friendly relations with the Beothuk. Not only have we lost the languages of the Beothuk, but the Beothuk are gone.

As a nation, we have to get serious about this and we have to make sure, going forward, in laws that this place is enacting, that we actually deliver on the United Nations declaration and deliver on the calls to action by the TRC. We have to make sure that we are really getting it because we have directly consulted with the indigenous peoples of Canada.

It is a great honour to speak to Bill C-91. Not only is it an act respecting indigenous languages, but it should be more precisely put, the language rights of first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, although the Inuit are expressing concerns that it does not quite get it from their perspective.

As some renowned scholars in indigenous matters have said, we should not even talk about “indigenous languages”; we should be naming all the languages and all the peoples, because they, themselves, are distinct.

The preamble to this bill specifies that “the recognition and implementation of rights related to Indigenous languages are at the core of reconciliation.”

Reference is made to the calls to action by the TRC on language and culture, as well as the adoption and implementation of UNDRIP. If we go to these calls to action, we see that they are actually titled “Language and culture.” It is not “language”; it is “language and culture”.

Government Orders

The TRC calls on the federal government “to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights”. Then it goes on to say this about the legislation that is to be enacted, this bill we are speaking to right now:

- i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
- ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
- iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds....
- iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
- v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.

It is right there in the calls to action. The TRC then calls upon the federal government to appoint a commissioner of aboriginal languages, which the bill does. It is to be noted that the calls to action also specifically call for the government to fully adopt and implement UNDRIP and to implement “a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures”.

In reading the actual call, we have to recognize that it is about language and culture. They are tied together. It is important to recognize that the calls to action on language and culture must be considered in the context of the bundle of rights in the TRC report and in UNDRIP, and there cannot be a handpicking of one or the other.

I would add that I have repeatedly tried to get the government to actually make UNDRIP binding in bills that come forward, in particular in decisions by the government that impact the lands and resources of indigenous peoples. Sadly, that was always rejected.

Why was the call to revitalize aboriginal languages issued? As shared so clearly in the TRC report, the very intent of the residential school program was to “take the Indian out of the Indian”. This was done by wrenching wee children from their families, communities and traditions, and forbidding their languages and cultural practices. As Commissioner Sinclair has said so clearly, it amounted to “cultural genocide”.

Far too many indigenous peoples today have lost not only their language, but the connection to their cultures and their traditional communities.

As my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, has shared:

The vast majority of indigenous languages in this country are endangered, and there is a critical need to address that challenge. There is an urgent need at this moment, as we speak, to address that challenge. Our languages are important. If the legislation fails to reflect the intent of the bill, we are not doing our indigenous brothers and sisters in this country any favours.

To the credit of indigenous peoples and other supportive groups, great efforts continue to be made to revitalize their languages and cultures. One example of an indigenous community investing in this objective is the Cayuga and Mohawk immersion initiative at Six Nations.

I had the honour a number of years ago to visit that community and to visit that school. It is absolutely inspiring to see what is done there, without government support, even though it is desperately needed.

●(1145)

The sad thing is that this particular school, which is working on teaching people the Gayogoho:no language, has to hold classes above the curling rink. It cannot even get the support of the government to build a proper school so that it can teach the children these languages. As I was leaving that facility, the children came out of the classrooms, and they went into a round house and sang traditional songs. I witnessed first-hand the tears of the elders, that once again their community is learning to speak their language and to understand the culture. It was phenomenal.

There are examples of non-indigenous entities supporting the development, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages. One such entity is the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute, or CILLDI, at my alma mater, the University of Alberta. The institute brings together indigenous Canadians from across the country to work on learning their languages and how they can promote and revitalize the languages. They get university credit for this. The government actually invests in advanced education. This is an area where we should be providing similar programs right across this country.

Some members have commented on the irony that while this place is debating about indigenous languages, some of the members of this place who are indigenous were not accorded the opportunity to speak in their language. One of my colleagues, the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, was not able to speak in Dene because she had to give a 48-hour notice. I am looking forward to the time in this place when we have the interpreters available. As the government moves forward and keeps changing what bills come forward, it is not necessarily possible to give advance notice about speaking in one's language. I have attended Dene gatherings in the Northwest Territories where there were 10 or 12 interpreters available. It is not that we do not have those skills in this country. We have to get serious about providing them in this place at the federal level.

We have witnessed a number of members speaking in this place. The priority has to be to ensure the opportunity for those who are indigenous to speak. Of course, it is great to hear those of us who are non-indigenous trying to speak those languages, and that is admirable.

I want to thank the member for Nunavut for raising the concerns raised by the Inuit at committee. The Inuit are deeply troubled by this bill, and it is very concerning that the government is not considering that and did not properly consult on this.

We called for a number of amendments, which it is my understanding everyone rejected. Those that are critical include the requirement that the indigenous language commissioner be indigenous, which I think is pretty obvious; to enshrine UNDRIP as a legally binding provision of this bill; to add specific reference to the discriminatory policy of the sixties scoop that led to the erosion of indigenous languages; and, finally, to include specific measures to respect the language rights of the Inuit.

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•(1150)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Edmonton Strathcona is a lawyer. Therefore, I would like to ask her about the legality, with respect to the charter as well as our Human Rights Act, of putting a provision in a bill where we prescribe particular background of an individual. We all agree that the indigenous languages commissioner ought to be an indigenous person, but I wonder whether putting such a clause into the legislation would violate the charter. How would the member hope to frame that so it can sustain a challenge on the charter front?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I understand from the hon. member that this is the reason why the government does not want to specify that in the bill. Somebody may decide to come forward and challenge that, but this is a bill specifically about honouring, developing and preserving indigenous languages. To me, it would be absurd that somebody would come forward and challenge that the person who is leading that program must be indigenous.

If this is supposed to be a nation-to-nation relationship, it is a perfectly reasonable request brought forward by first nations and indigenous peoples that this person should be an indigenous person. In law after law, the government is changing the legislation to actually specify that a lot of advisory bodies also include indigenous people, so why not specify here?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not actually aware that the people of Nunavut and their language were not protected in this bill. It was news to me when I heard the member for Nunavut speak. I think that is definitely a miss by the government.

Could the member elaborate on the amendments her party brought that were rejected so that we can understand what they were?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear the hon. member for Nunavut speak in this place.

I do not know if the member for Sarnia—Lambton was asking about all the amendments. I do not think it is appropriate for me to speak specifically to the call for amendments by the head of the ITK or by the member for Nunavut. I think they have expressed that need specifically very well themselves.

My understanding is that the deep concern is that the Inuit, the people of Nunavut and the Government of Nunavut felt that they were not sufficiently consulted in advance in the development of this bill. Surely that should be one of the most important aspects as we move forward under the UNDRIP and under the calls for action by the TRC, that every piece of legislation that comes forward in this place that may impact the rights and interests of indigenous people be developed hand in glove with those people.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I presented more than a dozen amendments at committee, and like other members, I was disappointed that there were no amendments accepted at clause by clause as the bill was reviewed.

I was very taken with the remarks by the hon member for Nunavut that he is the only Inuktitut speaker in this place who is

allowed to speak his mind because he sits as an independent. It is a powerful position to be in.

I have struggled with how to vote on this bill, but indigenous groups in my riding have asked me to support it. I will vote for it, but I do so with a sense of deep regret that the amendments to incorporate the Inuit people and Inuktitut as a language were not heeded. It also will need substantial funding. In that struggle, I think I share a lot of what the member for Edmonton Strathcona just said. I hope that both of us have come to where we are confident that we are doing the right thing on an issue that matters so very much, which is to preserve and protect indigenous languages from coast to coast to coast.

I just want to invite my friend from Edmonton Strathcona to share where she has landed in that struggle. Even though we know that this bill is not perfect, I think it must pass.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have worked together on many bills where almost all, hundreds, of our amendments have been rejected, even though the government has said that it is open to amendments.

My colleague has been very clear. We will oppose this bill. I am doing that out of respect for my two indigenous colleagues, who made very reasonable proposals for amendments, which were rejected.

As I mentioned earlier, the TRC itself was very specific. It called on the government to provide the funds. There must be at least some kind of provision in this legislation. We see this time after time in bills that come forward to begin to recognize the rights and interests of indigenous peoples; there is no commitment to funding. Another clear example is the safe drinking water legislation the Conservatives put in place in which they simply transferred liability to the first nations.

Therefore, no, with regret, I do not think, for something as significant as this, which is supposed to be implementing this country's commitment to the UNDRIP and to the truth and reconciliation calls for action, that a step forward is enough. How soon are we going to get a bill before this place again to actually correct the parts of this bill that should have been there to begin with?

•(1155)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all members who spoke in an indigenous language to this historic legislation in this very exciting debate, which is taking place on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe.

To set the scene and give a bit of background on the bill before I get into the bill itself, I note that now members can speak their languages here. Today the first speech was in Cree, and it had simultaneous interpretation.

The procedure and House affairs committee, which I chair, did a study earlier this year about having aboriginal languages in the House. It brought recommendations to the House, and all members in the House agreed to them, which was very exciting. For the first time in history, MPs who can speak an aboriginal language have the right to speak it in the House and at committee, with simultaneous interpretation.

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We can imagine indigenous youths sitting at home in an urban area, in a village or on a reserve seeing that they can use their language in the highest democratic institution in the land. We can imagine how much strength it gives them, how much hope it gives them and how much support it gives them for their languages.

That is a very exciting achievement of this particular Parliament. It was initiated by the actions of the member for Winnipeg Centre, who spoke first in the debate today. He spoke totally in Cree, as did some other members.

I want to tell members a story. We put a lot of emphasis on youth. As members know, the Prime Minister has a youth council, and many MPs have youth councils. I was at a youth meeting, which I think was convened by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. A young indigenous woman from the Yukon, who I think has spoken before the United Nations, made the point that people always say that if people get jobs, make good progress in their lives and get strong, they can bring forward their culture and language and that it will benefit all of us to see that creative, exciting diversity. She made the point that this is all wrong. It puts the cart before the horse. She said that what we need first is the language and culture and confidence in the language and culture, because that is what gives people the strength to succeed in school and in life. When they have confidence in themselves, they know where they come from and are very proud of themselves through their language. Of course, language is the basis of culture.

As was mentioned in the debate earlier, language is more than just translating a word, because languages express how we live. For instance, in Inuktitut, there are a number of different words for snow, whereas in English, there are not very many. Language portrays a culture, so it is very important to one's way of life.

Statistics show that indigenous people around the world who have pride in themselves, understand their language and have pride in their culture are more successful than those who do not.

This is a great move today in the House of Commons and there is a lot of support here. It is very exciting what the House of Commons is doing.

This is a great step in reconciliation, partly to fix a wrong that we were a big part of creating. Not only did foreigners coming to Canada overwhelm in numbers the first peoples here, but sadly, we took steps to diminish their languages through residential schools, the sixties scoop and relocation.

● (1200)

That is why Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages, is so exciting. First, it would ensure the language rights included under the rights referred to in section 35 of the Constitution, such as the right of indigenous people to develop and preserve their languages. Second, the bill would ensure adequate, stable funding for languages. I will talk about that in more detail later, because funding has been brought up before. Third is the revitalization and strengthening of indigenous languages. To ensure that all these things are implemented, a commissioner would be established.

As a number of members have mentioned at various stages of this debate, it is critical to move quickly on this bill, because indigenous languages are disappearing. Thank goodness many indigenous

leaders and elders in my area and other areas have taken to recording their languages so that they will always be there and can be revitalized and renewed by the youth. In my area, I think I saw the passing of the last elder who spoke fluently in Tagish. If he was not the last, there are not many left, so this is critical.

When Europeans first came to North America, there were over 90 indigenous languages. There are still over 70, but some have very few speakers, as the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs found out when we were studying this. It is very important that this bill be implemented as soon as possible to make sure that we halt the diminishment of these languages, promote and restore them and build them up among the youth. This bill would also fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 13, 14 and 15 and would set the stage for articles 11 to 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This legislation was co-developed with first nations, which is why a number of the clauses and principles were very thoughtfully created.

I want to mention a bit about funding. To implement, preserve and restore languages requires funding. This government has made sure that this is taken care of. In the last budget, \$330 million over five years was allocated for this, with \$117 million after that. Before the bill even comes into effect, all sorts of projects are happening across the country. There have been large increases in funding. Back in 2017, there might have been \$5 million, so there has been a huge increase in the funding necessary to move ahead.

This government has taken care of funding for the next five years. However, that does not preclude the possibility of a future government wanting to stop funding this. Therefore, included in this bill, in paragraph 5(d), is a statutory requirement that all future governments would have to fund the required activities, which I am sure the commissioner would monitor. It does not happen very often that there is such a clause in a bill, but we have put one in this one.

Paragraph 5(d) reads:

establish measures to facilitate the provision of adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages;

● (1205)

That preserves the funding. As I said, we have provided it now, but that preserves it into the future, regardless of what political party happens to be in power.

This is such a unique endeavour. It has been a great education for MPs, who have been hearing indigenous MPs and other MPs provide us with information related to their particular areas. I also want to provide some interesting facts about my particular area.

My riding covers the whole of Yukon and the traditional territories of 14 first nations therein. Some Europeans think that any one indigenous person in North America is the same as another—that they speak the same language, have the same culture, dance the same dances. That of course is not true.

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My particular area makes up one one-thousandth of Canada's population, but there are eight language groups: the Gwich'in, the Northern Tutchone, there is a bit of Upper Tanana, Southern Tutchone, Tagish combined with Tlingit, a tiny bit of Tahltan and Kaska. Each of these groups has a different culture and a different history. Their languages are different. To the north of us there are a few Inuvialuit people as well.

I am going to describe the eight first nations in Yukon so that people will have some information about these language groups that they would not otherwise have.

Traditional knowledge is very important. It is a unique type of knowledge passed down orally, generation after generation. According to oral tradition, Yukon first nation peoples have lived in this land since Crow, a mythological creature of the time, made the world and set it in order. Archeologists calculate that the first humans inhabited the Yukon more than 10,000 years ago, crossing the Bering land bridge from Asia or travelling the waters alongside.

Today, first nations people belong to the Athapaskan or Tlingit language groups. I will briefly talk about what the eight specific groups within them are like.

Let me deal with Gwich'in first. The Gwich'in people are our most northerly group in the Yukon. They inhabit a huge area of land in which there are four different dialects. Most familiar to Yukoners are the Vuntut Gwitchin, who reside in Old Crow. Then there are the Tetlit Gwich'in in the Northwest Territories, the Tukudh Gwich'in in the Blackstone area, and the Alaska Gwich'in.

The Vuntut Gwitchin first nation is the modern-day political organization of the Yukon Gwich'in. The Vuntut Gwitchin signed its Yukon first nation final agreement in May 1993. The people live along the Porcupine River and follow annual cycles of subsistence. Right at the centre of their life is the Porcupine caribou herd.

I will digress for a moment to mention the critical struggle going on to protect the Porcupine caribou herd. If that herd becomes extinct, it will result in cultural genocide for the Gwich'in people of Alaska, Yukon and the Northwest Territories, because their whole life revolves around that herd. Their clothes—including vests similar to what I am wearing today—and their food are dependent on the caribou herd. When I have been there, I have seen them eat caribou three times a day. The caribou is really the heart of their culture. It is absolutely fundamental that this herd not be diminished.

Mr. Trump and the Republicans have passed legislation to allow drilling on the caribou calving grounds. Calving, of course, is a very sensitive part of the caribou life cycle, and this drilling could endanger the herd, which currently numbers roughly 130,000. The Gwich'in people have fought for decades to protect that area, along with the Canadian embassy in Washington. I have been involved for a couple of decades in fighting against any drilling in the Arctic national wildlife refuge area. Canada has a responsibility to do this. We have an agreement with the United States to protect the Porcupine caribou herd.

The second group of people I will talk about is the Hän people. The Hän people live where the Yukon and Klondike Rivers merge. They lived through the greatest impact of change when the Klondike

gold rush marked their lives with great social upheaval and displacement.

The chief at that time, Chief Isaac, was very forward-thinking and took their songs and their dances to a community in Alaska, where he asked that they be preserved. He did not want to lose them with the massive influx of people. Dawson City was the biggest city west of Chicago or Winnipeg at the time of the gold rush.

• (1210)

They took their songs away, with a dance stick, and entrusted them to them. The dance stick was called a *gänhäk*. Then they brought them back, and now they are revitalizing their culture.

The next group is Upper Tanana. There are just a few people on the Yukon side; most are in Alaska. That is near Beaver Creek. A lot of the first nations moved around, depending on the time of year and where game could be found, so they were not on the existing locations where the Alaska Highway is. The effect of that highway on these first nations is an entire speech in itself, and I will not get into it at this time.

I am going through these groups faster than I would like, but I still do not have enough time to give more details.

The next large group is Northern Tutchone. They inhabit the central part of Yukon, often referred to as the heart of Yukon. There are three first nations there, within the Northern Tutchone Tribal Council: the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun, the Selkirk First Nation and the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation. The small villages of Fort Selkirk and Minto were home to the people of this area prior to the building of the Klondike Highway, or as we old-timers call it, the Mayo Road.

The next group, the fifth, is the Southern Tutchone, as we have done Gwich'in, Hän, Upper Tanana, Northern Tutchone.

The Southern Tutchone occupy areas of southwest Yukon. Many traditional areas and village sites were once the centres of trading activity for these nomadic people. While many of these locations were gradually abandoned with the building of the Alaska Highway, they are still regarded with reverence as the homelands of the Southern Tutchone people.

The school there is where my 10-year-old daughter has her favourite class, and it is also where my six-year-old son had his highest mark. That is probably a tribute to the great Southern Tutchone teachers they have. It is also a French immersion school.

The Kluane First Nation, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nation, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Kwanlin Dun are also in that area. The Champagne and Aishihik First Nation have started maybe the first immersion day care in Canada. The immersion is in the Southern Tutchone language.

It was at the Calgary Olympics that a Yukon first nation person sang the national anthem in Tutchone.

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The next group, as I mentioned earlier, may be functionally extinct. If not, there are not many speakers at the moment. I am referring to the Tagish language. The point about the Tagish people near the Carcross area is that this first nation people had great co-operation with the people in the gold rush, unlike what happened in some areas in North America. They helped people come in and were guides for them. They came in from the ocean over what were called “grease trails” because of the eulachon fish grease that indigenous people had carried on them for trade over the years.

Kate Carmack, whose brother was the famous Skookum Jim, recently received the great honour of being the first indigenous woman to be put in the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame for her role in the discovery that led to the greatest gold rush in the world.

As I said, there was great co-operation from the Tagish, and the inland Tlingit people as well, who traded over these grease trails. A number of generations ago, some of them moved inland from the coast to the Teslin and Carcross and Atlin areas.

The Kaska people are found in the southwest corner of Yukon, which they share with Ross River Dena Council and Liard First Nation and a number of people in northern B.C. and other communities. They have friends in the Dene people in NWT.

[Member spoke in Gwich'in as follows:]

Mahsi cho gu□nas ches shugha hasi□ma

[Gwich'in text translated as follows:]

Thank you very much for your comments.

[English]

● (1215)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2015 Liberal platform promised “new funding to help Indigenous communities promote and preserve Indigenous languages and cultures.” However, we note that there is no base funding committed in the bill before us. Unlike the Official Languages Act, the bill contains no federal obligation to fund indigenous languages and no reliable support for indigenous participation in multi-party agreements.

I will note the testimony of Aluki Kotierk from Nunavut Tunngavik, who said:

On the content of the bill, there are a number of central weaknesses, including that the bill does not contain any funding commitments.... Unlike Nunavut's Official Languages Act, Bill C-91 contains no actual rights or duties respecting the delivery of federal services in Inuktitut. The bill does not ensure that essential services and programs required for a healthy Inuit population and a prosperous northern economy, such as education, health and the administration of justice, will be available in Inuktitut where numbers warrant it.

In short, with the greatest respect for the intentions behind it, Bill C-91 is largely a symbolic effort.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would respond to those critiques of the bill.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the member was here for my whole speech, but because this concern had been brought up by a previous speaker, I outlined the specifics of the funding. However, I will repeat them.

The funding is already taken care of in the most recent budget with a massive increase of \$330 million over the next five years and \$117 million after that.

However, after the next five years, a future government could emasculate the program and the effectiveness of the bill by not providing funding. Therefore—and this does not happen often—we put a statutory requirement in the bill, paragraph 5(d), which reads, “establish measures to facilitate the provision of adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages”.

Therefore, by law, all future governments would have to continue the funding that is necessary to implement this bill.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's information about the tremendous number of indigenous groups in his riding. He mentioned some of them, but he was unable to mention all of them. I would like to give him a chance to mention some of those so that they do not feel left out. I would like to give him a few more seconds to do that.

● (1220)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I did want to mention the people in the Yukon more in depth, and I thank the member for allowing me this opportunity.

The Gwich'in people in the north cover a massive area and are, as I said, dependent on caribou. In the national parks that we have created, there are caribou fences. Because this great tundra is immense, it is difficult to catch the caribou, so these fences were used to entrap them.

As I mentioned, there is quite a difference between the Athapaskan and Tlingit languages. They are within a couple of days' walking distance from each other, can almost see each other over the mountains, but they cannot understand a word of what the other says—yet the Athapaskan people in the Yukon can understand some of the people all the way down as far as New Mexico. The Navaho are there, thousands of miles away. It is because of the migration that totally different people are adjacent to each other, yet they can relate to people thousands of miles away.

We also have, and I must give credit to various people, some very modern dance groups. Most of the first nations, for a long time, did not have a dance group, but now have some very modern dance groups that perform around the world. They are really bringing their culture back, with great credit to such groups as the Dakká Khwáan Dancers and many others.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Yukon for his in-depth knowledge on this issue.

There are 90 indigenous languages. According to UNESCO, 75% of them are on the verge of becoming extinct. I would like to get a sense from him whether the framework in Bill C-91 hopes to protect all indigenous languages or are we excluding any to his knowledge?

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Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, we are certainly not planning on excluding any. It will be up to the indigenous people themselves. We are trying to facilitate them because we co-developed this with them.

I am glad the member asked the question, because it reminds me that I forgot to mention something very important. Of course, there were consultations across the country. Previous speeches during this debate outlined the hundreds of meetings that took place, the details of which I do not know off the top of my head.

However, in the Yukon consultation I was at, the chiefs made it very clear that this could not be a one size fits all. Each first nation and indigenous community has not only its own language, but its own way of learning. We have all different types of traditional indigenous governments in Yukon, so one size does not fit all.

Therefore, this bill has been set up flexibly and the funding has to go to those first nations directly so they can implement it the way they know how. This way, with respect to the very important question the member asked, the languages of first nations will not be lost by trying to fit them into this one size fits all. Rather, they can implement their types of traditional learning, governance and societies and can bring back those languages.

As I said earlier, the indigenous people were so forward-thinking that they recorded some languages that for a while were extinct. With the types of funds that have been put into the bill and are statutorily required to remain into the future, they can bring them back to life. However, sadly that would not be the case for the Beothuk people, as a previous member mentioned.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on a question my colleague put to the hon. member. He raised the fact the TRC in a call to action specified that the government must finance the revitalization and protection of indigenous languages. The member responded that the law required that funding. However, the only place in the bill where there is anything about a provision of adequate sustainable funding is in the purposes.

A purposes provision is not a duty or an obligation. Therefore, the only part of the bill that provides anything of any substance is the establishment of the commissioner. That is the only place where I can see there is an entity created and there are certain duties of the commissioner. However, what about a duty to directly provide support to indigenous peoples themselves for the revitalization of, establishment of and ability to speak their languages?

• (1225)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, in my reading of the bill, both the part I quoted and the part the member mentioned, there is a statutory requirement to provide that funding. It would be very difficult for our government to not provide it. Obviously, we are going to provide it. We have already provided it in the budget, before the bill even comes into effect, and hundreds of projects are ongoing.

However, as the member said, it is very important to protect this for future governments. In one particular case, which I will not mention, although it is not directly related to first nations, an entity that helps reform governments signed up and a particular government funded it for one dollar a year, so obviously nothing

happened. That is why we are very strongly supporting the bill ensure the funding is referenced and would continue into perpetuity.

Hon. Jane Philpott (Markham—Stouffville, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-91, an act respecting Indigenous languages.

As all members in the House know, indigenous issues are among the biggest challenges and the biggest opportunities facing our country. As we create together the space for indigenous peoples to be fully self-determining, with an improved quality of life, we must all work together, across party lines, in a non-partisan fashion.

It is in that spirit that I would like to thank the member of Parliament for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for offering me this opportunity to speak as an independent member of Parliament on this important legislation.

The preamble, though not the body of Bill C-91, notes that:

the Government of Canada is committed to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms rights related to Indigenous languages.

Specifically, I would like to remind colleagues that article 13 speaks to the fact that:

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.

Article 14 goes on to talk about the fact that:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning...

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Bill C-91 takes the very important step to establish an office for the commissioner of indigenous languages.

I want to use the time given to me today to highlight some amazing initiatives across the country by indigenous peoples for indigenous peoples to promote indigenous languages.

I had the privilege of visiting many communities when I was minister of indigenous services, as well as when I was minister of health, and I want to share some of the wonderful initiatives I have witnessed.

Let us start in British Columbia.

In British Columbia, it is estimated that there are approximately 30 different first nations languages, and close to 60 dialects are spoken. We cannot speak about first nations languages without remembering Kukpi7 Ron Ignace. *Kukpi7* is the name for chief in the Secwepemc language of British Columbia. Kukpi7 Ron Ignace is certainly one of the champions of indigenous languages in his first nation in British Columbia.

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Together with his wife, Marianne Ignace, who is a professor at Simon Fraser University, they have written an extraordinary book. This is a book that has been worked on for a lifetime. It is called *Secwépemc People, Land, and Laws*.

I had the opportunity to visit the community of Skeetchestn, where Kukpi7 Ignace is the chief. I heard the children signing and sharing together in their language, and it was inspiring.

Let me tell the story of Huu-ay-aht First Nations in British Columbia. It is among the Nuu-chah-nulth-speaking first nations. The Huu-ay-aht people have taken an incredible initiative as they continue to pursue and inspire others by their efforts to be fully self-determining. They have established a social services project that takes on a number of initiatives, particularly for children. They have decided to exercise their right to take on child and family services within the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, and they are specifically ensuring they do so in order to bring their children back to their community so they are raised in their language and culture.

Let us move a little east to the province Alberta.

I want to tell my colleagues about the incredible work that is being done in Maskwacis, a region just outside of Edmonton. I had the privilege of being in this community when it announced the beginning of the Maskwacis Education Schools Commission.

● (1230)

I was there with Grand Chief Willie Littlechild, who used to sit in this very House. He spoke about the incredible initiative that the Maskwacis peoples had been able to undertake in order to start a school system of their own.

Grand Chief Willie Littlechild had been raised in residential schools. He talked about how his language and his culture had been taken from him as he was taken away to one of the largest residential schools in our country. However, now the Maskwacis, which is a gathering of four Indian Act bands, have come together to start a schools commission in order to exercise self-determination. Their education system there is Cree based, based upon the language of their people and their way of teaching. The contents of their teaching are based in their Cree culture and in their language.

We will then go a little further east again to the lovely province of Saskatchewan. Many examples can be seen across Saskatchewan, but perhaps one of the highlights in my mind is when I had the privilege of visiting the Whitecap Dakota First Nation, an extraordinary community just outside the city of Saskatoon.

While I was there, the chief showed me many things, but one of the most impressive was when we went to visit the Charles Red Hawk Elementary School. I met the woman who was the language teacher in that school. She gives Dakota language lessons to the children there. Their proudest moment was when a small group of children stood up spontaneously and asked me if they could sing *O Canada* to me in the Dakota language. It was a moment that is indelibly impressed on my mind. I saw the pride, not only of the children but of the elder who had taught them their language.

I want to then move to the wonderful province of Manitoba. I have spoken in the House before about the things that I have learned from the first nations of Manitoba as well as the Métis nation of Manitoba.

However, today I want to share a conversation about the work of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. The chiefs have been real leaders in one of the critical issues in our country, and that is the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care. They have highlighted the link between children being taken from their community into the foster care system and the loss of language that accompanies that. In fact, they have gone so far as to propose an act. It is called, the “bringing our children home act”.

In that act, the Manitoba chiefs speak to the fact that “We are reclaiming, practising and promoting our responsibility to pass down our knowledge, language, culture, identity, values, traditions, and customs to our children.”

This morning I had the opportunity to be in the indigenous affairs committee. A gentleman there had been in Manitoba and had experienced the foster care system. His name is Jeffry Nilles. I encourage people to look at the tape of his testimony in today's committee. He talked about what it meant to have been taken from his community, away from his family, about how he was shamed if he spoke in his language. It brought tears to our eyes as we heard about the moments he was treated cruelly because he naturally went to his native language and was punished for doing so. Now he is a man who is proud of the language of his peoples, but it has taken him some time to get there.

I will move further east again to the northern part of the province of Ontario. I would like to highlight in particular the extraordinary community of Fort Albany First Nation. I want to highlight a gentleman there who has been a real inspiration to me. His name is Edmund Metatawabin. Perhaps many members have had the opportunity to meet Edmund.

Edmund wrote a wonderful book, *Up Ghost River*, which had a big impact on my life. He talks about the role of residential schools. In fact, his book is an account of his residential school experience. He talks about the trauma of being separated from his language and his lineage, when he was forbidden to speak his language. He talks about the disastrous results that have ensued because languages and customs were suppressed by residential schools.

There is a good hint about the importance of indigenous languages in his book. Perhaps the most profound sentences in that book are when Edmund Metatawabin says, “There is no concept of justice in Cree culture. The nearest word is kintohpatatin.” He says that this “loosely translates to 'you've been listened to.'” Metatawabin writes, “Kintohpatatin is richer than justice—really it means you've been listened to by someone compassionate and fair, and your needs will be taken seriously.”

● (1235)

That is a word I will never forget. It reminds me of the richness of a word and how much a particular culture can teach us just by showing us the words of its language, as well as how much that can mean to all of us.

Government Orders

Let me continue to travel across Ontario. This time we will come right down to the border of Ontario and Quebec, and in fact this community crosses into the United States as well. It is the community of Akwesasne. The community has an amazing leader in Grand Chief Abram Benedict. Here again I saw how language is so much a part of the pride of this community.

I had the opportunity to visit for the first time the Mohawk immersion school there. This is a school in which elders have come together to teach the young people, who are the teachers. In turn, those teachers teach the children. People in that middle age group did not know their Mohawk language and had to learn it from the elders. Now they, as teachers, are passing it on to children.

One of the things that impressed me at that school was that they had created their own teaching materials. They had taken children's books and adapted them so that the words were Mohawk. It was not just the words; the concepts, pictures, traditions and stories were appropriate for the Mohawk community. It is an extraordinary example, and one that needs to be recognized.

[*Translation*]

And now we travel to la belle province. Quebec is home to many first nations, but I am going to talk about just one of them, the Huron-Wendat Nation. Their leader, Grand Chief Konrad H. Sioui, is an extraordinary man.

Konrad Sioui left quite an impression on me. He has many stories to share and knows much about his people's history and their places. He told me how those peoples named places, rivers and mountains. Where he lives, every place has a name in his language.

Across the country, many places have names that come from indigenous languages. Grand Chief Sioui talked about the importance of preserving those names in indigenous languages.

[*English*]

We know, for example, that the word Toronto comes from an indigenous language. It is believed that it comes primarily from a Mohawk name, *tkaranto*, which means "trees standing in the water". Right here in the city of Ottawa, we know that the word Ottawa comes from the word *adaawe* from the Anishinabe language, which means "to buy". Maybe we could sometimes think about the fact that our city has something to do with buying, but I will not spend too much time on that point.

Let us move along to some places in Quebec, since I was just discussing Quebec. Shawinigan is an Algonquin word that means "portage at the crest". We then look at the northern part of Quebec, because we must not forget the north, where we find the amazing town of Kuujuaq, which means "the great river" in Inuktitut.

We had better spend a bit of time in the Atlantic, although I know my time is running out. I want to talk about the incredible work of the Mi'kmaq in the Atlantic, and in particular their incredible education authority. The education authority is entirely led by the Mi'kmaq people and is called Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. I think the Mi'kmaq will forgive me for not getting that exactly right. I tried. We have often affectionately called this group "MK" because it is a little easier to say.

This is an education authority designed by Mi'kmaq for Mi'kmaq children. It has been incredibly successful, and this is in no small part related to its commitment to the Mi'kmaq language. It has, in fact, created an online talking dictionary, so that people can now find Mi'kmaq words online. There are now 6,000 or more Mi'kmaq words in this online talking dictionary. It offers language classes using the Internet, and video conference facilities have been set up so day cares throughout the region can teach Mi'kmaq to their children.

I was happy to hear that St. Francis Xavier University has now delivered its first program in the Mi'kmaq language.

● (1240)

While we are in the Atlantic, let us move north to Labrador and talk about Nunatsiavut, which is one of the four land claim regions of the Inuit Nunangat. The commitment of Inuit leaders in this country to the revitalization, maintenance and promotion of Inuktitut is something extraordinary. Inuit speak regularly about how Inuktitut is at the core of Inuit identity, spiritual beliefs and relationships to the land, as well as their world view and culture. It is fundamental to Inuit self-determination. I witnessed this myself when I went to meetings of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee, which are all translated into Inuktitut.

However, I should note that the Inuit do not support Bill C-91, and it is important for us to recognize that. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami organization, the ITK, hopes to see the bill amended to include both an annex that addresses Inuktitut as a distinct language and provisions allowing Inuktitut speakers to access federal public services in their language.

There is an impact when those services are not available. I saw it myself in relation to health. People said that tuberculosis, for instance, was not recognized quickly enough because there was no health care provider who spoke Inuktitut and could take a proper patient history. This is an important reality.

Time does not permit me to tell members about the things I observed in wonderful places like the Northwest Territories and Yukon. There are many examples of people working to revive indigenous languages.

It is my intention to support the bill, but more work needs to be done on this issue. This work should be continued in the next Parliament by those who have the privilege of returning to this place.

I had the privilege of learning an indigenous language when I lived in the country of Niger, in west Africa. I became moderately fluent in the Hausa language. The Hausa people have a saying:

[*Member spoke in Hausa*]

[*English*]

This means "silence, too, is speech". Let us not, any of us, be silent on this matter, on the need to revitalize, maintain and promote indigenous languages. Let us recall that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples lays out minimum standards for the survival, well-being and dignity of indigenous peoples.

Government Orders

The right to use, develop and transmit indigenous languages to future generations is nothing less than a matter of survival. The duty to recognize and affirm this right rests on us all.

• (1245)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her profile of the transformations that are taking place across the country. They can only lead all of us, but more specifically the nations she referred to, to a much better place and a much better future.

A Mohawk elder once walked me through an analogy. One of the great challenges we have in undoing colonialism and the racism attached to it is that the process of creating the challenges we find ourselves facing was a complex and very aggressive one. If the movement out of this is too simplified and too aggressive in return, it could lead to even more problems. In other words, colonialism is about rules, and layers and layers of more rules may create even more damage if we are not careful about how we transform the system.

One of the issues raised around this and referenced by the ITK is the notion that indigenous languages should be attached to geography, which was delineated through colonial map-making, and that the primacy of one language over another should be assigned based on geography.

The member opposite referenced that the name Toronto comes from *tkaranto*. It is a Mohawk word, but the treaty is held by the Mississaugas. At the time Toronto was named, the Huron-Wendat had care of the land. There are complexities in the way communities are nomadic. There are complexities in the ways colonialism is layered through generations. There are complexities in the way indigenous people hold and share land, nation to nation to nation, without our even being present.

In light of that, does the member opposite favour a geographic, territorial and map-making approach to language preservation, or should language preservation be based on the people who speak a language and the patterns they create for themselves?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his concern for this issue. The simplest answer to his question would be to say that it is not up to me. The answer is, in fact, up to indigenous peoples, be they first nations, be they from the Métis nation, be they Inuit, to determine for themselves. That is, of course, the definition of self-determination, one of the most fundamental rights of indigenous peoples.

It may, in fact, be that different indigenous peoples may answer the question differently in terms of whether it is a geographic decision or whether there is a cultural or historic basis for the decision. It is very important that we in this place unleash the decision-making process and allow it to be free to be where it belongs, which is in the hands of first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

That is why I take so very seriously the concerns raised by people like Natan Obed, the president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, for whom I have the deepest respect. They say that we need to listen.

I have acknowledged that I will be supporting this bill, but I think there are pieces missing, and I think we have to listen to the requests. As much as possible, we have to work side by side, indeed be led by indigenous peoples, to know how we as settlers and as partners working together can support this critical right.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course the hon. member had the privilege, as a former minister with several portfolios, to travel to those communities. It is indeed a great privilege to go into those communities, hear those languages spoken and see the support for their children. Of course, they have to have go-betweens because there are whole generations that were robbed of their language and culture because of residential schools and the sixties scoop.

The member mentioned that she is going to support the bill, yet she has problems with it. My concern about that is whether there has been genuine consultation and accommodation for first nations if we say that it was all very interesting but we are going to pass the bill anyway and maybe, someday, somebody might table a new bill.

For several of the bills that have come through this place, I and some of my colleagues have taken time allotted out of our own budgets to translate them. I find it stunning that we are bringing forward an indigenous languages bill, yet the government of the day did not take the time to make that bill available in at least some of the indigenous languages. I wonder if the member agrees with me that we need to do more than from time to time have somebody stand up in this House and speak in an indigenous language because they happen to be indigenous or to be learning an indigenous language.

Is there more that this place needs to do to genuinely act on truth and reconciliation and the UNDRIP on languages and culture?

• (1250)

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for her passion on this incredibly important issue.

The simple answer to her question is absolutely. Absolutely, there is more that we can and must do to continue to walk the talk, as it were, in terms of the promotion of indigenous languages.

I would acknowledge that we have come some distance. I was thrilled to hear during debate this morning that not only was the indigenous language of Cree spoken, but in fact, for the very first time, a question by one of my colleagues and the answer to that question were given in the Cree language. That is something to be celebrated, and we need to see more of that.

My colleague, the member for Vancouver Granville, speaks the language of Kwak'wala. I am not sure if I am saying that exactly right either. However, she talked about the fact that she might be able, in this House, to speak in her language, but we would need to provide interpretation.

Government Orders

•(1255)

Opposition members try to imply there is no money tied to this and that is just wrong. Let us look at clauses 8 and 9 and other aspects of the legislation. Money will flow as a direct result of it. There is the creation of a language commissioner to work at advocating, facilitating and ensuring we continue to move forward on this critically important issue, an issue I believe in my core that all members support. The comments of members tend to support the need to recognize the true value of indigenous languages and how the enhancement of those languages will be to the betterment of not only indigenous communities but of Canada's society as a whole.

For this reason, I would encourage all members to think about this as being a historical moment for the House. The acceptance of the legislation beyond the House is great and even overwhelmingly positive. For indigenous groups and individuals and non-indigenous people whom I have had the opportunity to talk about the legislation, it has been long overdue.

The legislation would ensure that many important languages do not disappear. I highlighted three languages that are fairly prominent within the riding I represent: Ojibwe, Anishinaabe and Cree. There are many others within Winnipeg North that may not be as commonly spoken but are equally important with respect to recognizing the potential in those languages.

Within this legislation, we allow for agreements to be reached where funding would flow. Other comments from the NDP, which appears to not want to see the bill pass, deal with the sixties scoop. If members read the legislation, the sixties scoop is incorporated into it. As a society, we need to recognize the harm caused by the settlers who came to what we know as Canada today. Many mistakes were made.

I believe the general feeling from the population as a whole is that we get behind the issue of reconciliation. Senator Murray Sinclair is the author of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the calls for action. He demonstrated incredible leadership, which has allowed the national government, provincial governments, municipal governments and the different stakeholders to recognize the importance of indigenous people and what we can do collectively to ensure we continue to move forward. By supporting Bill C-91, we are making a tangible commitment to moving forward on this issue.

•(1300)

For this reason, I encourage members on all sides of this House, in particular my friends in the New Democratic Party, to reconsider their comments this afternoon and look at making it very clear that they do, in fact, support Bill C-91, because if we listen to what they were saying this afternoon, it is obvious that they do not support it, which I believe to be a mistake. I believe that, as the previous speaker indicated, this should be an apolitical piece of legislation. It does not have to be partisan. Members of all political parties and independents can get behind it.

When the minister introduced the bill, and when it went through second reading and the committee stage, there was a great deal of interest, and the government consistently indicated that it was open to ideas and ways in which the bill could be modified. As I indicated,

a number of changes that were proposed were accepted, not just from government members but also from opposition members.

The speaker prior to me mentioned the word *kintohpatatin*, which implies the importance of listening. In representing Winnipeg North, I believe that I have listened to my constituents with respect to the issues surrounding Bill C-91. I believe that the Prime Minister has been listening, has understood, and has been working diligently with cabinet, the caucus, and I would go further by saying all parliamentarians on this very important issue.

This is, in good part, about reconciliation, which is why it is so important that we send a strong message by talking positively about the legislation and supporting it. It does not mean that we cannot talk about ideas or thoughts we might have to improve upon it in the future. It should go without saying that any legislation brought into the House of Commons always has the potential to be improved upon. There are 90-plus pieces of legislation coming through the House. Some of them, such as this one, are really good and all parties should get behind them. This bill might not necessarily be perfect in the way each individual would like to see it, but that does not mean that one has to vote against it. We must look at the principles at hand and what is behind the legislation.

This is more than just talk or propaganda. This is real. Hundreds of millions of dollars would flow as a direct result of this legislation. Indigenous languages in Canada would be better preserved, and in some cases saved, because of this legislation. At least three calls to action would be answered by this legislation. The overwhelming majority of indigenous people, from what I understand, are behind Bill C-91.

There will always be some who will say that we could do more or that we could do this or that. I do not question that, but at the stage we are at today, this is good, solid legislation that would have a positive impact in every region of our country. It is good in terms of reconciliation and so many other things.

•(1305)

I would challenge my colleagues across the way to recognize the true value and meaning of this legislation, get behind it, and vote for it.

•(1310)

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud indigenous person from the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk and Laich-Kwil-Tach people of northern Vancouver Island who has an understanding of her own language, Kwak'wala, I understand the importance of maintaining indigenous languages and ensuring that they last into the future.

I listened to the hon. member's comments, and I think about the lost opportunity that we have to create the space and create the foundation for transformative change in indigenous communities.

Many people and many members in the House have talked about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is in the preamble of the bill and which speaks to the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of indigenous peoples, including languages, which, as an indigenous person, I know are central to our well-being.

Government Orders

Would the member agree that it would be more important to put the minimum standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into the body of the legislation, thereby creating the space for rights recognition and ensuring the longevity and sustainability of indigenous languages?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I recognize the member's language, Kwak'wala, as being the language of a good number of indigenous people. I also recognize how important it is that government continue to move forward.

Before this legislation existed, there was nothing. In just over three years of governing, we have brought forward legislation that will have a significant impact.

I have had the opportunity to work with individuals in my community. I often make reference to Sharon Redsky, Cindy Woodhouse, Amy Chartrand and many other members of indigenous communities. I suspect that if I were to canvass them today, they would tell me that it is really important that we pass this legislation. Not only should we pass this legislation, but we should not forget about it. Maybe we should look at ways to continue it going forward.

I am going to quote from Bill C-91, page 5: "contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it relates to Indigenous languages." That is actually within the legislation.

The bill might not be perfect, but at the end of the day I would like to see it pass, and I believe this is something Canadians as a whole would like to see. Let us talk about the future.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do need to have a conversation about the future and the logistics and the practicalities of delivering on the aspirations of this legislation, which may be in part what my colleague from Vancouver Granville recognizes.

We support this legislation. As Conservatives, we support the aspirations and the ambition around this legislation. We recognize the foundational importance of languages and the importance of passing on cultural traditions, values and faith through families.

Part of the issue is that the introduction of this legislation was delayed for so many years after the promise was first made by the current Prime Minister, and a bunch of amendments have just been made. Now he is talking about consulting on the logistics and the details in the future, after third reading of the bill in the House of Commons.

I hope the member can shed some light on exactly the concrete plan for delivering on the aspirations of this legislation that all of us support.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as we move forward, the government hopes that the bill will pass through the House and get the support of the Senate. The monies, and we are talking about significant amounts, millions of dollars, are already allocated in the budget. The government is prepared to invest in this legislation right away.

The Conservative Party, here in the House, is supporting the legislation. One of the reasons I was hopeful that all members of the House would get behind the legislation is that it would send a very

strong message to the Senate, to our senators. We want the Senate of Canada to realize that it is the desire of the elected House of Commons to see this legislation pass. This is a piece of legislation that we do not want delayed.

If we listen to the possibilities of changes, let us consider this. We received a bit of criticism, asking why it took us so long. There has been a great deal of consultation, and a great deal of work has gone into this. There have probably been thousands of individuals involved in getting us to where we are today.

Out of respect for everything that has been done to date, I think it is time that we stopped talking about it. Let us get the legislation not only passed in the House but passed in the Senate. The Senate should realize that Conservatives, Liberals and others want this legislation passed as soon as possible, as it is.

• (1315)

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am from Calgary Centre, the traditional home of the Treaty 7 people, including the Blackfoot, Stoney-Nakoda and Tsuut'ina people. I talk to people from that region, and they know how important this bill is, not only for preserving the indigenous languages, but also for passing on that education component to the youth so that they can continue to strive and thrive, and have that sense of culture.

I would like to applaud the member for his speech, particularly for recognizing many of the good works the government has done, including investments in education, reversing boil water advisories, embracing Jordan's principle to ensure that services are available for first nations children at the same standard as they would be otherwise, and continuing to revamp our foster care system to embrace a more indigenous approach with families.

I was really struck by how the member connected the work we are doing on the 94 principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We adopted this work in the last campaign, and we are making progress. I would like to hear more from the member about how this connects to the work we are doing, and how it is fundamental to really seeing a nation-to-nation relationship with our indigenous peoples.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, whether in the Prairies or any other region of our country, indigenous issues are of the utmost importance. I know my colleague and friend gives a great deal of attention to this issue. I truly respect that.

The member points out what I would like to highlight as a very important issue. We can demonstrate, at the national level, implementing the calls to action where we can, but when we talk about the 94 calls, it is not just the national government that has a role to play. There are other levels of government, other groups, and indigenous leaders themselves who all have a role to play in the issue of reconciliation and the calls to action.

As an example, I appreciate some of the fine work that my local school division, the Seven Oaks School Division, is doing in Amber Trails, one of the schools promoting indigenous language. These are the types of initiatives that can really make a difference.

Government Orders

Our role here in Ottawa is to be able to lead and demonstrate leadership on the issue of reconciliation. That is something the government has taken very seriously since day one. Bill C-91 is an excellent example of that.

I have had the opportunity to speak on our foster care legislation, which is another excellent piece of legislation. We had a private member's bill, Bill C-262, another excellent piece of legislation. We have seen strong leadership coming from the House of Commons, and we need to be able to see that sense of co-operation and leadership being applied in all the different areas of Canadian society.

• (1320)

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with my hon. colleague from Lakeland.

It has been a very interesting morning listening to the speeches, and I am happy to rise to discuss Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages. I have had the opportunity to study the bill as a member of the heritage committee. I participated for many hours on that committee. I learned a lot from witnesses, and we heard some very thoughtful, insightful commentary on the bill's successes. We also heard about some possible shortcomings. I appreciate my colleague across the way referring to having the opportunity to speak to some of those challenges.

Before I do that, I need to talk about a play put on by the Siksika at Strathmore High School called *New Blood Dance Show*, a story of reconciliation. This is a phenomenal production that relates specifically to this topic.

It was in 2014 that the director of this play was inspired when she went camping with her sister at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. While she was there, she saw writings that are sacred to the Blackfoot people. They are recordings of their stories. She was sad to learn that when the Blackfoot people were moved onto the reservation in the late 1800s, they were not allowed to visit their writings and learn of their heritage. For 70 years, three generations were unable to learn their stories, and the translations were lost. The show is about learning these stories.

The director met with the chief of the Siksika at the time, Chief Vincent Old Woman, and he told her many stories about going to a residential school, the loss of language and the loss of heritage. From visiting those writings, she developed a play called *New Blood*. This is a phenomenal play put on by high school students, the majority of them Siksika. The play has been performed many times in southern Alberta and in British Columbia.

What they would really like to do, though, is come to Ottawa to put on that play. It is a play people need to see, and hopefully, if they keep applying for grants, they will be able to achieve that goal. I hope people here are able to see that production.

I believe that there has been some discussion about the rushed nature of this piece of legislation. The Liberals brought this forward at the end of three and half years, although they said years earlier that this was a critically important piece of legislation. Not only did they rush it to the point of just getting it through to start the process in the House, we were asked to do a pre-study before it was sent to committee.

We met daily, sometimes for many hours. The rushed nature of this legislation is probably the reason for the amendments and the ongoing challenges. It was problematic in the sense that members on the committee identified specific words that were going to create problems. When I first suggested that some of these words would be problematic, there were snickers on the other side.

When constitutional lawyers showed up as witnesses and started pointing out these same words as problematic, saying that this could end up in court, it became much more interesting to see the reaction. What was then problematic was that just minutes before we started clause-by-clause, the Liberals dropped many amendments on the table that were the exact concerns I had brought up. When I brought them up, they were snickered at, but when a constitutional lawyer brought them up, the Liberals paid attention, because they could see that this could cause problems and be tied up in court.

The Liberals referred to many amendments by the opposition being accepted. They were not our amendments. I do not remember, sitting on that committee hour after hour going through clause-by-clause, the amendments from the opposition being accepted. It has been said many times that they were accepted by the opposition. I do not remember that happening.

• (1325)

The Liberals have a piece of legislation, which we agree with and support, but we do not agree with the rushed nature of it. They talked about the extensive consultations they had. When we asked questions about the consultations, first they talked about doing them for six months. Then they said there was a three-month window. When it came down to it, they did consultations for just weeks. In committee, they said that it was down to weeks.

When we thought of the 600 different indigenous groups and sub-groups, such as the Métis and all the varieties of people out there, we began to understand that this consultation process was flawed. When we started to hear from witnesses that they had missed critical groups of people to talk to, we began to understand why the legislation was flawed. We began to understand why the legislation has problems and why witnesses were saying that the Liberals missed the mark.

We agree to support the legislation. The government said two years or three years ago that it was going to do it, but it should have started sooner and developed legislation that could have circumvented some of those flaws. Witnesses appeared who said that the bill had nothing to do with the Inuit. They were left out and not consulted. There are constitutional lawyers who are still concerned that the language, even as amended, could become tied up in court. That is the wrong place for legislation to go. If the government wants to get something done, it has to make the legislation better before it is passed. Although we agree with having it, the process left a lot to be desired.

Government Orders

I think of the people I have met from the Siksika Nation, the people who work in the education system. I see the immersion programs starting in Siksika. When I visit the schools or speak at their graduations, I hear how important their language is, but I hear that they are concerned that those who are younger than the elders but older than the youth are going to miss out. Immersion programs are starting in schools, but when the students go home, who are they going to speak to, because their parents do not know the language? The educators view this as a huge problem. They were never consulted on how to deal with that.

The school systems working with this are dedicated. They want it to work. Those school systems for Michif believe that the money is headed into bureaucracies. They believe it will not come down to where it is needed at the grassroots level. They do not believe that they were recognized as key components of this particular legislation. I agree with that. From my education background, I know of many types of government legislation that has been announced that at the school level has trickled down as pennies. The dollars went into bureaucracy.

Witnesses said that they believe that the money will go into national organizations. They do not believe that it will reach the schools, where it should be, because they were not consulted. There are many instances of people talking about languages disappearing or being at risk. If this money disappears into bureaucracy, it will not save those languages. That was a concern of the witnesses.

We will support this. However, we believe it was too rushed. There are challenges with it, and we wonder if it will get where it needs to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was on the opposition benches, which was not that long ago, the Stephen Harper government would have legislation moving through committees. I do not recall ever seeing an opposition amendment passed by the government of the day. In the four years of his majority government, I never saw it.

The member talked about not listening or acting. The government has clearly indicated that where we can improve the legislation, we are open to it.

Let us look at clause 18, which I will use as an example. It says, “The Commissioner and directors are to be appointed to hold office on a full-time basis.” That is what the legislation says today at third reading. That is not what it said at second reading. It was amended. This was an opposition amendment. It was an NDP amendment.

This government listened, whether to individuals outside the House or inside it. Even opposition members were listened to.

This is good, solid legislation. Why can we not agree and just let it go through? It is good, and I believe that a vast majority of our constituents would get behind it.

• (1330)

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's interest in wanting to let things go through, but I think one of the reasons we are here is for the opportunity to speak to the bill.

The member talks about being able to speak to things. I know he is well versed in standing up to speak about many things, and I appreciate that he is able to do that. That is what we are here for. We have the opportunity to speak about legislation. We may be in support of it, but we point out things that may have been challenging during the process and may require changes in the future. That is our role and our responsibility.

We will support the bill, and we will get this done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sincerely grateful to my colleague from Bow River for his speech and his contributions to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, particularly in the case of this study. Unlike me, he has a direct connection to these people and their reality. He has often spoken on behalf of communities affected by this bill.

I second what he said about the importance of this bill. I share his disappointment in the Liberals' grand consultation, which was supposed to take care of everything and happened a lot faster than expected.

For years, our wonderful Liberal government sat back and did nothing. Now, all of a sudden, right before the election, the government thinks it is time to take meaningful action. Does my colleague not find that despicable? The government says everything is as it should be and wants us all to support the bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work done by the committee. There was input from everyone who spoke at committee. There was heartfelt work done, many hours of it. Members tried to find the right words to make this legislation work and to make it good.

We listened to incredible witnesses who brought suggestions to us. They understood the issue, and this helped us understand the legislation now before us.

As my colleague said, we had the opportunity to make suggestions and take the suggestions we heard from witnesses. It was a challenge to move them forward. They were excellent suggestions from witnesses, which were made to help this legislation.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered the historic residential schools apology. He acknowledged the two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures and to assimilate them into the dominate culture.

He said:

First nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools.... The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

Government Orders

That apology was the beginning of an earnest effort to start to heal the intergenerational harm and trauma caused to indigenous people by over a century of federal government-imposed policies. Stephen Harper's apology, which was the first by a prime minister in Canadian history, led to the final settlement on Indian residential schools and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to ensure the full history of the residential schools and the experiences of survivors and families were made public and to provide recommendations on the path forward for reconciliation. The final report included 94 calls to action. This bill addresses calls 13, 14 and 15.

It is crucial to understand the complex shared history of the founding peoples within Canada, including when the power of the state was used to break families and to harm children in unspeakable ways in a systemic attempt to destroy traditions, beliefs and languages. The long and difficult journey of survivors and their families in speaking about those experiences and about the impacts that reverberate in real ways today can enable meaningful reconciliation in the future.

More than 150,000 indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes as part of the residential schools program, a program that predated Confederation and continued well into the 1990s. More than 20,000 indigenous children were taken from their homes and placed with non-indigenous families, a wave of displacement that became known as the "sixties scoop". Generations of children grew up without parental role models, without grandparents and elders, without the love and nurturing of family members to pass along foundational family and cultural values. They grew up away from their families and outside their communities, and the effects are readily obvious today.

In 2016, Statistics Canada reported that of the foster children in private homes who were under the age of 15, 14,970 were indigenous, which was over half of all foster children in Canada. The disproportionate socio-economic challenges among indigenous Canadians, such as violence, suicide and high-risk vulnerability, show that impact. There is a long and multipronged effort ahead to make right that immense and systemic trauma caused to indigenous people by a government-driven attempt to dismantle their cultural practices.

As Conservatives, we in particular believe deeply in families as the building blocks of society; in parents as first teachers; in limiting the scope of the state in intervening with families and individuals; in language as the cornerstone of generations being able to preserve traditions, values and cultural practices; and in the free and equal inherent dignity, sanctity and self-determination of every individual human being. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the Conservatives were the first to take this important step and that we support the aspiration and ambition of Bill C-91.

However, while Conservatives made historic investments and took action regarding indigenous culture, education, housing and water treatment under the previous government, the reality is that a total reliance on federal funding will never provide the future that first nations want for their children. That is why indigenous economic reconciliation and empowerment are also important to Conservatives. When indigenous communities have access to revenues independent of the government, they can invest in their

own priorities without having to get approval from a civil servant in Ottawa or fit their plan into a federally prescribed program application. Empowering first nations economically provides the tools for indigenous communities to invest in their culture and to preserve and nurture their heritage and language for future generations.

In Lakeland, Joe Dion of the Frog Lake Energy Resources Corporation has been a champion of empowering indigenous people to generate sustainable wealth for communities, elders and future generations. I represent a region blessed with an abundance of natural resources and indigenous people and communities who participate as partners, owners, employers, contractors and workers in responsibly developing these resources. I am proud to represent all communities and people in Lakeland, including the Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, the Kikino Métis Settlement, the Frog Lake First Nation, the Goodfish First Nation, the Kehewin Cree Nation, the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, the Onion Lake First Nation and the Elizabeth Métis Settlement.

• (1335)

For those communities and, unfortunately, other indigenous communities across Canada, the dream of economic self-sufficiency is being blocked by the current Liberal government. The Liberals' anti-resource agenda is sabotaging the best hope these communities have to become truly independent of the federal government.

Isaac Laboucan-Avirom, chief of the Woodland Cree First Nation, said, "It frustrates me, as a first nations individual, when I have to almost beg for monies when we're living in one of the most resource-rich countries in the world."

When this Liberal Prime Minister vetoed the northern gateway pipeline, the equity partners said they were "deeply disappointed that a Prime Minister who campaigned on a promise of reconciliation with Indigenous communities would now blatantly choose to deny our 31 First Nations and Métis communities of our constitutionally protected right to economic development."

When it comes to the Liberals' no-more-pipelines bill, Bill C-69, Stephen Buffalo, president and CEO of the Indian Resource Council, on behalf of hundreds of indigenous-owned businesses, said:

Indigenous communities are on the verge of a major economic breakthrough, one that finally allows Indigenous people to share in Canada's economic prosperity...[but] Bill C-69 will stop this progress in its tracks.

About the Liberals' oil export ban, Bill C-48, which was announced with no indigenous consultation 30 days after the Liberals formed government, Gary Alexcee, vice-chair of the Eagle Spirit Chiefs Council, says, "With no consultation, the B.C. first nations groups have been cut off economically with no opportunity to even sit down with the government to further negotiate Bill C-48."

He said:

If that's going to be passed, then I would say we might as well throw up our hands and let the government come and put blankets on us that are infected with smallpox so we can go away. That's what this bill means to us.

He went on:

Government Orders

Today, the way it sits, we have nothing but handouts that are not even enough to have the future growth of first nations in our communities of British Columbia.

Those are incredibly difficult words to read, but they reflect the deep-seated sense of betrayal that many first nations now feel toward the current Liberal government.

As the Conservative shadow minister for natural resources, I almost always talk about the multiple indigenous communities or organizations that want to develop mineral and energy projects in their territories because a majority of indigenous communities want resource development and want to partner with businesses to create opportunity for their communities and for future generations.

There are also many examples of initiatives that indigenous communities want to fund and have begun to establish across Canada to preserve their languages and culture. One of those examples, Blue Quills, is remarkable in how it has been transitioned from something used to attack and dismantle indigenous families and cultures to now champion the preservation and the future of indigenous languages, faith and cultural practices.

Blue Quills, located out of St. Paul in Lakeland, was a residential school, and now it is the largest language, cultural and sensitivity training centre in the area.

The history of the college dates back to 1865; the present campus was built in the early 1930s as a mission residential school. Blue Quills is one of the first indigenous-administered post-secondary education institutions serving first nations and other students from across Canada. It offers several courses that teach the Cree language, as well as anthropology and interdisciplinary courses on indigenous communication through art, dance and language.

Lakeland College in Vermilion, with a campus in Lloydminster, offers a specific program for indigenous educators. The college hosts an indigenous elders-in-residence program.

All of these programs are funded in part through the financial support of the local treaty first nations. Those first nations are also the very ones involved in responsible energy resource development, and they are concerned about their future and their future financial prosperity being threatened by the Liberal attacks on oil and gas in my region.

It is incumbent on all members of this House to work toward meaningful reconciliation. I want to quote Taleah Jackson, a young woman originally from Saddle Lake and a cultural guide with North Central Alberta Child and Family Services and Blue Quills University, a constituent who inspires me. She says:

My language is important to me as I am not a fluent speaker I see the value and the beauty of the language of my ancestors. But more importantly Language is the key to our ceremonies, stories, protocols, identities and our ways of life. It was told to me once that when we speak our language we are speaking from our hearts and the Creator hears our prayers. We must respect our fluent speakers and Elders for they have been instrumental to the preservation of Indigenous Languages and keep our sacred languages safe.

I agree with Taleah, because protecting Canada's indigenous languages is protecting our shared Canadian heritage.

● (1340)

It was on December 6, 2016, that the current Liberal Prime Minister promised to introduce this indigenous languages act, and

over two years have gone by. I hope that the Liberals also will provide a concrete plan of how they will deliver on the aspiration of Bill C-91.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member raised some very heartfelt and difficult language from members of her community that really points to the need for additional reconciliation and the government making legitimate attempts to meet the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I will point to three of them, those being the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action 13, 14 and 15. Each of these relates to language and culture. Indigenous groups have told us that they believe the bill reaches that divide and is a step in the right direction to meeting those three calls to action.

Although a large part of the member's speech was about issues that are economic in nature and related to jobs, which are also important, I wonder if she can confirm to us that she supports the intention and spirit of the aspects of Bill C-91 that relate to the truth and reconciliation commitments and that she intends to support the bill in the House.

● (1345)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, Conservatives do intend to support this bill here in the House.

The point that I was trying to make is, first of all, that Conservatives value and recognize the importance of languages and the preservation of cultural traditions and values. It was Conservatives who recognized and apologized for the attempt to destroy indigenous languages and cultures and also took the first step, which I think future governments are going to carry out. We also recognize the importance of the difference between words, spending promises and legislation on the one hand, and action, outcomes and deliverables on the other.

My point near the end of my speech was similar to what some members have raised in the House today. It is that the current Liberal Prime Minister made a promise in early 2016 that is embodied in this legislation, but we are close to the next election already, and at this point this legislation is being rushed through the House of Commons, once again with some mistakes having been made and with the idea that there will be some sort of consultation afterwards.

I think what Conservatives are pressing is that the Liberals really need to let Canadians know exactly how the ambition and the aspiration of Bill C-91 will be delivered, either through programs or policies, and what the cost implications will be and when the partnerships with the levels of government, indigenous leaders, indigenous communities and indigenous educators will happen. What will all that look like?

I think that it is our responsibility to ask those questions. It really is the Liberals' responsibility to tell Canadians as a whole those answers, and also to tell the indigenous Canadians to whom they promised this legislation exactly how they will deliver it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the parts of her speech related to indigenous peoples. They were very positive. We really appreciate that.

Government Orders

In reply to her last question, there are all sorts of projects under way in indigenous languages, and there is a large amount of funding for the next five years. The process is already under way. This legislation just means that it will go on into the future.

A previous speaker talked about consultations. Once again, I will refer people back to the second reading votes, when we talked about a huge number of meetings and consultations with first nations, Métis and Inuit.

However, my question is this. One of the amendments that was accepted previously and is in the legislation now was that the legislation must be reviewed every five years. Is the member supportive of that amendment?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would support the ability for future governments to review the legislation every five years. I think that will be critical to measure the outcomes of this legislation. The outcomes, after all, will be the most important thing in the long term—not just the words, the rhetoric, the promises and the spending announcements, but whether the aspiration of this legislation can actually be delivered, which I think my colleague from Bow River was talking about earlier.

I certainly support that concept of future governments reviewing this legislation every five years.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I recognize the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, I must inform her that I will have to interrupt her in 10 minutes for question period. Afterwards, she will have 10 minutes remaining.

The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask you if I can share my time with the member for Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. I am sure he would like to speak to this bill.

Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages, is very important to our government. This bill was studied by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, of which I am a member.

I would like to start by acknowledging that we are gathered today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people. I am probably not saying that right, so I apologize. I am francophone, and I am sure everyone can hear it.

I am happy to express my support for Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages. This initiative is incredibly important, and it is urgent to take action, especially with regard to the role of elders in the revitalization of indigenous languages. Needless to say, the reason this situation is so urgent is that the number of indigenous elders who speak these languages as their mother tongue keeps shrinking.

With their considerable life experience, elders are held in high regard as wise keepers of language and traditional knowledge. The participants and keepers of indigenous language who contributed to the engagement sessions on indigenous languages legislation last summer emphasized the importance of taking action. In many communities, the situation is critical because the number of people

who can speak these languages fluently is shrinking as elders pass away. Hope that the languages can be passed on via oral tradition is fading.

In 2005, the message that emerged from consultations by the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures was that taking immediate measures to stem language loss was crucial. That was 14 years ago, and the situation has only become more urgent since. Participants noted that first nations, Inuit and Métis languages had been under attack for at least a century. It goes without saying that revitalizing these languages may take time. Nevertheless, we must set short-term goals and get projects going immediately. Urgent action is needed, but the process is likely to take quite some time.

It goes without saying that there is a need to provide support to indigenous communities and governments to help them act immediately. For example, in the first nations context, one in three seniors reported having an indigenous mother tongue in 2016. By comparison, about one in 10 first nations children aged 10 to 14 had an indigenous mother tongue. That is a huge difference.

Some languages have few remaining speakers of the grandparents' and great-grandparents' generation. While no indigenous languages in Canada are considered safe, it is important to state that language vitality across first nations, Inuit and Métis varies broadly. For example, among the Inuit, a higher percentage of seniors also reported having Inuktitut as their mother tongue, compared to younger generations. However, the Inuit have the highest percentage of mother tongue speakers across all age groups, compared to first nations and Métis.

Less than 2% of the Métis population reported the ability to speak an indigenous language. A higher percentage of Métis seniors reported an aboriginal mother tongue and the ability to speak an aboriginal language, compared with their younger counterparts. Appropriate solutions to support the reclamation, revitalization, strengthening and maintenance of indigenous languages will be determined on the basis of the vitality of a given language, and will be in keeping with the communities' language strategy.

Indigenous elders must play an active role, because they are the ones with the knowledge. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report stated that communities and educational institutions should be prepared to draw on valuable resources from indigenous communities to facilitate the teaching and transmission of indigenous languages.

● (1350)

This is not to say that indigenous languages are completely gone when there are no speakers left. Languages can be revived through the efforts of documentation and archiving. In such cases, elders are the most valuable asset to help build resources for their languages for generations to come.

Take, for example, Peter White, an elder from Naotkamegwaning, who used his expertise and resources to record stories and songs from his elders to preserve them for years to come. People like him are making a valuable contribution to revitalizing these languages.

There is also Bert Crowfoot, from the Aboriginal Multi-Media Society, who saw the importance of preserving language 36 years ago, when he made the decision to safeguard audio and film content on old reel-to-reel tapes, VCR cassettes, old 16-millimetre film and floppy discs that contain storytelling, interviews and music in the Cree language. Today he is helping to direct a project called Digitizing the Ancestors to create a searchable digitized archive. It will be a resource to help future generations learn Cree by hearing voices from the past.

Elders, the carriers of indigenous languages, are also the keepers of the traditional knowledge written into those languages. It is widely recognized that the wisdom of elders is vital to transmitting an authentic interpretation of languages. Elders are known to be the true language experts.

The First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres reiterated the importance of elders in its report on indigenous languages legislation engagement, stating that elders guide our work and act as language advocates and experts within their communities and on a national scale.

During the engagement sessions that led to this bill, participants often reiterated the importance of engaging elders in any language revitalization efforts.

This legislation provides the flexibility needed to support various levels of linguistic vitality. In certain situations, this could mean encouraging elders to take part in planning, in activities and in programs. In other situations, it might be just as important to give elders an opportunity to learn their language within their community.

This approach is based on the premise that language revitalization is multifaceted. Several different approaches might be needed to meet the needs of the various segments of the community, ranging from early childhood learning to adult immersion programs.

I will close by simply adding that, sadly, indigenous communities are losing elders every year. We must take action. I call on all hon. members to work together to pass this bill.

• (1355)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I wish to inform the hon. member that there will be a five-minute period of questions and comments after oral question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, the commissioner wants a modernized OLA. It is going to take a lot more than a mere modernization because the OLA is based on an ineffective minority language protection model and a gross distortion of reality, which perpetuates the assimilation of francophones.

The OLA supposedly puts French and English on equal footing, but bilingualism is not at risk in Canada, French is. For 50 years, instead of changing the criteria in order to make more French-

Statements by Members

language services available in Canada, the government has been changing the linguistic indicators to conceal the decline of French.

Instead of making French the common language in the regions where there is a critical mass of francophones, the government reinforces English in Quebec and is stingy about providing services in French in the rest of Canada.

Short of a complete overhaul, the only way forward for French is to make Quebec a country that can better support francophones and Acadians.

* * *

[*English*]

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to add my heartfelt thanks to the afternoon of great tributes in the Yukon legislature, dedicated to the retiring Dr. Floyd McCormick, who served as a clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly for more than 18 years.

Clerks in this chamber, who send their best wishes, appreciate that Dr. McCormick was president of the Association of Clerks-at-the-Table in Canada. He represented Canada at the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table Conferences. Clerks from around the Commonwealth value Floyd's significant national and international contributions to the profession.

Yukoners of all stripes applaud Floyd's devotion to and safeguarding of our parliamentary democracy. However, what is not emphasized enough is Dr. McCormick's tremendous contributions to those in our community who are less fortunate. He and his wife, Sheila, would spend countless weeks preparing food for soup kitchens. This is one of the many examples I could give on Floyd's selfless character.

I wish my witty, wise, professional, thoughtful, endearing and compassionate friend a wonderful retirement.

* * *

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL MEDIA

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the immense contribution of local and regional journalists, columnists, and television and radio hosts in my region who are vigilant about protecting diversity of viewpoint and opinion.

In the age of social media, where instantaneous communication is king, they produce well-researched, top-notch content. They provide coverage of regional news that is of critical importance to individuals, business owners, and merchants.

These bulwarks of democracy include St-Pierre, Fortin, Lévesque, Simard, Boucher, Gendron, Beaulé, Larouche, Tremblay, Lebel, Drouin, Montminy, Soucy, Bernard, Chassé, Harvey, Charest, Deschênes, Nadeau, Pellerin, Bergeron, and countless others who have worked in the field. It is imperative that we acknowledge their work.

Statements by Members

In closing, I want to pay tribute to Richard Bossinotte, who for nearly 25 years has started his program *En toute liberté*, broadcast Saturday evenings on CHOX-FM in La Pocatière, with the national anthem, *O Canada*. Thank you, Richard.

* * *

WATER QUALITY

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 1, I tabled a bill to amend the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act between Canada and the United States to incorporate water quality.

I was inspired by members of my community who advocate day in, day out, for the protection of our waterways. It is important to highlight the hard work of Jacques Landry, president of Actions Lac Champlain and mayor of Venise-en-Québec. I will soon be awarding him a medal in recognition of his outstanding efforts.

I want to thank each and every resident for always defending our water quality so passionately. We all need to keep up the fight.

Soon I will get to award an honorary medal to the people of my riding. Brome—Missisquoi is extremely lucky to have such earnest advocates defending the environment and the liberal values that make us proud.

* * *

[English]

OJIBWAY SHORES

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ojibway Shores is the last remaining stretch of undeveloped natural shoreline in Windsor, home to over 160 rare species. It is part of a complex that includes Ojibway Park, the Spring Garden Natural Area, Black Oak Heritage Park and the Tallgrass Prairie Park. This area could become one of North America's ecological treasures.

Unfortunately, this publicly owned property is controlled by the publicly owned Windsor Port Authority, which has a history of trying to destroy it. For more than a decade, the community has battled to preserve Ojibway Shores by stopping the port from clear-cutting the trees and using it as a dumping ground. Now the Port Authority wants the city of Windsor taxpayers to pay again for Ojibway Shores, property the public already owns. Is this the Liberal policy for Canadians, to buy their environment from themselves?

I have asked the environment minister to protect Ojibway Shores. She has the power and authority to do it. All it takes is mere minutes and the minister's pen.

With the climate change and UN report outlining species extinction, why has the environment minister been missing in action? Now is the time to act and secure Ojibway Shores and begin the process of establishing a national urban park.

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SURREY CENTRE

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was elected in 2015, my good friend, Andrew Petter, president of SFU came to me with an idea to expand the Surrey campus.

On November 8, 2016, the Prime Minister and I announced Simon Fraser University's \$125-million sustainable energy environmental engineering building with \$45 million from the federal government. Less than three years later, the facility is officially open, and 440 students are now ready to learn skills that will make them leaders in the clean tech sector.

I am proud to work with a government that prioritizes education and understands the importance of our youth.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to Surrey's Top 25 Under 25, SBOT recipients, namely: Khayla, Anjali, Gurjevan, Summin, Donya, Adelaide, Ravneet, Karanvir, Aruba, Hajira, Shilpa, Tawanda, Chetanya, Shawna, Arpit, Haleena, Gaganjit, Ravneet, Abhayjeet, Brahmroop, Tanraj, Branden, Harjot, Richard, and Peyton.

Congratulations to Surrey's best and brightest.

* * *

● (1405)

IRAN ACCOUNTABILITY WEEK

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whose life matters?

At different times in history, the idea of universal human dignity and value has been challenged from different sources and for different reasons.

Some societies have sought to deny recognition to some human beings because that denial was economically convenient. If your society relies on slave labour, then recognizing the humanity of enslaved persons is inconvenient, even though it is morally right.

Other societies have used dehumanization to justify the expropriation of property from minorities or other forms of exploitation.

Sometimes it is inconvenient to recognize the vulnerable as human because it is costly to help and support them.

Our assessment of who is human should not depend on convenience; it should reflect objective reality.

Important events are taking place on Parliament Hill today, where people gather to speak out about the mass killing of innocents by the Iranian regime, as part of Iran Accountability Week.

It may not always be convenient for us to take a stand against that regime, but it is something we must do. We must stand against the dehumanization efforts of that regime, and ensure that universal immutable human dignity is recognized in every situation.

[Translation]

RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with the founders of the Dorval-based organization Respect Human Rights.

The organization's mission is to ensure respect for and application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to promote companies that respect those rights. According to the organization, our companies and institutions still have a lot of work to do. Thanks to initiatives like these, Canadians will be treated with dignity at work.

[English]

As Nelson Mandela said, “Any man or institution that tries to rob me of my dignity will lose.”

In the eyes of the law, and in a free and democratic society, we are all equal. Human rights are universal because they belong to all people. They are inalienable because they cannot be taken away, and are non-discriminatory because they must be respected without prejudice.

* * *

[Translation]

WINE FESTIVAL

Mr. Richard Hébert (Lac-Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, as a lead up to the Cépages en fête wine festival, Dolbeau-Mistassini held its 13th annual Gaspé dinner hosted by Hermel Bujold, a proud entrepreneur from the Gaspé who has been living in Lac-Saint-Jean for over 10 years. The event was an opportunity to discover the delicacies of the Gaspé region and attend a concert by our musical ambassador, Mario Pelchat, who was born in Dolbeau-Mistassini.

The second annual Cépages en fête will take place from June 13 to 15 in downtown Dolbeau-Mistassini. The festival's mission is to help people discover local wines from Lac-Saint-Jean and Quebec. Our region has an abundance of outstanding, high-quality products that are worth promoting.

I urge everyone from Lac-Saint-Jean to attend this festival marking the beginning of summer.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, Canadians were promised a Prime Minister who would be open by default, who would make decisions that would be based on science and not politics, who would not use omnibus budget bills, who would not gag civil servants, and what did they get?

We have a Prime Minister who has used multiple omnibus budget bills. He wants a northern B.C. tanker ban that is based entirely on politics and not on science. In 2016, the Prime Minister signed off on 235 civil servants being gagged for a lifetime over the so-called capability gap of the fighter jet replacement program. Today we still

Statements by Members

have many unanswered questions over SNC-Lavalin as well as Vice-Admiral Mark Norman's trial. In other words, Canadians got precisely the opposite of what they were promised by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister is not as advertised.

* * *

CHILD TAX BENEFIT

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the positive impact of the child tax benefit that was introduced by our government and the tremendous impact that it is having on families and communities across Labrador.

As of January 2019, more than 4,700 children and their families in Labrador communities have received the child tax benefit. This has meant over \$1.5 million in payments to these families.

Families in Labrador, like all families across Canada, are using this money to help pay for child care, after-school programs and improvements to housing. This money is helping them address food insecurity. Most importantly, it is lifting children in Canada out of poverty. Since 2013, child poverty in Canada has been reduced by 40%, in part due to the child tax benefit.

We know there is more to do and we have acknowledged that. We will continue to work towards—

• (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

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[Translation]

MOTHER'S DAY

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, we will celebrate and thank mothers. Day after day, these women give their all unconditionally. I want to wish an early happy Mother's Day to all all mothers, especially my wife Rana and *mia mamma* Providenza.

Cara mamma, I owe everything I am and hope to become to you. Grazie!

I would also like to send my best wishes to the many wonderful women who bestow maternal love on all those around them, although life did not bless them with children of their own.

[English]

I wish a happy Mother's Day to every woman who spreads motherly love. I thank them for shaping the leaders of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

[Translation]

I thank them for all of the visible and invisible acts of love they do each day.

Buona festa della mamma!

*Statements by Members***PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives, the Davie shipyard got the contract to convert the *Asterix* supply ship, which is now the pride of the Royal Canadian Navy. The ship was delivered on time. The Liberals, in contrast, dragged a vice-admiral with an impeccable career through the mud.

The Liberals have not awarded a contract for the *Obelix*, which our navy desperately needs. The Liberals' naval strategy does even not include plans to deliver a ship. The Davie shipyard had over 1,200 workers while the Conservatives were in office. Now all that is left are famine, crumbs and shady dealings.

In October, Quebecers will have an opportunity to put an end to interference, cronyism and arrogance by booting the Liberals from office. Davie workers deserve better. Quebec deserves better. Canada deserves better.

* * *

MEMBERS-PAGES SOCCER MATCH

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening MPs faced off against the pages in a soccer match. It was so nice out that neither team could use the weather as an excuse except when Matteo Le Clair and Damien Pilon scored the pages' first two goals.

Then the Conservative member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin passed the ball to the NDP member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who scored a goal.

[*English*]

In a novel display of non-partisanship, Liberals rejoiced this co-operation by the opposition.

The MPs pressed for an equalizer, but Quinten Beelik was a wall in the net for the pages. Jonah Sider-Echenberg forced me into some difficult saves, but even our gender-balanced cabinet featuring the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the Minister of National Defence could not save us from ourselves: two own goals by the Liberals. Sometimes sport does imitate life.

[*Translation*]

In the end, it was four to one for the pages. We have immense respect for them.

Congratulations to the pages.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Congratulations to the pages.

The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I join with millions of Canadians who believe that global warming is the defining political issue of our times. Climate scientists have explained how critical the current situation is. If we do not take immediate and effective action, we will face environmental catastrophe of immense scale. We could melt our polar ice caps,

lose the planet's coral reefs and see the extinction of a million species. Floods and wildfires are already here.

Thankfully, the movement for change is growing, and it is being led by young people all over the world. In Vancouver last week we saw thousands of students walk out of classes to march for action. In Vancouver Kingsway, I witnessed the energy and creativity of students from Windermere Secondary School, who organized Earth Day events and a mini WE Day to inspire youth-led change for a better future.

Let us follow the example of these young people and take the steps necessary to make sure they inherit a planet that is sustainable for all generations to come. I stand with them.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister sold himself to Canadians as something that he simply is not. Now, after broken promise after broken promise, failure after failure and scandal after scandal, buyer's remorse has set in.

The Prime Minister proudly announced to the world that Canada was back, but that was followed by a disastrous trip to India, a worse NAFTA deal, a blunder with the Chinese—I mean Japanese—prime minister and a collapsed relationship with China. The Prime Minister also claimed that he would usher in a new era of co-operative federalism, but when provincial governments did not simply agree with his carbon tax scheme, he imposed it against their will anyway.

Despite promising to be open and transparent, he has been caught multiple times politically interfering, and those who dared to speak truth to power had their reputations smeared.

The list of disappointments goes on, but one thing is certain: The Prime Minister is simply not as advertised.

* * *

● (1415)

MANITOBA

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Sunday, May 12, marks the 149th birthday of Manitoba, Canada's keystone province. Next year, the province will celebrate its 150th anniversary since being founded by Louis Riel's provisional government in 1870.

Manitoba is the traditional territory of over 60 first nations, and it is the heartland of the Métis nation.

We are proud to be the home of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the world-renowned national microbiology lab, where the ebola vaccine was developed.

Undeniably, Winnipeg, Manitoba, is the curling capital of the world, and Churchill, Manitoba, is the polar bear capital of the world. The province is also the home of the mighty Winnipeg Jets and of Folklorama, Canada's largest and longest-running multi-cultural festival.

Manitoba has an incredibly rich history of welcoming people from around the world.

I would like to wish all of our vibrant and diverse Manitoba communities a very happy Manitoba Day and a happy Mother's Day, too.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman's lawyer said, "No person should walk into a courtroom fighting their elected government or any sort of political factors." Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened in the Mark Norman trial.

The Prime Minister interfered in the judicial process. He withheld documents from the defence. The Liberals denied Mark Norman access to his own emails.

Why did the Prime Minister so clearly have his finger on the scales of justice in the Mark Norman case?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, almost everything the member opposite just said is not correct. In fact, as the director of public prosecutions stated yesterday, there was no contact or influence from outside the Public Prosecution Service either in the initial decision with respect to the laying of this charge or the decision to stay the charge.

The member opposite should know that all of the procedures conducted by the office of the public prosecutor and the RCMP are totally independent of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mark Norman's lawyer said, "what you don't do is you don't put your finger and try to weigh in on the scales of justice." However, that is exactly what did happen in the Mark Norman trial. The Liberals actively worked against him.

The Prime Minister said that Norman would be charged while the investigation was ongoing. He refused to waive cabinet confidentiality. He withheld thousands of documents from Norman's defence team.

How does the Prime Minister defend his blatant interference in an ongoing judicial proceeding?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, it is a little offensive to hear the member opposite impugn the integrity of the RCMP in the independent conduct of its investigations and also to impugn the integrity of the Public Prosecution Service, which has made crystal clear that at no time was there any contact or influence

Oral Questions

from the government and that all decisions with respect to initiating the prosecution or staying it were made independent of the government.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants Canadians to believe that because he failed when he tried to politically interfere in yet another criminal proceeding, that his failure should be celebrated as an exoneration of his bad behaviour. That is like saying that someone who tries to rob a bank should get off the hook if he or she fails to get away with the cash.

The Prime Minister withheld documents, coached government witnesses and tried to bankrupt Mark Norman. How does the Prime Minister defend this blatant political interference in the judicial system?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, none of that is actually true. Let me be clear that all procedures conducted by the office of the public prosecutor and by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are totally independent of the Government of Canada. The entire structure of their work is designed to keep them independent.

Decisions that are made are made on the basis of proper legal considerations and the evidence. All of those considerations are weighed carefully in court before a judge.

The matter was entirely without political influence, and that is exactly what the director of public prosecutions averred yesterday.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister did everything he could to stop the Davie shipyard. He tried to destroy the reputation of Vice-Admiral Norman, who stood up to this interference. The Prime Minister does not like anyone to oppose him, which is exactly what the former attorney general did in the SNC-Lavalin affair. By strange coincidence, when the former parliamentary secretary announced that he would testify against his own Liberal government, the charges were dropped.

If that is not interference, then what is it?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve better than innuendo. Therefore, I would remind the member opposite that when legal matters are to be investigated, they are investigated independently by the RCMP. Any decision with respect to laying of charges is made independently by the director of public prosecutions. As the director of public prosecutions made crystal clear yesterday, there was no contact to any member of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada in the determination of these decisions and there was no influence by the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are the only ones who do not see any interference in this matter. The truth is that the Liberals did not want the contract to go to Davie, so they tried to destroy the career of Vice-Admiral Norman, a man of absolute integrity.

Oral Questions

This Prime Minister refused to hand over the evidence to Vice-Admiral Norman, and yesterday his lawyer said that the Prime Minister's Office was even counselling witnesses.

If that is not political interference, then what is?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, with respect to the court order to produce documents, here are the facts. The Government of Canada met all its obligations with respect to third party record applications. All documents from the priority individuals identified by the defence in February were, in fact, provided to the court. In total, over 8,000 documents on behalf of the seven government organizations were submitted to the court over the course of this process.

It is important to acknowledge that on this matter both the judge and the Crown thanked departmental officials for their excellent co-operation in this process.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are struggling to find a place to call home. We are in the midst of a national housing crisis.

I met a woman who lived in co-op housing and she told me that living in co-op housing meant she was able to build a life, she was able to raise her three kids. Why can the government not understand that we need to build new homes, affordable, non-market, non-profit and co-operative.

Will the government adopt our plan to build half a million new affordable homes across the country?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to answer this question because not only do we have a plan to give every Canadian a safe and affordable place to have a home, but we also have put that plan into place since 2015.

In November 2017, we announced the first-ever national housing strategy, which will give half a million Canadian families a safe and affordable home in the years to come. We know we have a lot more to come, but we are well beyond planning for the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from Burnaby to Montreal, adequate and affordable housing should be a right, but it is increasingly out of reach for too many families.

After three years of Liberal inaction, Canadians are spending more and more to meet their basic housing needs. We have to make different choices to get different results.

Why do the Liberals refuse to adopt our plan to immediately build 500,000 quality affordable housing units?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to be able to repeat my answer. Since 2015, the Liberal Government of Canada has been proud of its work to make the Canadian government a

leader and partner on housing again. This leadership had been lacking for far too long.

In November 2017 we launched a national housing strategy that will free half a million Canadian families from living in unacceptable housing conditions all across Canada, far beyond Burnaby and Montreal. We are proud of this plan and we are now very proud to be implementing it.

* * *

● (1425)

JUSTICE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Vice-Admiral Norman's trial has been a disaster from the beginning. Once again, there are serious allegations of interference by the Prime Minister's Office.

The NDP has asked the director of public prosecutions to exercise her right to appoint an independent prosecutor to investigate these allegations. We need to restore public trust.

Will the Liberals co-operate with the director of public prosecutions so we can get to the bottom of this?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I quite frankly find it offensive when a member in the House rises and impugns the integrity and reputation of the RCMP and the director of public prosecutions by suggesting they would ever conduct their business in any way that was less than independent.

If the member opposite perhaps did not hear, the director of public prosecutions yesterday repeated that there had been no contact or influence from outside the PPSC either in the initial decision to prosecute or in the subsequent decision to stay the charge.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are clearly avoiding the question. Yesterday we learned crucial information was not just hidden from Vice-Admiral Norman's lawyers, it was even hidden from the prosecution. His lawyer said that the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's Office withheld information, but she did not know why. The only people who can answer why are sitting on the Liberal benches.

Why did the Liberals hide vital information from the prosecution, the defence and from the rest of Canadians?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. The government met all of its obligations with respect to third-party record applications. As I have said, all documents from priority individuals as identified by the defence in February were in fact provided to the court.

Over 8,000 documents on behalf of seven government organizations were submitted to the court over the course of this process. The government met its obligations, and the public prosecutor has indicated that there was no inappropriate contact or influence on her decision-making.

Oral Questions

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about political influence. In the first Liberal cabinet meeting, Scott Brison interfered with a naval shipbuilding contract, and that action leaked out. The Prime Minister had the leak investigated and the Privy Council Office identified 73 people who were aware of the leak.

My question is simple. How many of the 73 names did the Prime Minister or the PCO give to the RCMP to investigate?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is a lawyer and shares the same profession as me. Therefore, he should know that when we investigate a charge, that is done by law enforcement, and in this case the RCMP. He should know that when we lay a charge that it is sent by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, an entity that his party created while in power. Finally, he should know that when a decision is made to withdraw a charge or stay it, that is also done by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

All of those entities, and all of those steps were taken independently, as they should be in the country.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as that member should know, the Prime Minister asked for an investigation of the leak. Seventy-three names were found to have known about the leak, but only one name was handed to the RCMP, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman. Without that investigation, he would not have been relieved of command. Without that direction from the Prime Minister's Office, he would not have lost his job, his reputation or have spent two years fighting for the vindication he had yesterday.

Will the member stand in the House and apologize to Vice-Admiral Mark Norman?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in different contexts, I have a lot respect for the member opposite for the advocacy he does for the men and women in uniform in the country. However, it is important to underscore that there are men and women in uniform, namely the RCMP, who took charge of the very investigation that the member is impugning. He is impugning the law enforcement officials and the independence of their work.

Who the member should also listen to is not just from our side of the House, but the defence counsel for Admiral Norman who said "The decision to stay this prosecution...was discretion exercised by prosecutors and the DPP, unimpacted by any political considerations, as it should be."

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville needs to calm down.

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

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing we do know is that former minister Scott Brison stepped down because he did not want to have to answer questions about taking the contract for the *Asterix* away from the Davie shipyard and handing it over to his buddies.

What is more, the Prime Minister implicated himself by going out of his way to prevent the disclosure of documents. If he really wanted to know the truth, he would have allowed Vice-Admiral Norman's defence team access to all the requested documents, even his own emails.

Does the Prime Minister still believe there was no political interference?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I will emphasize three key points.

First, the decision to investigate was made by the RCMP. Second, the decision to lay a charge was made by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. Third, the decision to withdraw the charge was also taken by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

It is also important to note what the director of public prosecutions said in her own words:

[*English*]

"No other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political—

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it true that the first decision of the Prime Minister and cabinet was to seek to cancel the *Asterix* contract, hurt Davie and eliminate 1,000 jobs in the Quebec City region? That was this cabinet's first decision.

They also refused to hand over thousands of pages of documents that were requested by Norman's defence team. The documents that were received recently were redacted. They did not want to provide these document before because they knew full well that the charges would be dropped. They did not want to question important witnesses and it was the Prime Minister himself who asked the RCMP to investigate.

Why are they trying to convince Canadians that there was no political interference?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question of political interference was raised a number of times by the director herself, yesterday. I just read her comments into the record.

What I can say about the investigation and the legal process is that the government fulfilled all its obligations. All the documents from the individuals identified by the defence were submitted to the court. All told, over 8,000 documents involving seven organizations were submitted. As far as the status of the file is concerned, the judge even thanked departmental officials for their co-operation.

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly the Prime Minister does not like it when people of honour stand up to him.

He tried to interfere in a shipbuilding contract, but Vice-Admiral Norman protected the navy and the delivery of the ship it needed. When the Prime Minister did not get his way, he began a politically motivated campaign against Vice-Admiral Norman. He instructed the RCMP to investigate and told the public that Norman would be charged and end up at trial.

When will the Prime Minister realize that he cannot use the power of his office to attack those he views as his enemies?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I respect the member's service to this country, as we all respect Vice-Admiral Norman's.

However, what I can underscore and perhaps elaborate for her is how the legal process works. The legal process conducts itself in an independent manner. When requests for documents are made, we identify the documents. Decisions as to what is redacted and what is covered by cabinet confidences are made independent of political actors, as they should be.

Furthermore, we do not intervene in that judicial process, because we safeguard the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law. That is the way the system is supposed to work, and that is something I would hope all members of this House would appreciate and protect.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those independent organizations can only make informed decisions if they have the documents to read them.

The Prime Minister thinks he is above the law, and it is time to restore Canadians' confidence in the highest office in the land. We know that he politically interfered by refusing to turn over critical documents to Mark Norman's lawyers. He interfered by refusing to waive cabinet confidence. He interfered by counselling key witnesses on what to say.

Everyone knows this is political interference. When will the Prime Minister admit it?

• (1435)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us hear what the actual director had to say:

No other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence in either the initial decision to prosecute Mr. Norman or in the decision to stay the charge today.

The reason the Minister of Border Security was so appalled by this line of questioning is that members should not impugn the integrity of the people who are leading the judicial system or who are independent officials. Second, members should not impugn the integrity of people who do not have a chance to stand up in this House and defend themselves.

I will do it for them. The director of public prosecutions operated independently at all times.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, whether we are talking about Vice-Admiral Mark Norman's reputation or the workers at Davie shipyard in Quebec City, the Prime Minister's reprehensible behaviour on this file has had significant repercussions. The Liberal government is showing that it has no respect for the rule of law. Now we are hearing about allegations of witness tampering, not to mention the documents the government concealed.

Will the Liberals finally allow Canadians to hear the truth and order a genuinely independent inquiry to get to the bottom of the Mark Norman affair?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I can say in response to that question is that the investigation was handled by the RCMP.

The decision to prosecute was made by the director herself. The decision to stay the charges was made by the director herself. I want to highlight the comments of Mr. Norman's counsel once again. She said:

[English]

The decision to stay this prosecution was discretion exercised by prosecutors and the DPP, unimpacted by any political considerations, as it should be.

She further underscored that that is in fact how things are supposed to work. I agree with her assessment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nobody on this side is impugning the motives of the RCMP or the director of public prosecutions; what we are impugning is the motives of a government that interfered in this case when the Prime Minister said, before charges were laid, that it was going to go to court, which hired the reporter who reported on Scott Brison's pork-barrelling, and which has been accused of having told witnesses what to say. That is what we are trying to get to the bottom of.

Instead of trying to defend the director of public prosecutions with its discredited word, it should launch an independent investigation to show that nothing happened. When are we going to have—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite unfortunate that it has come to this. In the last four months we have had two occasions when the director of public prosecutions has felt it incumbent upon herself to issue public statements about non-interference. The first was in February, when she talked about comments that related to a different matter that was being elaborated on in this House. The second was yesterday.

The fact that she feels compelled to issue these kinds of statements, declaring in the loudest voice possible that no influence occurred, is actually a function of the type of question we are facing in this House. I think it is a sad state of affairs, because independence is important.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Vice-Admiral Mark Norman objected to the Liberals' scheming and interference and stood up for the navy, the Prime Minister attacked him and accused him before criminal charges had even been laid. That is interference.

The Liberals did not hesitate to drag the vice-admiral through the mud and try to destroy his unblemished career. However, we now know that the vice-admiral defended the Royal Canadian Navy against the Liberals' partisan interests. The *Asterix* was delivered on time and on budget.

When will the Prime Minister apologize to Vice-Admiral Norman and give him back his—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister played no role in the decision to stay proceedings. He was not aware of the decision made by the director of public prosecutions in this case. The PPSC acts independently, but in this case, it is acting on behalf of the Attorney General of Ontario, which, under the Criminal Code, is responsible for overseeing the case.

Yesterday, the director of public prosecutions said there had been no contact or influence from outside the PPSC on either the initial decision or the decision to stay the charge.

• (1440)

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Vice-Admiral Norman took a stand for the Royal Canadian Navy and against Scott Brison's political interference, the Prime Minister attacked him.

We know that Vice-Admiral Norman always made good decisions that were in the national interest and that the Davie shipyard delivered the *Asterix* on time and on budget. As far as military procurements go, it was a resounding success.

When will the Prime Minister apologize to Vice-Admiral Norman?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Public Prosecution Service of Canada confirmed, every decision was made completely independently. Based on this decision, the deputy minister has revised the policy in place regarding Vice-Admiral Norman's original request to have the legal fees paid for. I have agreed with this advice and have authorized it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister himself said that Mark Norman would end up in court, even before charges were laid. Clearly, this was a political attack on someone who was standing up for what is right. It is another example of the Prime Minister attacking someone who got in his way.

Oral Questions

When will the Prime Minister apologize and have Vice-Admiral Norman reinstated as vice-chief of the defence staff?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate what the Public Prosecution Service of Canada said, that every decision was made independently.

I want to quote from the statement that was released. It states:

No other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence in either the initial decision to prosecute Mr. Norman or in the decision to stay the charge today.

General Vance, the chief of the defence staff, will be meeting with Vice-Admiral Norman, and then we will be talking about the next steps.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not what Canadians see in the aftermath of the Vice-Admiral Norman travesty. What they see is a pattern of corruption with the Prime Minister, the PMO and the Liberal government, who attack and try to discredit anyone who stands up for truth, who stands up for what is right and who gets in their way.

What is the government really so desperately trying to hide? Will the Prime Minister apologize to Vice-Admiral Norman and reinstate him as the head of the navy and second-in-command of our armed forces?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, no other factors were considered in this case, and no influence was created.

General Vance will be speaking with Vice-Admiral Norman at the appropriate time, and a discussion will be had as to the future.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, HIV patients in Saskatchewan are not receiving treatment with free, readily available antiretroviral drugs that will save their lives and prevent transmission of the virus. This is in direct violation of the Canada Health Act. Meanwhile, many young people with HIV in my province are dying, and Saskatchewan has the highest HIV diagnosis rate in the country.

Why will the Liberal government not enforce the Canada Health Act and ensure that HIV patients in Saskatchewan have the same access to treatment and care as other Canadians?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is deeply committed to addressing HIV and AIDS. We are investing \$87 million annually to tackle HIV and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne illnesses.

If there is an issue in the province of Saskatchewan, as the member has indicated, I would be happy to have her come forward and speak to me, and I will take it forward to Health Canada.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, key members of the Trois-Rivières business community are getting behind a promising project at the airport. The city just invested in the construction of a new terminal, and the federal government is also expected to contribute soon.

Meanwhile, the Liberal government snuck a measure on the privatization of security services at Canadian airports into the most recent budget.

Are the people of Trois-Rivières and its business community right in thinking that this privatization could facilitate the implementation of security measures and the designation of their airport?

[English]

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure Canadians that we are putting forward measures to improve the air passenger experience. We have provided funding to address increasing passenger volumes at our airports and to decrease passenger wait times. Our government is committed to maintaining the highest levels of security for the travelling public while improving the passenger experience. Any decision that is made on CATSA privatization will take those into account.

* * *

● (1445)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian businesses and consumers know how important the U.S. market is for the Canadian economy. That is why it was so important to negotiate a good new NAFTA deal.

However, the Conservatives have repeatedly changed their tune about NAFTA. During the negotiations, they urged us to capitulate to U.S. demands to reduce our access, then criticized the good deal that we got. Now they are reversing themselves again.

Can the minister tell this House why the new NAFTA is such a significant achievement?

Ms. Pamela Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean is absolutely correct. Our government stood firm for a good deal, and we got a good deal. We did this despite the fact that the Conservatives and the Leader of the Opposition were advocating for capitulation and to accept any deal at any cost.

Yesterday, after months of criticizing the new NAFTA, the opposition leader promised to ratify it. He admits it is a good deal. He is clearly on board with our leadership.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a crisis of affordability in this country, and it is the fault of the government. Canadians are being crushed by

high fuel prices because of the carbon tax and the Liberals' hostility to pipelines. We put forward a common-sense motion this week that would help people afford to get to work and to school. The government voted against it: absolutely shameful.

When will the Liberals admit their carbon tax is nothing but a cash grab, and stand with Canadians for a change?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the party opposite voted for the Paris Agreement and for standing up and taking action on climate change. What are those members doing now? They are lying to Canadians. They are not saying to Canadians that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

The hon. Minister of Environment and Climate Change should know that the word she used is unparliamentary. I would ask her to apologize for using that word.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that.

The party opposite is misleading Canadians. Instead of actually talking about the cost of climate change to Canadians, which has gone from \$400 million to over \$2 billion per year that everyone is paying for right now, instead of talking about the money that Canadians are getting back, with a family of four in Ontario getting a climate action incentive rebate of \$307, Conservatives are misleading them because Conservatives do not want to take serious climate action. They do not believe that climate change is the problem. They want to do—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, gas prices in British Columbia are sky-high, and residents in my riding do not have the option of walking across the border with jerry cans, which is what is currently happening.

Yesterday, the Liberals doubled down and voted against eliminating the carbon tax and for keeping prices at the gas pumps high. Now that they have rejected our plan, what is their plan to make gas prices more affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. We have not put a price on pollution in B.C., because B.C. has stepped up. B.C.'s gas price has gone up by one cent because of its carbon price.

The party opposite does not seem to understand that everyone is paying the cost of climate change. In Ottawa, in the national capital region, we have seen massive flooding that is impacting people's lives and people's property. It is just going to get worse. Our climate change report says that Canada is warming at twice the global average.

We need to take action on climate change. Why will the party opposite not join us?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely clear that the Liberals have no plan to make gas more affordable. The Prime Minister himself said that the carbon tax being high is what he wanted to change behaviour. Well, changing the behaviour of cancer patients who have to drive to their treatment is not acceptable. There are many, many impacts for everyday Canadians that the Liberals do not seem to understand.

We have a plan to make life more affordable, eliminating the carbon tax and getting Trans Mountain built. Why will the Liberals not just admit that they do not care about the price of gas in British Columbia?

• (1450)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why does the party opposite not care about climate change? Climate change is real. It is having an impact.

In British Columbia, there were forest fires that were burning stronger and longer than ever before. There were mothers who were talking to me about being worried about their kids going outside because the air quality index was 10 or dangerous. There were people who were being hit in the tourism industry, because people were worried about the forest fires and the impacts.

We need to take action on climate change. There is a real cost. The environment and the economy do go together in the 21st century. I wish the party opposite would understand that.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals do not have an environment plan. They only have a tax plan. That is because the millionaire Prime Minister has never had to worry about money, and it shows. The Liberals' carbon tax has increased the price of everything. Their new fuel standard will further hike the cost of gas and diesel, and their cancellation of northern gateway and delays on the Trans Mountain expansion have helped drive prices to all-time highs in B.C.

The Prime Minister actually says that making everything more expensive for everyone is “exactly what we want”. Well, the Liberals do, but Canadians do not.

How could the Liberals actually vote against the Conservative motion to stop increasing the price of gas?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about what we have done to make life more affordable. We have increased taxes on the 1% so we can reduce them on the middle class. We brought in the Canada child benefit—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. It is notable that members would like to have the rules applied strictly but only against the other side. That applies to both sides. Order.

The hon. Minister of Environment has the floor.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about how we have made life more affordable for Canadians. We reduced taxes

Oral Questions

on the middle class. We brought in the Canada child benefit, which has raised 300,000 children out of poverty. Yes, we are making it no longer free to pollute, but we are giving the money back to Canadians, so that a family of four in Ontario will receive \$307, which is more than most families will pay.

We need to take action on climate change. We need to grow our economy. We need to do it in an affordable way. That is what we are doing.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the CRA claims that the majority of mental impairments are temporary, including autism, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. In fact, these are life-long conditions. They are severe and prolonged, yet the CRA still expects these individuals to reapply for the disability tax credit.

Rather than gouging vulnerable people and their families, will the minister just commit to correcting this unconscionable policy immediately?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that living with a disability can have a major impact on the daily lives of those affected and their loved ones. That is why we put in place measures to make the disability tax credit more accessible, especially by simplifying the form and allowing nurse practitioners to certify their patients' forms.

The government reinstated the disability advisory committee, which was dismantled by the Conservatives in 2006, in order to give people with disabilities a strong voice in their dealings with the agency. We look forward to the committee's recommendations.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, experts are calling out the Liberals' failure to address the housing crisis and their attempts to mislead Canadians.

Oral Questions

They revealed that the percentage of federal spending on housing is at a historic low and that funding for social housing remains stagnant. They have exposed how the Liberals inflate their numbers by treating existing programs as new ones, counting hypothetical money and representing provincial spending as their own. They say the Liberals are not serious about housing and are taking baby steps.

Why is the government deceiving Canadians and refusing to act on affordable housing?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer this question.

We believe that every Canadian should have a safe and affordable place to call home. That is why, since 2015, we have invested \$7.5 billion, additional dollars, helping one million families. That is why in November 2017, we announced the first-ever national housing strategy, a \$40-billion strategy. Sorry, it is a \$55-billion strategy, because of the April 2019 budget. That is going to lift half a million Canadian families out of housing conditions that are not acceptable in 2019.

* * *

●(1455)

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CTV News reported that the Liberal government is cutting a program that employs dozens with developmental disabilities.

These workers are finding great meaning in their work at Library and Archives Canada. Our leader has pledged to restore the funding for this program.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and reverse this cold-hearted cut?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking unprecedented actions to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in our economy, including inclusive work opportunities. With respect to this program, we have been working for a year with this organization. We have extended their contract. We are making sure that they have meaningful work so they can contribute to our government's operations.

We are not in the business of paying people a dollar an hour to do work, as the Conservatives were.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this all seems highly unlikely. The Liberal government is taking the jobs of 34 Canadians with disabilities who work in the archives, jobs that cost the Canadian government a mere \$500,000. More than money, the government is also taking away their honour, pride, and dignity.

Will the Prime Minister stand up and apologize, or will it take another six months to resolve the situation?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said,

we are not letting these people go. We are looking for meaningful work for them. They are exceptionally gifted employees.

We are not in the business of paying people a dollar a day. I misspoke in my previous response. I meant to say a dollar a day. Our government pays its employees fairly. It is important to remember that we have been working with this organization for a year and we will find good jobs for these people.

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they are not paid a dollar a day; they are paid at the Ontario minimum wage level.

Canada's disability community's motto is "Nothing about us without us", but the Prime Minister is moving on without them, cutting 34 jobs for disabled Canadians. The disabled community is already concerned with the Liberals' refusal to strengthen the toothless accessible Canada act.

When, at committee, the minister was asked about these job cuts, she said that these people are no longer operationally required.

A Conservative government would save these jobs. Will the Liberals follow our lead and reverse these heartless job cuts?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I will set the record straight. It was our government that actually committed, extended the contract and paid these individuals up to minimum wage. It was the Conservative government that paid them \$1.50 a day. It is only under the leadership of our government that they are being paid the wage they deserve.

We are working tirelessly with this organization to find them work. I did not say these individuals were not operationally required. I said that the work they were doing is no longer necessary, so that is a very important distinction. I have absolute respect for these workers and their families, and we are doing right by them, I can assure all Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, anti-choice activists are rallying on Parliament Hill today. What is worrisome is that some Conservative members are joining them, trying to control women's decisions over their bodies.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

We know that members of the Conservative Party do not believe that safe access to abortion services is a right, because they said so in the House last year. In the face of these threats to women's health, could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health tell the House where the government stands on women's right to choose?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, women, and women alone, should be the ones making decisions about their own bodies. That is why we stood up for safe access to abortion at home and abroad, from supporting groups like Planned Parenthood to increasing access to Plan B and Mifegymiso. It should concern all Canadians that the Leader of the Opposition only won the Conservative leadership thanks to the same anti-choice activists protesting today. Unlike the Conservatives—

• (1500)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Red Deer—Mountain View.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Earl Dreshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry contributes over \$110 billion annually to the Canadian economy, yet the Liberal government seems perfectly content to let countries such as India, Saudi Arabia, Peru, Vietnam and now China get away with taking unwarranted trade actions against this vital sector of our economy. Canola farmers are the most recent victims of the Liberal government's bungling with our global partners. When will the Prime Minister resolve the canola issue with China?

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week was a good week for Canadian canola farmers. The federal government, working with provincial governments, stakeholders and farmers, announced a support package for farmers, while recommitting our efforts to resolve the trade dispute with China. We continue to call on China to resolve this issue based on scientific evidence. On top of that, the Minister of International Trade Diversification is leading delegations around the world to promote the best-quality canola in the world.

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*[Translation]***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's culture and communications minister wrote to our Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism to share his concerns about the crisis at Telefilm Canada.

As a side note, I hope that the minister will allow the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to support my motion today to call Telefilm Canada before the committee.

Since last week, CTVM.info and all major media outlets have been reporting about how much the cultural community needs a strong, tuned-in Telefilm Canada. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism promised to act this week.

It is already Thursday, so does he have some good news to announce about our cultural scene, for once?

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been working on this issue for the past month. Directors, producers and creators can count on us. As the minister said last week, we will have concrete solutions to announce this week. It is not about scoring political points; it is about ensuring that movies in French can be produced this year. Why is the member trying to politicize that? We are used to the Conservatives turning their back on our culture, but why is the NDP only talking about this important issue now?

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, information technology has revolutionized our lives, but cybersecurity has emerged as an issue that comes with challenges and great opportunities for growth.

I would like to know what actions our government is taking to aid cybersecurity initiatives.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for Brampton South for her advocacy on this topic.

We are working with our partners in business and academia in order to strengthen Canada's cybersecurity and to become a world leader in the field.

We have invested \$895 million to fund our new national cybersecurity strategy to ensure that our cyber-systems are secure and resilient, to encourage innovation and to support effective leadership and collaboration between government and all our partners.

Our government will be introducing legislation to create a Canadian framework for cybersecurity across all sectors.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reach of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps goes far beyond brutalizing its own population. It goes far beyond interfering with its Middle East neighbours. It is also terrorizing Canadians, such as radio host Narges Ghaffari, by forcing family members in Iran to pass on the message of "Stop your activism", so that, as the saying goes, "no one gets hurt".

A year ago, the Liberals voted in favour of our Conservative motion to list the IRGC as a terrorist group.

When will the Liberals stop tolerating this murderous regime, take a stand for human rights and finally list the IRGC?

Business of the House

● (1505)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Criminal Code listing regime is an important tool for countering terrorism and is part of the government's commitment to keep Canadians safe.

The update to the listings is an important step to fight terrorism globally and ensure that Canada remains a safe and peaceful country. There is a prescribed step-by-step process. New entities are added once it has been determined that they meet the legal threshold.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it has gotten to the point where Premier Legault has to think about scaling down and delaying the Quebec City tramway project because the federal government is not pulling its weight. The project is \$800 million short. The money is there, but the government refuses to hand it over to Quebec without conditions. This problem could be solved tomorrow morning.

Will Ottawa get out of the way, let Quebec manage funds from the integrated bilateral agreement based on its needs and contribute fully to the Quebec City tramway?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to answer this question.

Everyone is clear on the fact that the federal government allocated \$1.2 billion to the project from the start. It did so in June 2018 when the Philippe Couillard government told Mr. Labeaume that Quebec could be ambitious and build a comprehensive transportation system with a \$3.3-billion envelope. He knew perfectly well where those federal funds were coming from. Those funds were available in 2018 and they remain available today.

As a proud citizen of Quebec City, I truly hope that Mr. Legault's government will make the Quebec City tramway a priority, as it should.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, could the government transfer the funds with no strings attached and do the same for other programs?

What we are hearing is that the \$800 million has to come out of the green infrastructure fund, meaning that all of Quebec's municipal green programs would have to be scrapped to make way for the Quebec City tramway. We should not have to choose between sacrificing our regions or sacrificing our national capital. We can carry out all of these projects if the money is transferred in a lump sum.

Tax revenues are supposed to be used to serve our needs, not to serve programs.

Will the government let Quebec handle infrastructure dollars without imposing conditions?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague

that a budget of \$5.2 billion has been allocated for public transit in Quebec. He will be happy to hear that Quebec is getting the biggest chunk of this public transit budget per capita, not including the \$1.8 billion from the green infrastructure fund. The Couillard government agreed to take the federal government's \$800-million contribution from that fund, leaving \$1 billion for the rest of Quebec.

Furthermore, in the last budget, we used the federal gas tax to increase transfers to municipalities by \$500 million. The margins are there. If Quebec's priorities have changed, the Legault government should say so.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am told on good authority that the Prime Minister has a secret plan to ban legal firearms. Apparently this plan is to be executed by cabinet directive, with no debate in Parliament.

The Prime Minister plans to announce this gun ban at the Women Deliver conference to be held in early June in Vancouver, which New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern will also attend.

Could the Prime Minister confirm or deny this zero-accountability secret plan?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the House that the government remains absolutely committed to undertaking all measures that are effective in keeping Canadians safe.

As I believe every member of the House would agree, there is no greater responsibility for any order of government than the safety of its citizens and the protection of its kids, and we are prepared to consider whatever measures would be effective in this regard.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope we receive a more extensive answer than we did in the answer to the last question.

Could the House leader for the government tell us what business we can expect for the remainder of this week and for next week?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will complete debate at third reading of Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act.

Tomorrow we will begin debate on the Senate amendments to bill C-55, an act to amend the Oceans Act and the Canada Petroleum Resources Act.

Next week the government will be proposing a motion to debate the rising climate emergency across Canada.

[Translation]

At noon on Monday, we will resume debate on Bill C-55.

On Tuesday, we will move on to Bill S-6, the Canada–Madagascar tax convention implementation act, 2018.

Wednesday shall be an allotted day.

Finally, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), I would like to designate Tuesday, May 14, for consideration in committee of the whole of the main estimates for the Department of Justice.

• (1510)

[*English*]

In closing, mothers who provide love and guidance are present in our lives in many forms. I am thankful to the mother figures in my life. On behalf of the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada, and I am sure all members in this House, I wish all mothers a happy Mother's Day.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions on a point of order.

* * *

PARLIAMENTARY INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe you will find agreement for the following motion regarding the parliamentary internship programme, of which I am a proud former intern:

[*English*]

That the House:

- recognize the fiftieth anniversary of the Parliamentary Internship Programme, founded in 1969 through a motion of this House, which operates on a non-partisan basis under the auspices of the Speaker, and is administered by the Canadian Political Science Association;
- congratulate the ten current interns, alumni, and staff of the Parliamentary Internship Programme; and
- reaffirm its support for this outstanding experience for young professionals to learn about and participate in Parliament.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the

Government Orders

opportunity to rise in the House to once again discuss an important issue.

[*Member spoke in Michif as follows:*]

Bonn Lapray Mijee

[*Michif text translated as follows:*]

Good afternoon

[*English*]

It is always an honour to rise and speak in this House on behalf of the citizens of Saint Boniface—Saint Vital on legislation that will have such a profound impact on Métis, first nation and Inuit people across this great country.

Today we have had the opportunity to hear speeches in indigenous languages. Unfortunately, I will not be able to recite the entirety of this speech in my own indigenous language, the language of the Métis people, Michif. However, I have often risen in this House and spoken about the deep pride I have in being a member of the Métis nation.

I am proud to represent my riding of Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, the birthplace of Louis Riel and his final resting place. When I rise in this House, I often think of my ancestors who fought not only at Red River but also in Batoche. I think of Joe Vandal who was killed in a battle at Batoche. I think of his relatives, Baptist Vandale and Pierre Vandale, who were arrested at Batoche fighting for Métis rights in Saskatchewan. I try to honour their legacy by continuing the fight to improve the lives of Métis people across this country.

Bill C-91 is indicative of the progress that our government has made, in partnership with indigenous people, towards reconciliation. This piece of legislation was inspired, promoted and advanced by indigenous people. It was the Assembly of First Nations which, in its document “Closing the Gap”, emphasized the importance of protecting indigenous languages across Canada. This document raised the profile on the issue, bringing it to the national stage.

We have seen for generations the Government of Canada implementing laws and regulations on indigenous peoples without their input or collaboration. However, the legislation we are speaking of today is the very opposite of that historical practice on how we make laws in Canada. The idea for the legislation came directly from first nation, Métis and Inuit people. While novel, it is shocking to me that it took this long until any government actually started listening to indigenous people to make laws that they want for themselves.

The bill itself was co-developed with indigenous groups, ensuring that the legislation reflected the needs of indigenous groups. Through the committee process, the bill has been improved through more consultation with indigenous individuals, groups and organizations. Frankly, this is exactly the way legislation concerning indigenous peoples needs to be created.

Government Orders

For me, this piece of legislation is extremely relevant and time-sensitive. The world is watching what we do as a nation to protect indigenous languages. The United Nations declared that 2019 was the International Year of Indigenous Languages. In passing Bill C-91, we are taking concrete action as a federal government to ensure that the protection of these languages is enshrined in federal law.

What is equally important with this law is ensuring ongoing funding for the protection of these languages. I would be remiss if I did not mention the investment that was committed in budget 2019 for indigenous languages. Budget 2019 commits \$334 million over five years with \$116 million ongoing. This is not perfect, but it is definitely a tremendous step in the right direction. I am very proud of our budget commitment towards indigenous languages.

I feel that I am a living example of why this legislation is very important. While I had the opportunity to learn both official languages, I am also proud to be a Franco-Métis, and like many other Métis people, I was not afforded the opportunity to learn the Michif language.

• (1515)

In 2016, according to census data, there were approximately 580,000 Métis living in Canada. However, only 1,170 indicated knowledge of Michif. This exemplifies the problem facing indigenous languages in Canada. Roughly 0.002% of Métis people can speak their language.

Historically, Métis people actually spoke a variety of languages, including Michif, French, English, Cree, Ojibwa and Bungi. One of these languages, Bungi, a combination of Gaelic and Cree mixed with French and Sauteaux, is already extinct. Brayet, believed to be spoken by Métis in what is now Ontario, a mix of French and Ojibwa, is also extinct. It is nearly impossible for us to determine specifics of this language. This is a true shame, and emphasizes why we must work together to protect other indigenous languages.

Together, there are three dialects of Michif. Michif is considered by linguists to be the true mixed Métis language. It mixes Plains Cree verbs and verb phrases and French nouns and noun phrases along with some Sauteaux as well as English, depending on the locale and the family.

Michif French, spoken in various places in all three prairie provinces, is a dialect of Canadian French that sometimes employs an Algonquin syntax. Northern Michif, spoken in northwest Saskatchewan, is a dialect of Plains Cree with a tiny number of French words.

Despite the staggering low number of Michif speakers, we must praise the resilience of these languages. Despite a history of colonization and a history of residential schools and day schools, the Michif language still exists today. This speaks to the pride of the Métis people in their culture and in their history.

Métis people have also been undergoing a cultural re-emergence. More people are discovering their Métis heritage and reclaiming their traditions and cultural practices. Despite all the attempts throughout the history of Canada to destroy indigenous cultures and traditions, we have persevered.

Through institutions, such as the Louis Riel Institute in my province of Manitoba and the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan, learning materials have been made accessible and available to the Métis. These learning materials serve a dual purpose through teaching and instruction, but also in maintaining and preserving the language.

I must also mark the work of Norman Fleury, a Michif language specialist. Norman's work to preserve and protect the Michif language has been invaluable. The Métis people owe Norman a great deal of gratitude. Norman is the author of the first Michif dictionary, *La Lawng: Michif Peekishkwewin*.

With this legislation, I hope that it will be easier for children and grandchildren across Canada to learn their indigenous language.

I hope to see within my lifetime a thriving community of Michif speakers. With this legislation I believe that this is both possible and attainable.

• (1520)

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you will note that all sides of this House recognize the importance of language revitalization and preservation.

However, what I have been consistently concerned about is there are five weeks left in this Parliament and the government, in the last weeks of this Parliament, is rushing many pieces of legislation through. We hear there are so many now that the legislative clerks are having trouble keeping up.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary why it is with bills that are produced by the government in an unheard of way there have to be 23-plus table-dropped amendments. It is absolutely unheard of. What could give us any confidence that the government has actually done this particular piece of legislation right?

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work we have done in indigenous communities on many fronts.

Since being elected in 2015, we have invested, in partnership with the Métis, Inuit and first nation peoples, over \$21 billion in infrastructure, education, health and child welfare. We have made a real difference in all of those fields across the country. We launched the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The bills we have introduced are only part of the overall strategy toward better meeting the interests of indigenous peoples across Canada.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a number of times my colleagues have tried to insert into the binding text of the legislation the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Currently, in this piece of legislation, it is once again in the preamble but is not part of anything that is binding.

I wonder if my hon. colleague might comment as to why we once again find ourselves with a bill for indigenous people that does not include the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Government Orders

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, our government was very proud to support the private member's bill on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP. I believe every member on this side of the House supported that legislation, which is currently in the Senate. We hope that it will receive royal assent before we rise for the next election. Given that every member of this House has supported UNDRIP speaks for itself. Once it receives royal proclamation, I hope it will be the underpinning of much legislation. Legislation such as this fulfills the actions that begin with the adoption of UNDRIP. I am very supportive of UNDRIP.

• (1525)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his incredibly hard work on this legislation.

In the “Purposes of Act” part of the bill, clause 5 states, “The purposes of this Act are to”, and under paragraph (g) on page 5, it states, “contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it relates to Indigenous languages.”

I wonder if the member could comment on the significance of that with respect to the bill.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage for his hard work on this languages bill. It really came together through the contributions of many individuals on all sides of the House.

Five or six years ago, if we had asked ourselves whether the words “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” would actually be in the text of a bill that was approved in the House of Commons, and I hope will be approved in the Senate and receive royal proclamation before we rise, we would have told ourselves that it was absolutely impossible. This side of the House has endorsed UNDRIP unanimously. The wording contained in UNDRIP is in this bill. We are very proud of that. It is something that is going to make this country stronger.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, I would like to salute all the people of Beauport—Limoilou tuning in this afternoon. I would also like to salute my colleague from Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, who just gave a speech on Bill C-91. We worked together for a time on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I know languages in general are important to him. I also know that, as a Métis person, his personal and family history have a lot to do with his interest in advocating for indigenous languages. That is very honourable of him.

For those watching who are not familiar with Bill C-91, it is a bill on indigenous languages. Enacted in 1969, Canada's Official Languages Act is now 50 years old. That makes this a big year for official languages, and the introduction of this bill on indigenous languages, which is now at third reading, is just and fitting. That is why my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, the Conservative Party's indigenous affairs critic, said she would support the bill when it was introduced back in February. Nevertheless, we do have some criticisms, which I will lay out shortly.

The bill's purpose is twofold. Its primary purpose is to protect indigenous languages and ensure their survival. Did you know that there are 70 indigenous languages spoken in Canada? The problem is that while some languages are still spoken more or less routinely, others are disappearing. Beyond ensuring their survival, this bill seeks to promote the development of indigenous languages that have all but disappeared for the many reasons we are discussing.

The second purpose of the bill, which is just as commendable, is to directly support reconciliation between our founding peoples and first nations, or in other words, reconciliation between federal institutions and indigenous peoples. As the bill says, the purpose is to support and promote the use of indigenous languages, including indigenous sign languages. It seeks to support the efforts of indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen indigenous languages, especially the more commonly-spoken ones.

Canada's official opposition obviously decided to support the principles of this bill right from the beginning for four main reasons. The first involves the Conservative Party's record on indigenous matters. Our record may not have been the same in the 19th century, and the same could be said of all parties, but during our 10 years in power, Prime Minister Harper recognized the profound tragedy and grave error of the residential schools. He offered an official apology in 2008.

I want to share a quote from Prime Minister Harper, taken from the speech by my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo:

The government now recognizes that the...Indian residential schools policy...has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

That is why my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo said:

We acknowledged in 2008 that [the Canadian government at the time was] part of the destruction of these languages and cultures. Therefore, the government must be part of the solution in terms of helping to bring the languages [and culture] back, and part of that is Bill C-91.

This is why I said that reconciliation is one of the objectives of this bill, beyond the more tangible objective. That is the first reason the Conservatives will support this bill on indigenous languages.

The second reason is that, under Mr. Harper's fantastic tenure, we created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was an important and highly enlightening process.

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• (1530)

There were some very sad moments. Members of indigenous nations came to talk about their background and share their stories. They put their cards on the table for all to see. They bared their souls and told the Canadian government what they go through today and what their ancestors went through in the 19th century. Not only did the Conservatives offer a formal apology in 2008, but they also created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to promote reconciliation between indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada and all Canadians. Our legacy is a testament to our sincere belief in reconciliation. I am sure that is true for all MPs and all Canadians.

Now I will move on to the third reason we support this bill. I am the critic for Canada's official languages, French and English. That is one of the reasons I am speaking today. When I first saw Bill C-91 on the legislative agenda, I considered the issue and then read the Official Languages Act of 1969. The final paragraph of the preamble to the Official Languages Act states that the act:

...recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the use of languages other than English and French while strengthening the status and use of the official languages....

When members examine constitutional or legislative matters in committee or in debates such as this one, we need to take the intent of the legislators into consideration. When the Official Languages Act was introduced and passed in 1969, the legislators had already clearly indicated that they intended the protection of official languages to one day include the promotion, enhancement and maintenance of every other language in Canada, including the 70 indigenous languages. Clearly that took some time. That was 50 years ago.

Those are the first three reasons why we support this bill.

The fourth reason goes without saying. We have a duty to make amends for past actions. Those who are familiar with Canada's history know that both French and English colonizers lived in relative harmony with indigenous peoples for the first two or three centuries after Jacques Cartier's arrival in the Gaspé in 1534 and Samuel de Champlain's arrival in Quebec City in 1608. Indigenous peoples are the ones who helped us survive the first winters, plain and simple. They helped us to clear the land and grow crops. Unfortunately, in the late 19th century, when we were able to thrive without the help of indigenous peoples, we began implementing policies of cultural alienation and residential schools. All of that happened in an international context involving cultural theories that have since been debunked and are now considered preposterous.

Yes, we need to make amends for Canada's history and what for what the founding peoples, our francophone and anglophone ancestors, did. It is a matter of justice. The main goal of Bill C-91 is to ensure the development of indigenous languages in Canada, to keep them alive and to prevent them from disappearing.

In closing, for the benefit of Canadians watching us this afternoon, I would like to summarize what Bill C-91 would ultimately achieve. Part of it is about recognition. The bill provides that:

(a) the Government of Canada recognizes that the rights of Indigenous people recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 include rights related to Indigenous languages.

This is a bit like what happened with the Official Languages Act, which, thanks to its section 82, takes precedence over other acts. It is also related to section 23 on school boards and the protection of anglophone and francophone linguistic minorities across the country. This bill would create the same situation with respect to section 35 and indigenous laws in Canada.

• (1535)

The legislation also states that the government may enter into agreements to protect languages. The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism may enter into different types of agreements or arrangements in respect of indigenous languages with indigenous governments or other indigenous governing bodies or indigenous organizations, taking into account the unique circumstances and needs of indigenous groups, communities and peoples.

Lastly, the bill would ensure the availability of translation and interpretation services like those available for official languages, but probably not to the same degree. Federal institutions can cause documents to be translated into an indigenous language or provide interpretation services to facilitate the use of an indigenous language.

Canadians listening to us should note one important point. I myself do not speak any indigenous languages, but for the past year, anyone, especially indigenous members, can speak in indigenous languages in the House. Members simply need to give translators 24- or 48-hour notice. That aspect of the bill is about providing translation and interpretation services, but those services will not be offered to the same standard as services provided under the Official Languages Act. However, it is patently clear that an effort is being made to encourage the development of indigenous languages, not only on the ground or in communities where indigenous people live, but also within federal institutions.

I would also point out that the bill provides for a commissioner's office. I find that a little strange. As my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo said, for the past four years, the Liberals have been telling us that their most important relationship is the one they have with indigenous peoples. I understand that as a policy statement, but I think it would be more commendable for a government to say that its most important relationship is the one it has with all Canadians.

Now I will talk briefly about the current Commissioner of Official Languages. Many will understand the link I am trying to make with the new indigenous languages commissioner position that will be created. Right when all official language minority communities across the country are talking about the need to modernize the act, today the Commissioner of Official Languages released his annual report and his report on modernizing the act. Most Canadians want bilingualism that is even more vibrant and more wide-spread across Canada. At the same time, there are clearly important gaps in terms of implementing the Official Languages Act across the entire government apparatus.

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I have a some examples. A few months ago, the National Energy Board published a report in English only in violation of the OLA. At the time, the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie said that was unacceptable. The government's job is not to simply say so, however. She should have taken action to ensure that the National Energy Board complies with the Official Languages Act. Then, there were the websites showing calls for tender by Public Services and Procurement Canada that are often riddled with mistakes, grammatical, syntax, and translation errors and misinterpretation. Again, the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie told us that this was unacceptable.

There is also the Canada Infrastructure Bank, in Toronto. The Conservatives oppose such an institution. We do not believe it will produce the desired results. In its first year, the Canada Infrastructure Bank struggled to serve Canadians in both official languages. Again, the minister stated that this is unacceptable.

These problems keep arising because of cabinet's reckless approach to implementing, as well as ensuring compliance with and enforcement of, the Official Languages Act across the government apparatus. It has taken its duties lightly. The minister responsible is not showing any leadership within cabinet.

● (1540)

When cabinet is not stepping up, we should be able to count on the commissioner. I met with the Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Thériault, yesterday, and he gave me a summary of the report he released this morning. He said that he had a lot of investigative powers, including the power to subpoena. However, he said that he has no coercive power. This is one of the main issues with enforcement. For example, the majority of Canadians abide by the Criminal Code because police officers exercise coercive powers, ensuring that everyone complies with Canadian laws and the Criminal Code.

The many flaws and shortcomings in the implementation of the Official Languages Act are due not only to a lack of leadership in cabinet, but also to the commissioner not having adequate coercive power. The Conservatives will examine this issue very carefully to determine whether the commissioner should have coercive power.

The provisions of Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages, dealing with the establishment of the office of the commissioner of indigenous languages are quite vague. Not only will the commissioner not have any coercive power, but he or she will also not have any well-established investigative powers.

The Liberals waited until the end of their four-year term to bring this bill forward, even though they spent those four years telling us that the relationship with indigenous peoples is their most important relationship. Furthermore, in committee, they frantically rushed to table 20-odd amendments to their own bill, as my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo pointed out.

How can the Liberals say their most important relationship is their relationship with indigenous peoples when they waited four years to table this bill? What is more, not only did they table the bill in a slapdash way, but they had to get their own members to propose amendments to improve it. It is not unusual for members to propose

amendments, but the Liberals had to table a whole stack of them because the bill had all kinds of flaws.

In closing, I think this bill is a good step towards reconciliation, but there are no tangible measures for the commissioner. For instance, if members have their speeches to the House translated into an indigenous language and the translation is bad, what can the commissioner do? If an indigenous community signs an agreement with the federal government and then feels that the agreement was not implemented properly, who can challenge the government on their behalf?

There is still a lot of work to be done, but we need to pass this bill as quickly as possible, despite all of its flaws, because the end of this Parliament is approaching. Once again, the government has shown its lack of seriousness, as it has with many other bills. To end on a positive note, I would like to say that this bill is a step toward reconciliation between indigenous peoples and the founding peoples, which is very commendable and necessary.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the way the member opposite structured his speech, especially the parallels he drew between the Official Languages Act and the indigenous languages act. I think they are very important.

We are celebrating 50 years of the Official Languages Act, and in these 50 years, we have made enormous strides in protecting both official languages in Canada and in increasing their use. In places like Toronto, many schools are bilingual, and there are many French immersion programs. There are many different programs available to support official languages.

It is in this spirit that I want to ask my question. It is essential that the government take leadership in ensuring that languages are protected. In a place like North America, which is predominantly English speaking, other languages, including French and indigenous languages, can easily be lost. In the case of indigenous languages in Canada, the government has played a very important role in their demise over past generations.

What does my friend think are the important aspects of the language commissioner? What can be done to strengthen that aspect?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. We are celebrating 50 years of having two official languages in Canada. They are official languages in terms of status and institutionalization of the facts, because historically, there were two languages three centuries ago. They were part of our identity in Canada, and they are still part of it.

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There are a few ways to ensure that the Commissioner of Official Languages has more powers. As legislators, we have to do our due diligence and look at this carefully. Specialists have said that we should have pecuniary and administrative sanctions. For example, some governmental agencies and private enterprises go against the law. Only one private enterprise in Canada is under the law, which is Air Canada. Some of them constantly go against the law in their behaviour and actions, on a monthly basis sometimes. Although the commissioner is constantly making recommendations, 20% of his recommendations are never followed, as was said this morning. Why? It is because he does not have the power to tell organizations to stop or they will pay a fine.

Another option is to have an executory deal. It is less coercive. The governmental agency or private enterprise could be asked to make a deal, such as being in accordance with the law within five months.

If my colleague is interested, he can look into how it is done in Wales, England. It has a commissioner who has huge coercive powers.

• (1550)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the member and I chatted once after a speech about Diefenbaker. We were on the same side for a short period, and then we veered off.

The government members have said that they entertained amendments from the opposition regarding the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I am not sure my colleague shares my view, but I would like to see the declaration in the text of the bill. I would like to hear his comments on that. The government has included it in the purpose of the bill, with language like “contribute to” and “facilitate”. It is not in the binding text of the bill, and for me, this means that it is not something the government has to adhere to.

I would also like him comment on the fact that we do not have to wait for a private member's bill, Bill C-262, to pass. The government has all the power it needs to include sections of the UN declaration immediately in the language bill.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, if I correctly understood what the member said, there is, in fact, a part at the beginning of the law that speaks about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, which does not bind the government to this law, and maybe she finds that unfortunate. However, I voted against UNDRIP.

There were some indigenous people in my riding who came to my office, and with courage and pride I sat in front of them and explained to them why it was actually a courageous act as a legislator in 2018 to vote against the ratification of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by Canada. Why? It is because most constitutionalists would say that it goes against some of our own constitutional conventions and laws, and I think that a courageous legislator must tell the truth to Canadians.

Although we might like UNDRIP, it is not in accordance with Canadian law. What is most important for a legislator is not to protect United Nations accords; it is to protect the Canadian law. I explained that to my constituent, who was an indigenous person, and

I think we had huge respect for each other. Although he did not agree with me, I understand why he could not agree with me, which was because of the history he had with us and the founding people. Maybe that is why UNDRIP is not so clearly enshrined in this law.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's speech and his passion for official languages. I only wish that I was fluent in more than just one.

There are some important distinctions between the Official Languages Act and the indigenous languages act. The indigenous languages act is about protecting and preserving. As the national chief famously said at committee, this is not about putting Cree on Corn Flakes boxes. It is about their culture and protecting language within their culture.

Could the member comment on the importance of a language?

Second, the member talked a little about the amendments. When the government has to introduce amendments, it is actually because of mistakes in the text. These are mistakes the government members did not catch when everyone else was submitting amendments. These are mistakes they had to fix at the very last minute. Could the member talk about how absolutely extraordinary it is for a government piece of legislation to have so many mistakes that it does not identify until the last minute?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, to the first question on the importance of language, I know what it means, because I am a Quebecker. I am a French Canadian, and I am able to speak in French in this institution, but I like to show respect and answer in English when someone talks to me in English. My father is an anglophone, by the way.

When my daughter was born five years ago, I intended to speak to her in English, and I told my wife that she could speak to her in French, but I could not do it, because when I speak in English to my daughter, it is not from my heart. I do not feel the connection. Therefore, yes, a language is fundamental to a person's identity. It is fundamental to carry the culture we are from. It is impossible for me to speak to my kids in English. I do not see them that much, because I am here, but when I speak to my kids, I want my heart to be speaking.

Second, it is obvious that there were a lot of mistakes in the bill, because the government had to present more than 20 amendments. We should be afraid that there are other mistakes in the bill, which we did not have time to discuss or analyze correctly. I think that could be something troublesome that the next government, which will be Conservative, will have to repair.

• (1555)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am hesitant and a little uncomfortable today to be speaking to this bill. I am going to talk about that in a bit.

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Before I do that, I just want to acknowledge what a great honour and privilege it is for me to represent the people of North Island—Powell River. One of the things that is unique and wonderful about that region is that I represent over 20 indigenous communities that come from the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples, the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples and the Coast Salish peoples. I am very proud to represent the northernmost part of the Coast Salish territory.

I have learned a lot from those communities and I know from them how important language is. I am also very proud that this fall in Campbell River we will have our first kindergarten immersion program, speaking Kwak'wala, which is amazing. It will allow a portion of the indigenous community I represent to send their children to school, learning their first language. I am so proud of that work.

It is important that we recognize on the ground how much work is being done in communities across the country and how many indigenous communities and the communities around them are working with them to make these things a reality.

My granny lost her language. She went away to residential school from the age of four to the age of 16. When she came home, she did not have a lot of memory of her language.

My auntie, her daughter, also the hereditary chief in my family, named Hatix-kuwa, which means “peace within the frame of a house”, now teaches language in our community. It is amazing that when the work is done and the focus is there, what communities can do.

When I heard about the legislation initially and I looked at it, I felt a lot of excitement and pride in the work the communities I represent and the community I am from had done. However, I am struggling.

It is important that when we are in the House, we remember that as legislators our jobs are to struggle. It is to not look at things simply but to look at them in a more broad and complex framework and to ensure we are humble as we walk in that path. When we make decisions, we make them on behalf of the many people in the regions we represent.

One of the biggest struggles I have in this place is that so little is being done, but it is better than nothing. At some point, it is important that we say that a bit better is not just better than nothing. It is not justice.

In the history of the country and its relationship with the first people of this land, justice has never been a reality. Where justice happens, it happens because the people themselves do the work to make that justice a reality.

I want to speak to the fact that it is hard because this bill aims to protect and preserve indigenous languages. It does not reflect the key recommendations that were made at committee by language experts to do that work. We need to sit with that. Recommendations that are needed to meet the objective of protecting and preserving these languages were not accepted.

I want to be very clear. From my perspective and the reality in which I have grown up, these languages were stolen, literally beaten out of children. When we look at the responsibility of this place to be part of protecting that, to bringing back those language keepers, to

ensuring we are passing that on to the next generation, we need to be accountable for that, all of us, because it is our job as legislators.

Language is the reality around us. Many elders have said to me that language is based on the land. It is based on the relationship that people have with the land and how the people act toward one another on the land on which they live. That is pretty fundamental. When we think about the languages that we have in the country and the fact that so many of us do not know them, it means we do not know the relationship of the people with this land. We do not know how the people interacted with the land and we do not know how they treated each other. I do not even know how to explain how important this is.

When I think of the elders and the wisdom they have given me and how they have had to translate that language into languages that I understand, I am just incredibly humbled and grateful. I am always aware that there is so much I do not even begin to understand. What an honour it is to be in that place and that they allow me to make all my mistakes.

● (1600)

The other concern I have with the bill, the other issue I am struggling with, is the financial resources are not stable and they are not long-term. How will this allow for the activity to continue and for long-term planning to occur?

Recently I was at an event with the Klahoose, Tla'amin, Homalco and the K'ómoks First Nations in my region. They are relatives. They came together and created a language site where they were sharing languages. All of these elders were saying words. It is all recorded so we can keep this, so we can protect it and pass it on to the children. Two of my children are part of that process.

I looked at the great work they were doing. One of their challenges was how to plan long term. When it is project to project, they continue to hope they have enough resources.

I am here to say that I want more. I want better. I want justice. I feel like it is time. I feel like it is way beyond time.

Another concern is the fact that the indigenous language commissioner has no guarantees on the extent of his or her powers and capacity to represent the best interests of the many communities across the country. When I think about the work the communities I represent are doing to protect their language, to protect the people who are the keepers of their language, to ensure they are in a process of taking the language keepers and passing it on as teachers to the next generation, it is a sacred duty, it is a sacred commitment and they are working so hard.

I believe there should be accountability in this place to know what is happening, to understand the challenges. The indigenous language commissioner should have a significant role in this responsibility.

The other thing that really concerns me was the fact that Inuit communities shared a lot of their concerns. The ITK suggested there should in fact be Inuit-specific legislation, that the proposed indigenous language commissioner was little more than a substitute for the aboriginal languages initiative program, which failed. It really just oversaw the decline of indigenous language in recent decades.

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When we hear testimony like that, we need to remember, as the people who do not understand the languages, there is a relationship there that we cannot fully comprehend, but we must honour it and recognize it.

Here I am, standing in this place again, looking at another piece of legislation that starts something, and people are going to support it. Of course the communities I represent want to see this. They want to see something. Again, it is a little better. It is better than it was before, and it is something to hang our hats on, but it certainly does not go far enough. It does not get to the core issue, which is, what is our commitment in this country as the representatives of the place that stole the language, that supported places that beat the language out of children?

One of the elders from my community used ask me to think about the first children who went to residential school and when they came home. They were gone for years and they came home and could not speak the elders' language. They could not speak to our own children. They were there and they were so happy they had finally come home, but the children could not understand what they were saying to them. They have still not healed from that.

When we stand in the House, we think we understand and when we propose things, we have to remember indigenous communities have paid long enough. I will struggle with this decision. I will struggle out of respect for the communities I represent. I will struggle because even in the face of this adversity, they are still here. Like my granny said, "You don't complain, Rachel, because we're still here."

We need to do better. We need to ensure that the people who are still here get to go so much further. We will do our due diligence and we will support them in doing that, recognizing they have a right to their language that was stripped away from them.

• (1605)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments the member opposite has put on the record this afternoon. Bill C-91 is historic when we look at the importance of language. As the member just finished illustrating, quite eloquently I must say, at the end of the day when we have those calls for action, when we talk about reconciliation in the report, three calls to action are addressed within the legislation.

I think we would all agree that it might not be perfect legislation, but we waited a long time, generations for it. It provides hope to the 15,000-plus people with indigenous backgrounds who I represent in Winnipeg North.

I wonder if my colleague would agree that the legislation moves us forward on the whole idea of reconciliation, rectifying a wrong, and in a tangible way provides hope for future generations. It is not just for indigenous people. We will find non-indigenous people who not only support, but also have an active interest in indigenous languages.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I think about the practices in the family I am married into. The practice is that when we talk about serious things, we pause and take a moment to reflect. This is not something in the culture of this place, which is unfortunate.

Often we are put in time crunches where we are pushed very quickly to respond to many things. I accept that is part of the challenge of this place. I think that if a lot of indigenous elders came here and helped us work through some of these things, we would all be a lot richer and more fulfilled as human beings.

I am tired of a little being enough. When we starve people and give them a small amount of food, it feels like everything. My struggle is when do we finally acknowledge that we need to give so much more.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member for North Island—Powell River on board with the Veterans Affairs committee, which she recently joined. It is great to work with her.

She has may recognized in her research that before the study we are doing right now, we did a study on indigenous matters. In particular, we have gone to the northern part of Canada to Yellowknife. When we were there, we met with a lot of our Canadian rangers. We found out there were multiple languages in the north.

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on how the legislation might be of benefit to them or actually be a detriment to them.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I am so honoured to sit on the committee, working for veterans in our country. I appreciate working with the member on those very important issues.

We should all be curious about multiple languages. I think about my last event I referred to earlier. Four nations put together a website with different words and were looking at how to merge sentences, and all of that part as we learn a language, and how one community would say one word differently than how another community would say a similar word.

The nuances of indigenous languages across the country are extremely profound and mesmerizing. It is an honour to learn them. I hope the legislation moves forward to engage with that. I do not think it is enough. I worry that it will be short-term, not long-term. A lot of people in my riding who focus on indigenous language talk about the need for stability with respect to resources to do the long-term work.

Hopefully it will be a step in the right direction. I know indigenous people will make it a step in the right direction because of their hard work. I just wish there were more.

• (1610)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly found the speech by my hon. friend from North Island—Powell River extremely moving because of her deep connections within the community, but I am still not certain and I am struggling.

I plan to vote for this legislation. I will soon have an opportunity to say why. However, given the stress of knowing that this bill is not everything that is needed, yet is a step forward, I am wondering on what side she is going to land and how she is voting on this bill when we come to vote.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, what I will say to my constituents is that I am still struggling with that problem.

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I take that struggle as a sacred commitment to the work that I do and the place that I do it. It is hard, because I hear the voices from my riding saying that they know this is a step, but it is not a good enough step, and they are disappointed. At what point do we stand up and say a little bit is not good enough? When a society in this country was based on beating language out of children until they did not have it anymore, at what point do we say that we need to do better?

I will struggle with that. When I am asked to make that decision, I will be happy to talk to every single one of my constituents about my reasons.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I would like to inform the House that there have already been more than five hours of debate on this motion. Consequently, all subsequent interventions shall be 10 minutes for speeches and five minutes for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Saskatoon West.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my remarks, as many have today, by saying that we meet today on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg. I hope that one day we will begin all our daily proceedings in this place with this acknowledgement. I also want to acknowledge that my riding is situated in Treaty 6 territory and on the ancestral homeland of the Métis people.

[*Member spoke in Cree as follows:*]

□□□

[*Cree text translated as follows:*]

Hello.

[*English*]

On behalf of my constituents of Saskatoon West, I am honoured to offer a very small greeting in Cree. I do not speak the language. Of Canada's 70-plus indigenous languages, Cree is the most widely spoken in my riding of Saskatoon West.

We know that the ancestral languages spoken by the first peoples of Saskatchewan and Canada are at risk of not just decline but in many cases of extinction.

Of all the people reporting an indigenous mother tongue in Canada, the third-highest proportion lives in Saskatchewan. For centuries, Saskatchewan has been the ancestral home of many first peoples, including the Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux, Dene, Dakota, Atsina and Blackfoot. Many people would not know that we have five indigenous languages spoken in my riding: Cree, Ojibwa, Dene, Dakota and Michif. Indeed, most would not know that the vast majority of indigenous languages in this country are endangered and that there is a critical need to rise to the challenge and ensure their preservation, protection and promotion.

While Bill C-91 seeks to preserve and protect indigenous languages in Canada and to try to put our colonial past behind us,

I find it deeply flawed. Sadly, I do not believe it would accomplish all that it is set up to do.

My esteemed New Democrat colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, who helped draft the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, expressed at second reading some significant concerns about the effectiveness of the legislation that he hoped would be addressed by the committee. I thought I would share his concerns.

First, the bill does not provide or indicate that significant funding will be dedicated for the protection of indigenous languages in Canada.

Protecting and promoting indigenous languages requires stable and long-term financial support based upon the needs of indigenous communities and provided within the principles of free, prior and informed consent. However, for four long years, instead of a federal government taking decisive action to protect, preserve, promote and invest in indigenous languages, the responsibility to educate our young people has continued to fall primarily on dedicated teachers, elders and individual speakers. These community leaders and language keepers have done an amazing job in building curricula and facilities, creating teaching materials and doing fundraising to help protect their languages.

One of those leaders, who lives in my riding of Saskatoon West, is Belinda Daniels. Belinda is a member of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation and an educator and teacher with Saskatoon Public Schools. Belinda comes from a generation of Cree people who grew up feeling shame and trepidation for trying to learn their own language, so as an adult, Belinda founded the Nehiyawak Summer Language Experience, a Saskatchewan language immersion summer camp that has been held annually for the last 13 years at Wanuskewin and is open to anyone wishing to learn Cree.

Belinda is a true leader, and I want to thank her for all her great and hard work in preserving and promoting the language of her people.

Belinda and others working hard to teach indigenous language need a federal government that will provide substantial and meaningful financial support to help them preserve and protect our traditional languages and cultures in Canada, but there is no such provision in Bill C-91, and the government rejected all opposition amendments that sought to provide this assurance.

A second shortcoming of the bill relates to the status given to indigenous languages. During the drafting process, the government was reputedly told that the status of indigenous languages in Canada must be defined, yet this bill provides no such framework. New Democrats would like to see indigenous languages recognized as official languages or given special status and would like to see this recognition articulated and implemented in collaboration with indigenous peoples.

Government Orders

A third issue, which I have already raised in the debate today, pertains to indigenous rights, and specifically to articles 11 to 16 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The bill before us today does not include within the text, and therefore the legally binding sections of the bill, the inherent rights of indigenous peoples to their languages, as articulated in the UN declaration.

• (1615)

New Democrats wanted to see articles 11 to 16 explicitly referenced in legislation, and we tabled an amendment that would do so. However, it was defeated by the government.

I have two final points I wish to raise that are particularly troubling to me and to others.

First, for some reason the government failed to include the sixties scoop in the preamble, where the bill references the racist and discriminatory policies and laws of the Canadian government that were detrimental to indigenous languages and contributed significantly to the erosion of these languages.

Over 20,000 indigenous children were stolen from their families, placed into foster care and adopted by non-indigenous families by the sixties scoop. During this time, the Saskatchewan government implemented the “adopt an Indian Métis” child program, or AIM, as it was called. AIM, promoted sometimes through classified ads in local newspapers, encouraged the adoption of indigenous children by non-indigenous families. This program was jointly funded by the Canadian government and the Province of Saskatchewan.

The sixties scoop and AIM were distinct racist government policies to devastate indigenous families, and in so doing to deny indigenous children and their families their basic human rights, including the right to their indigenous language and culture.

Bill C-91 should have acknowledged these racist government policies to ensure we all understand how we got here today and why a bill like Bill C-91 is so needed.

Finally, Bill C-91 would not require that the indigenous language commissioner be an indigenous person. This is the office that would oversee the progress of this legislation, yet government members rejected the NDP's attempts to ensure indigenous oversight over the bill's implementation.

Although government speakers promised at second reading to work with opposition parties and other members of the House and to be open to amendments that would improve the bill, I feel this legislation has found its way to the floor of the House today with virtually no opposition amendments of substance included.

To recap, the government rejected opposition and other members' calls to define the status of indigenous languages in Canada, strengthen indigenous oversight over federal programs, explicitly refer to our country's obligations under UNDRIP, include significant moments in our colonial history and, finally, to provide adequate funding so that indigenous languages can enter into a new era of revitalization.

Clearly, colonialism is not yet behind us, and I urge all members of the House to do better.

To end, I am profoundly disappointed—I think that would be the word—that this Parliament has missed the opportunity to really and truly co-create with indigenous people an indigenous language bill that would have truly transformed people's lives.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the work of my colleague, the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River. This member has shown parliamentarians how to collaborate and work together on legislation. She has proven that working together yields positive outcomes. Her leadership on her own private member's bill, Bill C-369, is nothing short of commendable.

Unfortunately, when it came to Bill C-91, her leadership and knowledge as an indigenous Dene woman were discounted. Despite the great personal cost of her efforts, we are being asked to support a bill that falls well short. I quote her words:

While the bill would be a step forward, to what goal and to what end are we walking toward? Is the goal one of half measures that would marginally improve indigenous language education in Canada, or is the end goal one of fundamental change to Canadian society that fully respects the needs of indigenous languages, recognizes their place in our culture and creates a generation of indigenous youth who speak the same languages that generations of people before them spoke?

I wish we were today debating a bill that was the fundamental change my colleague had hoped for.

• (1620)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is deeply troubling to hear that the NDP has chosen not to support this bill.

I do want to point out two key aspects of the bill that we have heard about a number of times today.

The first is with respect to UNDRIP. In the purpose part of this bill, in paragraph 5(g), it is very clear that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is incorporated into the text of the bill. I just want to point that out.

The second point is with respect to amendments. Bill C-91 as revised is available to all members. All of the amendments are underlined. It is very clear that a number of amendments offered by different parties went through. I fully reject the premise that we did not incorporate amendments from opposition members. There is one amendment from our friend from northern Quebec. There are many others that we incorporated. I am really disappointed in the position taken by the NDP.

What is the member's solution to making sure that indigenous languages are protected? We have heard many times from many communities the dire need to have indigenous languages protected. If we as a Parliament cannot get this done within the remaining days of this Parliament, it will be considered an opportunity missed. It would be very disappointing to many communities around the country.

Government Orders

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I anticipated that my hon. colleague might bring the issue up. I respect the fact that he has pointed out a number of times the reference to UNDRIP in the bill. In my comments I mentioned that it is not in the binding part of the bill. That is an extremely important distinction.

I did not at any time say no amendments were accepted. In my speech I talked about the ones that I thought were very important and should have been included in the bill to make it much better.

In no way has anyone on this side of the House delayed the government's ability to do this work quickly and to do it properly. I heard the parliamentary secretary speak of being open to amendments. I think the amendments that eventually were included in the bill by the government were not all the substantive amendments that were suggested. For that reason, I find this bill to be very lacking.

I did not in my speech talk about whether I would support the bill. I wanted the government to understand that there are a lot of problems with the bill so I mentioned those in my comments.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for pointing out that Bill C-91 contains a number of flaws.

Inuit communities, in particular, were not heard and their needs were not taken into account in the drafting of this bill. Eleven measures proposed by the Inuit were not included in this bill. Why were they not included when the government claims that this bill is the result of extensive consultation?

We know that the majority of Inuit in Nunavut speak Inuktitut. I believe the figure is 84%. They were not consulted and they are not getting any funding under this bill that would have allowed them to support their communities and to ensure that funding is not provided only by indigenous and Inuit peoples.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for highlighting another aspect of the bill that I did not have the opportunity to talk about in my remarks. That is the objections from Inuit people about the lack of mention and protection and consultation with governments as well.

I am a non-indigenous person who does not speak an indigenous language. It may be fine for me and the parliamentary secretary to say that this is a good start and that we should get on with it, but it is not. It is not talking about my identity and my culture. It is not an either-or kind of thing.

As the member who spoke before me mentioned, it is important that we pause and listen to one another and do the good work that we are meant to do. I am trying my hardest to do it but it is very difficult with what is contained in the bill.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Windsor West, The Environment; the hon. member for Sherwood

Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Drummond, The Environment.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by acknowledging that we are standing here on the traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples and express to them our deep appreciation for their extraordinary hospitality and patience.

[*Member spoke in Cree:*]

□□□□□□.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

My riding in this place, as you just spoke it, is Saanich—Gulf Islands. Saanich is an anglicism of a *SENĆOŦEN* word for the nation of the traditional peoples of the lands that I have the honour to represent in this place. I am still struggling to pronounce it properly. According to my friend and colleague, who is also my MLA at home, Adam Olsen, who is from the Tsartlip First Nation, it is “Wsanec”, but I am still not pronouncing it right. However, in the *SENĆOŦEN* language that comes from that nation where I live, I raise my hands to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all my friends and colleagues in this place, and everyone in this place is my friend, and say *HISW□□E SIÁM*. I do not have a *SENĆOŦEN* translator in the booth, so I will translate that this means “honour, honour, thanks and respect”.

One of the chiefs of my territory explained to me that her grandfather told her that standing with one's hands up in the air actually represents a tree and that the trees of our territories protect us, sustain us and that we are in a relationship with them.

Today, we have heard a lot of people in this place speaking of how language is a critical, if not foundational, indispensable part of culture. I have learned so much from my friends who are *SENĆOŦEN* speakers about how true that is.

Government Orders

I am very blessed to live on the southern tip of Vancouver Island on the coast of the Salish Sea, the most spectacularly beautiful, blessed place in this country. When we translate the word for “humans” in the language of the peoples of the territory in which, through their generosity and patience, we live, it comes out the “human people”. When we translate the word for “salmon”, it comes out the “salmon people”. The word for “whales” is the “whale people”. The word for “trees” is the “tree people”. In the creation stories that come from that culture and those peoples, the Creator actually took people and said, “You’re a hard-working people; we’ll make you the salmon.” Some people were scattered like stones across the water and became the islands themselves. The more I learn about the culture, mythology, stories, traditions and languages that come from the place I represent here, Saanich—Gulf Islands, the more I feel compelled to say that I am the member of Parliament for the human people in Saanich—Gulf Islands, and for the salmon people, and for the whale people and for the tree people. It is an extraordinarily different world view and it is communicated through language.

Currently, at the University of Victoria there is a groundbreaking program at the law school, which is under the direction of Professor John Borrows and other indigenous scholars. It is now offering degrees in indigenous law in the same way our law schools in this part of the country offer degrees in common law, which is the one I learned. I got my degree at Dalhousie University. At the University of Ottawa one can get both a common law and civil law degree. In Quebec, there is a different tradition of civil law. At the University of Victoria there will now be a degree program in indigenous law.

The programs that are taking place are bringing law students into the culture of Tsartlip. There are four first nations communities within my riding: Tseycum, Tsartlip, Pauquachin and Tsawout. The Tsartlip program involves indigenous scholar *SENĆOŦEN* speakers to communicate how the relationship with the land dictates the law. It is extraordinary and it is growing. The Tsartlip First Nation has an immersion program where children are currently learning *SENĆOŦEN* as they learn English.

• (1630)

They are learning from a program that uses a teaching method that comes from Hawaii. It makes us so happy, as other members have said, to hear the children speak the traditional languages that skipped a generation. Through all kinds of colonialism and oppression, whether it was the sixties scoop or residential schools, the languages were almost lost. What a tribute to the persistence and resilience of indigenous peoples that the languages were not lost.

Turning to this bill, I had 10 amendments that went to committee. I tried hard but they were not successful. They were derived from the testimony of many people, indigenous organizations and groups before committee. I desperately regret that this bill excludes the interests and concerns of Inuktitut-speaking people. The ITK’s evidence and their quite extraordinary leader, Natan Obed have gone unheard, and that is a tragedy.

I was particularly directed by a brief to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage on Bill C-91 from the First Peoples’ Cultural Council, because their headquarters is in my riding of Saanich—Gulf

Islands. The council had many criticisms and wanted amendments. In its brief to the committee, the council said:

We support legislation to recognize and revitalize languages. We respectfully ask that you consider our recommendations to strengthen Bill C-91. There is an urgency to pass this legislation before the end of this parliamentary session. However, the greater urgency concerns Indigenous languages themselves.... The need to act is urgent. Nevertheless, in spite of the current status of Indigenous languages, we know that reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining and strengthening them will be possible, with adequate, sustainable and long-term funding that is held and directed by Indigenous people.

The disappointment is large that we do not have at this point that commitment to sustainable, long-term funding. We do not have the amendments. One of my amendments was to ensure that we recognized in Bill C-91 that this is within the context of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It falls short.

I want to explain briefly why I will be voting for this bill, while I recognize it falls short. One reason is that I am amazed by the work in indigenous languages of Chief Dr. Ron Ignace of the Skeetchestn First Nation, also Shuswap. He has asked me to vote for this bill. He worked hard on the bill. He told me to get this bill through. That weighs on me. He has written a book on indigenous languages, on his own nation’s language.

Also, I have been asked by the very group whose testimony I just read in part, the First Peoples’ Cultural Council. The council said that I have to vote for Bill C-91. The council wants to get it through and get it passed.

Here is my commitment, here in this place, standing here now.

I heard the wonderful speech of my colleague from Markham—Stouffville and agree that voting for this bill is not to say that we have accomplished what needs to be done. Voting for this bill does not mean we think this bill meets what is required of us in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action. Voting for this bill is a pledge and a promise to do more.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

We must do more. We must protect indigenous languages across Canada.

[*English*]

Protecting languages, restoring languages is not accomplished by Bill C-91, but if we do not get this passed now, we have less to cling to. My promise and my pledge is this: As leader of the Green Party of Canada, I will make reconciliation will central to our electoral campaign. Real justice, real reconciliation will be central. When we come back in larger numbers after the election, we will come back to insist that stable funding be provided, to insist on the inclusion of Inuktitut, and to insist on the things that we are honour bound to provide to ensure the protection of these languages.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to voting on this piece of legislation, would the member join me and maybe three other people to stand and force a recorded vote?

Government Orders

•(1640)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, out of deep respect for the member for Nunavut, who is the only Inuktitut speaker in this place who is able to speak the language without pressure or whips, yes, I will stand with the hon. member.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have learned a lot from the member in my first term as a member of Parliament.

I have worked in the community and I have worked from the other side with governments, and my concern is that governments—not individuals, but governments—tend to check boxes off and say they have done something. That is my concern with this piece of legislation. It does not go far enough.

I want to echo her comments to say that regardless of the outcome today—and I think we understand what the outcome will be, as the government has a majority—I will also continue to work to improve this piece of legislation.

I would like to give the member an opportunity to make more comments on that.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is always the question of whether the perfect is the enemy of the good, but this bill is so far from perfect. On the other hand, because of the requests that have made to me directly from indigenous peoples, I think we are better off to pass it now. If I had heard from anyone in indigenous communities, and particularly communities in my riding, that they did not want it passed, I would lean toward voting against it.

I voted against the environmental assessment bill that is currently before the Senate. I think, in a word, that it is putrid. It falls so far short of promises that to pass it makes things worse, because that is when the box we ticked off sets environmental assessment with the wrong architecture in concrete for good.

This is different. This is not the wrong architecture; it is just not enough. We can go back after the election, and if enough of us who are worried that this bill is not good enough make the pledge, we can insist and make it an election issue.

I do not take anything for granted. All of us are up for interviews with our employers to find out if we are rehired or if our contract is suspended, but when we come back and if we come back, we can fight to make sure this program is properly funded.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for committing to stand with me.

We have heard from the government how important this piece of legislation is, and members from the opposition are saying the same thing. If the legislation is so important, Canadians deserve to see how their representatives stand through a recorded vote, rather than just seeing it agreed to on division.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, procedurally it takes only five members of Parliament to insist on a recorded vote. I think we can find among our numbers enough members who see the benefit of knowing how members voted and of allowing constituents to see how they voted.

Anyone who votes to support the bill in this place should be honour-bound to take it to the next steps, the next stages, that are so clearly missing in the bill right now. Those who vote against it are only voting against it because—at least according to the speeches from the New Democratic Party caucus—although they have a commitment to the principles, they find the bill inadequate. I would hope that all of those members who are re-elected will join anyone else in this place who says they voted for it on probation, in principle, but we have to fight for more.

•(1645)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 so we can begin private members' hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With all due respect to the member for Winnipeg North, I feel I might be more effective than he was.

I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House for the clock to be seen at 5:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***RESPECTING FAMILIES OF MURDERED AND BRUTALIZED PERSONS ACT**

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-266, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (increasing parole ineligibility), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats support progressive crime and justice legislation that seeks to reduce instances of violent crime and offer chances to increase rehabilitation for those convicted, all the while upholding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In our 2018 policy paper, adopted by democratic convention, New Democrats clearly stated absolute support for the following: investment in crime prevention, with a focus on at-risk youth and gangs; support for community and not-for-profit organizations active in crime prevention; emphasis on rehabilitation and reintegration wherever possible, particularly for treating addictions; maintenance of a youth criminal justice system that is distinct from adult courts; support for restorative justice initiatives, including redress and restitution whenever possible; safeguards for the rights, health and dignity of prisoners; adaptation of sentencing rules to allow, under judicial discretion, more severe sentences for violent crimes; strengthening the rules for sentencing dangerous offenders; and the prohibition of reinstatement of the death penalty.

Legislation like Bill C-266 tries to create the appearance of a tough-on-crime stance without addressing the issues at the heart of the matter, and that is the reason we will not be supporting this bill. How could we, when it misses the entire point of protecting the public and does nothing to prevent recidivism?

In contrast to Conservatives, who believe in tough-on-crime policies that please their base and do little to reduce crime, and in fact cost so much more, New Democrats believe that our criminal justice system should be structured around the principles of restorative justice. Canada's justice department defines restorative justice as a strategy that "focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime, while holding offenders responsible for their actions. A restorative approach is being used in different criminal justice cases across Canada. When effectively used [and supported by governments], restorative justice can lead to better outcomes for victims and offenders and reduce the number of cases that go to trial."

The Conservatives may be able to fundraise by claiming that progressives are soft on crime, but restorative justice is not soft on crime. It is effective, both in terms of costs and in terms of reducing the potential for traumatizing victims. We know, for instance, that there is empirical evidence to prove that when a restorative justice framework is applied in a conviction, the victims are more satisfied with the outcome than when restorative justice is not employed. Restorative justice substantially reduces repeat offending for many, many offenders. It helps reduce post-traumatic stress symptoms in victims and the related public and private costs. It often results in a reduced desire for revenge on the part of victims against their offenders, and it helps reduce the cost of administering the criminal justice system.

Bill C-266 is not based on the principles of restorative justice. It proposes to increase the period of parole ineligibility from 25 years to up to 40 years for those who are convicted of abduction, sexual assault and murder of an individual in a single event or a series of events. While we absolutely understand that this bill is designed to protect the victim's loved ones from appearing at parole sentencing, it removes any foreseeable chance of release and therefore reduces the potential for rehabilitation. It is an approach that stubbornly refuses to take into account any and all circumstances regarding the offending individual.

There is also the question of whether this bill would stand up to a charter challenge. As life sentences are currently viable only with parole to 25 years, and with the abolishment of the faint hope clause, any longer sentence may fall under inhumane and degrading punishment. The Harper government fulfilled its 2011 election promise to abolish the faint hope clause, which allowed prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment with a parole eligibility period greater than 15 years to apply for early parole once they had served 15 years.

To compound this situation, the legislation before us serves to remove good behaviour as an incentive in correctional facilities, which of course increases the potential of violence toward other inmates and correctional workers. We should absolutely be concerned about the safety of correctional workers.

● (1650)

In Canada, the constitutionality of indefinite detention imposed by life sentences is based on the potential for eventual release on parole. This has resulted in the 25-year maximum before eligibility for parole. In the past, courts have allowed, on a case-by-case basis, sentences where eligibility exceeded 25 years. This gave the courts the needed discretion in the most serious crimes involving dangerous offenders and in situations where the full 25-year sentence was not appropriate. However, this was prior to the abolishment of the faint hope clause. Now that the faint hope clause is no longer in effect to mitigate increases in eligibility periods beyond the 25 years, any increase beyond that would likely be deemed unconstitutional and cruel and unusual punishment.

Harper's Bill C-48 passed in 2011 and was used only four times to issue 75-year parole ineligibility. All four of these cases are currently under appeal. One has been challenged in Alberta's court of appeal because of constitutional concerns. Legal experts expect to see the case appear at the Supreme Court of Canada in the coming years due to the length of sentences that could be unconstitutional.

Private Members' Business

As I am sure members will recall, the rationale for the faint hope clause was to incentivize offenders to participate in programming and work towards rehabilitation. This, in turn, leads to reduced violence and better behaviour towards other inmates and our correctional workers. Inmates with nothing left to lose are more likely to resort to violence and to be more difficult to manage in the prison population. In 2010, internal studies by the justice department found that this was precisely the case, with lower recidivism rates among faint hope offenders and better behaviour in the community.

The faint hope clause was not a free pass to parole. Canada is very selective in who is granted parole. It is very rare for those who are convicted of the most serious crimes to ever be granted parole. Those who are granted parole have shown good behaviour and are less likely to offend than the general population of Canada. It is fascinating that the rates of offence are below those in the general population.

It is more humane and much cheaper to release those who qualify for parole than to keep them behind bars. Those who were given life sentences who are paroled are still supervised until their deaths, with regular reporting to parole officers.

It is also worth pointing out that despite opposition from Canada's defence lawyers, the repeal of the faint hope was supported unanimously by Conservatives and Liberals alike. The NDP and the Bloc opposed it, of course.

Much like the abolishment of the faint hope clause and the introduction of consecutive periods of parole ineligibility, Bill C-266 would remove the incentive for good behaviour in correctional facilities and thwart any possibility of rehabilitation. It would create tension in Canada's prisons, and prisoners and correctional officers would be endangered.

The Canadian Bar Association

does not believe that Canadians would benefit from a system where individuals are condemned to spend their entire lives behind bars, with no hope of ever being released. Even those convicted of homicide, the most serious of all crimes, should know there is some slim possibility, after serving lengthy periods of their sentences...of being released into the community and contributing to society, provided that their behaviour while incarcerated makes them deserving of such a privilege.

We understand the trauma that victims' loved ones face when an offender is eligible for parole, but we cannot support legislation that will do more harm than good. We must take into consideration the fact that this legislation proposes a solution that is likely to be deemed unconstitutional.

We believe that our justice system should be structured for the best possible outcomes, and this particular bill would not achieve that.

• (1655)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-266, an act to amend the Criminal Code with regard to increasing parole ineligibility.

I want to begin by thanking the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for introducing the bill. It is certainly consistent with his great record here in Parliament. I was pleased and honoured when I served as Minister of National Defence and he was parliamentary secretary. He worked very hard to see that justice prevailed in every

possible opportunity, whether it involved Ukraine or Iranian human rights and democratic issues.

The member has always stood up for the rights of victims, and I support and laud his efforts here in Canada and abroad. He was one of 13 Canadians banned from travelling to Russia under retaliatory sanctions imposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2014. I loved his retort to that. He said, "Sanctions by Russia will not silence me standing up for Ukraine. This is a badge of honour for all critics of the Crimea Invasion".

This is what this legislation is all about: standing up for what is right.

I have to tell the House how proud I was as defence minister when he went personally to Ukraine to help get the equipment and all the supplies that people in Ukraine needed. I remember seeing him on television and thinking what a great moment it was for a member of Parliament and for him personally.

Under Stephen Harper, I was justice minister for six and a half years. One thing about the Harper administration is that it was completely consistent in standing up for the rights of victims. We did not hear too much from the NDP about victims, but it was certainly a priority of the Harper government to make sure that people had confidence in our criminal justice system.

I had the opportunity to meet with many victims over the years. I remember the grandparents of one of Clifford Olson's victims telling me how awful it was that Clifford Olson was not even prosecuted for the murder of their grandchild. Why? It was because it was already locked in. He received 25 years with no parole, so the Crown decided not to proceed.

How did that make the family feel? They told me they were victimized themselves, because there was no justice at all for their grandchild.

As a result of those kinds of cases, our Conservative government introduced the possibility of consecutive sentencing, which again is up to the courts to decide. It is not mandatory.

The first case involving consecutive sentencing was in New Brunswick, after three members of the RCMP had been murdered. The person convicted of that crime became ineligible for parole for 75 years, and I did not get one email. There were no letters, no phone calls, no demonstrations whatsoever from people who thought it was a bad idea that this individual would have to basically spend the rest of his life behind bars.

It was the same with the faint hope clause, which we heard quite a bit about. I have to disagree with the hon. member as to why that legislation was put in.

Private Members' Business

I remember the day I introduced that bill in Parliament. I went outside for a scrum, just outside the House of Commons chamber. I remember one reporter asking me if I thought people were going to stop committing murder now because they would not be eligible for the possibility of parole after 15 years. I told her the truth. I said I was not sure why anybody would commit murder, that it was a mystery to me, but I told her that what I did know about the bill was that it would reduce victimization of the people who have suffered because of what someone else had done.

Here is what was happening: No matter how disgusting the individual was and how unlikely it was that he or she would get parole, many times they would apply after 15 years. The families would tell me they were victimized again. They told me they were worried and upset at the possibility of the person who killed a member of their family getting out.

• (1700)

Their victimization does not stop there. It would happen again after 17 years, 19 years, 20 years, 21 years, 23 years. Every time it came up, they would tell me the same thing: How awful it was that there was a possibility that the person could be released.

When we introduced the bill to get rid of the faint hope clause, we were thinking about victims. That is who we were standing up for. That is what wanted to do during our time in government.

There is another part to this. If people see sentences that do not align with the seriousness of a crime, people's confidence in the criminal justice system will be reduced. It is absolutely vital that Canadians have complete confidence that the criminal justice system will do the right thing. If the penalty for people who commit terrible, serious crimes does not align with those crimes, people's confidence in the criminal justice system will be decreased. This is not what we need.

One of my constituents, a woman by the name of Marcia Penner, recently wrote to me about the Tori Stafford case. She said:

"I am writing you today to ask you to fight for the justice of Tori Stafford. The monster (Terri-Lynne McClintic) who took this sweet girls life needs to be put back behind bars where she belongs."

"As you may or may not remember, I was best friends with Kristen French. Over 26 years later we are suffering the adverse effects of the lack of justice."

"Please don't let this happen for Tori. Let's fight for her, and keep her killer locked up where she belongs. Behind bars, and away from more innocent children."

This is consistent with what I have heard over the years.

Members may remember the Bernardo case, which took place in my area. On the 25th anniversary of the death of Kristen French, Donna French and the mother of Leslie Mahaffy went to a hearing. As members remember, both girls were abducted, brutally tortured, raped and murdered by Bernardo and Karla Homolka. When Bernardo was up for the possibility of parole for all his crimes, Debbie Mahaffy stated at the hearing:

We have had to relive Leslie's pain and horror—our pain and horror, as if it happened yesterday, not 27 years ago.

Leslie's violent, horrific death changed everything in my psyche and in my life.

I do not want to be in the same room as Bernardo but here I am

She went on to say:

The effect of this parole hearing allows Bernardo to abduct our beautiful memories of Leslie as he had inserted himself and the ugliness of her death into our lives yet again.

Donna French added:

It's painfully unthinkable that Paul Bernardo's parole ineligibility did not change by a single second, a single minute as a result of his unspeakable murder of Kristen.

It so diminishes her life. I appreciate that the Criminal Code has been amended to lengthen the parole period, but it is not retroactive.

However, going forward, it will be.

That is why I am supportive of this. I am sure there are members in the Liberal Party who, in the previous Parliament, voted in favour of a bill identical to this one.

I know I am speaking on behalf of my Conservative colleagues when I say that we will continue to stand up for and worry about victims. We will continue to ensure that people can have confidence in the criminal justice system. Our party was all about that in the years we governed. I hope people will support my hon colleague who brought this forward and do the right thing.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to private member's Bill C-266, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to increasing parole ineligibility. The bill seeks to protect victims and reduce the possibility of re-victimization by limiting the number of parole applications victims are required to attend.

The underlying assumption of Bill C-266 is that its proposed reforms would spare families from the heartache of reliving the loss of a loved one who may have been murdered in unspeakable circumstances, as is often the case.

It should be noted that Bill C-266 is similar to previous private members' bills, specifically Bill C-478 and Bill C-587. Bill C-478 got through second reading stage and was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, but it did not go further than that. Unlike Bill C-266, former Bill C-478 did not require that the offences for which the offender was convicted be committed as part of the same criminal transaction.

I want to take a moment to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for the laudable objective of the bill. I think all hon. members of the House can agree that minimizing the trauma, psychological suffering and re-victimization of families whose loved ones have been murdered is a worthwhile cause that merits our full consideration.

Private Members' Business

Victims have rights at every stage of the criminal justice process, including the right to information, protection, restitution and participation. These rights, previously recognized by internal policies of the Parole Board of Canada and the Correctional Service of Canada, are now enshrined in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and give clear rights to all victims of crime. For example, victims have the right to receive certain information about the offender in the charge of the Parole Board of Canada or the Correctional Service of Canada.

Victims' participation rights include the following: attending the offender's parole hearing or listening to an audio recording of a parole hearing if the victim is unable to attend in person; presenting a written statement that outlines the continuing impact the offence has had on them and any risk or safety concerns the offender may pose and requesting that the Parole Board consider imposing special conditions on the offender's release; and obtaining a copy of the Parole Board's decision, including information on whether the offender has appealed the decision and the outcome of the appeal.

I would like to provide some examples in English.

• (1710)

[English]

I would note that currently victims who do not attend a parole hearing are entitled to listen to an audio recording of the hearing, but if victims do attend, they lose their right to listen to the recording. Simply stated, parole hearings can be quite difficult for family members, as I said in French. Despite attending the hearing, they may not always remember everything that was said. They may, for a variety of reasons, wish to listen to an audio recording at a later date. I am pleased to know that changes proposed in Bill C-83 would give all victims the right to listen to an audio recording, regardless of whether they attend the parole hearing.

[Translation]

These legislative provisions and policies were designed to be respectful of the privacy rights of victims who do not wish to be contacted or receive information about the offender who has harmed them.

[English]

This recognizes the fact that victims are not a homogenous group and that while some victims may choose not to attend or receive information about parole hearings to avoid emotional trauma, others will attend parole hearings as a means of furthering their healing and feel empowered by having their voices heard.

Anything we can do to better support victims of crime merits serious consideration, and I support sending the bill to committee for further study. I am also mindful that changes to the laws governing our criminal justice system can sometimes have unintended consequences, so I hope that committee study of this legislation, either in this Parliament or in the future, will include a range of witnesses and perspectives.

[Translation]

Clearly, there are various ways of providing support to victims. The proposed changes in Bill C-266 could be one way to improve

the experience of victims during the post-sentencing stages of the criminal justice process.

As parliamentarians, we should strive to have a fair, just, and compassionate criminal justice system for all those involved.

[English]

For all these reasons, I will be monitoring closely the debate on Bill C-266 and look forward to hearing the views of other hon. members on its potential impacts.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am truly honoured to participate in the debate on private member's Bill C-266, which was introduced by an opposition member. This is the second time that the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman has introduced this piece of legislation. He previously introduced it in 2013, also as a private member's bill.

First and foremost, this bill is for victims of crime. The principle of balanced justice is essential in Canada. It is important in our lives as parliamentarians and, especially, in our lives as citizens. Any time we want to, or have to, amend the Criminal Code, we should be making sure that victims are treated just as well as anyone else, which is exactly what this bill would do. It would spare victims from having to relive their painful experience at a parole hearing after having already relived it during the original trial.

The bill essentially seeks to increase the period of ineligibility to automatic parole from 25 years to 40 years. The reason the hon. member introduced this bill is that far too often we have seen criminals who committed sordid acts get released after 25 years. By the way, I will point out that the bill we are discussing does not concern all offenders. It specifically concerns those who were convicted of abduction, sexual assault or murder.

Not only are these people released after 25 years, but their victims have to testify again before the Parole Board of Canada so that the judge can determine whether the offender will be released on parole. That is the problem: the victims of a crime committed 25 years ago have to relive these events and testify all over again about the pain they suffered, the legitimate fears they might have 23 or 25 years later, and especially the horror they have lived with this entire time.

In those situations let us think first and foremost of the victims. That is why Bill C-266 is specifically designed to protect victims from having to relive this pain so soon after their assault. For victims of such serious crimes, the scars never heal.

Private Members' Business

The bill is not dictatorial, because ultimately, the judge will be the one who decides whether to grant parole after hearing the case and analyzing the situation. It is not automatic or official, and there is no cause and effect.

It is also important to realize that the families affected by the tragedies may suffer as much as the victims themselves, and they are also asked to testify about why the criminal should not get parole. This causes them further pain, and they could be revictimized if they have to testify again under similar circumstances. We need to think about them.

As I said earlier, this is not the first time this bill has come before the House. Apart from a few details, it is virtually identical to the one tabled in 2013 by the same member. The interesting thing is that, at the time, certain people supported the bill. I would like to quote something that was said at the time, presumably in English:

I am pleased with what I have heard from the member, especially given the fact that the bill would allow the judge to use it as a discretionary authority. As such, I feel comfortable supporting what the member has brought to the House today.

I could not have said it better myself. Who spoke those fine words? It was none other than our friend, the ineffable and very vocal member for Winnipeg North. Back then, he supported the bill. As I said, I suppose he made the comments in English, but I had fun quoting them in French.

• (1715)

He was not the only one who supported the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman's private member's bill. At the risk of repeating myself, I must say I would rather say his name than the name of his riding.

Many members on the government's front bench supported this initiative. They included, among others, the following members: the member for Charlottetown; the member for Cape Breton—Canso, who has sadly announced that he will not be running in the next election and we do not know whether he would have been re-elected for that is up to the voters; the current member for Bourassa, with whom I had the pleasure of serving in the National Assembly; the member for Malpeque, chair of the Standing Committee on Finance, who works very hard; the member for Sydney—Victoria; the member for Toronto Centre; the member for Vancouver Centre; the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, the current Minister of Transport; the member for Wascana, the current Minister of Public Safety; the member for Labrador; the member for Winnipeg North, as I said earlier; the member for Beauséjour, whom we wish a speedy recovery of course; the member for Cardigan, who is still Minister of Veterans Affairs; the member for Ottawa South; the member for Scarborough—Guildwood; the member for Vancouver Quadra, the fourth President of the Treasury Board in the last six months and my counterpart as I am my party's Treasury Board critic; the member for Halifax West, the Speaker of the House; the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, with whom I had the pleasure of serving on the parliamentary committee that studied physician-assisted dying; the member for York West; the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, whom I hold in high regard and with whom I have had the pleasure of appearing before a few parliamentary committees; the member for Trinity—Spadina, a riding in the Toronto area; and the member for Papineau, the current Prime Minister of Canada.

All of those people are current government members. They are examining this bill, which is a good thing. However, I would like to remind them that, in the past, in 2013, they voted in favour of a bill that was more or less identical to Bill C-266.

In closing, I would like to point out that, just a few minutes ago, I was very impressed by the remarks of the member for Niagara Falls. As members know, he has been diligently serving this country since 1984, when he was first elected to Parliament. He has held high-ranking positions with dignity. He is an inspiration to all those of us who aspire to be part of the executive branch of our Parliament.

The member for Niagara Falls served as defence minister and justice minister, as well as in other capacities. For six years, his honesty and fairness served as an inspiration to us all. As everyone knows, that is an extremely sensitive job, and that was especially true at the time. It requires a great deal of delicacy and exemplary and inspiring honesty. The member for Niagara Falls served for six years. He is probably the one who has held the position of minister of justice and attorney general the longest. He will always be an inspiration to his successors.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-266, respecting families of murdered and brutalized persons act, which was tabled by my colleague, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

This bill would see the parole ineligibility for Canada's most heinous and degenerate criminals have the possibility of being raised up to 40 years. As it stands currently, the maximum time for parole ineligibility is 25 years, with the first hearings starting at 23 years. One can imagine the families of the victims of these heinous crimes having to return and relive the events that took their loved ones away from them, and not only once. If the convicts are denied parole, and many times they are because of the brutality they undertook, then new parole hearings happen every two years. This, of course, creates the potential to make the families of the victims relive their nightmare over and over again.

This bill is not designed for the average criminal committing the average crime. It is designed for the worst of the worst, offenders who had such disregard for the dignity of the human person that they ought not to see the light of day. This should not be seen as a bill to increase the punishment of these individuals, but to protect the victims' families.

This bill would empower the courts to make decisions based on a jury's recommendation. I will quote from the bill:

[The judge] may, having regard to the character of the offender, the nature of the offences and the circumstances surrounding their commission, and to the recommendation, if any, made under section 745.22, by order, substitute for twenty-five years a number of years of imprisonment (being more than twenty-five but not more than forty) without eligibility for parole, as the judge deems fit in the circumstances.

This is a good piece of legislation, and it will protect the families of the actual victims of a heinous crime.

Private Members' Business

I would just like to draw the attention of my colleagues on the government side to the support of some of their members who support this bill. That includes the member for Charlottetown, the member for Cape Breton—Canso, the member for Bourassa, the member for Malpeque, the member for Sydney—Victoria, the member for University—Rosedale, who is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the member for Vancouver Centre, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, the member for Regina—Wascana, another minister, the member for Labrador, the member for Winnipeg North, the member for Beauséjour, the member for Cardigan, the member for Ottawa South, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, the member for Vancouver Quadra, the member for Halifax West, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, the member for Humber River—Black Creek, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, and the member for Spadina-Fort York.

Most importantly, I would draw to my colleagues' attention that the Right Hon. Prime Minister, the member for Papineau, also expressed his support during this bill's previous introduction to the House in the last Parliament.

This bill, with the support of all of those members, who now sit on the government side, goes against the standard operating procedure for the government, because when it comes to the victims of crime, we have not seen a great track record of the Liberals doing the right thing. The Prime Minister, a supporter of this bill in its first incarnation, has long tried to paint criminals and the perpetrators of crime as victims of society.

The Prime Minister said, in the wake of a horrible terrorist attack in the United States, that the terrorists must have been feeling excluded and marginalized by society, and that we really need to look at the root causes of these actions.

These terrorists killed three people and maimed hundreds more, but according to the Prime Minister, they are the victims here. The Prime Minister, again, showed how much he cares for victims when he paid a convicted terrorist \$10.5 million, after he killed a U.S. medic, Sergeant Chris Speer, leaving behind a wife and children who are still trying to find justice.

● (1725)

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michael Barrett: My hon. colleagues across the way are heckling, obviously in support of that payment of \$10.5 million. Let me just check. I think here on my list I have the name of the member—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, who should already know, that he should not be heckling while someone has the floor.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, that parliamentary secretary, the member for Winnipeg North, supported that bill, so we look forward to his vote on it coming up. I am sure it is because of his support for the bill that he did not need to hear all I had to say. The member also serves a Prime Minister who thinks it wise to treat

Canadians who fought for ISIS with poetry classes instead of locking them up where they belong.

We are looking for a stronger standard. Canadians deserve better. The families of victims deserve this bill. I am proud that it was my Conservative colleague who put forward this important bill to stand up for the victims of crime and their families. I am proud to stand with my colleagues who will support it. I look forward, again in this Parliament, to see the members who supported it during the last Parliament standing with us to support the families of victims who have suffered enough and deserve to see true justice done.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been enjoying listening to my colleagues in this debate. I do not have a full 10-minute speech, but I did want to briefly make a couple of observations on the record.

I have heard some of my colleagues speak in favour of the bill and make what I think is a very important and compelling point, which is that when someone has committed an offence and is called before the Parole Board, often victims' families are involved in those parole hearings, and their presence in those hearings can be very painful in the context of hearing about and reliving those discussions.

I also heard colleagues from other parties make the observation that if someone has been through a process of rehabilitation, and if the determination is that the person is no longer a risk to society, then it is not in the public interest for that person to continue to be incarcerated.

I want to briefly observe that I do not think these points are necessarily incompatible and that there can be a reconciliation of those objectives through perhaps broader reforms to the parole system. For instance, reforms could require a two-step application or that an initial step be surpassed before families are involved in a hearing. That is not in the bill currently before us. However, I think it is important for us, as much as we can, to look for opportunities to reconcile these dual objectives, which are both part of our criminal justice discussion.

I think all members would accept that if someone has been through a complete rehabilitation program and is no longer a risk to society, it is not in the public interest for the person to continue to be incarcerated. That continuing incarceration creates a cost to society, a cost to the system, resources that could be better spent on programs that prevent crime in the first place. These decisions do not require a strict binary.

It sounds like this bill is going to go to committee, and I look forward to the process of study that is going to happen there. However, I would also encourage members to contemplate legislative alternatives that could potentially bring about reforms to the parole process that would achieve both objectives and address the concerns that have been legitimately raised by members on both sides of the debate on this bill.

● (1730)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Adjournment Proceedings

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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 15, 2019, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise again to talk about Ojibway Shores, which is a 33-acre parcel of land in Windsor where we have a significant opportunity to create an urban park area that would be important, not only for our area of Windsor and Essex County but also across this country and across the globe.

A UN report came out recently, showing many endangered species and describing biodiversity as being a challenge. Ojibway Shores is an opportunity for this country to actually reverse some of this trend and contribute to positive improvements for flora, fauna and other species that require a good habitat.

Along the Detroit River is a piece of property for which the Windsor Port Authority is the custodian. I want to be clear about this. The port authority, like other port authorities across Canada, is a public entity, on public land, with public assets. Port authorities respond directly to legislation, the Canada Marine Act, in this chamber and to the Minister of Transport.

We are asking for that property of 33 acres to be transferred to Environment Canada, or even potentially to the City of Windsor. However, it should be done soon and for no additional cost.

The government is in a process right now where it is requiring Canadians to buy back a piece of their environment. What is important about this piece of property is that it was slated for development by the port authority itself. For over a decade, I and others have fought to preserve this piece of property. In the last few years, the port authority has tried to bulldoze and clear-cut the property. Thank goodness we were able to halt that.

In fact, there was going to be a public meeting, and I want to give credit to Dominic Amicone of the Amico construction company, whom I called out of desperation at the last minute. He was part of a group that had been incentivized to be part of the port authority's plan to clear-cut and smash down the heritage on this important piece of our environment. Despite having a financial interest in this, he pulled out and did not do that, and we have preserved the forest and species since.

There has been a lot of public pressure thanks to a number of good citizens, groups and organizations, of which there are too many to mention right now, and we have been able to put that in abeyance.

What is important is that this area of 33 acres along the Detroit River is connected to other types of environmentally important land. Whether it be Black Oak Heritage Park, the Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Park, Ojibway Park itself or the Spring Garden ANSI, they could create an amazing environmental corridor, in an official capacity if it happens now, that is home to many species at risk.

The port authority's boldness in this action at certain points has been unreal. The Gordie Howe International Bridge is being built next to this property. At one point the port authority wanted to take the money from the community benefit fund for itself; it wanted to lease this property back to the citizens so that this area, which has some of the highest poverty rates and challenges in Canada, would get some mild benefit for the border being there.

Therefore, we have asked the government to transfer the Ojibway Shores property to the Ministry of Environment to make it part of a national urban park. I have written the Minister of Environment on this, but she has not acted on it and has shown no interest.

The Prime Minister chastised the member for Burnaby South for not taking action or not wanting to take action. I would suggest the Prime Minister could take action quite simply on this. All we are asking for is a signature process to protect this piece of property.

• (1735)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the concerns expressed by my hon. colleague on the status of Ojibway Shores.

I share his belief that the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas is of great importance. I note he began his remarks by citing the recent United Nations report highlighting that one million of the world's eight million species were facing the threat of extinction.

Before I deal specifically with the Ojibway Shores question, I want to remind him that in budget 2018 our government laid out a \$1.3-billion investment in nature and conservation, which is unquestionably the largest single investment of its kind in the history of Canada.

Our government takes the concerns associated with the management of Ojibway Shores very seriously.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Minister of Transport was entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that Canada's transportation system functioned in the best interest of our national economy, while preserving our natural environment through prudent, sustainable management. Achieving an appropriate balance between these two areas is a major priority of our government.

Under the Canada Marine Act, the Windsor Port Authority has been given the legal and administrative autonomy to determine its own course of action, taking into consideration economic, social and environmental factors, as well as the viewpoints and priorities of the port's users, stakeholders and local communities.

The Windsor Port Authority has therefore the responsibility and the legal authority to carry out day-to-day operations and is entirely responsible for managing port lands, including federal land such as the Ojibway Shores.

On January 30 of last year, the Windsor Port Authority publicly stated that the industrial development of Ojibway Shores would be placed on hold, that it supported the idea of preserving the 33 acres of environmentally sensitive land and that it would give due consideration to any reasonable land exchange proposal that could achieve this important objective.

It is also my understanding that the Windsor Port Authority and the City of Windsor are currently exploring different scenarios that could result in a mutually beneficial exchange of properties that would include the Ojibway Shores. A balanced exchange of this nature would permit the long-term management and preservation of Ojibway Shores, while allowing the Windsor Port Authority to continue pursuing its objectives for increased economic development and trade benefiting the Windsor-Essex region.

I want to commit to the member that protecting nature and conservation is a major priority not just for me personally but our government. We have made the single largest investment in nature and conservation in the history of Canada. I look forward to continuing to work toward this important objective.

• (1740)

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, the Windsor Port Authority is asking Windsor residents to pay for their own environment. If the government has \$1.3 billion of funds available, it would make sense. The port and the minister would require a process to have a signature to get it to the Minister of Environment. We can do that for no cost or a transfer of funds.

The Liberal administration is asking citizens to buy federal property from themselves, with their own taxpayer dollars, as opposed to putting that money into greater environmental protection.

I want to ensure this is very clear. The Minister of Transport can simply transfer it to the Minister of Environment with a signature process and then it can go from there, but it can be protected right away. There are no excuses; action can be taken right away.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, in the short time I have to respond, I want to reiterate our support for the preservation of our natural environment to ensure that important properties are protected for future generations.

As I mentioned earlier, and this is an important point, under the Canada Marine Act, as a matter of law, the Windsor Port Authority has been given the legal and administrative autonomy to determine its own course of action, while taking into consideration the priorities of the local community, including the environmental stewardship of the Port of Windsor.

We respect the autonomy of the Windsor Port Authority in this regard, which has been granted previously by Parliament. We therefore encourage the parties to continue their discussions in good faith in order to reach this important outcome that could potentially protect the area for future generations.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, I asked the government a question about whether it would list the Iranian IRGC as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. On June 12 of last year, the government supported my motion to immediately list the IRGC as a terrorist entity. Up until now, the Liberals have totally failed to act. When asked about this in question period, the Liberals mired the discussion in process and failed to answer the direct question.

Therefore, I want to ask the question again. Is it the intention of the Liberals to list the IRGC as a terrorist entity? I understand they say the process is ongoing, but they had no problem voting for a motion to do it immediately. It has been almost a year. Have they changed their position or not? We would like to know.

Today, Professor Irwin Cotler, a former Liberal MP and minister, and also other representatives from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights were on the Hill, as well as people who had been victims of the Iranian regime. All of the victims who were brought to the Hill were very supportive. As one of them put it, "Sanction all the oppressors". They were supportive of sanctioning those who were involved in committing atrocities against the Iranian people. These sanctions would target the IRGC and human rights abusers.

If it is just a matter of process for the government, then I wonder why it has not used Magnitsky sanctions. The Liberals have been very reluctant to bring any kind of sanctions against Iran. Commendably, they have brought Magnitsky sanctions against human rights abusers in other cases, but they have not done so against Iran. It is very striking. If there are sanctions imposed against other human rights abusers but no action on Iran, either Magnitsky sanctions or the sanction of the IRGC, it starts to paint a disturbing picture. It starts to make us wonder if it is not just a matter of process or a matter of policy. Therefore, again, when will the Liberals list the IRGC? Is it still their intention to list the IRGC?

Irwin Cotler and the Raoul Wallenberg group gave us a list at our meeting of 19 oppressors whom they would like to see listed under Magnitsky sanctions. I would submit to the government as well that its failure to sanction any oppressors in Iran is telling and the government should move forward on both of these fronts.

Adjournment Proceedings

The names on the centre's suggested list of people to sanction under the Magnitsky act are Mahmoud Alavi, minister of intelligence; Hossein Ashtari, chief of the law enforcement force; Seyyed Alireza Avaei, minister of justice; Abbas Jafari Dolatabadi; Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, minister of the interior; Hassan Firouzabadi, senior military adviser to the supreme leader; Gholamhossein Gheibparvar; Mansour Gholami; Asghar Jahangir; Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi; Sadegh Amoli Larijani, the chief justice of Iran; Asghar Mir-Hejazi; Mohammad Moghiseh; Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei; Mostafa Pourmohammadi; Ebrahim Raisi; Abolghassem Salavati; Abbas Salehi; and Sohrab Soleimani. I apologize for the mispronunciation of their names, although they are probably more bothered by the fact that I am proposing that they be sanctioned than they are by the mispronunciation.

Again, I call on the government to clarify its Iran policy. Does the government intend to list the IRGC, as it voted to on June 12, yes or no? Why has it not proceeded with any sanctions against oppressors, be it IRGC, or sanctions under the Magnitsky act?

• (1745)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is committed to ensuring that Canada takes all appropriate actions to counter terrorist threats to our country, our people, our way of life and our interests around the world.

I can assure the hon. member that officials have been working diligently to assess the possibility of listing Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps under the Criminal Code. Assessing an entity for listing is an iterative process that requires a thorough review.

Under the Criminal Code, an entity must meet the legal threshold of reasonable grounds to believe they have knowingly carried out, attempted to carry out, participated in or facilitated a terrorist activity or is knowingly acting on behalf of, at the direction of, or in association with a listed entity. This is determined by preparing a criminal or security intelligence report, which documents the entity's activities. The report is reviewed by independent counsel at the Department of Justice to ensure that the entity meets the legal threshold for listing. If the Minister of Public Safety agrees that this legal test is met, he may recommend to cabinet that the entity be listed.

When an entity is placed on the list, banks and financial institutions freeze its assets, and Canadians are not allowed to knowingly deal with such assets. Once listed, an entity falls within the definition of a terrorist group in the Criminal Code. This can render certain terrorism-related offences applicable and can help to support possible criminal investigations and prosecutions of those offences. This includes offences related to terrorist financing, recruitment and training and leaving Canada to knowingly participate in a terrorist activity.

Listing an entity under the Criminal Code is one of the many tools Canada uses to combat terrorist financing, operations and support for terrorist activities.

There are restrictive measures already imposed against entities and individuals within the IRGC and against Iran that have an effect similar to a listing. These include the listing of the IRGC's special

forces as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. These forces are the branch of the IRGC responsible for extraterritorial operations and are Iran's primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorist groups and operations abroad. They provide arms, funding and paramilitary training to other listed groups, including the Taliban, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, all of which are also listed under the Criminal Code.

Other existing measures against the IRGC include the sanctions imposed under the Special Economic Measures Act. Individuals and entities listed under this legislation are subject to an asset freeze and a dealing prohibition. In addition, the regulations explicitly target IRGC organizations, such as the IRGC Air Force, Missile Command and Navy and several members of its senior leadership.

Furthermore, Canada has listed Iran as a state supporter of terrorism under the State Immunity Act. This listing allows victims of terrorism a means to seek financial compensation from Iran.

Members can be assured that Canada is looking at all possible options to constrain the activities of Iran that threaten national security, and we continue to consider whether and to what extent a listing is the appropriate mechanism.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my friend, I know he is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and I would think that he has a lot on his plate in terms of those files. It would have been nice if the government showed the importance with which it treats this issue by having someone involved in foreign affairs or public safety respond to my questions.

It should be well known to those who work on these files that the IRGC has engaged in all these activities. Another review of the process for listing, when the government said a year ago that it would immediately list the IRGC, is just not up to what Canadians expect.

It looks like the government is trying to hide behind long process explanations. Why can it not just answer the question? If the Liberals voted to do it a year ago, why can they not get it done?

Why have they also failed to sanction people under the Magnitsky Act? They have not used the Magnitsky Act, they have not sanctioned the IRGC, and the sanctions the member talked about were all sanctions put in place by the previous government. Congratulations, the Liberals have not removed any of the sanctions the Conservatives put in place—

Adjournment Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, the time is up. I will have to allow the hon. parliamentary secretary to respond.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, with respect to the opening comment, I would like to point out to the hon. member that I am capable of answering the question. I have an academic background in public international law and I understand the issues at play and the government does take them seriously.

Listing an individual or a group as a terrorist entity is a public means of identifying their involvement with terrorism and curtailing their support, but listing is just one component of the international and domestic response to terrorism.

With that in mind, I want to reiterate that Canada has already taken action against Iran and the IRGC specifically, such as listing their special forces responsible for extraterritorial activities. These actions are broadly consistent with our international partners, who have designated components of the IRGC under their own sanctions regimes.

I also want to restate that the assessment process for possible listings is ongoing even as I speak. Before action is taken, the listing process does require the necessary due diligence.

I want to assure the hon. member that we are taking all steps to ensure that Canadians are kept safe and that we are not put under unnecessary threat from terrorist activities abroad.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As the hon. member for Drummond is not present to raise the question for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*English*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:51 p.m.)

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