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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 28, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons administration's strategic plan 2019-22.

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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 responses to five petitions.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-99, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to the mental health challenges that Canadian farmers, ranchers and producers face.

I would also like to note that this non-partisan study is probably one of the most important studies we have ever done. We hope the government will accept our recommendations.

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

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the official opposition members of the committee wrote a supplementary report.

We agree with the report as a whole. We supported the production of the report, which we fully agree with. However, we produced supplementary opinions because we believe the report should go further, particularly to reflect a lot of testimony with regard to the urgency of the problem, as well as the need for action on several fronts, such as public education, social media attacks, and the harmful impact that government decisions can have on farmers' mental health and stress levels.

Furthermore, the committee had an opportunity to take a stand on a measure that has been a direct cause of significant stress for Canada's farmers. I am referring to the carbon tax. One of the recommendations in the report is to scrap it immediately to remove a stress factor for farmers across the country.

Again, I will reiterate that the official opposition supports the report produced by the entire committee. We simply wanted to suggest some additional ideas.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, entitled "Support for Indigenous Peoples in the Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry."

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

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 30th report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, entitled "Main Estimates 2019-20".

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 34th report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security concerning Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis.

Routine Proceedings

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

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[English]

PETITIONS

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today from dozens of residents in Calgary. It was presented to me by Charlotte Woo from the University of Calgary.

The petitioners are asking that the government address the fact that there are approximately 766 million people living in poverty around the world. They also point out that approximately 7,000 will die every day from AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Therefore, they are asking that the government increase Canada's international assistance funding by 15% per year until we achieve a contribution equal to 0.7% of our gross national income.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a honour to present a petition from hundreds of Canadians on behalf of thousands of vulnerable children.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada, having agreed to the standards in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to recognize the barriers within its own direct payments to families and remedy them. They are requesting that the funded services like the homelessness partnering initiative provide funding for client supports for children; that the government provide the Canada child benefit and the children's special allowances for all children; that it set standards within the Canada social transfer to ensure that all children, without discrimination in any form, benefit from the special protection measures and assistance; that it recognize children of parents with addictions and homeless children in need of special support to enable them to achieve improved life outcomes and receive equal benefit to their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; that it reduce the level of material deprivation for children who move a lot for reasons related to homelessness, parental addiction or incarceration, or government care experiences; that it reduce the interprovincial and territorial disparities that exclude children living in circumstances not considered under the current eligibility rules; and, finally, that it increase supports for children living with the highest level of exclusion.

• (1010)

CANADA SUMMER JOBS INITIATIVE

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by dozens of Canadians.

They are concerned that the government has forgotten about section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which identifies, among other things, the freedom of conscience, freedom of thought and freedom of belief as fundamental freedoms. They are concerned that the attestation requirement for the Canada summer jobs program is a violation of section 2 of the charter. They are calling on the Prime Minister and the government to defend freedom

of conscience, freedom of thought and freedom of belief and to withdraw the attestation requirement on the Canada summer jobs program.

I have two other signed petitions that identify the same concern. I would be prepared not to speak to those individually but to lump them all together, with your permission, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Absolutely.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[Translation]

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by dozens of citizens. I know that a number of similar petitions have been signed by thousands of citizens from coast to coast to coast.

The signatories note that Canada has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but that many of the government's policies do not uphold those rights for everyone equally.

I would like to share just two examples. The housing first benefit takes only adults into account. It does not take children, who are often those in the greatest need, into account. The child benefit is not distributed equally either.

There are other examples, but, essentially, what the petitioners want the government to do is fix programs that do not uphold the principle of equal rights for all children. They want the government to ensure that no child is excluded and that all children can achieve their full potential.

[English]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the member for Langley—Aldergrove, I hereby present 30 petitions calling on the Government of Canada to make changes to the current drinking and driving laws in Canada and to make a change to the Criminal Code.

The charge of impaired driving causing death should be charged to the offence of vehicular manslaughter. If a person is arrested and convicted of impaired driving, there should be an automatic one-year driving prohibition. If a person is convicted of causing bodily harm while impaired by being under the influence of either drugs or alcohol, there should be a minimum mandatory sentence of two years' imprisonment.

I also ask your permission, Mr. Speaker, to sign only two of these and lump them together in the same presentation.

The Speaker: Again, absolutely.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

HOUSING

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of constituents from Port Alberni, Parksville and Courtenay, which are in my riding, to end homelessness and recognize housing as a human right. They cite that an estimated 235,000 people in Canada experience homelessness. They also cite that the government is committed to reducing homelessness by 50% over 10 years, which would still leave 117,500 Canadians homeless each year.

The petitioners are calling on the government to take immediate action by officially recognizing that housing is a human right and adopting Motion No. 147 to develop a plan to end and prevent homelessness in Canada.

• (1015)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today in support of Bill S-240. If members are not aware, it is a bill dealing with the issue of forced organ harvesting. The bill has been through this place and through the Senate once, but it is back in the Senate for consideration of amendments. Petitioners hope that the Senate will pass this quickly so that it gets done before the next election.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about the consequences for children when their parents end up in jail, particularly as they relate to the structure of government programs, which make it very hard, if not impossible, for those children to access benefits once their parents are jailed. Often these children end up in informal caregiving situations, so the caregiver cannot access benefits, such as the Canada child benefit. In addition, as rent supplements are often paid to an individual adult, once the adult is in prison, the child cannot benefit from that supplement. Canadians believe, as I do, that we do not want to make it harder for children to have good support in life and to succeed, whatever their parents may have done.

That is why the petitioners are calling on the government to change the structure of its programs to ensure that children continue to be supported, whatever the situation of their parents may be.

TAXATION

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of dozens of citizens of Toronto, Etobicoke, Scarborough and Guelph, Ontario, I am pleased to present a petition asking the government to reverse its decision to apply an excise tax to cannabis sold for medical purposes and to recognize that medical cannabis should be exempt from the federal goods and services tax.

As members may know, the government has responded to previous petitions; however, those responses have not been satisfactory. These petitioners are asking the government to reconsider its decision and remove the excise tax so that Canadians have access to the medication that their doctors prescribe.

The Speaker: Before I move to the hon. parliamentary secretary, I note that I saw the member for Avalon rise when I was asking for the presentation of reports from committees. I had not been informed

Government Orders

that he had a report to deliver, but I gather he does. I think what he wants is to ask for the unanimous consent of the House to return to presenting reports from committees in order to allow him to do so.

Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Avalon.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for granting me leave to do this.

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 23rd report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, entitled “Striped Bass in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and Miramichi River: Striking a Delicate Balance”.

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

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ACCESSIBLE CANADA ACT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.) moved the second reading of, and concurrence in, amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-81, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, as a person with a disability and as the Minister of Accessibility, it is truly an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-81.

Over three years ago, our government embarked on a journey aimed to make things better for a significant percentage of the population that has a history of being ill-treated or ignored. The time to act is now.

The time to propose a new system that would help address the barriers to inclusion faced every single day by Canadians with disabilities has come. The time to do things differently as a government, to ensure that all Canadians have an equal chance at success, has come.

Government Orders

[Translation]

I am extremely proud of the work we have done in creating this transformative piece of legislation that will improve the lives of millions of persons with disabilities.

• (1020)

[English]

This bill reflects the voices of thousands of persons with a disability, their family members and their friends, and it spans decades of advocacy. We could not have come this far without the strong collaboration of the disability community and its strategic and thoughtful work, which has been incredibly impactful.

I would like to recognize the excellent work done in the other chamber and by our Senate sponsor, Senator Munson, on the bill. Bill C-81 was carefully studied over the course of many meetings, and both chambers made amendments to strengthen this historic legislation.

Members of the disability community shared their views and experiences, many of them very personal. I am grateful for their engagement and dedication to the advancement of accessibility in Canada.

[Translation]

We took to heart the messages heard from these witnesses and proposed amendments to echo those voices and concerns. Our government supports all the amendments made to Bill C-81 brought forward in the Senate as we recognize that they reflect key priorities voiced by the community.

[English]

Let me provide members with a breakdown of some key amendments made in the Senate.

A significant change responds to the specific requests of witnesses that Bill C-81 set a deadline for the realization of a Canada without barriers. Accordingly, the purpose of the legislation, as well as the mandates of the minister and the Canadian accessibility standards development organization, would now reflect the objective of realizing a Canada without barriers on or before January 1, 2040. By adding a specific deadline, the disability community has stated that it would be able to hold government accountable on progress and ensure that accessibility remained a priority for future governments. To mitigate concern that this deadline could provide a reason for people to delay action on accessibility until the deadline neared, amendments have been made to add the words “without delay” to the preamble of the bill. These words would clarify that nothing in the act would permit any delay in the removal or prevention of barriers to accessibility.

I have also heard the community's strong call to recognize the importance of sign language to the deaf community in Canada. Therefore, I am pleased that Bill C-81 was amended to recognize American sign languages, *langue des signes québécoise* and indigenous sign language as a primary language for communication by deaf persons in Canada.

I would also like to acknowledge that we have interpreters on the Hill in Parliament today.

This legislation is intended to complement the existing human rights framework in Canada. Nothing in this bill or the regulations made under it would limit or replace the duty to accommodate, which is an established principle of human rights. That is why I support the amendment to clarify that nothing in the accessible Canada act or its regulations would limit a regulated entity's duty to accommodate under any other act of Parliament in any way.

[Translation]

We know that transportation services should be accessible for everyone. In response to stakeholders' concerns, an amendment was made to allow the Canadian Transportation Agency to identify an undue barrier, even if a transportation service provider is not in contravention of an accessibility regulation.

[English]

This would ensure that the CTA could fully address barriers that persons with disabilities may face in the federal transportation system.

Further, adding stronger language on intersectionality in the principles of the bill responds to the disability community's desire to see greater recognition of the impact of multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination that influence how barriers impact diverse groups of persons with disabilities.

[Translation]

As we work together to build a Canada that is more inclusive and accessible, we have an incredible opportunity to reshape the way we think about disability.

[English]

This legislation would send a clear signal to Canadians that persons with disabilities will no longer be treated as an afterthought. It is our systems, policies and laws that need to be fixed, not our people.

We can see the finish line. By concurring with all amendments made and swiftly passing Bill C-81, we can continue on this journey that will lead us to a society that treats all people with the dignity they deserve, a society in which everyone has equal opportunities to contribute and a society that is truly inclusive.

• (1025)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments and for her personal passion for this legislation.

From what I understand, when the Senate replied to the bill, it made two additional notes, and I would appreciate the minister's comment on them. One was a concern that funding could still go to projects that did not have complete accessibility as part of them. It encouraged us and the government to be vigilant on this point. I wonder if the minister could comment on that. Is it something that should have been addressed in the legislation, or does it maybe require separate action? The other issue was the importance of training in preparation for the full implementation of and engagement with this framework.

Government Orders

I wonder if the minister could offer some comments on those points and on how the government can ensure that the concerns of the Senate in this respect are incorporated in our practices going forward.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, through Bill C-81, we would put in place mechanisms to ensure, as much as possible, that the funding we allocated would reflect the principles of accessibility. Where that was not possible, say for jurisdictional regions, such as provincial jurisdiction, we would build it into our policy and programs. I think of our national housing strategy and the Canada child benefit. The notion is that we have to recognize that disability is in and of itself a unique characteristic, and we would not be put in a position of putting funding into programs, policies or allocations that did not take accessibility into account. I will use the example of our national housing strategy. Built into that project is a carve-out for ensuring not just that the building code is met but that there are actually accessible units built, as a matter of course, in using this money.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a red-letter day for us and for people in the disability community because we are coming back to the House of Commons today with some amendments so that we can strengthen Bill C-81, which is a milestone. However, I would ask the minister to take this opportunity to assure Canadians that some of the most egregious concerns we had that were not met in the bill, even with amendments, are going to be addressed.

Mainly, people living with different abilities need to have a one-stop place they can go with their concerns. Right now, Bill C-81 would separate enforcement and implementation among four organizations. I would ask the minister to help us envision how we can move this forward. We know that it is a federal election year, and people in the disability community are diligently watching how we can move this forward in a campaign year.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question and, of course, her partnership on Bill C-81. This bill belongs to all of us.

The elements in Bill C-81 are additional elements in an existing system. We have things in place. We have structures in place through the Canadian Transportation Agency, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, which means that we are not starting from scratch. However, we are very aware that the sectoral approach taken in Bill C-81 has raised a concern that people will not know where to go first. Therefore, the leadership of both our government and these organizations has created, and we have built into Bill C-81, what we call a no-wrong-door approach, which means that wherever people go, it will be the responsibility of the system to point them in the right direction.

For example, if an individual had a complaint and went to the accessibility commissioner with it, and that complaint should have gone to the Canadian Transportation Agency, it would be the accessibility commissioner's responsibility to get it in front of the right people and not the responsibility of the individual filing the complaint. This would be required. We already have a memorandum of understanding with these organizations as they work to design this system in a way that would create that seamless service approach.

We are aware of that concern. Disability advocates have raised it with us. We are doing everything we can to make sure that it is at the back end and that we do not deal with these concerns at the front end through the experience of the person who wants some help.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the minister and her government for approving or supporting these amendments. However, I would point out that the vast majority of the amendments were brought up at committee by opposition members, Conservative, NDP and Green, who all agreed that these amendments were important to the bill. Unfortunately, the Liberals on that committee refused these amendments. Therefore, I want to give the minister credit for standing up here today and voicing her support for these critical amendments.

The one question I would like to ask the minister, which came up frequently during the discussion at committee, certainly for our stakeholders, is on the issue of exemptions for federal departments. Federal departments would be able to ask for and be granted an exemption from the legislative regulations as part of Bill C-81. I would like to ask the minister if she is going to be diligent to ensure that any requests for exemptions through Bill C-81 would be strictly restricted or followed through to ensure that there was a good, valid reason for those exemptions to be approved.

• (1030)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes, we will be very diligent. Thanks to the amendments put forth through the House committee, there would now be more robust accounting for an exemption when it was granted. The rationale for granting an exemption would have to be published. It would be a time-limited exemption. They would have to apply. It would not be something that would go on in perpetuity.

The positive aspect of exemptions is that they would acknowledge the innovation and the forward-looking nature of some of the organizations that fall within federal jurisdiction. Some of them are already doing a lot on accessibility, so we wanted to have flexibility in the legislation to allow us to basically accept that what they are doing is equal to or better than what would be required under the law. Those who were not doing anything or enough, at least under my watch, would have a very tough time getting an exemption.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the minister would be aware, a number of different interest groups have come to MPs across the country during this period. Certainly I have heard a lot from people who are advocates for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. I wonder if the minister can confirm that she believes that the Senate amendments would adequately address those who have been calling for additional protections for American sign language, *langue des signes québécoise* and international sign language, and, if not, if she has identified any gaps and how those might be addressed in the regulations.

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Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, it is very exciting that we have managed to get into Bill C-81 the recognition of American sign language, *langue des signes québécoise* and indigenous sign language as the primary language for Canadians who are deaf. This is something I heard loud and clear and that I was very pleased to have supported. It was a bit of a journey as we worked through the process of official-language designation versus primary language. I think we got to the right place.

We have to understand that to Canadians who are deaf, sign language is an aspect of self-identity and culture, and we owe it to all of them to make sure that we recognize that as we move forward toward an accessible Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):

[Member spoke in sign language]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say hello to members of the deaf community who are here today.

There is much that needs to be improved in this bill. My colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh spoke earlier about enforcement. It is key that this become something far more than symbolic and that it allows for full accessibility.

I do not believe the minister adequately responded to the question from the member for Windsor—Tecumseh. How is the government going to guarantee enforcement and make sure that rights enabled through this legislation would actually be put in place?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Speaker, this legislation would fundamentally create a system in which we focused on a human rights approach to disability rights, and that would be a game changer for the disability community in our country. We know, and we heard very loudly, that as much as we needed to acknowledge the importance of accessibility and inclusion, we also had to put some teeth in this law. That is why we would have, in my opinion, very robust enforcement mechanisms that could result, for example, in a \$250,000 fine per day for a non-compliant entity.

Proactively, however, we would be requiring federally regulated entities, including the government, to create accessibility plans. People with disabilities would have to be part of the creation of these plans.

As much as we need to have an enforcement side to this, what we really want is to build a Canada that is accessible so that we do not have to enforce the regulations, so we are doing a lot of work on the front end. We do not want to build a compliance system that does not look at the proactive change we are trying to address and build systemically into the way we work with Canadians who have disabilities in our country.

• (1035)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today to address Bill C-81, an important piece of legislation that recognizes and affirms the inherent dignity of all people regardless of disability. It seeks to create the kind of policy environment and framework that facilitate full participation in every aspect of Canadian life for Canadians who have disabilities.

Those watching can be assured of the support of all parties in this House for this legislation. Today we will discuss some missed opportunities and some related issues on which we have not agreed with the government's actions. Specifically, for instance, we will discuss some of the issues around employment. We had a private member's bill from my friend, the member for Carleton, that dealt with facilitating the full involvement of Canadians with disabilities in terms of employment. There are areas of disagreement among the parties in terms of the best way to move forward and the best way to affirm these principles.

Nonetheless, those watching should know that we in the opposition, and all parties, are supportive of moving forward with this legislation. Whether the bill passes today or tomorrow, I am not sure of the exact timeline. However, I think we will certainly see this bill pass into law before the election. It will be good news and a positive step.

Before getting into some of the substance of the legislation, I want to pick up on something said by my colleague, the member for Foothills. He has done a lot of great work on this bill on our side, as have the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin and other members who have been part of the process. The member for Foothills pointed out that amendments for this bill that were put forward at the committee level by Conservatives, as well as by other opposition parties, were not supported by government MPs at the time of the initial study by the House of Commons committee. That is an important point, that they were not supported at that stage.

Notwithstanding disagreements about some of the particulars around amendments, we have supported this bill at every stage. After the bill passed third reading, it went to the Senate. The Senate made a number of amendments that reflected the same concerns that Conservative members of the House had been hearing from the stakeholder community, those representing Canadians with disabilities. Those same concerns that we heard were also heard by the Senate, and they were part of the discussion that happened in the context of that Senate committee.

The bill was amended somewhat at the Senate, and then it was brought back to the House. Now we are debating whether to agree to and support those Senate amendments. I think members will find, generally speaking, support across the parties for the Senate amendments, which make improvements on the text of the bill as it was.

Those who are watching should note how this legislative process works through the details, and how senators were able to be more influential over the legislative outcome than members of the House were. The government would not accept amendments that came from members of the House, but then accepted those same amendments that came from members of the Senate.

We have seen this in a number of cases. I recall Bill C-14, to which an amendment around palliative care was proposed. Actually it was not even just proposed at committee; it was voted on by all members in the chamber at that time. It was voted down. Then, in similar form, it was proposed by Senator Plett, and it passed in the Senate. It was then accepted as part of a subsequent message from the House of Commons.

Government Orders

We see this process happening, in general, in this Parliament, because of the relative lack of independence that we sometimes see in committees and the way committees are unfortunately quite controlled, and the relative independence of the Senate, certainly relative to the House of Commons. It is not as independent as maybe some like to claim, but it is relatively independent compared to the actions of members, especially government members, in the House of Commons. Senate action actually has a greater practical impact on the legislative process.

Again, although I am happy to see the incorporation of these amendments, I think we should be concerned about that, just as a matter of legislative process. We want this House and its elected members of Parliament to be strong in the exercise of their responsibilities.

● (1040)

Nonetheless, although we raise questions and highlight some of the means by which some of these issues have come forward, we are pleased to see these amendments. They reflect issues that have been raised by the stakeholder community and by members of Parliament from our party and, I believe, other parties as well.

With that said about matters of process, let me turn now to the particulars of the legislation, Bill C-81, that is before us. To summarize the content of the bill, in a nutshell, it is essentially about requiring regulated entities, that is, the public service and federally regulated workplaces, to develop accessibility plans. It also requires that the content of those plans be regulated and enforced.

As the minister and others have pointed out in some of the remarks they have made during this process, very often our human rights processes are complaints based. That is, complaints issues are considered when there is a violation or a potential violation of somebody's rights. A complaint is then made, and an adjudication happens around that complaint.

A point that the minister has made, and she is quite right in making it, is that this approach is not the full realization. It is important that people have those avenues available to them, but it is not the full extent of what we would like to see in this context. Rather, we would prefer to see a proactive approach, where we are ensuring the protection of rights from the beginning and not merely putting in place a system that allows complaints to be adjudicated after people's rights have been violated.

Seeking to have regulated entities develop plans, prepare and publish those plans, implement them and facilitate their enforcement creates the conditions for a more proactive approach to these issues, rather than simply a reactive approach. That is wise, worthwhile and something that all parties support. It would establish proactive compliance and enforcement mechanisms. These plans must be multi-year and involve the setting of goals, reporting requirements, mechanisms for investigation and a variety of processes that seek to ensure the realization of those plans to the fullest possible extent.

This legislation would also create an organization called CASDO, the Canadian accessibility standards development organization, and allocate \$290 million over the next six years for its creation. This organization would work within the government to create regulations related to various aspects of the legislation around the built

environment, employment, service delivery, information and communications technology, transportation and procurement, and always with the goal of the full integration of people with disabilities, facilitating their full participation within society, without barriers.

Failure to meet standards set by CASDO would lead to fines. It should be noted that the action of CASDO would be within federally regulated entities and directly within the federal government only. Nonetheless, the hope is that this legislation would involve the setting of standards that would then be adopted and become useful across all facets of Canadian society, including those outside the federally regulated workforce. There would also be 5,000 Canadians with disabilities hired for the public service, which is also encouraging to see. Our party, as people have seen, has been vocal on the issue of ensuring that those who have disabilities are not arbitrarily excluded from the public service.

● (1045)

This is the broad framework of the bill. It puts in place some mechanisms and processes to ensure there are no barriers to participation in society for people with disabilities.

Today we are in the process of debating issues related to proposed Senate amendments. The minister has spoken, and I would like to highlight the various Senate amendments that we are considering. Although the Senate did not incorporate all the changes that had been proposed at committee, in the House or that had been suggested by the broader disability community, all the changes that were made were reflective of those particular concerns.

First is the issue of including in this legislation a timeline for the realization of a barrier-free Canada; that timeline is 2040. The goal is that this work would be completed, taken fully to fruition, by 2040. The amendments also seek to clarify, though, that the setting of that deadline is not an excuse to wait until the proverbial night before to get the homework done. Rather, the amendments are to ensure the work is done by that point. They create that timeline or deadline but do not seek to permit any kind of delay or preservation of barriers in the name of it not being 2040 yet. That is an important element as well.

Growing up, I was always taught that deadlines are the mother of invention and that more gets done when there is the focusing effect of an upcoming deadline, so the work of the community and the Senate to ensure that there is a timeline in place for the implementation of these measures is quite commendable and important.

Another area of amendment from the Senate was that it asked that intersectionality be taken into consideration in this account. Amendments were put forward to recognize the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination, the fact that people with disabilities may face discrimination as a result of an intersectional reality. Therefore, the planned response to barriers needs to be a response that takes that circumstance into consideration. We recognize that reality. We recognize the importance of the various plans that are put forward by regulated entities to recognize that intersectionality is part of the dynamic.

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Further, the amendments put forward by the Senate seek to address the issue of preserving the existing human rights of people with disabilities. This was really more of a clarification, but the testimony heard in the House, as well as by the Senate committee, emphasized the importance of this clarification, recognizing that there are already obligations under various human rights codes, in particular in the case of federal entities under the Canadian Human Rights Act and other federal laws. Various groups highlighted the importance of clarifying that the new framework put forward with this bill does not in any way derogate from the existing recognized rights and obligations that are enumerated as part of those existing human rights codes. We recognize that aspect as important as well.

Through other amendments, the Senate sought to protect existing rights in the context of passengers with disabilities through the Canadian Transportation Agency.

• (1050)

The expectation is that many of the complaints would come through the Canadian Transportation Agency. This was put forward by people in the disability community. It is therefore important for the legislation to create enforceable standards around the action that this body must take in the removal of barriers. This is an important piece as well.

On the specific issue of transportation, I want to read briefly from a briefing from ARCH Disability Law Centre. It said the following:

However, subsection 172(2), a provision that is currently in the Canada Transportation Act, effectively means that once the CTA make these regulations and transportation providers, like airlines, comply with these regulations, they do not need to do anything more.

This is problematic because the regulations that the CTA sets may not meet the duty to accommodate protections that people with disabilities have under human rights law.

Under subsection 172(2), if a passenger with a disability complains to the CTA that an airline or other transportation provider should have accommodated his or her disability, the case would fail if the airline complied with CTA regulations. A more detailed analysis of this is available in the final legal report.

The committee did not repeal subsection 172(2), but adopted an amendment which would change it. The proposed amendment allows the CTA to find that there is a barrier to accessibility even if the transportation provider has complied with the CTA regulations. For passengers with disabilities, this means they can file a complaint with the CTA that they face an undue barrier in the federal transportation system and insist the transportation provider do more than what the CTA regulation requires.

The passenger with a disability could win his or her case even if the transportation provider complied with all CTA regulations. However, the CTA could only order the transportation provider to take corrective measures. The CTA could not order the transportation provider to pay the person damages or money compensation. This is different from other complaints to the CTA about inaccessibility of the federal transportation system. Generally, for these other complaints, the CTA can order the transportation provider to take corrective measures and to pay damages to the person.

Essentially, the argument that is being made is that although the amendment would improve the section, there still would be a gap. People in the community expect transportation companies, airlines, rail lines etc. to accommodate those with disabilities. The concern is that these entities might be able to say that they have met the standards of the regulations so they do not have to do anything more if in fact the case may be that they could and should do more to accommodate the full participation of a person with a disability.

The Senate amendment says that the CTA could well find that the transportation provider should have done more even if it attained the minimum standards set by the regulation, but it could not award damages in this case. That is an improvement made through the work of the Senate, but as the discussion around this illustrates, there is still a gap in what was asked for and what was expected.

The next amendment is around the issue of sign language. The legislation recognizes specific forms of sign language: American sign language, Quebec sign language and indigenous sign languages. It recognizes these as primary languages used by deaf persons in Canada. This has been an issue that the deaf community in particular has been long advocating on, and it has the support of all other stakeholders as well.

We have had many discussions in the House about the importance of language. We recently had a debate on indigenous languages, a legislative framework around indigenous languages, the importance of our two official languages and the experience and culture that are tied to the use of language in that context.

• (1055)

As well, I think we all recognize that the recognition of sign language is part of that picture as well as part of a broader, deeper appreciation of the way in which language is tied to culture and experience. Of course, for people who are limited in their ability to communicate in other ways, it is particularly necessary. It does have significance and meaning beyond the necessity of communicating in that form.

These are some of the amendments the Senate has adopted to the bill. They do not address all the issues that people in the stakeholder community and the wider community have been looking for, but they are steps forward and are things that are well supported by all members of Parliament. We are hopeful this will go forward and we will be able to see movement to get these amendments through.

In my remarks today I want to frame a little of the discussion around who the bill is for. In other words, why are the technical elements I have explained important and who do they matter to specifically.

In that context, I want to make a few remarks about Jean Vanier, about his vision of inclusion, but of something much bigger and greater than inclusion. As we talk about these issues, he is a figure on whom all of us should reflect. He is certainly the greatest known champion of people with disabilities.

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He passed away earlier this month. His death was met with recognition and tributes from all aspects of our politics and many different aspects of Canadian society. He was a revolutionary figure practically in how he sought to facilitate the inclusion in society of people with disabilities. However, he was also a revolutionary figure intellectually. His experience as a philosopher and his way of thinking informed and contributed to his work. He was described in biographies as a philosopher and a humanitarian, which is an optimal and necessary combination. It is dangerous to be a philosopher without being a humanitarian and it is dangerous to think of oneself as a humanitarian without some attention to the philosophical roots of humanitarian work. We see that intimate connection between the ideas Jean Vanier sought to advance and the practices he championed.

Jean Vanier came from a privileged family. His parents were well known as well. He was born when his father was part of a diplomatic mission. He had a military career as well, but then he pursued a doctorate in philosophy. His dissertation would position much of the work he would do later. His dissertation was on happiness as principle and the end of Aristotelian ethics.

I feel a connection to that because I did my Masters dissertation on happiness measurement, which was also significantly influenced by Aristotle. The question of happiness is under-discussed in politics. It is important for a lot of the legislation. He was someone who brought in a philosophical framework to the work he did that was rooted in Aristotelian concepts of happiness. In the meantime, he drew on Aristotle's conception of happiness, which is different from a contemporary concept of happiness. This influenced his work with Canadians with disabilities.

• (1100)

Jean Vanier's desire for disabled people was not merely that they experience formal, structural inclusion or be able to get into the same spaces as everyone else. Rather, his desire was for them to experience love and happiness through community and friendship. Therefore, he sought to build communities of disabled and non-disabled people living together in meaningful friendship.

Vanier wrote this:

The cry of people with disabilities was a very simple cry: Do you love me? That's what they were asking. And that awoke something deep within me because that was also my fundamental cry.

He noted that the pursuit of recognition of their humanity, happiness and love was what people with disabilities were seeking, which was often denied to them by a structure that did not affirm their dignity. The thing they were seeking was the same thing that all people were seeking and that in fact they could and they would seek that together. That was Vanier's wisdom and vision.

He developed into his work, and would write subsequently about them, concepts of happiness informed by his work with people with disabilities. He drew very much on Aristotle's concept of happiness. Aristotle, writing in Greek, obviously uses the word "eudemonia", which more directly is translated "the life well lived". He argued in that context against notions of happiness that were more pleasure-based, more rooted in happenstance, the random benefit of good fortune generally in material terms. He had a richer understanding and appreciation of what happiness was.

Aristotle argues, and Vanier follows him in this sense, for the connection between virtue and happiness, that virtues are the qualities of character that allow life to be lived well.

We know as members of Parliament and as human beings that so much of human striving is in pursuit of happiness. We do not always agree on what that is or on how we strive for it, but so much of life is about striving for happiness.

More recently, our side has been very much influenced by the utilitarian school of thought, which argues that happiness is about pleasure over pain. This was the core of Bentham's concept of utilitarianism. Mill formerly follows it, but he reinserts aspects of Aristotle's definition of happiness with arguments that the cultivation of higher levels of happiness requires the development of a certain nobleness of character.

Vanier's passion for philosophy and the idea of happiness continued throughout his life. In 2001, he wrote "Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle". In it he talks about three utilitarian virtues: love, wisdom and justice. I want to read a quote from the book in which he talks about the importance of friendship and love as part of friendship.

He states:

Through friendship I communicated in the consciousness that my friend has of his own existence. For in the same way that we feel that we are alive and exist through activity and derive pleasure from it, so, through friendship, we feel our friend live and exist. And the union is so profound that the goodness of the life of our friend extends to us and gives us pleasure. In friendship there is almost a communion, a merging of two beings and their rightful good. The friend is an *other self*. Everything that I experience, he experiences.... In this friendship we continue to be two, but we are one in a great and noble activity that we accomplish together. Consciousness of the goodness of my friend fills me with just as much joy as if it were my own. My friend's happiness becomes my happiness.

This was his philosophical concept of friendship that was essential for happiness, facilitated by the virtue of love. It informed his practical vision for building communities that would include disabled and non-disabled people. We could call that inclusion, but it is a much richer and deeper concept of inclusion than a formal one. It is that we live in communities of love, good will and solidarity for each other with real friendship. We see others as another self and we identify with that kind of love for others. It is part of his concept of happiness, which entails friendship and living together while in community.

• (1105)

Jean Vanier, as I said, brought a rich concept of happiness, love and friendship into his work with disabled people. He saw people in institutions when he was living in Paris at the time of the founding of the L'Arche movement, who were being maintained poorly in the worst instance. He saw that very often the attitude towards the disabled resulted, in the worst instance, in people being maintained poorly, and in the best instance people being treated a little bit better in terms of their material condition. However, the real need was for the humanity of all people to be affirmed through communities of meaningful friendship and love, through which people were pursuing happiness together. That was his vision.

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The radical practical idea started with Vanier personally getting a house and moving in with people who had disabilities. He saw that this was not merely an act of service done by him for other people; rather, it was about the development of shared community. He saw how through this reality of shared community he could learn from those people he was living with. He wanted other people who did not have disabilities to be able to learn and grow through these communities and friendships, which were meaningful and pursuing happiness together.

Jean Vanier said that “L’Arche and Faith and Light have been part of a real revolution.” So often in the past, people with intellectual disabilities were seen as a source of shame for their parents, or even in some situations as a punishment from God. Their parents and carers have often been seen as wonderful people, even holy, for looking after people “like them”. Today, it is becoming clear that it is people with intellectual disabilities who humanize us and heal us if we enter into real friendship with them. They are in no way a punishment from God, but rather a path toward God.

He understood that people with disabilities are in their fullest and most complete sense people. They are human beings with the same dignity and value as anyone else. They have both needs and things to contribute, which is obviously the situation of us all. Those needs and contributions are realized through meaningful community. He also understood that the value of social structures replicating insights and benefits of family-like structures.

I was recently in Bogotá, where I had a chance to visit SOS Children's Village to see some of the work they were doing. They made a very interesting point to me about the way we care for children who cannot be cared for by their families. I think it is a similar insight to Jean Vanier, which is that institutions' formal structures do not work nearly as well as, let us say, family-like structures. The way SOS works, at least in Columbia where I was, is that children are put into environments designed to be family-like. They are in homes. They have parents looking after them. Although they are not able to be with their own families, they experience a support structure that is meaningfully similar to that of a family and that leverages the kind of love, connection and friendship that is important in family structures. That was understood by Jean Vanier when he sought to do the same thing in how he structured the L’Arche movement with meaningful family-like communities where people would live together in communities of love and friendship.

● (1110)

Very shortly before he died, Jean Vanier received the Templeton Prize, which is a great international honour. He spoke about the work he did and the ideas and vision behind it. It showed us the kinds of sensibilities that should animate our work in this area. I want to read from part of his acceptance speech for the Templeton prize. He said:

L’Arche and Faith and Light have been part of a real revolution; so often in the past people with intellectual disabilities were seen as a source of shame for their parents, or even in some situations, as a punishment from God. Their parents and carers have often been seen as wonderful people, even holy, for looking after people “like them”. Today it is becoming clear that it is people with intellectual disabilities who can humanise us, and heal us, if we enter into a real friendship with them. They are in no way a punishment of God but rather a path towards God....

To be with is to live side by side, it is enter into mutual relationships of friendship and concern. It is to laugh and to cry together, it is to mutually transform each other. Each person becomes a gift for the other, revealing to each other that we are all part of a huge and wonderful family, the family of God. We are all profoundly the same as

human beings, but also profoundly different, we all have our special gifts and unique mission in our lives.

This wonderful family, from its earliest origins and since then with all those who have been spread over this planet from generation to generation, is composed of people of different cultures and abilities, each of whom have their strength and their weakness, and each of whom is precious.

The evolution of this family from the earliest days until today certainly has entailed wars, violence, and the endless seeking of domination and more possessions. It is also an evolution wherein prophets of peace have continued to cry out for “peace, peace”, calling people together to meet each other as beautiful and precious.

Many of us in our world continue to yearn for peace, and for unity. However so many of us remain stuck in our cultures where we are caught up fighting to win and to have more. How can we become free of the culture that incites people, not to responsibilities to the human family and to the common good, but to individual success and to domination over others? How can we get rid of the tentacles and the shackles of this culture, to become free to be ourselves, free of our oversized egos and compulsions, free to love others as they are, different yet the same?

To be with is also to eat together, as Jesus invited us: “When you give a meal don’t invite your family, friends or rich neighbour, but invite the poor and the lame, the disabled and the blind, and you shall be blessed.” To become blessed, says Jesus, is to invite the poor to our table (Luke 14).

Let us be very clear that it is not the guests who are blessed because they enjoy good food at a party, but rather the host is blessed by his encounter with the poor. Why is the host called blessed? Isn’t it because his heart will be transformed as he is touched by the wonderful gifts of the spirit hidden in the hearts of the poor? This has been the gift of my own personal journey and those of many others. We have been led by those who are weak onto the road of the blessedness of love, of humility and of peacemaking.

To be transformed, first we must meet people who are different, not our family, friends and neighbours who are like us. Let us meet across differences—intellectual, cultural, national, racial, religious and other differences. Then from this initial meeting we can begin to build community and places of belonging together.

Community is never called to be a closed group, where people are hiding behind barriers of group identity, interested only in their own welfare or their own vision, as if it is the only one or the best. It cannot be a prison or a fortress. Unfortunately, for a long time this was the rather closed vision of different churches and religions. Each one thought itself the best, with all knowledge and truth. Hence, there was no communication or dialogue between them.

Isn’t there a danger that we close ourselves up in our own professional, religious or family groups where we never meet those who are different?

Community, on the other hand, is a place of togetherness in spite of differences, of people united in love and open to all other people. A community then is like a fountain or a shining light, where a way of life is being lived and revealed, open to others and attractive to them. It is a place of peace, revealing a way to peace and to unity for the human family.

● (1115)

Community is a place of belonging where each person can grow to become fully him or herself. It is belonging for becoming.

We belong to each other so that each member can become more human, more loving, more free, more open to others, particularly to those who are different. When each member can develop their unique gifts and help others to develop theirs, members are no longer in competition but in collaboration, in cooperation and in mutual support.

To become is not to prove I am better than you, but rather supporting together each other in opening up our hearts. Thus community is a place of transformation. Community is a place of belonging where each one may be transformed and find human fulfilment.

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What alternatives do we have for human growth? Belonging which is too rigid stifles becoming; on the other hand too much individual growth or becoming without belonging can become fighting to get to the top, or else it can become loneliness and anguish. To win is always to be lonely, and of course nobody wins for long.

Community then is not a closed group but a way of life that helps each person to grow to human fulfillment. The two key elements of community are mission and mutual caring for each one. We come together for a purpose that is the mission, and also to be a sign of love or rather to grow in love for each another. It is a mission that defines why we are together, and being together we learn to love one another.

At L'Arche and Faith and Light our mission is to provide community where the most fragile person is the heart of the community, and can grow in their humanity and in their capacity to love.

Community then becomes a place where we learn how to love each other. To grow in love is a long and difficult journey, and it takes time. L'Arche and Faith and Light are not just places where we do good to people with intellectual disabilities. They are places of relationship, where we grow in love together.

But what is love? This word has been flung around for all sorts of emotional experiences as well as acts of bravery of soldiers, fighting out of love for their country. For me, love is to recognize that the other person is a person, is precious, is important and has value. Each one has a gift to bring to others. Each one has his or her mission in the larger family of humanity. Each one reveals the secret face of God.

We need each other, to grow in this sacred love, which implies love of those who are different, of those who get my goat and drive me up the wall, because of difference of ideas, temperament, culture, approach and so on. Community is a place where we rub up against each other's sore spots.

Hopefully we can in this way rub off some of the tiresome and sour traits of our characters, so that we can become our real selves. To love then is to see in the other, the heart of the person hidden under all that annoys us. That is why to love, in the words of St Paul, is to be patient, which is to wait, and to hold on. It is to believe and to trust that under all the mess in the other person is their secret being, their heart.

In L'Arche some of the people we welcome have deep anguish and even violence. They are difficult to live with in community. We have to be patient and to believe that their true self will gradually emerge. We also have to be patient with ourselves as well, and believe that if we try to love and become open to a spirituality of love, our own true selves will also gradually emerge. If we love, if we truly love other people and believe in them, then they are transformed, and we also will be transformed.

Community then is a place of healing, of transformation, and of humanising people. It's a place where we are commissioned to grow in love, and in forgiveness, and this is real work. If you don't want to be transformed and to grow in love, then don't partake in community! When we find the strength to accept people as they are and to meet them in their secret being, they open us up to love.

These remarks by Jean Vanier are so profound and so critical, not just to this particular debate but to all of the debates we have in this place, because they talk about the way in which we can and do live in community with each other. That is, we understand the balance, if you will, or the necessary combination for belonging and becoming and the importance of having open-ended communities where we invite other people in and seek to learn from them.

• (1120)

The relationship we have with people who come from different backgrounds, people who are disabled or people who may have been historically disadvantaged for a variety of reasons is not to feel that they are in need of somebody else's charity, but, rather, to include each other in full community and recognize the way in which we become in community, we belong in community and we learn from each other.

This is something I have observed in my own interactions with members of my family. I have a beautiful cousin who has Down's syndrome. She was one of the flower girls at my wedding. I will always remember a story that my uncle told. It was a story about how he had learned from her, and sharing the story was a way in which we all learned from her. It was about a time when he and his children were at a hospital, where there was a lady, whatever her

circumstances were or whatever bad news she had just heard, standing outside a hospital room crying. My uncle told his children that they should mind their own business, make sure they do not stare, walk past and move on. While he was giving these instructions, it was too late. His daughter Anastasia had already wrapped her arms around the woman who was crying, hugging her and crying with her.

This is an example of the kind of response by somebody who may not have the same socially programmed inhibitions that tell us not to interfere in each other's lives, but, rather, had an unbridled openness and empathy that led her to immediately show love in this way for this total stranger. It was her capacity for unlimited love and pursuit of community that opened my uncle's eyes and my eyes through that story to things that maybe I needed to learn, things that maybe we all need to learn, through greater community with people who have developmental differences and different kinds of experiences, but have so much to contribute.

That is the idea and philosophy of Jean Vanier. That is what the objectives of this bill are all about.

We need to remember that putting in place a framework that seeks to create a country that is free from barriers—

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order having to do with relevance. I see there are a number of advocates in the gallery. We have organized interpretation for them, and it is wonderful to see them here. They have come to hear all parties speak on this very important piece of legislation, and it is a shame that the member is speaking at length. That is his prerogative, but out of respect for those who are here to hear all parties, I wonder if the member might give us some indication of how long he plans to speak this morning.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for her intervention. As she alluded to, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has unlimited time. I have been listening to his remarks with a view to ensuring that his remarks stay within the boundaries, which, as the parliamentary secretary knows, are usually fairly broad, as long as it is relevant to the topic that is before the House. The hon. member who currently has the floor has the ability to make those decisions. Points are taken, I am sure, but it is not really incumbent on the hon. member, when he has unlimited time, to indicate when his remarks will come to an end. If he wishes to do so, of course, that is his prerogative.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague across the way, if she had been listening to the remarks I was making, they were all very clearly on the issue, which is why I was making them. These are important points to make.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Garnett Genuis: If the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader wants to heckle, that is also his prerogative, but we are having an important discussion.

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I appreciate the opportunity to make the points that I am going to make. I understand that the government intends to bring forward a motion today on extended hours. To be clear, there is absolutely no reason why the bill before us would not move forward. I am making arguments that I think are important and worthwhile, and I am sharing personal stories about members of my own family. If members do not take that seriously or want to cast aspersions or imagine other things, that is their prerogative, but it is not really in the spirit of what the discussion could be. These are things I have wanted to share, and I appreciate that the Standing Orders provide me with the opportunity to share them.

The parliamentary secretary asked about details. I do not have a specific length of time in mind, but I would tell the parliamentary secretary if I did. I want to discuss these points. Of course, interventions like the one we just saw make it harder for me to do that, but I will resume where I was in terms of making the point that I was making. When I finish making my remarks, others will speak, and I am sure we will get the bill passed in due course.

As well, there are issues in terms of the bill not reaching the standard that many people wanted and the government rejecting amendments, which are things I have spoken about. Nonetheless, I am hopeful that there are further steps that can be taken after this.

I will go back to the point I was making before I was interrupted. I was speaking about the experience of my cousin who has Down's syndrome and the things I have been able to learn from her. The principal point that I think we need to absorb from the life and legacy of Jean Vanier is that the relationship between people who are not disabled and those who are should not be seen as one of charity, but, rather, one of people who have different experiences living together in communities of love and friendship and being able to learn from each other.

I want to make the point, in the context of my beautiful cousin who has Down's syndrome, that very often when parents who are expecting a child receive a diagnosis and find out that their child has some genetic condition, that is associated with a lot of surprise and maybe fear and lack of awareness about what this is going to mean for their family. We know as well that there is a high level of selecting out children who have that condition. I wish that every family that was not sure what to do in that situation would have an opportunity to speak to my uncle and aunt, or have an opportunity to speak with somebody like my cousin to see the love, joy and teaching that come through the community with that person. It can be a surprise to find out that what one had expected is not what is going to happen. Sometimes the unexpected is filled with such opportunity for love, joy and learning.

What are the key takeaways that we should have as members of the House from the points I have made and from the work of Jean Vanier?

First of all, we need to go beyond a formal, legalistic notion of inclusion. The legal standard of inclusion is, let us say, the minimum standard. Our goal, rather, should be to build meaningful community among all people to recognize the contributions that all of us make together in the way we treat each other, and to put our emphasis on the pursuit of a concept of true happiness: that is, living well together, not merely thinking in terms of material well-being.

● (1125)

I started this point in my discussion by asking whom this bill is for, whom the work is being done for. The answer is that it is for all of us. People with disabilities benefit from a society in which there are no barriers to their participation. However, everyone, whether with a disability or not, benefits from being part of a society in which we can live together in a community where the contributions and experiences of those with disabilities are heard and where we pursue happiness, community, love and meaning together.

Part of how we do this better, and this is a subject I referenced earlier and something I wrote about in my master's dissertation, is the measurement of happiness. Part of creating a society in which all of us can pursue and attain happiness is, I would argue, measuring happiness as well. There are questions and controversies around the best way to do that statistically, but efforts made to engage in the meaningful measurement of happiness are important and are part of the picture. It is something we should consider as part of subsequent statistical instruments.

Having made that point, having outlined whom I think the bill is for, I now want to discuss some of the amendments that were proposed at the committee in the House and were not accepted. As we move this legislation forward, it is important to note what has been done and what is positive, but also to acknowledge that there are some areas of missed opportunities. There are some areas where we could have done better. In fact, amendments were proposed by other parties that were unfortunately not adopted by government members at the committee.

First of all, there were amendments put forward on the House side that introduced proposals around dates and timelines. This is an issue now being incorporated at the level of the Senate, but it was proposed in the form of amendments to clauses 5, 11, 18, 23, 111 and 148. Amendments were proposed that would have established timelines, and we made the argument that timelines were absolutely essential.

We argued as well that the bill had to require positive action by the minister. We argued that the bill ought to require the progressive realization of a barrier-free Canada by the minister and should therefore remove permissive language. A lot of the language in this legislation in effect does not actually require the minister to do anything. It uses a lot of language around the word "may", such as that regulations may be established or proposals may be put in. That exists in the context of exceptions.

While we have a legislative framework in place that may allow the minister to do certain things around the realization of a barrier-free Canada, the framework is very open in terms of allowing the minister to do certain things or not do certain things. There was an interesting comment made by the minister today in the context of questions and comments, where the issue of exceptions was raised by my colleague from Foothills. The minister said that they would certainly be very careful in their use of those exceptions under her watch.

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That is the rub, the exercise of these powers by the minister. I take the minister at her word in terms of her sincerity about this bill, but it is our job in the opposition to ask questions about whether the framework relies merely on the goodwill and the word of one person, or whether it puts in place the structures that provide certainty and indeed a protection for the kinds of circumstances that we would like to see. The minister says that they will be very careful in their use of exceptions, at least under her watch, and that under her watch they will certainly do the things that are laid out in this legislation. Of course, under the current government, we do not know how long a particular minister will remain with the responsibility of a portfolio. I think all parties want to see the legislation be meaningful in ensuring impacts.

• (1130)

We sought to address this issue in the form of amendments, but unfortunately we did not see progress on it. These amendments dealt with the issue of permissive language in clauses 15, 16, 75, 93, 94 and subclause 146.1. We need to try to do better in this respect. Although we tried to get things done, unfortunately that did not happen.

We proposed amendments to subclause 17(2) and clause 21 to ensure the independence of CASDO, the accessibility commissioner and other key positions. Certainly, we are very concerned about the track record of the government in not always respecting the independence of things that we would expect to be independent. We raised concerns at committee about the issue of the legislation ensuring the sufficient independence of these bodies. Without independence, there is a concern about whether the accountability functions we expect will be followed. Our amendments in this respect were also not adopted by the government and the changes we proposed have unfortunately not shown up subsequently.

We proposed an amendment to clause 18, that the bill must designate CASDO as the only body to develop accessibility standards. The framework put in place by the legislation seeks to deal with a number of different parts and aspects of government. Certainly, we recognize the importance of ensuring that all of those are included and that the regulatory structure is there to cover them in all cases.

Our amendment proposed that the government have a standard set centrally by CASDO, which presumably is the goal of establishing that entity. The legislation, as it stands, creates a more complex scheme than is necessary by having some of these standards set external to CASDO. We raised this issue as well. In the follow-up implementation of the legislation, people will want to see it so they can explore the effectiveness of those provisions.

We also proposed an amendment for a new clause 33.1 to ensure there would be accountability regarding public information during CASDO's work on developing an accessibility standard. Again, there is a need for accountability as part of these frameworks. We are not keen on provisions in legislation which the government tells us "just trust us". When the issue is important, "just trust us" is not enough. We want to see a framework that requires government action, that is accountable and that provides a reasoned and effective framework to ensure that accountability is in place.

We then proposed amendments about strengthening accessibility plans. Unfortunately they were rejected. They related to clauses 42, 47, 51, 56, 60, 65 and 69. Then we proposed specific amendments to remove exemptions.

Let us reflect on the actions we have seen from the government and the concerns that might arise when well-connected companies are lobbying for exceptions regarding their obligations. Frankly, we know this is going to happen. Our legislative framework may say that federally regulated companies have to comply with certain standards, but it is possible to make exceptions. Some companies are going to calculate that it is actually easier for them, less expensive perhaps, to spend resources lobbying politicians and ministers to give them an exception. They would rather do that than invest in the required changes to make themselves more accessible. Unfortunately it is relatively likely that some people will make this calculation and will use the tools and resources available to them.

• (1135)

We have seen in recent months a government that when the pressure is on, when the well-connected lobbyists are brought to bear, rather than follow through on the intention of legislation, the government may allow that exception. Let us say the argument is around jobs, that if companies are required to conform to such a standard, then they will not be able to continue to operate and they will have to move their headquarters, whatever the arguments are made in those cases.

That is why those who are following us today, those who are concerned about the effectiveness and the impact of this legislation should be concerned about the power the legislation gives around the granting of exceptions.

We have permissive language and the refusal of the government to move forward with amendments around the removal of exceptions, amendments which were supported by the Conservatives. Although there are high aspirations associated with the bill and although I do not doubt the sincerity of some people on the government side around the legislation, this creates circumstances in which it does not compel the government to act and it gives the government a great deal of space to say to a company that it does not have to follow its obligations. An area of regulation that it maybe had the power to put forward action on, it will not do that anymore.

It is precisely our job as members of Parliament to ensure the legislation we put forward is directed to and binding on government. So often, unfortunately, and what I have seen in my time here in the last three and a half years as an MP, is legislation that leaves the door open for the minister to exercise a great deal of discretion.

There is some latitude for ministerial discretion in the specific working out of details around regulations in the plants. However, when we have so much flexibility that the minister can say an exception will be put in place, that is a totally different case. This goes beyond the normal expectation that there is some degree of ministerial discretion involved in this case. This goes much further than the norm and that is why we proposed those changes. We are concerned about what the government's real intentions are and what the real actions will be.

Government Orders

I do not want to cast aspersions on everyone's intentions, but somebody made the decision somewhere, whether it was in the Prime Minister's Office or somebody else around the cabinet table, to leave the door open to the possibility that someone could be let off the hook in a particular case.

We proposed an amendment as well to designate the accessibility commissioner as the one body to handle compliance for accessibility standards and the adjudication of complaints. This was another amendment that dealt with streamlining the effectiveness of the bill.

The bill does not designate a central agency to oversee compliance with accessible ability requirements. Enforcement as envisioned under the framework right now is done by multiple agents: the accessibility commissioner, the CRTC, the CTA and the Federal Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board. Again, just as with setting a standard, through a complex patchwork of different organizations, this will create far more than is necessary with respect to confusion and barriers to those who wish to access the process.

● (1140)

If somebody is looking for standards to hold an agency or an entity up against, if he or she is looking to make complaints, the legislation does not have this sort of single window that would provide clarity around standards as well as enforcement. This is again a missed opportunity. Members of the committee and the House had tried to put forward amendments to address and strengthen this, but unfortunately we did not see action in that respect.

We felt, and we still feel, that multiple bodies looking at accessibility complaints from different angles will create a potential patchwork unfair administration of the act, and we should be concerned about that.

● (1145)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is important legislation. I would ask you to see if there is a proper quorum.

The Deputy Speaker: It would appear that we do have quorum. I thank the hon. member.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I find the reaction and heckles by some members of the government very surprising. We know they do not like listening to opposition perspectives. We have seen multiple efforts by them to shut down debate on different issues. Yes, I am criticizing their failure to respond properly to proposals put forward by Conservative members and agreed to by members of other parties to strengthen the legislation.

Government members do not want to hear that perspective. They want this to be a day when we all agree on every detail. I said right at the beginning, very clearly, that we agree on the principle and that moving this legislation forward would be an improvement on the status quo. However, part of the purpose of the parliamentary conversation is to identify aspects of legislation that need to be improved.

The members across the way may not want to hear these criticisms. They may not want to hear about the fact that this

legislation provides a possible exception, whereby a company like SNC-Lavalin might lobby the government for an exception. However, we need to talk about those things. We need to talk about how we strengthen this legislation and about some of the missed opportunities.

Members can be assured that this legislation will pass this session. However, these are criticisms that the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader would benefit from listening to rather than heckling. In any event, it is an important part of the argument we are making. The fact that this legislation does not “require” the minister, but only “invites” the minister to take certain action, and the fact of the exceptions that exist are issues that need to be identified and discussed.

There is also the issue of the administrative complexity that I was talking about before the point of order was raised, and the rejection of an amendment that would have designated CASDO as the only body to develop accessibility standards, and the rejection of another amendment that would have designated the accessibility commissioner as the one body to handle compliance with accessibility standards and the adjudication of complaints. The fact that these amendments were rejected increases the relative complexity that people will face when they are engaging with these issues in the legislation.

Part of our job as the opposition is to reflect the feedback we have heard from stakeholders and to say, yes, the government needs to do better. It can do better. It should have done better. We support this legislation going forward, but we are asking for more for Canadians with disabilities, to facilitate the realization of a full vision of shared community, one in which we go beyond the minimum and do as much as possible together.

We proposed amendments, as well, to ensure that the process for making complaints and reviews by the accessibility commissioner would be fair. We proposed amendments specifically to clauses 117 and 142 to say that this would not allow organizations to be exempted from producing and publishing accessibility plans, feedback processes and progress reports. We proposed amendments to include stronger provisions for reviewing the accessible Canada act and monitoring the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As well, one amendment that was adopted and showed up in the Senate version eventually concerned sign language. It is important to note that we are glad to see this adopted through a Senate amendment, but it had been proposed at the House level as well.

One particular concern we raised about the coming into force of this legislation is that if clause 207 were left in, it would lead, according to the Statutes Repeal Act, to the act being automatically repealed within 10 years of receiving royal assent. That was perhaps a technicality, but one with important consequences that we sought to address.

Government Orders

● (1150)

In the course of proposing 60 amendments at committee, the government only adopted three, and they were not of the substantive variety we had hoped for. They supported two amendments to make reviews fair and accessible, which were improvements, and one amendment to the preamble that changed “Canadians” to “persons in Canada”. Essentially, it was a fairly technical linguistic change in the preamble, which was an important change in language, but the substantive concerns about the legislation we had highlighted were not fully addressed.

The Senate committee study provided some important perspective, and on the issue of the structure of this legislation, I want to read from testimony at the standing committee that studied this bill, in particular the testimony of David Lepofsky, the chair of Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. He is a real champion on these issues. He has done extensive work representing and reflecting the concerns of the community. I want to identify what he said about this bill. He stated:

Bill C-81 is strong on good intentions, but palpably weak on implementation. It's called an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, but it does not require a single barrier anywhere in Canada, ever, to be removed.

I will read that again as it is fundamental to the criticisms that I and others have made. He stated:

It's called an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, but it does not require a single barrier anywhere in Canada, ever, to be removed. People with disabilities need and deserve better than that.

Bill C-81, at its core and its heart, is driven by the commendable notion that the federal government will enact enforceable regulations called accessibility standards that will tell federally regulated organizations what they have got to do. But it doesn't require any federal accessibility standards to ever be enacted as enforceable regulations. People with disabilities need and deserve better.

Let me be clear: The regulations that the bill requires to be enacted within two years are on procedural things, not substantive accessibility standards. The federal government could meet that deadline merely by prescribing the forms that people with disabilities shall use if they want to give feedback to Air Canada or Bell Canada. People with disabilities need and deserve better than that.

This legislation splinters its enforcement and the setting of enforceable regulations among multiple federal agencies. From the minister's defence of her practice, she conceded that if she was starting from scratch, that isn't necessarily how she would do it. But her explanation of why she did it gives triumphant ascendancy to federal bureaucracy over disability equality.

Now the question is: What do we do about it? The question is not: Are you going to pass this bill, senators? You're going to pass this bill, so let's take that off the table. We all know it. We all understand it. That's the starting point.

That was the starting point for my remarks as well. I said that the Conservatives are supporting this bill, but that there are issues. There are issues the community has raised, and in terms of how we see the issue, and with the substantive aspects of the provisions of this legislation. Our support and the community's support to pass this legislation is clear, but there are big gaps.

I will go back to the testimony, which states:

The question before this committee is: Are you going to amend it first? What we say is that you must. The reality is this bill needs a lot of amendments not to make it perfect, that's a red herring, but to get this bill from the status of weak to one that is closer to what people with disabilities need and deserve.

In the House, there were a couple hundred pages of amendments. Hard work over the past weekend has led us to distill it down to a series of amendments before you that we proposed and you have received e-mails from some witnesses who support them, which fill a grand total of 3.5 pages and cover a few core themes.

● (1155)

I am only going to address a couple of them, but let me be clear, there is time to do this. You are going to vote in committee on May 2. I understand you will do third reading by May 16. We are working and approaching the federal parties to urge that, once amendments are passed if they are that the house consider them quickly, so the issue of swift passage of this bill, whether amended or not, is now, procedurally, not a bar to your being able to do what we need you to do.

Again, we will see this legislation pass, but there are issues that we need to address.

The testimony continues:

So what should you do?

Well, let me just focus on a couple, but I invite questions on all of what we proposed. Lets just turn to the headlines. Yesterday, the Government of Ontario announced a multi-billion-dollar plan for new subways in Toronto, but only if other levels of government, including the federal government, add billions to the allocation the province is committing to. That's not unusual. But we need the federal government to be required, before it spends our money on a project like that, to say a ground rule of getting our federal money is you have to meet certain federal accessibility requirements.

Now, the minister came before you a week ago and said, We cant do that. We dont have constitutional authority to do that. Respectfully, the minister is wrong. Its called the federal spending power. Have you heard of the Canada Health Act? The Canada Health Act says that if provinces get federal money for provincial health programs, they must meet federal accessibility requirements. Not disability accessibility, but their financial accessibility.

If what the minister told you is right, then the Canada Health Act has been unconstitutional for over three decades since it was enacted. I would be staggered to believe that is the position of the current federal government. If they can do it there, they can at least attach strings when they give money, if they agree to, to local projects and not just federal buildings. You might look at me and say, Oh, come on, in 2019 we wouldnt use public money to build inaccessible public transit. Senators, go to YouTube, search on AODA Alliance and public transit. You will see a video we released during last springs provincial election that has thousands of views and media coverage where we document serious accessibility problems in brand new subway stations in Toronto that just opened within the past year-and-a-half.

This isnt about perfect, folks. This is about basic equality, so we ask for an amendment that would at least require federal ministers or their ministries, if they are agreeing to give our federal money to a province, a municipality, a college or university for a project like that, to put, as a term of the agreement, an enforceable term, just like the Canada Health Act, that accessibility requirements are required. Why should the federal government ever allow federal money to be used to create new barriers or perpetuate existing ones?

I will note, just as an aside, that this specific issue that he spoke about here, the issue of federal money funding infrastructure that may not meet a certain accessible standard, is one that the Senate flagged for our consideration, but it is not reflected in the amended provisions of this legislation. This is an area that requires, I think, more discussion and exploration by government on how we should ensure that the accessibility standards we expect are met, especially in new construction and infrastructure, so that we have taken the basic steps required to ensure that it is accessible to people. That is something that should be fairly obvious. However, if we do not put in place processes and mechanisms to ensure that the obvious happens, sometimes it does not.

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According to Mr. Lepofsky, in fact, there was a claim made that it would somehow be unconstitutional to put these conditions in place. It is interesting, because we see a federal government that, in general, in so many different areas, is very heavy handed with what it tries to impose on the provinces, even trying to use federal spending to compel them to implement particular policies in provincial areas of jurisdiction. It is interesting how that separation is selectively invoked in some cases but not in others, which seems to be an excuse for inaction in this case.

The testimony continues:

Let me give you one other core amendment. My colleague from the CNIB said the minister last week had agreed to amend the bill to ensure that it does not curtail in any way the human rights code and the duty to accommodate. I hope the minister does that, but I don't hear her as having said that. I hear her as having said that she, as a former human rights lawyer, has ensured that this bill doesn't interfere with the duty to accommodate. But senators, it threatens to.

● (1200)

Clause 172 of the bill perpetuates a provision in the Canada transportation legislation that would let the CTA enact a regulation, and once it does so, to set standards for accessible transit, no matter how low that standard may be and no matter how deficient from a human rights standard it may be. As a traveller with a disability or others in my coalition or anyone in Canada, we are barred from asking anymore under the legislation's guarantee against undue barriers.

With that provision in the act, our position is: Please don't ever enact any standards under the CTA because they threaten to take away our rights. A simple amendment would repeal that provision from the act.

I will note that, in this case, this testimony led to an amendment. Of course, we are pleased to see that the amendment was made on that provision. That was one issue from this testimony that was, in fact, addressed, which is why we were pleased to see that change in the Senate amendments. The version of this bill that was originally proposed, and that the government appeared, initially at committee in the House, not to see any problem with, was, in fact, a version whereby the CTA could enact regulations that would be below the human rights standards and that would have the potential impact of lowering the standards that are in place for the protection of the rights of Canadians with disabilities. This indicates the importance of the Senate amendment process and the benefit of the fact that in this case, the government, although not responsive as much to House amendments, did come around in response to proposals on the Senate side.

The testimony from Mr. Lepofsky states:

Let me conclude by inviting questions on the other areas that we've raised. I'm telling you that we are not just about saying what's wrong. We are about proposing constructive suggestions for what's right, and the amendments we've placed before you are designed for a Senate that has a limited time frame to act, a commitment to respect policy decisions made in the House of Commons and an eagerness to ensure that these amendments can be considered by the house quickly and easily, with a realistic chance of them being taken seriously. They are designed to be tailored both to our needs and to what the minister said to you last week. So we ask you to take them all seriously. They are all substantive, and they all bear on the needs of all people with disabilities.

I conclude by saying this: I'm speaking for my coalition, but as an individual, I first came before Parliament 39 years ago as a much younger individual—my wife said I had hair back then when she saw the video—to appear before the standing committee considering the Charter of Rights. At that time, the Charter proposed to guarantee equality but not to people with disabilities. I and a number of other folks argued and succeeded in getting the Charter amended to include that right.

I leave you with two thoughts. First, the amendments we seek are aimed at making that right become a reality, not just as a matter of good intention but as effective implementation.

The government members who do not like hearing arguments against their bill may be encouraged by the fact that I am now coming to the conclusion of my remarks.

These were all important points to make. Here is a brief summary of the key elements I have highlighted in this bill.

The bill is about requiring regulated entities to make accessibility plans. It is a positive step, but it would not have the force and the pressure on the government in terms of compelling government action that many people within the disability community want to see. We tried to reflect those concerns in the context of a debate that happened here in the House the first time around and at committee. Unfortunately, all the more substantive changes were rejected in the House. The Senate put forward a number of amendments that were positive, but they would not fix the bill in every respect, certainly from the perspective of our caucus and those in the community.

Therefore, while we are pleased to support these amendments and this legislation, we will continue to call on the government to do better and to give reality to the promise that “better is possible”. That is what we are asking in the context of this legislation. The Senate amendments make improvements, but they do not go all the way in terms of the improvements people are asking for.

● (1205)

I talked a bit about who this legislation is for. It is important to recognize that the steps we take to facilitate an accessible, barrier-free society benefit people with disabilities, but they benefit all of us, because they give all of us an opportunity to live together in meaningful community and to learn from each other.

There are things that are not in the bill. In some cases, they are things that could not be addressed by a bill, and in some cases, they are things the government should have addressed but did not.

Legislation can ultimately only go so far toward addressing people's attitudes and culture. Building a barrier-free Canada is not just a political decision; it has to be a social commitment. It has to be something we all commit to leading on and acting on together as parliamentarians and as citizens. We call on business leaders and people from all walks of life to see what they can do to build and facilitate meaningful commitment, goodwill, friendship and love among people, regardless of ability or disability.

Those kinds of social and cultural changes are important. Legislation without that kind of social commitment is not enough to create a truly barrier-free Canada.

I want to again say that the work done by my colleague, the member for Carleton, on trying to ensure that disabled Canadians are able to access paid work, was very important. It was disappointing to see that bill voted down by the government. I hope that in a subsequent Parliament, we will be able to see progress on the initiative he put forward.

Government Orders

Not everyone is able to work, but there are many people who have a disability who are ready, willing and able to participate in paid work. They benefit our economy by doing so, but they also benefit from the community associated with work. They benefit from a sense of purpose and meaning that comes to many people from being able to go to work every day.

More needs to be done to support the kinds of initiatives we saw in that private member's bill. Maybe it will come back in a future Parliament. Maybe we will see other kinds of action that will seek to specifically address the issue of barriers that exist for disabled Canadians seeking employment.

With that, I will conclude my remarks. I am supportive of the bill. I am supportive of the amendments. I am hopeful that we will be able to see more action, and in the future, that we will be able to challenge the government. Rather than rejecting amendments in the House and sending them to the Senate and then accepting them at that point, maybe a novel idea would be to have some of these amendments adopted in the House in the first instance, which would skip the step of bringing the bill back to the House afterward.

There are some areas that could be better, but there are positive steps here. People can be assured that we will support the bill and support these actions. Going forward, we will continue to hold the government's feet to the fire. In the areas where it says it may regulate, we will apply the pressure necessary. We were not able to get from "may" to "must" in the legislation, but we will work to create a political imperative so that the government does not fail to act.

Those in the community who are following us today can be assured of our commitment to always hold the government accountable on these issues and to ensure, with the high-minded discussion around Bill C-81, that the objectives that were laid out are fully realized.

•(1210)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the minister introduced the bill, not only at third reading but also at report stage and second reading, it became clear that we were debating historical legislation. This is legislation that is going to have a real impact in all regions of our country. The minister has been very inspiring within our caucus not only for me personally but for many of my colleagues. She has ultimately led us to the point we are at today.

I know full well that the constituents I represent appreciate this legislation, even in its amended form. The minister has been very gracious in recognizing that this legislation is in good part because of the many advocates across Canada.

I am really impressed by the fact that we have an interpreter in our gallery who is providing sign language, and I indicate "hello" to the people who are visiting us in the gallery. I thank them for witnessing what we believe is historical legislation.

Members of the Conservative Party have said that they would like to see the bill passed. I believe that it will be passed, because it crosses political partisanship. We want this historical piece of legislation passed.

How long does my friend believe it will take to get this legislation through the House? Does he see it taking many more hours or many more speakers from the Conservative Party?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the member's initial comment that this is historic, or as he said, "historical", legislation, let us be clear that the bill may have an impact, because the bill says that the minister "may" put in place certain regulations and "may" also make exceptions. As is so often the case, the devil is in the details. We will see which direction things turn in terms of that "may" or may not. We sought to remove open-ended power to make exceptions and the ability of a minister to essentially do nothing under the legislation. High-minded rhetoric is important, but high-minded rhetoric is not a replacement for action. This legislation would provide a framework for action; it would not oblige action. There are other issues in terms of concerns raised by people in the community that are not addressed.

The member asked about the prospective timeline. The timeline for passing the legislation really depends on the government in terms of when it wants to see it brought forward. Obviously, the government has the power to prioritize certain bills. This is a bill from the government, like some other legislation, that we support. There are things on the government's legislative agenda that we do not support. If the government prioritizes this bill over other items on the legislative agenda, I am sure that we will be able to get it passed very soon, but that is a question of prioritization for the government in terms of how it uses the House calendar.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his exhaustive efforts in describing the position of the official opposition on Bill C-81.

It was very interesting to hear about the history of legislation and, of course, about someone in our history like Jean Vanier, who created watershed moments. However, to be quite frank, when the official opposition was in government, for 10 years there was inaction. What I am hearing now is a keen understanding of how legislation has to evolve and progress. However, I would like to hear from the member a little more about his insights into how government policies and laws should be viewed through a disability lens.

As the member knows, there was testimony with regard to the legislation being designed to stipulate a disability lens. Perhaps the member can talk a little more about using a disability lens, which is not actually articulated, and what he would envision it would look like.

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• (1215)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I disagree a little with the member's comments about the record of the previous government. I think it is clear that the previous Conservative government did take substantive action that had an impact in terms of improving accessibility and making life better for Canadians living with disabilities. One of those provisions, championed by the former finance minister, Jim Flaherty, was the disability savings account. Some of these policies did make a difference. I do not dispute that there is always more work to do. We never have a government that at the end of four years, or even 10 years, says that it fixed every problem and that everything is great. There is always going to be more work to do, and we commit to continuing that work going forward.

The member spoke about having a disability lens, which is looking at the policies and actions of government through this lens and asking what the impact is. How are people from this community with these kinds of experiences seeing the impact on them of a policy? I agree that having that lens is important. An idea that I am sure Jean Vanier, as a devout Catholic, would share with me is the idea of a preferential option for the most vulnerable informing all aspects of policies we bring forward, looking in particular at the impact those policy decisions would have on those who are most vulnerable. Therefore, we would need to particularly concern ourselves with protections in their situations, the realization of their rights and the affirmation of their dignity.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, the person in charge of the legislative agenda for the government, talk about the urgency of passing this legislation. Certainly we all share that sense of urgency. We have heard from stakeholders who almost unanimously want to see this legislation passed. All members in this House are committed to that, so stakeholders can rest assured that it will happen.

However, the current government has been in government for almost 30,000 hours. We are down to the last month that the House is sitting before the next election campaign, and finally we are getting around to debating this important piece of legislation.

I would ask my hon. colleague to reinforce, for stakeholders who are watching this debate today, his commitment and our official opposition's commitment to seeing this important legislation passed before the House rises for the election.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are very keen to see this move forward. Again, there are questions I should have been posing to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, not the other way around: How much of a priority is this legislation? Based on that, when does the government plan to schedule it?

We saw the Liberals, for instance yesterday, choosing to schedule a debate on a non-binding motion that was not impacting legislative changes. They could have scheduled this debate yesterday. They chose not to do that, and it is their prerogative to schedule a debate when they want to. We will see how much of a priority this is for the government.

When the Liberals schedule the debate, contrary to some of the heckles I received, the opposition will speak. We are not going to let them schedule a debate on this legislation and then be the only ones speaking to it. There will be opposition speeches made as part of a debate on this legislation. If the government is committed to moving this forward, we are committed to moving it forward as well. The scheduling is up to the government.

• (1220)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take this time in the House to speak on the rights of people living with disabilities and Canada's responsibility as a signatory to the UN convention on those rights. The NDP supports Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, as amended by the Senate.

I am proud to have been part of a larger movement of stakeholder groups and civil activists who put a great deal of effort into attempting to make this bill the best it can be. We have supported it from the beginning and offered numerous amendments that would have helped the bill realize its ambitions to create a barrier-free Canada.

New Democrats have long believed that any accessibility bill tabled by the government should essentially be enabling legislation for Canada's obligations to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Canada ratified this convention in 2010 but until now has done nothing to bring our laws into conformity with it.

I congratulate the minister and her team for their work on this bill and for her willingness to accede to the Senate's amendments. There are still numerous provisions within the bill that remain in need of fixing, and I would be remiss if I did not discuss them now in order to further our understanding on what is yet to be accomplished. This being a federal election year, I know our citizen activists are listening and gaining a better understanding of how they can effectively use a campaign season.

In its current form, Bill C-81 is inadequate to the expectation of fostering a society in which all our citizens can participate fully and equally. This cannot even begin to happen until all our institutions are open and completely accessible to everyone. This is truly what fostering a barrier-free Canada will look like. Unfortunately, Bill C-81 makes minimal movement in that direction.

We are not alone with our concerns. During Bill C-81's time in the House Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, or HUMA, the federal government received extensive feedback on the bill's many shortcomings from people living with disabilities across Canada, as well as from their organized networks of advocacy. For example, last October an open letter was sent to the federal government, signed by no less than 95 disability organizations. Many of these same organizations also testified before HUMA. Disability organizations repeatedly pressed for this bill to be strengthened.

Our esteemed friend, David Lepofsky, is chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance. He is an esteemed and respected mind, with legal expertise on accessibility rights. At the Senate committee, he stated:

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Bill C-81, at its core and its heart, is driven by the commendable notion that the federal government will enact enforceable regulations called accessibility standards that will tell federally regulated organizations what they have got to do. But it doesn't require any federal accessibility standards to ever be enacted as enforceable regulations. People with disabilities need and deserve better.

Let me be clear: The regulations that the bill requires to be enacted within two years are on procedural things, not substantive accessibility standards. The federal government could meet that deadline merely by prescribing the forms that people with disabilities shall use if they want to give feedback to Air Canada or Bell Canada. People with disabilities need and deserve better than that.

The issues that Mr. Lepofsky cites in this quote remain unaddressed in the amended version of Bill C-81.

● (1225)

For New Democrats, this is a very serious issue. To understand why, let us look at the headlines. Last month, the Government of Ontario announced a multi-billion dollar plan for new subways in Toronto, but only if other levels of government, including the federal government, add billions to the allocation the province is committing to. That is not unusual. However, before it spends our money on a project like that, we need the federal government to be required to say that as a ground rule for getting federal money, certain federal accessibility requirements must be met. If money is requested from the federal government, here is what is required for accessibility. It seems very simple.

The minister has claimed she does not have the constitutional authority to impose accessibility requirements on provinces, but she does. She has what is known as federal spending power, and it is a power that is very substantial. We are all familiar with the Canada Health Act. The Canada Health Act says that if provinces get federal money for provincial health programs, they must meet federal accessibility requirements: not disability accessibility, but financial accessibility. If the federal government truly lacks this power, then the Canada Health Act has been unconstitutional for over three decades. If the federal government can attach strings to the CHA, then it can attach strings when it gives out money to local projects and not just federal buildings.

I commend the hard work that many stakeholder groups did during the Senate phase of Bill C-81. Our friends at the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, or AODA Alliance, along with the ARCH Disability Law Centre, among several others, lobbied senators with a shortened list of amendments covering the most important changes that need to happen to Bill C-81 if the bill is to become the kind of law that our people living with disabilities need.

In fact, we would like to thank all the disability organizations, numbering at least 71, that signed the open letter sent earlier this month to the House of Commons. They called on the House of Commons to ratify the Senate's amendments to Bill C-81. This open letter, which the Council of Canadians with Disabilities delivered to all MPs on behalf of its 28 signatories, all listed below, explains that these amendments improve the bill. The Senate formulated these amendments after holding public hearings at which disability organizations and advocates pointed out the need to strengthen a bill that the House of Commons originally passed last fall. The Senate got the message and formulated a short package of 11 amendments, which together fit on two pages.

I would also like to commend everyone who participated in the massive letter-writing campaign to the minister, the Prime Minister and all members of Parliament. It is always exciting to see concerned public action on any issue. It was not at all clear from the minister's Senate committee testimony that she would accept some of the amendments put forward, but I believe the campaign was a crucial component to making this happen.

Going into the Senate, prior to committee, major stakeholders proposed a distilled version of the changes they wanted to see in the bill before it became law. The amendments proposed for Bill C-81 before the Senate began debating it were a distilled version of the amendments they presented during the hearings before the House of Commons committee.

I would like to run through these very quickly, as they are absolutely essential if Bill C-81 is to be effective.

First, impose clear duties and deadlines on the federal government when implementing this law.

Second, set a deadline for Canada to become accessible.

● (1230)

Third, enforcement should be solely in the hands of the accessibility commissioner, not splintered across various organizations, such as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Transportation Agency, which, as has been pointed out numerous times, have a sorry record of implementing the few accessibility obligations they already have, never mind new ones.

Fourth, we should ensure federal public money is never used to create or perpetuate disability barriers.

Fifth, we should ensure that the federal government will not be able to exempt itself from any of its accessibility obligations under the bill.

The Senate eventually accepted the following amendments to Bill C-81: first, setting 2040 as the end date for Canada to become accessible; second, ensuring that this 2040 timeline would not justify any delay in removing and preventing accessibility barriers as soon as reasonably possible; third, recognizing American sign language, Quebec sign language and indigenous sign languages as the primary languages for communication used by deaf people; fourth, making it a principle to govern the bill that multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination faced by persons with disabilities must be considered; fifth, ensuring that Bill C-81 and regulations made under it could not cut back on the human rights of people with disabilities guaranteed by the Canadian Human Rights Act; sixth, ensuring that the Canadian Transportation Agency could not reduce existing human rights protections for passengers with disabilities when the agency handled complaints about barriers in transportation; and, seventh, fixing problems the federal government identified between the bill's employment provisions and legislation governing the RCMP.

Government Orders

As members can garner from comparing the proposed amendments with the ones the Senate approved, several crucial amendments did not make it into the bill. One of the more important of these dealt with the issue that Bill C-81 splintered enforcement and implementation in a confusing way over four different public agencies, rather than providing people with disabilities with the single-window service they needed.

As part of this, it leaves two public agencies, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Transportation Agency, to continue overseeing accessibility, despite their inadequate track record on this issue over many years and in the very recent past. The NDP understands that this is an urgent issue which needs to be addressed urgently.

When the bill was in committee, I tabled amendments that would have closed the many exemptions and powers allowing public officials to exempt any organization from key parts of Bill C-81. The NDP feels the bill fails to effectively ensure that the federal government will use all its levers of power to promote accessibility across Canada. For example, it does not require the federal government to ensure that federal money is never used by any recipient of those funds to create or perpetuate disability barriers, such as when federal money contributes to new or renovated infrastructure.

This is a significant point because the federal government can easily require all projects utilizing federal dollars to meet accessibility standards. Experience tells us that without this requirement, federal agencies will contract out important work to third parties to save money, thus bypassing federal accessibility specifications. Our NDP amendments would have addressed this issue directly.

For example, inaccessible public housing could potentially be built and there would be little anyone could do about it, despite the government's repeatedly stated commitment to accessibility and disability issues.

While we commend the government for accepting the timeline of 2040 as the time when Canada is to become accessible to five million people, Bill C-81 nevertheless lacks mandatory timelines for implementation. It allows, but does not require, the government to adopt accessibility standards, yet does not impose a time frame within which this is to happen. Without these, the implementation process, even the start-up process, could drag on for years.

• (1235)

An egregious provision the bill lacks is the requirement that all federal government laws, policies and programs be studied through a disability law lens. This seems a strange omission indeed, as this is the proverbial low-hanging fruit.

It is crucial that societies eliminate these forms of discrimination, not just because doing it is the right thing to do but because it enables a previously ignored and sizable section of our population that contributes its talents and abilities to the betterment of us all. Everyone wins when everyone can contribute.

When it comes to ensuring accessibility for five million Canadians with disabilities, Canada lags far behind the United States, which passed a landmark Americans with disabilities act 29 years ago.

Canadians with disabilities still face far too many barriers in air travel, cable TV services, and when dealing with the federal government.

Now that Bill C-81 is back in the House, it only needs to hold one vote to ratify these amendments. No further public hearings or standing committee study of the bill are needed. Once the amendments are passed during that vote, Bill C-81 will have completed its journey through Canada's Parliament. It will be law. It will come into force when the federal government gives Bill C-81 royal assent.

Major stakeholders have recently written to leaders of the major parties asking that they commit to bringing a stronger national accessibility bill before Parliament after this fall's federal election. That is why, while we support the passage of Bill C-81 as amended today, the NDP also commits that when we become government in 2020, we will bring forward a much stronger version of the bill, one that will correct some of its more glaring shortcomings.

As others have noted, yes, the bill is an important first step. However, people living with disabilities have waited so long, too long, to live in a country that allows their flourishing as citizens with full human rights realized. For instance, our neighbours and family members should not be told that they must wait until 2040 until they can, say, use functioning, accessible subway elevators, or use their own wheelchairs on international flights or attend an accessible all-candidates debate and so on.

Unfortunately, the present government has left the task of making Canada fully accessible to future governments. I confidently say that New Democrats are up to this task and genuinely committed to it.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her advocacy on this issue. I know she has been a very vocal advocate for people living with disabilities. I want her to know how much I personally appreciate all the work she has done. I know advocates across the country appreciate her work as well.

This is landmark legislation. It has been a long time coming. I am really proud that our government is bringing it forward. The national housing strategy had a stream in it that included inclusive housing. I firmly believe it is not only the government's role to make our country an inclusive Canada; it is incumbent on all of us.

My question has to do with the member's comment on how we only need one vote. We have brought the bill back to the House. It is really important to the government, and I believe it is important to the New Democratic Party as well, that we get the bill done and done quickly. We have one vote. If we could get all parties to agree to move quickly on this, we could see this voted on and become law right away.

Could the member comment on the importance of getting the bill done in a very timely manner and having all parties supporting that timely passage of the legislation?

Government Orders

•(1240)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her personal dedication to this and for recognizing the work that so many of us do on a personal level.

Right now we are talking about a legislative process that many Canadians have been watching for a long time. Therefore, to see it being rushed through right now is a bitter pill we have to swallow. However, we also know there were many missed opportunities, and that is frustrating.

I sat at the committee that saw these amendments go through in the House of Commons. We had testimony. We had expertise. We had former cabinet ministers from provincial governments that had enacted disability acts. They told us what we needed to do. We had the Commissioner for Human Rights. We had the Public Service Alliance representatives talk about employment equities. Countless people with the expertise presented precise amendments that we could have put in place long ago.

It is a bitter pill that we have to swallow. We are being rushed to go through legislation, but we do not have much choice. We are coming to the end of June. I know it is a milestone, but a lot of Canadians look at this and see that it falls short of the mark. We have to think positively or we will not continue to advocate and that momentum will be gone. Of course we will continue to advocate for this, but we recognize that it is very frustrating that we missed these significant opportunities. It would be pretty disingenuous for me to say I am not really disappointed in that.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are at an interesting point today. I think we would find common ground among all parties that this is a step forward and that the legislation absolutely needs to pass before the House rises prior to the election. That is critically important. Where there may not be common ground is whether we have one day of debate or two days of debate. The government has shown a propensity to limit debate and choose questionable priorities over time.

We are sitting here in the last month of this Parliament, finally getting around to this bill. We have seen four different ministerial appointments on this file and three different ministers and we are finally debating this in the last month of this Parliament.

As my hon. colleague from the New Democrats pointed out, the bill was at committee several months ago. Committee members on all sides listened to the testimony of expert witnesses and made very valuable contributions and suggestions for amendments that would have made the legislation even stronger. There is no reason for us to be sitting here in the last month of this Parliament having this conversation today. This could have been passed a long time ago. Had those amendments been made at the House committee, then the Senate would not have needed to move amendments and we would not be debating this now. It would already be done.

Therefore, I want to give my hon. colleague from the New Democrats an opportunity to comment a bit on the process and what we may have learned as parliamentarians from this process.

•(1245)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, a lot of us come into this place as individuals who are championing people in our commu-

nities, and now we are part of a collective in Parliament and are all honoured to be here. This is some of the passion that I think was also behind electoral reform. It is this idea of partisan politics and political expediency that comes with the nature of this. I have seen the strategizing. I have seen how people count on coming legislation and it falls short of the mark. That is what happened here in this process.

However, I truly believe that just as many of the people who are advocates and are closer to the ground and are living with disabilities can never give up hope, neither can I. We have to frame the momentum as we move forward. We have to be critical because we have to maximize the energy and time we have moving forward to hone in on the changes that we need. That is what we have to do in Parliament. Personally, what I have observed in my time here is that we all need to continue talking about this in a candid way to reach all members of our communities, no matter where they are politically.

When an issue reaches the mainstream and becomes the expectation of all Canadians, then it will be moved forward quickly. We can use a narrative together that we understand that legislation is not the only answer. However, we cannot have legislation that allows for voluntary interpretation. We cannot have legislation that says it is going to be enforced with exemptions and without a hearing, rationale or appeal process for those exemptions either. There is a host of areas that we need to work together on. Those to me are the no-brainers. Those are the things that we can work together on. We need to mainstream these issues so that no government can ignore them or fall short again.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh for her extraordinarily hard work in speaking to the concerns of Canadians with disabilities and in strengthening this legislation. I worked at committee with her on Bill C-81, trying to strengthen it. I welcome the amendments from the other place.

I also want to thank and laud the work of disability rights advocates like David Lepofsky, whose office was so helpful as we were trying to draft the most effective amendments we could. I share some of my friend's sense of this being bittersweet. I think we have to get this legislation passed. Disability rights advocates across Canada are calling on us to do it.

I also want to thank the minister. It is a rare thing when a minister in this place accepts previously rejected amendments in order to strengthen legislation. Many of my amendments and those of the member for Windsor—Tecumseh were rejected in clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, but now the minister has accepted some strengthening of the bill. We welcome that.

We hope that this legislation passes and gets royal assent. How can we be most useful in making sure that the promise of a barrier-free Canada is delivered?

Government Orders

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I have alluded to this before. I think that all of us, when talking about this legislation with advocates in the community of people living with disabilities, need to be honest and candid about where its shortcomings are. We have to identify and target the areas that need improvement. If we are serious about this, each of us needs to commit, in our ridings, to ensuring that every election we participate in is accessible. We need to prioritize and make sure that people coming to a microphone have access to sign language interpretation and all kinds of access.

That is what we can do. We can make this a federal election issue, which then becomes a very strong social signal.

● (1250)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Centre.

It is truly an honour to speak this morning on this historic piece of legislation, Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. When I was elected, one of my priorities was to see us recognize the challenges faced by those living with disabilities, to raise awareness in my riding and across the country on how we can improve the lives of these friends and neighbours, and to enact legislation to ensure that we are moving forward on a barrier-free Canada. With Bill C-81, the federal government is leading by example, as this legislation would ensure more consistent accessibility in areas of federal jurisdiction.

Why is this important? It is because of people like Steven Muir, who works in my office. Steven lives with a developmental disability. I met him in Oakville and we became friends. Steven fell in love with Maggie, who lived in Ottawa. That presented some logistical challenges to their being together, and while it took a few years to work out the details, Steven left his job and his support network to move to Ottawa to follow his heart. Today, he is happily married to Maggie and I have had him working in my office since 2016. Steven deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, and that has not always been the case, in particular when it comes to employment and housing.

Karina Scali is another friend of mine who lives in Oakville. Karina has worked harder than most people I know to get a post-secondary education. She has faced barriers most of us would find insurmountable, including bullying at school, but she has persevered through all of it and is working toward her degree in early childhood education. She has struggled to find paid employment, not because she is not capable but because of her disability, and that is just wrong.

My friend Joe Dowdall was injured in a workplace accident, which put him in a wheelchair. Joe works at the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793 and has been an incredible advocate at all levels of government. When I was elected, he told me that I need to work on improving the lives of those with disabilities and I promised him that I would.

I do not have time to share all the stories of my friends at Community Living Oakville and In The Loop Media, but they too have faced challenges in our community and deserve more from all levels of government and Canadian society. They are just a few examples of individuals who will be impacted by the bill before us

today. There are thousands more, actually five million more, across the country with stories that are similar.

Bill C-81 would benefit Canadians by removing and preventing barriers to accessibility in areas under federal jurisdiction, including in built environments, employment, information and communication technologies, procurement of goods and services, the delivery of programs and services and transportation.

An important part of this bill is the appointment of an independent chief accessibility officer, who will be responsible for monitoring and reporting to the minister on the implementation of the act.

The bill outlines three duties for all regulated entities. They would have to create accessibility plans in consultation with people living with disabilities, they would have to set up ways to receive and respond to feedback from their employees and customers, and they would have to prepare and publish progress reports in consultation with those living with disabilities that outline how they fulfill their accessibility plans. The bill proposes to create the Canadian accessibility standards development organization to develop and model accessibility standards. In general, these standards would outline how organizations can identify, remove and prevent barriers.

An accessibility commissioner within the Canadian Human Rights Commission will be appointed and report to the Minister of Accessibility. The commissioner will be responsible for compliance and enforcement activities, as well as handling complaints for most federal activities sectors. The bill proposes a mix of proactive compliance activities, including, but not limited to, inspections, compliance audits and orders, notice of violations, penalties and more. The legislation provides individuals with the right to complain and receive compensation if they have experienced physical, psychological or monetary harm because an organization has not met its new obligations under the act and regulations.

It is especially meaningful to be speaking today during National AccessAbility Week, which has been held each year since 2016. Bill C-81 would see National AccessAbility Week officially start on the last Sunday in May.

The legislation also gives the Canadian Human Rights Commission responsibility for monitoring Canada's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In that regard, I had the opportunity to travel to Israel on an inclusion mission organized by Reena Foundation, March of Dimes and Holland Bloorview. I know some of them are watching right now. What an incredible opportunity this is to see some of the groundbreaking work being done in that country to make it more accessible and inclusive.

● (1255)

I also got time to spend with some of the leading advocates of accessibility and inclusion in Canada. I got to know Yahya, who is living in supportive housing run by the Reena Foundation, a terrific organization that allows Yahya to live independently and with dignity.

Government Orders

David Lepofsky, chair of the AODA Alliance, joined us on the trip, and I had the chance to talk to him at length about the bill before us today. I am pleased to read that Mr. Lepofsky has stated that the Senate amendments reflect an important victory for those disability advocates who have devoted so much time and energy to strengthening Bill C-81.

This trip allowed me to explore what is possible alongside those living with a disability. What a unique and blessed opportunity it has been. It has helped guide my perspective as I work in Parliament.

The Senate has made several important amendments to Bill C-81, and I applaud the government and the minister for accepting these amendments. These amendments include one that adds a deadline for realizing a barrier-free Canada. Adding a deadline was something that many disability advocates said was needed, and I am pleased to see its addition. The Senate amendments also recognize American sign language, Quebec sign language and indigenous sign language as the primary languages for communication for deaf persons in Canada. I know this amendment was extremely important to the deaf community, and it is great to see a sign language interpreter here with us today. These amendments and others made by the Senate have strengthened what is already groundbreaking legislation, and it is my sincere hope that all parties can work together to pass Bill C-81 as quickly as possible.

While the bill is historic, it is not enough to truly change the lives of Canadians with disabilities. We need a culture change in our country. Everyone needs to think differently about inclusion. We need to stop accepting the view that those living with a disability do not deserve a minimum wage. We need to build more inclusive housing so that people like Steven and Karina have a safe, affordable, inclusive place to live. Government alone cannot build an inclusive and accessible Canada. Every single Canadian needs to change their attitude.

Employers cannot only change a life, but can improve their business's bottom line by hiring staff living with a disability. Make no mistake that passing Bill C-81 will make a difference, and it will send the message that the federal government believes in the abilities of all Canadians.

I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Minister for Accessibility for her leadership in building an accessible Canada with this legislation and in so many ways, both big and small. The minister is a role model for many Canadians, and I thank her for all of her hard work on this bill.

I also want to thank my friend Senator Jim Munson who was the sponsor of this bill in the Senate. I can think of few parliamentarians who have been so passionate about inclusion for so many years. Senator Munson became emotional when Bill C-81 passed third reading in the Senate, posting on Twitter, "This has been a good day for Inclusion—good day for Canada".

To the minister and Senator Munson, to all the disability advocates and organizations who have been played a part in guiding and supporting us to where we are today, and to every person across Canada who has played a role in seeing this bill before us come to fruition, I thank them for their passion and commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible country.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her speech. I have had the opportunity to work with her over the course of this Parliament on issues that we share a common passion and concern for, namely, helping the most vulnerable.

As we get to the stretch run on this, I think all parties are supportive of moving the proposed legislation as is at this point. We are dealing with the legislation as is, and we want to see it passed before the end of this Parliament. However, stakeholders have raised some concerns about how much further the bill could have gone in terms of the use of "musts" versus "mays" in the bill and in really putting some teeth behind the legislation. For all of us who advocate for the most vulnerable, I think the biggest concern we have when looking at legislation or initiatives moving forward is that our intentions actually translate into meaningful action to improve the lives of the people we are trying to help.

Perhaps the member could speak to those concerns of stakeholders about whether the bill would actually translate into meaningful action, and to the government's commitment to ensuring that it happens.

● (1300)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the member for his personal commitment to advancing inclusivity and accessibility. He is one of the most passionate people on this issue I have ever met. I had the privilege of speaking and meeting with him, and I truly wish his party shared that same passion.

The Conservatives were in power for 10 years and never brought forward legislation on building an accessible Canada. It was an opportunity that was missed for 10 years. I am incredibly proud of the government and the minister, not only for bringing the legislation forward, but for listening to stakeholders, to the testimony and to the changes that were made in the Senate and accepting the Senate amendments.

Absolutely, there is always more we can do to make Canada accessible, and we always need to be listening. It is something that, as legislators but more importantly as Canadians, we all need to take seriously and keep moving forward. I look forward to working with the member and all members of the House, as well as any Canadian who wants to advance this legislation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

Given that the bill includes standards that the government is not required to implement, it could take several years before anything is done.

Does the member agree that we should add, as the NDP proposed, deadlines for implementing the standards and regulations in order to bring about real change and enable people with disabilities in every federal institution and federally regulated entity across the country to benefit from this accessibility act?

*Government Orders**[English]*

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, certainly one of the things that were added by the Senate was a timeline, which was being called for. We have seen challenges with the implementation of the legislation that was brought forward in Ontario. I have personally seen instances where organizations have met the standards but have not made the building inclusive when it comes to viewing areas for sports, for example, or leaving a lip or a gap that might as well be the Grand Canyon for anyone in a wheelchair. Therefore, some of it goes beyond just legislation. By the federal government adopting this bill, we will be sending a message to Canadians, to employers, organizations, architects, designers and planners, to start thinking about these things and implementing them right away.

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in support of the passing of Bill C-81, the accessible Canada act.

It is so symbolic to speak during National AccessAbility Week, when we celebrate the contributions of persons with disabilities and promote accessibility and inclusion across our communities and workplaces.

I would like to acknowledge all the energy invested in the proposed accessible Canada act by all those who have worked so hard to get us where we are today: persons with disabilities, stakeholders, industry and all who play a crucial role in improving accessibility in Canada.

In 1991, I was the victim of a random act of violence that left me a C5 quadriplegic. My life changed forever, and I saw first-hand the everyday issues Canadians with disabilities face, including tasks as ordinary as getting out of bed, going to the bank or getting on a plane. These became real challenges that were significant hurdles. Things became significantly harder due to the inaccessibility of the terrain. The problem was not my disability; it was the barriers put in my way. For instance, stairs can be a heck of an impediment to my progress.

Since entering politics 12 years ago, one of my goals has been to help Canada become a community where people with disabilities reach their individual potential and are recognized and valued as citizens. That is why I am so proud of our federal Liberal government's new accessible Canada act, the most significant piece of legislation for the rights of persons with disabilities in over 30 years.

Before I talk about the merits of the bill, it is important to note that this is not some stand-alone legislation meant to be the only thing our government is doing with respect to moving forward the lives of persons with disabilities in this country.

Our national housing strategy contains a significant focus on accessible housing. This includes the five new housing projects funded so far in Calgary, in partnership with organizations like Horizon Housing, YWCA Calgary, HomeSpace and many more. In addition, our infrastructure investments are being implemented with accessibility in mind. We are helping to provide more university and training opportunities to assist people with disabilities in becoming more involved in our labour force.

The accessible Canada act truly belongs to the disability community and reflects the priorities of persons with disabilities. To get here, we heard from over 6,000 individuals and organizations through the most accessible consultations ever held by government. All people who contributed to the legislation did so because they understood the importance of using their experiences to help drive the change needed for a better tomorrow, where everyone is included and no one is left behind.

Over three years ago, our government worked to develop legislation aimed at removing barriers to inclusion, to ensure that all Canadians have an equal and fair chance at finding success.

One of the things my disability taught me was the critical role that government plays in people's lives. I have always looked at it this way: Whether a person is born of a rich family or one that struggles, whether a person is born with a disability or acquires one along the way, that person deserves an equal and fair chance at success. This act would help level the playing field and promote equality of opportunity.

This bill pursues a very important goal: to make Canada barrier-free. Everyone is ready and eager to see the bill passed, and the organizations with responsibilities under Bill C-81 are ready to act in accordance. The CRTC, the Canadian Transportation Agency, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board have all testified that they are ready to implement their respective roles.

● (1305)

Of course, the road to inclusion has been fought for a long time by individuals and organizations across this country, organizations I was lucky enough to work with and within, such as the National Educational Association of Disabled Students and the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Alberta, which have been pushing these rights forward for many years.

Federal accessibility legislation and leadership at the national level have been long overdue. Canadians expect the Government of Canada to lead when it comes to accessibility. That is a responsibility that our government is taking very seriously. It is important to underscore that this historic bill reflects the work and commitment of the disabled community, whose priorities and concerns have been addressed and are reflected throughout the bill.

This includes recognizing sign languages as the primary language for communication by deaf persons in Canada, clarifying that nothing in the act or its regulations limits the duty to accommodate of regulated entities, ensuring the timely implementation of this legislation toward the realization of a barrier-free Canada by 2040, and recognizing intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination that persons with disabilities may experience.

The bill, built on the principle of "Nothing for us without us", belongs to the disability community. Moving forward, the community's continued participation will be absolutely essential for the bill to be effective.

Government Orders

In many ways, the bill puts into legislation the best practices that top organizations follow. Looking back, I was very lucky to have institutions like the University of Calgary, with instructors who recognized the support I needed, or organizations like the one I practised law with, Dentons Canada, where I was very lucky to have the company provide the voice-activated computer and the assistance I needed to make it through my daily work.

I have been likewise very lucky in the accommodations I received when I was at the Alberta legislature and here, at the House of Commons. I have had incredible support from my wife, my family and my long-term caregiver, Liza Tega, who have always stepped in and done all the things that were simply very difficult for me to do.

However, people with disabilities should not have to rely on this kind of luck. That is why we need legislation. With this legislation, we are creating a system whereby barriers are identified and removed proactively, and we are establishing enforcement mechanisms to ensure that regulations are respected and followed by businesses and areas under federal jurisdiction. It would create avenues for accessibility complaints through a “no wrong door” approach, and it would provide for oversight and monitoring of these issues and emerging accessibility issues.

By legislating National AccessAbility Week and bringing Canadians together to recognize the valuable contributions of persons with disabilities, this law would send a clear message that systems will be designed inclusively from the start. With the accessible Canada act, we are strengthening the collaborative approach for a country that is fully accessible and inclusive, where everyone has an equal and fair chance at success.

• (1310)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that it is a good sign that the government and the minister have decided to support the amendments from the Senate. When the bill was at the committee stage, Conservatives, New Democrats and Green Party members put forward dozens of amendments, and all of them, except three, were voted down by the Liberals, including many of the amendments that were brought forward by the Senate.

I want to highlight the fact that a lot of this could have been expedited if the Liberals had supported the amendments that came from stakeholders at the committee stage. One amendment that was not supported, and we have heard about this from stakeholders over and over again, was about the inconsistency that will come from having four different departments looking after complaints, advocacy and removing those barriers, including CTA, CASDO and the other boards.

I understand from the minister that it is a “no wrong door” policy, but what the stakeholders are looking for is the right door. By having four different administrations and four different departments trying to organize the barriers and regulations, there is going to be a lot of confusion. We have heard from stakeholders about consistency in how the complaints are going to be handled and how the restrictions and the new regulations are going to be rolled out.

Does my colleague not agree with stakeholders that having one consistent group, such as CASDO, oversee Bill C-81 would be a better option than establishing four different departments to do the job of one?

Hon. Kent Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his passion and advocacy for the betterment of the bill. Through his work, we can see that he is truly committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for people with disabilities in this country.

The process by which we arrived at this point on the bill reminds me of sausage making: We do not really want to watch it or smell it, but at the end of the day, we have to go through all the processes. Not only have we heard from the House floor and accepted and rejected amendments at committee, but there has been further due diligence from the Senate. I think we have arrived at a pretty good place, as we see all-party support here for this legislation.

In terms of the member's direct question, in my view, the no wrong door approach is better. By putting four different heads on this issue, after a time, people will know where to go. These bodies will have the relative expertise in their given area to be able to deal with the matter, hopefully on an expedited basis, and with this expertise they will be able to move the teeth of the legislation through their organizations.

• (1315)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to echo some of the comments we have heard, both from my colleagues and from colleagues in the official opposition.

As a general comment with respect to the no wrong door policy, I note advocates have asked that a one-stop or one-door entry be put into the disability provisions to be implemented and enforced by the government.

It has been my experience and the experience of many Canadians that governments in general do not do a very good job of working together across departments and agencies. They are very siloed. I am very concerned that we will say there is no wrong door, but the actual mechanisms that are needed will not be in place for this to be a reality for citizens on the ground. I would welcome the member's comments about how that will not be the reality for Canadians.

My final comment is about the House of Commons and our offices as members of Parliament. It is my understanding that the legislation would not be applicable to Parliament, to the House of Commons and to our offices as members of Parliament. If this is the case, I would welcome the member's words of advocacy in making sure there is legislation or there are regulations at some point that include the offices of members of Parliament, both here in Ottawa and within our constituencies.

Hon. Kent Hehr: Mr. Speaker, knowing the minister responsible for this file and the passionate advocate she is for accessibility in the bill, I can assure the member that there will be no wrong door. People who work in these departments and head these organizations will know how to take accommodation requests. They will know how this legislation works and that moving forward on bettering the lives of people with disabilities in this country is foremost at every turn.

I believe the way the bill is crafted will lead to more success for people with disabilities rather than less, although there will always be an opportunity for us to learn, grow and continue to move forward in the spirit we intended.

Government Orders

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Bill C-81, an act to enable a barrier-free Canada. I would like to reiterate the Conservative pledge to work with all parliamentarians towards its swift passage.

On that note I thank the minister, the government, other members of the opposition, people with disabilities, businesses and public servants who have come together through this process to put forward a positive if imperfect bill.

Regardless of these imperfections, this late in a parliamentary cycle it is important that we move swiftly to get it passed. There are important improvements that will help remove the barriers faced daily by Canadians with disabilities. This bill, with all of its imperfections, deserves to be passed, and the House can count on full Conservative co-operation to ensure that it does so as quickly as possible.

Now that we acknowledge the foregone conclusion that the bill will pass, and we have commitments from members of all parties to make it happen quickly, I want to use my brief time to highlight the next steps that we must all take in order to ensure a truly barrier-free Canada, one where Canadians with disabilities can fulfill their full potential. I will focus my remarks on the issue of jobs.

We know that a job is the best anti-poverty plan that exists. That is important to this discussion, because fully 27% of people with disabilities lived in poverty as of the Canadian Survey on Disability in 2012. That number falls from 27% to 8% for people with disabilities who have jobs.

Amazingly, that same Statistics Canada survey demonstrated that the poverty rate among people with disabilities who had jobs was actually lower than the poverty rate for the general population. In fact, if we put two people side by side, one who has a disability and a job and the other who has neither a job nor a disability, we would find that the working person with a disability was significantly less likely to be living in poverty.

I use this statistic to demonstrate that it should not be considered a foregone conclusion that people with disabilities must live in want. To the contrary, their natural God-given skills, industry and perseverance allow them not only to support themselves but also to prosper. Unfortunately, there are numerous physical and governmental barriers that stand in the way.

An Employment and Social Development Canada report from some years ago said that of approximately 795,000 working-aged Canadians who are not working but whose disability does not prevent them from doing so, almost half, 340,000 of these people, have post-secondary education. Let me reiterate that. There are 800,000 people with disabilities who are not working even though their disability does not prevent them from working, and almost half of those people have university educations.

The evidence suggests that they desperately want to work and will seek out opportunities to work, but that numerous barriers stand in the way. Many of the physical barriers are addressed in this bill, but there are other governmental barriers that remain in place.

Income and other social support programs often punish people with disabilities for working. Allow me to quote an organization

called Return on Disability. It is an organization that specifically invests in businesses that do a good job of hiring people with disabilities and serving customers with disabilities. I quote:

● (1320)

Anecdotal evidence suggests that these programs represent a barrier to employment, as individuals who risk building a career must at some point forfeit their benefits.

Let me give an example. Once a minimum wage-earning person with a disability in Alberta earns \$1,150 a month, that person faces a clawback of disability support assistance of almost 100%. It takes 12 full working days for someone on minimum wage to earn that amount. On the 13th day, the government starts reducing the benefit by \$1 for each dollar earned. On top of that clawback, the worker pays income and payroll taxes, not to mention gas and carbon taxes to drive to the job in the first place. The combined effect of all these taxes and clawbacks leads to the outcome that someone can lose \$1.25 for each extra \$1 they earn. That is a negative wage. Every extra hour the person works actually makes them poorer. Ironically, the same government that was in place in Alberta, which was hiking the minimum wage, was punishing the same workers for receiving that increased wage. As the wage went up, the clawback sharpened, and the person was actually worse off.

These disincentives for work are not only discouraging but can also be scary. In Alberta, a single disabled person loses the Alberta adult health benefit program once he or she earns over \$16,580. Ontario is almost as bad. People with disabilities who receive the Ontario disability support plan income support payments are penalized if they work. Simply put, for every \$2 they make above \$200 a month, their ODSP benefits are reduced by \$1. This is on top of other clawbacks to housing, child care benefits, bus pass support and drug benefits that could support mobility devices, hearing and visual aids, medical supplies, respiratory devices, transportation allowances and so on.

These penalties have the effect of making it next to impossible for many people who are disabled and desperately want to work to do so. We call this the marginal effective tax rate, a fancy way to describe what people lose for every dollar they earn. We know from the data that it has an effect on the ability of people in these circumstances to work. According to Stats Canada, 94,000 people with disabilities say the reason they do not work is that they would "lose additional support". Also, 84,000 do not work because they expect their income would drop if they did. These numbers come from Stats Canada surveys and include only people who used to work or who indicated that they are physically capable of doing so.

Let us unpack those numbers. Almost 100,000 Canadians who have a disability and who are physically capable of working have told Stats Canada that the reason they do not is that government programs would punish them if they did.

Government Orders

The solution to this, of course, is to adjust our tax and benefits system across levels of government to ensure that people always gain more from their wages than they lose to clawbacks and taxes. There are a number of ways to do this.

First, we could adopt the opportunity for workers with disabilities act, a bill I introduced early in this Parliament, which received support from members of the NDP, the Green Party and some Liberals. That bill would make it a condition of the Canada social transfer that provinces adjust their tax and benefits systems to ensure that people always keep more in wages than they lose in taxes and clawbacks.

Second, we could look at adjusting the workers benefit disability supplement and the disability tax credit, both of which have the potential to make work more financially rewarding. Jim Flaherty originally designed that benefit. It was then called the working income tax benefit. He specifically had in mind people with disabilities, because of course this was a long-standing passion of his.

● (1325)

The idea was to basically give the working poor, and particularly the working poor who are disabled, a pay raise on their earned income, allowing them to springboard over the welfare wall, which holds so many hard-working and promising workers back.

For the people who still cling to old stereotypes about people with disabilities, there are countless examples of those who have incredible workplace achievements and potential. There are real life stories that support this statement.

As one father of an autistic child wrote, “Charity is a good start, but it isn't a game changer.... Charity wasn't what people like my son really needed; they needed jobs. Only a job could give them a place in the world.” Randy Lewis, that father, created jobs for people like his son.

As senior vice-president of Walgreens, he launched a massive hiring drive to employ about 1,000 people with disabilities at the retail giant's distribution centre. He writes in his amazing book *No Greatness without Goodness*, “With a paying job...they would be part of our world—not relegated to the shadows and reliant on the charity of strangers. Work would fill their days, offer healthy challenges, and provide relationships. Work would mean independence.” That 1,000-person hiring spree turned into a massive financial success for Walgreens.

The company reported that the distribution centres, which are incredibly competitive and competing on the basis of fractions of pennies, requiring 100% accuracy on where products go through the system, were successful and profitable even through the transition period as a result of, not in spite of, the decision to hire 1,000 people with disabilities to do the important work. They earned full wages and did the same jobs as everyone else had done, in many cases doing them better.

In Canada, we have similar anecdotes.

Tim Hortons franchise owner Mark Wafer hired a young man with Down's syndrome, named Clint. He turned out to be his best and most loyal worker. He did all the same tasks as his co-workers

and made the same money, with no government wage subsidy or workplace tokenism. He arrived early, left late and never stopped all day long.

This impressed his boss, who had overcome a disability himself. “I grew up 80% deaf, having to fight for my rights”, said Wafer, who owns five Tim Horton's franchises, “but I always believed that the only way to live a full life is to have a paycheque and that paycheque has to come from the private sector.”

Wafer has put his money where his mouth is, having now employed over 100 workers with disabilities, people like Clint. Furthermore, he has made it clear this was a business decision. His five franchises were among the best franchises in the entire Tim Hortons chain, beating other peer group averages on the measurements of success, including the speed to serve customers and the outright profitability of those franchises.

In fact, he often has a chuckle comparing the performance of his workers to the performance of so-called VIPs who show up on Camp Day, people like politicians and sports celebrities who work in Tim Horton's one day a year to raise money for the Tim Hortons camp. He has compared the statistics on how long it takes for customers to get served on that day to the speed with which his workers, who have disabilities, are able to serve those same customer and shows that the so-called VIPs are blown out of the water.

He has demonstrated the enormous success and potential of reaching out to people who have disabilities and hiring them in the workplace. In fact, they are not just anecdotes. Of the million Canadians with disabilities who work, 328,000 of them have severe or very severe disabilities.

● (1330)

We know this kind of success can be replicated. As I said earlier, at Mark Wafer's Tim Hortons branch, his turnover was only 40% a year, while the industry average was 100%. He reduced turnover by hiring people with disabilities. This was important because one staff turnover cost him \$4,000. Based on 16 metrics used to measure the operations of the stores, Wafer said his business outperformed the others. He said, “I don't run a better business. I have a better workforce.”

Similarly, the two Walgreens distribution centres, where 40% of the workforce have disabilities, became the most efficient in the company's history. He said, “Once they fastened onto the work, most have laser-like focus. Not only did they work hard, they didn't want to quit.” They sorted, packaged and sent off thousands of different products worth millions of dollars to dozens of stores every week. This required speed, frugality and flawlessness. The slightest error would send products to the wrong place and empty shelves would send unsatisfied customers to the competitor.

Government Orders

Speaking of the management at Walgreens, he said, “We all agreed that spending extra money” was not what was needed. “No one had to say so—it just was.” He went on to say, “In a business that plots the difference between success and failure by one-eighth of a penny, loss show up quickly and can be disastrous.”

He points out that his hard-nosed business-driven approach was perfectly compatible with having a workforce that included people with disabilities. In fact, many of them outperformed those who had no apparent disability at all.

In Canada, we have some great examples of new innovations. A company called Meticulon in Calgary helps people with autism become information technology consultants. They have the opportunity to earn \$24 an hour doing IT work, mostly in Calgary's energy sector, but now broadening out to other fields.

Then there is the opportunity in reaching a bigger market. According to Return on Disability, over a billion people around the world have disabilities, representing a combined market of customers equal to a country nearly the size of China. There are major business opportunities for business owners who are smart enough to hire people with disabilities and serve customers with disabilities.

We need to remove some of the government obstacles that have stood in the way. Right now the biggest among them is the high levels of marginal effective tax rates that punish people, not just those with disabilities but all those who are on social assistance, for making the courageous decision of entering the workplace. In doing so, we sell people short, we deny them their opportunities and we fail to recognize their desire, which is similar to our own, to contribute to their fellow humanity.

Work is a basic human need, not just for a livelihood but for a life. There is dignity in labour, as Martin Luther King famously said. There is dignity in all labour, no matter what kind of work a person does. King famously said that if someone was a street sweeper, to then go out and sweep streets like Beethoven made music, sweep streets like Michelangelo made art, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry, sweep streets so well that when the person entered through the gates of heaven, people would cry out that there stood the great street sweeper who did his job well.

Let us take this occasion, where all of us are united in this common goal, to recognize the inherent dignity of every person, including and especially those who have overcome disabilities and difficulties, and clear the way for them to fulfill their full potentials.

● (1335)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Carleton for advocating for people who want to work meaningfully in society regardless of their background or their ability to do so. Whether it is working with the CNIB or on his private member's legislation, the member has done much in this Parliament to advocate for those with challenges.

We have heard criticisms by stakeholders and elected officials that the legislation before us, when it comes to designing regulations, has multiple departments that would be responsible for it. Some in the stakeholder community have said that it is confusing as to who they

give feedback to so these regulations can be rolled out in a timely way, in plain language and in a format that can be easily understood and so everyone who falls under the legislation knows the responsibility under law. Does the member agree with that assessment?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, simplicity is a virtue. Oftentimes in politics, bureaucracy and government generally there is too much complexity and unnecessarily so.

The provisions of the bill should be executed in the most seamless and simple fashion possible. People, regardless of whether they have disabilities, ought not to have to spend time weeding through government paperwork and bureaucracy. They should go straight to the result, and the result is an accessible Canada for every Canadian. I hope the government, as it administers the bill into the future, and future governments after it, will ensure that happens.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning I heard the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan talk about the importance of caring for the most vulnerable members of our society as well. Unfortunately, disabilities often contribute to this very economic vulnerability.

My colleague was a member of the previous government, which created a disability savings plan. I wonder if he could tell us a little more about that program.

Did that program produce the desired results?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Yes, the previous government did create a disability savings plan that helps people with disabilities and their families save money for the future. We want children with disabilities to be able to use that money to support themselves after their parents are gone.

Now the system needs to be improved, given how complex it is. Plus, for people to access it, they must be eligible for the disability tax credit. The department is currently coming up with interpretations that prevent some individuals, including diabetics, from accessing the credit. Without that credit, one cannot opt in to the disability savings plan.

I therefore think we need to work together to simplify the system and allow more people to access it. People need to save up some money, not fill out paperwork.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague.

Bill C-81 would improve accessibility in all areas under federal jurisdiction so that all Canadians, regardless of their abilities and disabilities, can participate fully and inclusively in Canadian society.

This bill, which we introduced last June, was improved at every stage of the process. Our government welcomes the Senate's proposed amendments. I would like to know what my colleague thinks of the Senate's proposed amendments.

Government Orders

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I generally agree with the direction the government is taking. I think the Senate's amendments are similar to the ones the NDP and the Conservatives proposed in committee.

Obviously I do not have time to go over all the amendments in 30 seconds, but I have already congratulated the government on introducing this bill. I think some of the amendments further improved the bill and that the final product, despite its imperfections, is an improvement over the status quo.

[*English*]

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I applaud the efforts of everyone in making a very helpful bill become reality. I also applaud my colleague for mentioning the contributions of employers who are willing to create jobs and hire people with challenges. Statistics have shown that they have proven to be very loyal employees who perform well.

When I was the minister for seniors, I had a special employers panel for family caregivers looking after people and children with disabilities. We modelled the employer panel for people with disabilities, and this is a model we should follow.

I lived through that challenge as well, because my husband was legally blind when we were married, and he aged into disability as well. There is a connection between the needs of seniors and aging into disability. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

• (1345)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I thank the former minister responsible for seniors for sharing her personal experience with this issue. I know that she has been a great supporter of her husband, who has a vision impairment. They have lived a very rich life, and it is a good example of the great life all people can have, even when they encounter the difficulties disability brings.

Today we can celebrate that this bill would help knock down some of the unnecessary physical and other barriers that are in the way. We need to begin the conversation on how to take yet further steps in the future to remove governmental barriers that remain so that all people can fulfill their full potential.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that it took the Senate to do what the Liberals were unwilling to do in this House and at committee to fix this bill, or at least to make an attempt to fix it.

The member for Carleton talked about the advantages work provides, both psychologically and socially, but he also talked about the benefits there should be from working, from an economic perspective, and how disabled people are often disadvantaged in retaining work. I am not sure that all viewers, and maybe even those across the aisle, fully understand the issues surrounding the marginal tax rate. I wonder if the member could extrapolate on that a little further.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, when people say the term “marginal effective tax rate”, eyes begin to glaze over right across the land, but it is a very important concept, because that is the amount of money one loses for every extra dollar one earns. This loss happens in two ways. First, social benefits are often clawed back as someone earns an additional dollar. Second, income and payroll

taxes apply to what is left. The combined effect can mean real marginal tax rates of over 100%.

For example, in Saskatchewan, until recently, minimum-wage workers on disability assistance who went from part-time to full-time work would actually have a pay cut. In other words, they would make less money working 40 hours a week than they would working 20 hours a week. These are people trying to escape from poverty, improve their situation and climb the ladder, and the government punishes them for doing so. Surely we can adjust our social benefits and tax system to ensure that people keep more of their wages than they lose to clawbacks and taxes.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin. He will have approximately 12 minutes, and when we resume debate, he will have another eight minutes, with 10 minutes for questions and comments.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is to be here just before question period, when members from all parties will certainly be in complete opposite positions on issues and when it tends to be a fairly feisty time. Instead, at this moment in time, we are talking about something that, in many ways, we agree on. It is that rare opportunity to be discussing an issue on which we may have different approaches, but the result we are shooting for is the same.

First, it is really important to make clear that this legislation will pass. It has the support of members on all sides of this House. We may have ideas on how we want the legislation to be constructed or on ways it can be improved to have more impact for the people who need it, but we all agree that it is a step forward. Certainly the stakeholders from across the country agree that this legislation is a step forward.

As my colleague previously noted, it is a foregone conclusion that this legislation will pass, so today we are having a conversation about it. We are able to use the opportunity we have, as members of Parliament elected by the people of Canada to debate issues in this House, to talk about how the process could be improved or about our vision of where this legislation would have an impact.

To that end, I want to start with what has worked in this process. I want to commend, first of all, the parties that have been involved in this process, the stakeholders and Canadians with disabilities, for their ability to come together to find common ground. So often the enemy of progress in this country is our inability to come together. We wind up with a cacophony of ideas and a lot of noise from different people advocating for perhaps the same end but through different means. It is very confusing for policy-makers, regardless of political stripe, making decisions in that environment.

We have seen alliances formed in this process. Alliances of organizations with varying interests have come together and advocated strongly on their common ground. These include organizations like FALA and the AODA. David Lepofsky, who has been a tireless champion, Bill Adair, who I know is here today listening to the debate, and so many others their alliances represent have been part of this process. In finding that common ground, we find ourselves here today in a conversation, with all parties in agreement.

Statements by Members

I want to talk a bit about why this is important to me personally. By now I think everyone in this House knows that I have a son with autism. Jaden is now 23 years old, and in many ways, he is like a three-year-old or four-year-old in a 23-year-old's body. He is non-verbal, but he has incredible skills. If given the opportunity, he has something incredibly meaningful to offer to our society and our country.

As I am telling this story, the best example I can give in terms of perception is from an interview we did six years ago with Steve Paikin, on *The Agenda*. We did this interview with Jaden and his sister Jenae, who was 13 at the time. Jenae, as a 13-year-old, was asked by Steve, who knows both Jaden and Jenae and has a real interest in helping them tell their story, if she ever wished that Jaden was "normal", like every other kid. Jenae, as a 13-year-old, without hesitation, responded, "Well, honestly, since Jaden was diagnosed with autism before I was born, I don't exactly know what a normal brother is like, so Jaden kind of is my normal."

Steve pressed her a little bit and asked if she liked him just the way he was. It was kind of a softball question. We do not see too many of those in this House. Without skipping a beat, her answer was that if Jaden did not have autism or was cured or something, we would miss the Jaden we have now. This is coming from a 13-year-old. I tell this story in a lot of my presentations across the country to university students and basically anyone who will listen.

• (1350)

What I learned from that interview, as I reflected on it over the years of telling the story multiple times, is the fact that it made me think about my own normal and maybe a little about Jenae's normal, in the sense that Jenae never really had a choice. She was born into the family. She is three and a half years younger than Jaden.

However, the school they went to, which is a kindergarten to grade 12 school, had a choice. That school's choice was to include Jaden in a regular classroom with a full-time aide.

When we made the choice to put Jaden in that school, and when we made the choice to push for him to have a full-time aide, we were advocating for Jaden. We thought that it would be better for Jaden. We did not know Jaden the 23-year-old. We knew Jaden the five-year-old at the time. We thought that was the best route for him in his schooling.

Over the years, we started hearing from students who were in Jaden's classroom. They would tell us that their lives were immeasurably better because they got to know Jaden. It made them think differently about the world.

I am about to turn 50 next week. My normal for 50 years, when I think about it, if people can imagine a video game, is a circle that surrounds me as far as I can see. My normal is basically that circle following me around for 50 years. In this building, it would be all the people I can see. Sometimes we have a TV screen come into that circle. Sometimes we have a computer monitor that exposes us to something from outside the circle, but our normal really is what we are surrounded by.

If we are not including people like Jaden in that circle, in our normal as we go through life, our lives are going to be impacted in very negative ways. As we think about this legislation, we should

think about the importance of creating an environment in which all Canadians can be included in every aspect of our society. I encourage us all to think about our lives in terms of that circle and to think about the strengths we have. If our circle only includes people who are exactly the same as us, who have the same strengths we have, then our strengths are not really even strengths, because everyone has the same strength. If our circle includes only people who have the same weaknesses we have, our weaknesses are going to be more profound, because there is nobody in that circle with skills and abilities to counter those weaknesses.

What Jaden brings to the table is a different way of thinking. So many Canadians have been excluded from our workplaces, our schools and all the environments in which we live. What we have missed are people who have incredible skills and abilities, because we have not gone down the road of creating the circumstances and opportunities to include them. Our society is less because of those decisions we have made.

Today, as we have this conversation, we have the opportunity to right that wrong. We see and hear from members across this House who recognize that opportunity.

I know that my time is running short, so I will wrap up for now with this. I have been part of this House for 13 years. Rare is the opportunity to come together with colleagues from all parties on something as important as this. I cannot wait to stand in this House with my colleagues from all parties to support this legislation and take this meaningful step forward.

• (1355)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin will have 11 minutes and six seconds coming to him when we return to debate this topic.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian government's \$100-billion shipbuilding strategy is a fiasco. By excluding the largest shipyard, Davie, and dividing the contracts between two shipyards outside Quebec, Ottawa has shot itself in the foot. Almost 10 years later, not one of the ships ordered has been commissioned, all so that Quebec would be excluded from getting contracts.

The Prime Minister himself acknowledged that two shipyards do not have the capacity to meet the needs of the Coast Guard and our armed forces.

What has the government done to fix the Conservatives' \$100-billion mistake? It has awarded \$16 billion in contracts to the same two shipyards that already have too much work, once again excluding Davie and Quebec.

This scheme is funded by our own taxes. With 50% of production capacity in Canada, Davie deserves its fair share of the contracts, and Quebec will accept nothing less.

Statements by Members

[English]

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the incredible work of a Cloverdale—Langley City resident, Dollie Greensides. In 1960, Dollie joined the Cloverdale Ladies Auxiliary, which was part of the Cloverdale Legion, two organizations with a rich history since 1927.

Since joining the ladies auxiliary, Dollie has served as treasurer, secretary, sergeant-at-arms and president. She has been instrumental in selling 50-50 tickets for many years and speaking to school children during the annual poppy campaign. For her outstanding service to the community, Dollie was awarded a life membership in 1985 and a meritorious service award in 1995. This is the highest medal in the ladies auxiliary.

Today, we can still find Dollie carrying colours to the branch general meeting, volunteering at the annual Christmas bazaar and serving beans at the Cloverdale Rodeo. Recently, Dollie was recognized for her 60 years of service to the Cloverdale Ladies Auxiliary at a special ceremony, surrounded by ladies auxiliary members, friends, and family. Past presidents and members spoke about Dollie's numerous accomplishments and awarded her with a 60-year service pin and bar.

My thanks to Dollie for all of her great service.

* * *

●(1400)

STORMONT—DUNDAS—SOUTH GLENGARRY

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past 15 years I have had the honour and privilege of representing the residents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry in the House. I can truly say that sitting in this chamber among my honourable colleagues, both past and present, has been the greatest time of my life.

To the residents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, I would like to use this opportunity to thank them for their confidence in me and electing me as their member of Parliament for five consecutive terms; for placing their trust in me; for allowing me to be their voice in the greatest democracy in the world; and for sharing their thoughts, opinions and concerns with me. I did my best to make sure they were addressed.

During my 15 years as a member of Parliament, I did all I could to promote my riding and to try to bring investment dollars back home in order to see our community grow and prosper. I will continue to give back in whatever capacity I can to the people who so faithfully put their trust in me for the past 15 years.

* * *

[Translation]

ROBERT BENOIT

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of admiration for my constituents and the outstanding work they do.

Today I would like to talk about Robert Benoit, a proud representative of Brome—Missisquoi and former MNA in Quebec City. He is the president of the board of directors of Memphremagog Conservation.

His commitment to protecting the environment is unparalleled. Robert Benoit is a pioneer in protecting the water quality of our beautiful Lake Memphremagog. His commitment benefits the entire community.

I would like to acknowledge his dedication to protecting our natural resources. He is an exemplary volunteer to all those around him, which is why I awarded him the MP's medal on Friday, May 17, in honour of his work.

Thank you, Robert, for your dedication to protecting our region.

* * *

ROUYN-NORANDA HUSKIES

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the summer of 2018 the die was cast. Without victory, winter would prove eternal.

Two armies prepared for battle in Abitibi-Témiscamingue: the Pirates in the south and the Huskies in the north. When the army from Témiscamingue, the Pirates, won a decisive victory over the Ravens and won the Russell Cup, the battle began in the north.

Led by champion Pouliot, the Huskies racked up a historic 59 wins, successively took on the Cataractes, the Tigers and the Océanic and then vanquished the formidable Mooseheads to bring home the President's Cup.

Nevertheless, the “pack” knew from experience that the battle was not yet won. During the final assault, they were almost wiped out by Suzuki's storm, but they rallied and claimed victory over the Raiders and the Mooseheads. The Huskies made it through the final storm with ease and then won the final battle against the Moosehead warriors.

The invincible Teasdale, the tireless Dobson and the impenetrable Harvey brought home the coveted Memorial Cup.

After they won three regional cups, the courageous Huskies' victory parade will surely be the highlight of the summer.

* * *

DANIELLE MIRON

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a long service awards ceremony will be held today.

The event will highlight House of Commons employees' years of service. I would like to thank all House of Commons employees for the outstanding work they do day after day.

Statements by Members

My riding, Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, is honoured to be home to one of the amazing people who will be receiving this award. Danielle Miron has been working at the House of Commons for over 20 years, and for all those years, she has been working for her community. She works in my riding office in Lachute. We are fortunate to have her in Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, where she uses her experience to help the people of my magnificent riding.

I congratulate Danielle on her award and thank her for her many years of service to Canadians.

* * *

• (1405)

[English]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister reflects upon his own record, he sees nothing but years of scandal, ethical breaches and failure. He knows that the clock is ticking, so he has decided to stack the deck for the October election.

He has already put spending caps on opposition parties while the government has a blank cheque. He left a massive loophole in election laws that allow Liberal-friendly foreign interest groups to interfere in campaigns. He has taken over planning for the leaders debates without any input from the opposition. Now he has put his friends at Unifor, who claim to be the opposition leader's worst nightmare, in charge of doling out Canadian tax dollars to the media in an effort to politically influence the campaign in his favour. That is a classic from the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister might be stacking the deck in his favour, but come October he is going bust.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I recognize the made-in-Canada mineral program that has reached global attention as countries around the world have been adopting sustainable practices set forth by the Canadian mineral sector.

The Towards Sustainable Mining 2019 Excellence Awards recognize the work of Canadian companies who advance social, environmental and economic practices. These practices include indigenous relations, health and safety, biodiversity and water management.

I would like to congratulate the winners of the 2019 TSM Excellence Awards. Glencore's Raglan Mine increased local Inuit employment by 110%. IAMGold's solar energy initiative reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 18,500 tonnes annually.

Canadian mineral companies are operating in over 100 countries across the world. Let us all be proud of our innovative practices that Canada's mineral sector has set here at home and around the world.

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to welcome students from the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, who are visiting Parliament today.

These young people from Laval, Lanaudière and the Laurentians are Canada's future. They are deeply concerned about the environment and climate change. For many, those concerns are the reason they are interested in politics.

I am proud to rise in the House today as a member of a government that cares about the future of our young people, our country and our planet. I am proud to be a member of the government that has a plan for the future, the government that negotiated the first national climate plan with the provinces, the government that put a price on carbon. Climate change is real, and so is our plan.

* * *

[English]

GRANDE PRAIRIE—MACKENZIE

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that tough times can bring out the very best in people. This past week, we witnessed this in my northern Alberta riding.

As firefighters battled flames near High Level and Paddle Prairie, we witnessed an outpouring of support from the surrounding communities for evacuees and others affected by the fires.

I am incredibly proud of the caring spirit of our region and the folks who have reached out to those who have been impacted during these hard times. We are blessed to call home communities with people who believe that this attitude should be the norm and not the exception.

We have seen thousands of volunteers welcome evacuees into their homes and community centres and provide food, water and other necessities. Their support and care has been invaluable and has not gone unnoticed.

I hope those in the House will join me in thanking the volunteers and all of those who have raised a helping hand in the evacuation, including the RCMP, the Canadian Rangers and local municipal officials, as we pray for the continued safety of the crews battling the flames.

* * *

[Translation]

ROUYN-NORANDA HUSKIES

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know you are a Mooseheads fan, but Sunday, May 26, was a great day. The Rouyn-Noranda Huskies won their first Memorial Cup with a 4-2 win over the Halifax Mooseheads.

After shattering a Quebec Major Junior Hockey League record with 59 wins in the regular season, including 25 consecutive wins, and taking the President's Cup by beating the Mooseheads in six games, the Huskies won their first national title. The Huskies are extraordinary ambassadors for the town of Rouyn-Noranda and the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. The team is without a doubt the biggest source of pride for the community.

I would like to highlight the contribution of head coach Mario Pouliot, tournament MVP and Montreal Canadiens prospect Joël Teasdale, the parents, players, host families and all staff who worked hard to make our major junior hockey league a national success story.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

ACROMEGALY

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to raise awareness about a rare disease called acromegaly. I was made aware of this rare disease by a constituent of mine, Mme. Dianne Sauvé, who was diagnosed with acromegaly in 2012.

[Translation]

Today, I want to make the House and all Ontarians aware of this rare disease called acromegaly.

[English]

Acromegaly is a hormonal disorder that develops when the pituitary gland produces too much growth hormone during adulthood. I am pleased to say that Dianne has formed a support group in Ottawa and has a Facebook group, Acromegaly Ottawa Awareness and Support Network, to help raise support for and awareness of this disease.

[Translation]

I therefore wish to thank Ms. Sauvé for her courage and perseverance, and for sharing her experience with all of us.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister recently shared some sage advice with some patrons at a pub that “in the House of Commons, if you repeat it, if you say it louder, if that is your talking point, people will totally believe it.”

Clearly, the environment minister does not believe that the Liberals have an environment plan. In fact, no matter how many times the Liberals repeat it, the budget did not balance itself, the carbon tax does not reduce emissions and they will not meet their Paris accord targets.

In fact, recent reports by the government show that under the Liberal government, emissions have increased each and every year and will continue to increase and that Canada will miss its targets by 150 megatonnes. All of this despite their job-killing carbon tax,

Statements by Members

which just goes to prove that the Liberals do not have an environment plan. What they do have is a plan to raise taxes.

The Liberals are a broken record of broken promises and will not meet their Paris accord targets. A Conservative environment plan will not raise taxes, will embrace our natural resource development and will be a clear road map to reaching our destination for the benefit of all Canadians.

* * *

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES WEST

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Equal Opportunities West is an amazing organization in Winnipeg that promotes an inclusive community where people with disabilities are treated with respect and dignity. It does incredible work in our community and I am proud to support it.

I am also pleased to share that I will be hosting my third annual Community BBQ and e-waste drive in support of Equal Opportunities West. Last year, we beat our previous record and helped divert almost 20,000 kilograms of e-waste from landfills, and we are looking forward to topping that this year.

I encourage everyone in Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley to stop by on June 8, drop off their e-waste, pick up a hot dog and say hello to the amazing staff, volunteers and participants of Equal Opportunities West.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, at a pleasant local restaurant called River's Edge, I met with conscientious community members for a quiet lunch. The first rule was no talking, which is what I want to talk about today.

I want to thank members of our culturally deaf community, Gary Vassallo, Erika Thibert, Deborah Martinez, Christopher Newman, and our sign language interpreters, Christie Reaume and Lana Hildebrandt, for helping us with this experiential learning opportunity.

The quiet lunch allowed us to deepen our understanding of being deaf. We had business improvement association members and business leaders from car dealers to front-line bank workers, all working to improve their customer service and do their part to remove barriers.

I thank those in Windsor—Tecumseh for always looking for ways to make progress and to be an inclusive community. It is because of them that we can celebrate the accessibility—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister pretends he has a plan for addressing climate change, but he has a tax plan; that is the carbon tax plan, and we know this will not do anything to lower emissions. How do we know this?

Oral Questions

Well, B.C. and Quebec have both had a carbon tax for a decade and their emissions have not gone down; they have gone up. Australia had a carbon tax, which drove up the cost of everything but did not reduce emissions or help the planet, so it got rid of it.

The Liberals also know they are not going to achieve their Paris targets. The Auditor General has said so. The Liberals are giving large industrial emitters a special deal that exempts them from the tax, making Canadian families and small businesses pay more to drive to work, heat their homes and put food on the table.

This spring, the Conservatives will present Canadians with a real environmental plan that will lower emissions without making Canadians pay more. We know the Prime Minister has a tax plan, but where is his climate plan?

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

AVIGNON—LA MITIS—MATANE—MATAPÉDIA

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I entered politics in 2015 to help rebuild my region's trust in Ottawa after the decade of darkness under a Conservative government.

We have completely changed course since our election and now my region is booming. It has tremendous economic momentum thanks to our government's investments in such things as upgrading the Carleton-sur-Mer wharf, building lookouts in Matapédia and Saint-André, modernizing SEREX in Amqui, building a new arena in Mont-Joli, allocating \$27 million to the Institut Maurice-Lamontagne, decontaminating sites and extending the Mont-Joli airport runway, as well as repairing and rebuilding the port of Matane and creating more than 220 federal jobs back home.

Since 2015, my riding has seen investments totalling \$160 million, thanks to the Prime Minister's leadership, an extraordinary team and a comprehensive program. People back home were right to put their trust in us. Let's imagine another four wonderful years.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NEWS MEDIA INDUSTRY

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's decision to appoint Unifor to his panel to determine eligibility for a half-billion-dollar media package has destroyed the government's credibility.

Unifor is a highly partisan group and it has very aggressive and partisan goals. It has made clear that its objective is to elect Liberals and defeat Conservatives, and yet the Prime Minister has chosen to appoint it to this very important panel.

Why does the Prime Minister not openly admit he is stacking the deck for himself?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know that a strong,

independent media is a cornerstone of Canadian democracy. We are therefore acting to ensure that media continue to hold elected officials to account. We are ensuring that both employees and employers are represented on the independent panel.

When it comes to the media, the Conservatives' only plan is to eliminate CBC/Radio-Canada, which would mean no local coverage in smaller communities and the end of an institution valued by Canadians for generations.

Unlike what the Leader of the Opposition put in his leadership platform, we will not let that happen.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue. The government has indicated that it is setting up a panel that will have on it an entity that is clearly biased in the government's favour. The entity will be in charge of determining criteria for a half-billion-dollar media bailout package.

The Prime Minister can tell us the former positions of the opposition, but the reality is that his position right now is this. He is undermining the independence of journalists, who are very concerned.

Will the Prime Minister remove Unifor from this panel?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that any strong democracy relies on an independent, strong media that is there to do its job of holding politicians to account. We need to make sure that both employers and employees are part of the panel that will oversee the independent media fund. This is something we understand.

The Conservatives, however, continue to attack organized labour, including attacking the largest private sector union in the country, because their hate for labour does not know limits. Well, we are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the Prime Minister to stand there and tell someone who grew up in Cape Breton and is a product of a coal-mining family that she hates labour is absolutely disgusting. I am not afraid to have dirt under my fingernails.

I am going to quote one journalist who seeks to have independence: "Now the government that benefited from Unifor's partisan largesse has asked it for help deciding who's a proper journalist and what's a proper news outlet."

You could have done better, Prime Minister. Why did you not?

● (1420)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Milton is an experienced member, but I remind her to direct her comments to the Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton will come to order, now.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder where the member opposite's high dungeon was when her government was bringing in anti-union legislation, Bill C-525 and Bill C-377, which were the very first things we eliminated when Canadians voted the Conservatives out and voted Liberals back in.

We will always respect organized labour in the country. We will work with it and the hundreds of thousands of Canadians it represents.

We are going to continue to stand up for an independent media. That means supporting employers and employees.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals want to ruin the credibility of journalists with the election just five months away.

The Prime Minister decided to include Unifor, a union that has openly admitted to being a Liberal Party supporter and has said it would be the Conservatives' and our leader's worst nightmare.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and take Unifor off the panel tasked to decide how to distribute \$600 million amongst the media across Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, strong, independent media are vital to Canadian democracy. We are taking action to ensure that the media can continue to hold governments to account. We are ensuring that employees and employers are represented on this independent panel.

The only plan the Conservative opposition leader has for the media is to get rid of CBC/Radio-Canada. That was in his campaign platform during the leadership race. It would mean no more local coverage in small communities, and it would spell the end of a cherished and respected Canadian institution.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the media.

This is what some in the media have had to say. Mario Dumont, Caroline St-Hilaire and Daniel Lessard have said they are uncomfortable with the Liberal Prime Minister's decision. Don Martin from CTV said that this is a most serious threat to journalistic independence.

I will repeat my question for the Prime Minister: when will he remove Unifor from the panel he set up to distribute millions of dollars to the media across Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well aware that Conservatives have a history of bashing unions.

In fact, under the previous government they introduced an anti-union bill that we had to repeal in order to work with the unions. We respect the responsibility of unions to represent workers, the employees. That is why we wanted employers and employees from the media to be represented on the panel to make it truly independent. We will always protect our independent media.

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, investing in strong public services is a Canadian value, but the OECD reports that Canada now ranks 25th out of 37 countries on social spending. At the same time, the Liberals gave \$29 billion a year to rich companies with no strings attached.

The Conservatives and the Liberals have starved our public services, while using our money to help the richest companies. When will the Liberals stop helping their wealthy corporate buddies over the public services on which families count?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to talk about services that families count on, he might want to ask his colleagues in the NDP why they voted against the Canada child benefit, which gives more money to nine out of 10 Canadian families and has lifted 300,000 kids out of poverty over these past years.

On top of that, our investments in community, in workers and in families have lifted over 825,000 Canadians out of poverty. We know that investing in support for the middle class and those working hard to join it is how to create growth for the entire economy.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are having a hard time making ends meet and they are disappointed in the Liberal government.

They cannot go back to the same old Conservative approach. Governments that eliminate the services families rely on are responsible for these difficulties. No more spending to help wealthy corporations. We must make better choices if we want better results.

When will the Liberals stop giving more to large corporations instead of Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite does not seem to realize that the first thing we did was to increase taxes on the wealthy and lower taxes on the middle class. We then introduced the Canada child benefit, which helped lift 300,000 children out of poverty.

The NDP voted against these two measures, but we stood strong. Canadians created one million new jobs, and we also managed to lift 825,000 Canadians out of poverty. We are creating growth and helping people.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need to help our families and protect our workers.

The Liberals want to pander to President Trump and rush ahead with the new NAFTA, but there is no reason to do that.

Oral Questions

The government can and must apply pressure to fix the agreement. The U.S. Democrats are working to secure a better NAFTA that protects our jobs and lowers drug prices. By refusing to support the Democrats, the Liberals are not advancing progressive trade.

If the priority is to protect jobs, why the rush?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we negotiated a good deal for Canadians, for workers and for families from coast to coast to coast. We are not the only ones saying so.

Just ask Jerry Dias of Unifor, who called the agreement much better than the agreement signed 25 years ago.

Hassan Yussuff, from the Canadian Labour Congress, said that the renewed NAFTA gets it right on labour provisions, including provisions to protect workers from discrimination.

Lino LoMedico, a team leader at Chrysler's Windsor assembly plant, is very proud of the job we did negotiating NAFTA.

The unions support—

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Burnaby South

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no Canadian worker who wants to rush through this deal if there is a chance to work with Americans to better protect their jobs. Not only does this deal risk jobs, it could also drive up the costs of medication for families. Clearly, it could be better.

Democrats in Congress are fighting for improvements on jobs and protecting the environment. Will the Liberals stop rushing to help Donald Trump and instead work with progressives to fix this flawed deal?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we worked hard to negotiate the best possible deal for Canadians, and that is exactly what we got. They do not have to take our word for it. Union leaders from Unifor and the Canadian Labour Congress and even Lino LoMedico, team leader at Chrysler's Windsor assembly plant, said, "We're actually very proud of the job that our Canadian government did and kudos to the negotiator."

The reality is that if the New Democrats do not want to listen to union leaders, let them listen to their own MP for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who said that this is the best deal possible and it protects workers all around this country.

The Speaker: I know it is near the end of the term, but I ask members to remember that it is rude to interrupt, and we should allow people to speak when they have the floor and not when they do not have the floor.

The hon. opposition House leader.

* * *

NEWS MEDIA INDUSTRY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many, including those in the media, have expressed concerns about the Liberals' \$600-million press bailout. Andrew Coyne wrote about the bailout that "it intrudes the government into areas it has no business being in", and "It is a disaster...now unfolding".

That is because the Liberals have put overtly anti-Conservative Unifor on the committee that will oversee which media get funding. Will the Prime Minister finally admit that this is all part of the Liberals' plan to rig the next election?

• (1430)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the Conservatives are playing a very dangerous game. They are attacking the media. They are saying that our journalists can be bought. Yesterday, they said that our journalists were for sale. Instead of supporting professional journalism, they are attacking it.

We say quite the opposite. We have to support professional journalism and take into account the principles of the independence and freedom of the press.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we trust the media. It is the Prime Minister Canadians do not trust, because we have all seen how vindictive he gets when anyone dares to stand up to him.

Even the CBC said, "The government just made its toxic media bailout plan even worse". We agree with the CBC.

In federal and provincial campaigns across the country, Unifor has been campaigning against Conservatives and pledges to do the same in the upcoming election. Therefore, will the Prime Minister admit he has made another terrible error in judgment and reverse the decision and get Unifor off this committee, for—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if they want to talk about the CBC, let us talk about the CBC. The Leader of the Opposition just said that he would like to dictate to the CBC how it covers its stories, how it tells its stories. That is totally unacceptable. When he was asked if he would cut the CBC, once again he did not answer.

We are saying that we need more professional journalism, not less. That is why we are moving forward with this, respecting one fundamental principle: the independence of the press.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage claims that an independent press is exactly what a democracy needs to function, and then he appoints Unifor to sit on his panel—a union that describes itself as our leader's worst nightmare. So much for independence. Even Andrew Coyne says that any chance this process would not be politicized has now vanished.

When will the Liberals stop attacking the credibility of journalists with their gimmicks?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite something to hear that from a Conservative who wants to get rid of the CBC and control how it covers the news.

Oral Questions

Once again, the Conservatives are playing a dangerous game by attacking professional journalists and calling them fossils. We, on the other hand, are introducing a program that respects fundamental principles such as the independence and freedom of the press.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the worst cuts to the CBC were made by the Liberals, and now the Minister of Canadian Heritage is attacking the credibility of journalists. In fact, a National Post journalist said that the minister was putting foxes in charge of the chickens. The minister's panel of independent experts is made up of a highly partisan union.

Will the minister take off his rose-coloured glasses, remove Unifor from the panel and hold a real election, unless he prefers a rigged election?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we need is a panel that is both independent and representative of the entire industry. Yes, it takes employers and people from newsrooms, but it also takes people who represent workers, people who represent journalists, people who represent minority communities and people who represent ethnic media.

We need a variety of opinions while respecting one fundamental thing: freedom of the press. Rather than attacking the media, the Conservatives should follow our lead and support it. Our media is one of the pillars of democracy.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. I have heard the dulcet tones of the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George many times today. As much as I enjoy hearing those tones, I would prefer to hear them only when he has the floor.

The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Engage Canada is an anti-Conservative organization that tries to influence elections. Unifor boss Jerry Dias has boasted that Unifor was a major financial supporter of Engage Canada in the last election. The Prime Minister has appointed Unifor to his panel to determine eligibility for a half a billion dollar media bailout package. At the same time, Unifor is bankrolling anti-Conservative special interest groups.

Will the Prime Minister finally kick Unifor off this panel, or is this just part of his plan to try to rig the next election?

• (1435)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. What our government did is bring in Bill C-76, which actually strengthens the rules around advertising and activities for third parties in the lead-up to the election. We brought in a pre-writ spending period, which will begin on June 30. This is the first time in Canadian history that this is being done to make sure that there is a fair and level playing field when it comes to our elections.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Unifor is spending union dues collected from its members to fund anti-Conservative special interest groups like Engage Canada, who are trying to influence the outcome of the upcoming election.

Knowing its anti-Conservative bias, these Liberals have still appointed Unifor to a supposedly independent panel that will decide which media will get access to half a billion dollars in government subsidies.

Will the Prime Minister finally kick Unifor off this panel, or is this all just part of his plan to try to rig the next election?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we said yesterday, the Conservatives are going down a dangerous path. This is just another line in their story trying to undermine our democratic institutions. They have gone after the CEO of Elections Canada, they have gone after the commissioner of Canada Elections, they have gone after the commissioner of the debates commission and now they are going after a free and independent press. Canadians deserve better and democracy deserves better.

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[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even though the new NAFTA has many shortcomings, the Liberal government wants to rush to ratify it. U.S. milk and poultry producers are about to flood our market.

Workers' jobs and rights are not adequately protected. The cost of certain medications could rise, and environmental protection is not guaranteed. In short, there are many parts of this agreement that are not progressive and that could hurt us.

Why will the Liberals not address these shortcomings rather than rushing to ratify the agreement?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the NDP needs to understand is that reopening this agreement would be like opening Pandora's box. Why is the NDP prepared to risk our economic stability?

It would be naive for the NDP to believe that Canadians would benefit from reopening this agreement. The NDP is playing a very dangerous game.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is simple. We want a better deal for working people.

While Liberals are ramming through the ratification of the new NAFTA, Democrats in the U.S. are fighting for a more progressive deal. Canadians want to know why the Liberals are not. Once again the Liberals are putting their interests ahead of priority number one, protecting Canadian jobs. If the Liberals push this through before the Democrats fix the deal, they are throwing away a once in a lifetime opportunity to make trade fair for Canadian workers. Under NAFTA, we lost over 400,000 manufacturing jobs alone.

I have a simple question. Why are the Liberals doing Donald Trump's bidding at the expense of Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the NDP needs to understand is that re-opening this deal would be like opening Pandora's box.

Oral Questions

We have an agreement that safeguards more than \$2 billion a day in cross-border trade. The NDP are naive at best and playing political games at worst to suggest that Canada would benefit from re-opening the deal.

If the NDP wants to take a page out of Donald Trump's playbook and withdraw from NAFTA, it should have the courage to say so.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, the Minister of Environment was caught saying something that was insulting, to say the least. She said, and I quote, “we've learned in the House of Commons, if you repeat it, if you say it louder, if that is your talking point, people will totally believe it.” Basically, repeating and shouting works. That is utterly insulting to Canadians and to the members of the House of Commons.

In light of that situation, how can the Minister of Environment have any credibility when it comes time to talk about our Paris targets?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how ironic to hear the Conservatives talking about credibility on environmental matters. We on this side of the House will take no lessons from the Conservatives. As people watching at home can see, only Conservatives like those across the aisle could oppose the polluter-pay principle.

We are proud to be taking action on climate change, protecting Canadians and their families and protecting the planet. We will invest in environmental protections for Canadians.

• (1440)

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier to refrain from shouting when someone else is speaking.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the environment, the Liberals are all talk and no action. However, they have done two things. They imposed the Liberal carbon tax and they sent \$4.5 billion in taxpayers' money to Houston. That is the Liberal record.

We are not the only ones who have noticed that the Liberals say one thing and do the opposite. The Liberal government's own “Clean Canada” report, which was released a few days ago, shows that the government is falling short of the Paris targets by 79 megatonnes.

What credibility does the Liberal government have when it comes to recognizing the Paris Agreement, when it did not even respect that agreement?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians watching at home, particularly those in my colleague's riding, see the Conservatives' true colours. The Conservatives have the nerve to criticize our plan for the environment when they have no plan of their own. The fact that they have no plan tells Canadians that the

Conservatives are against reducing greenhouse gas emissions. They do not want to do anything to lessen the impact of natural disasters. They have no regard for future generations.

We have a plan and we will take action. We will protect the environment for Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why is he always screaming over there?

The answer came from the environment minister, who said:

if you actually say it louder, we've learned in the House of Commons, if you repeat it, if you say it louder, if that is your talking point, people will totally believe it.

That is the Liberal strategy to convince Canadians they will be better off by paying higher gas prices while missing the Paris accord by 80 million tonnes of carbon. Is that not really the Liberal strategy, to say it louder even when it is wrong?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say this very calmly.

We will take no lessons from the Conservatives. Only Conservatives can be against putting a price on pollution. We are proud to act on climate change. We are proud to protect this generation and future generations. We are proud to protect our planet. We will continue to invest in disaster mitigation and resilience so that future generations do not have to spend year after year for damages caused by climate change.

The Speaker: A little calm is so nice.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that calmed him down a little bit. Unfortunately, Liberal members in the House do not realize that while they raise the volume and raise taxes at the same time, they make both our ears and our wallets worse off.

The member across the way, now that he has calmed down, is sitting behind a leader who has advocated \$1.60 a litre gas prices. Will he stand today and tell us exactly how high gas prices will go, once the full and final Liberal carbon tax is in place?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Conservatives is that either we shout and they do not listen, or we speak quietly and they do not listen. One thing is clear: Canadians who are watching us at home are listening, and they know one thing for sure. They know that the Conservatives have no plan for the environment, and they know that there will be no reduction in greenhouse gas emissions with the Conservatives. They will take no action to protect communities against natural disasters. They will take no action to protect this generation and future generations.

We made a different choice. We are going to invest to protect the planet, to protect Canadians and to protect our environment.

Oral Questions

•(1445)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, supply-managed sectors are always the first to be sacrificed in trade agreements. Between concessions granted through CETA, CPTPP and now NAFTA 2.0, the dairy sector is seeing close to a 10% loss to our domestic market for milk production. Democrats in the U.S. are working to improve some of the shortcomings of NAFTA 2.0, but here in Canada, Liberals are ready to accept that what they have given up is the best Canada can get.

If the trade deal can be improved upon, why is the government trying to rush through ratification now, when a better deal for Canadian farmers is attainable?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to reassure him and all supply-managed dairy farmers across Canada.

I would like them to know that we are making progress. We already announced the amount of funding earmarked for them in the last budget. I am sure that in the coming weeks, we will have more details to announce about the mechanisms that will help provide their compensation.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's cheese market is slumping as European cheeses flood in. CETA is not benefiting major players, and it is certainly not benefiting small producers in Quebec.

Domaine féodal, a cheese factory in Berthierville, is not even operating at 50% of its capacity. Guy and Lise are doing everything they can to protect their company and employees in the wake of the trade deals signed by the Liberals.

I am making a heartfelt plea today. Does the government have a plan for protecting Quebec's artisanal cheese producers?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague, as well as dairy processors. Again, we made a strong commitment to all supply-managed industries. We have created working groups, and we take these discussions very seriously. They will soon see how well we have listened.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Official Languages criss-crossed the country meeting with minority francophone communities. She soon realized that the Conservatives' cuts threatened the survival of organizations that promote our linguistic rights.

After presenting the most ambitious official languages action plan ever, the minister recently began the process of modernizing the Official Languages Act.

Can she tell us about the latest developments?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today in Ottawa, 500 people gathered to celebrate 50 years of official languages and to strengthen our act. It was an opportunity for me to make a big announcement about a new online tool for learning French and English. Developed by CBC/Radio-Canada, this new tool is free for everyone. It will be called “The Mauril” in honour of Mauril Bélanger, our official languages champion and dearly departed colleague.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the media is reporting that hundreds of criminals, including drug dealers and contract killers from Latin America, have entered Canada on fake Mexican passports. Yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety attempted to reassure us, saying that the numbers reported by the media cannot be verified. Canadians are not reassured if the public safety minister does not immediately know what is happening at our border.

Has the minister managed to verify the numbers today?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the premise of the question is entirely bogus. Since January 2018, lifting the visas with Mexico has resulted in Canada gaining nearly 500,000 legitimate travellers, generating millions of dollars in economic benefits. At the border, since January 2018, the CBSA has prepared inadmissibility reports for approximately 190 Mexican nationals on criminality grounds. That accounts for 0.04% of all Mexican travellers seeking—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the Minister of Public Safety who is charged with keeping Canadians safe, but he does not know what is happening at our border and cannot tell us how many drug lords and contract killers are flooding into the country on fake Mexican passports. Every day the minister does not have control of our border is a day that Canadians are at risk.

Can the minister tell us when he might be able to verify the number of criminals entering Canada unchecked, or even how these criminals are able to enter Canada with fake passports?

•(1450)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member simply refuses to hear. Let me repeat the point. At the border, since January 2018, CBSA has prepared inadmissibility reports for approximately 190 Mexican nationals on criminality grounds. That accounts for 0.04% of all Mexican travellers seeking entry into Canada. Canadian laws are being effectively enforced by the CBSA and by the RCMP.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good for the minister to say that officers sent back 190 Mexican nationals, but what we want to know is whether the minister thinks that Félix Séguin's report for TVA is true and that around 400 Mexican gang members are trafficking drugs in Canada. Yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, simply repeating unverified information does nothing for the security and the safety of Canadian borders. The facts are that when persons cross the border or arrive at a port of entry and present a problem, with either identification or perhaps not turning up for appropriate proceedings, or presenting any kind of public danger, they can and are detained until Canadian officials are satisfied of their status and their safety.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, and this falls under the responsibility of this government and the Prime Minister, who does not really believe in the safety and security of Canada, I am talking about an hour-long report from a journalist who travelled to Mexico and received information that cartel members are operating in Canada, including 200 in Montreal.

Can the minister tell us whether the government is taking action to find these dangerous cartel members?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when anyone is suspected of criminal activity in Canada, whether a Canadian citizen or a foreigner attempting to enter the country, the appropriate authorities, either CBSA at the border or the RCMP, pursue every measure under Canadian law to investigate these people, to charge them and, if they are inadmissible in Canada, to remove them and send them home.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, salmon farms in Clayoquot Sound, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, are experiencing a devastating sea lice emergency for the second year in a row. Again this year, juvenile wild salmon are being exposed to lethal loads of sea lice, with infection rates of up to 100%. British Columbia has never seen levels like this before, and wild chinook salmon are on the brink of extinction. When will the minister enforce the law and protect wild salmon?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans works to manage risk with provincial authorities and stakeholders in the industry.

With respect to sea lice, every single licensee has, as a condition of the licence, a requirement to monitor outbreaks of sea lice. Funding is in place and has been provided. All policy with regard to sea lice and aquaculture will be based on science and consultation with all appropriate stakeholders.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised to lower Canada's sky-high drug prices by improving the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board but backed down after opposition from Donald Trump and the drug lobby. Then they signed a new NAFTA, which the Parliamentary Budget Officer said would cost Canadians billions more for medicine. Now the government is gutting a crucial World Health Assembly resolution aimed at reducing global drug prices. Why are the Liberals doing big pharma's bidding and failing to lower the cost of medications for all Canadians?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear. If we want to move forward with the national pharmacare program, the first thing we have to do is lower drug prices. The first thing we did is that we are in the process of modernizing the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board. We have also joined the pan-Canadian pharmaceutical alliance, and so far we have saved billions of dollars because we are able to bulk-purchase drugs with other provinces and territories. Finally, we have launched the advisory council on the implementation of a national pharmacare program. I look forward to receiving its final report next month.

* * *

● (1455)

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is inconceivable that the Liberal government, the Canadian government, did not invite the families of fallen soldiers to a memorial here in Canada.

This is highly disrespectful, not only to our fallen soldiers, but also to their families and loved ones.

The minister was there and he was aware of the event details. When did he learn that the families would not be there? He is the minister. He is the boss. He is a veteran.

Why did he approve this completely disrespectful decision?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, there was a mistake made. I can assure my colleague that I talked to the veteran today. The veteran will be in Normandy.

Oral Questions

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence knew in advance that the families of the fallen would be excluded from the Afghanistan memorial dedication. He was there, after making this cruel and heartless decision. Canadians have witnessed his government's shameful contempt for those who gave their lives. Why would he dishonour his position and approve such a ceremony?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said in the House yesterday, and outside to the media, I offer my heartfelt apologies to the families of the fallen for this ceremony. The families of our fallen will always have access to this memorial and an appropriate ceremony will be organized for them.

I would ask the member opposite to stop playing politics and trying to make it seem like the Conservatives have a better monopoly.

We went to the Party Under the Stars. We publicly stand together and we ask the member to stand together and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Let us not have any interruptions of the question or the answer.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, trying to use wiggle words instead of making a decision is not leadership.

Our Canadian Armed Forces and our veterans want a defence minister, not a spectator. The defence minister sat idly by during a secret ceremony for the Afghanistan memorial, instead of standing up for the families of the fallen. As someone who served in Afghanistan, it is shocking that the minister could be so thoughtless when it comes to honouring our fallen soldiers. Why did the defence minister take part in the secret ceremony when he knew it excluded the families of the fallen?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to politicize or dignify the member's insinuations in this regard.

As I stated, I want to offer my heartfelt apologies to the families of our fallen. This memorial will always be accessible to the families. An appropriate ceremony will be organized for them.

I ask the member to stop playing politics in this regard and work together. He knows exactly what I am talking about.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Members need to remember that this is the House of Commons and it is a place where we have to allow others to speak. Even if we do not like what we hear, it is still important that we do that.

The hon. member for Montarville.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week the international grand committee on big data, privacy and

democracy is meeting in Ottawa to understand how governments around the world can tackle challenges to our democracies.

[*Translation*]

We know that Canada enjoys a strong democracy that is an example to the world. However, a lot of work remains to be done to develop our model of open government.

[*English*]

Could the President of the Treasury Board tell the House about the leadership role Canada is playing on this important topic?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Joyce Murray (President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from Montarville for his question and his work on this topic.

[*English*]

As a government, we have led by signing onto the Christchurch Call to Action and by announcing Canada's very first data charter.

[*Translation*]

This week, Canada is co-chairing the Open Government Partnership Global Summit 2019.

[*English*]

We are welcoming governments, civil society and thought leaders from around the world to come together and help us tackle threats to democracy and help chart a pathway forward together.

I invite all members of the House to join us as we work with governments to make government more—

● (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Prime Minister's out-of-control spending includes a plan to run deficits for decades, and he has to raise taxes on Canadians to pay for it. His carbon tax is not enough to pay for his big spending, so he has to find a new way to take money from hard-working Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that he supports the Liberal plan to introduce a new tax on drinks?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making the healthy choice the easier choice for Canadians. That is why we have moved forward proudly with our healthy eating strategy.

Oral Questions

Last year, we banned industrial trans fats. We have also launched a wonderful revision of Canada's food guide, which has been extremely well received by Canadians. We are moving forward with respect to restricting unhealthy food to kids.

Let me make it clear. We have no plans on moving forward with the policy about which the member opposite is speaking.

* * *

[Translation]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the passengers' bill of rights has so many exemptions that it looks more like a list of official excuses than an actual travellers' bill of rights. For more than four years travellers have been promised that their rights will be respected, but instead they get over-bookings, unreasonable delays, and cancelled flights. Last Friday, the minister told them that they could wait another six months, something about satisfying the airline industry lobbyists yet again.

When the minister is done with his industry's bill of rights, does he plan to come up with one for passengers as well?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are extremely proud of the passengers' bill of rights.

Our government believes that when someone buys a ticket, they have certain rights. I encourage my colleague, who is clearly unfamiliar with the content of the bill of rights, to go to the official Canadian Transportation Agency site and get the facts before saying such ridiculous things.

[English]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for decades, Canadians have had to endure long delays at the airport, hence the interest today. They have also had to endure cancelled flights and lost baggage, with no clear, consistent rules to support them when such cases occur. My constituents are well aware of these issues and are looking to our government to make positive change.

Could the Minister of Transport please update my constituents and all Canadians on the progress that is being made by this great Liberal government?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Humber River—Black Creek for her tireless work as chair of transport committee.

We in the Liberal government believe that when an airline sells a ticket to a passenger, that passenger has certain rights. That is why we implemented the air passenger protection regulations, which we announced last Friday and which will come into effect this summer.

Air passengers are entitled to certain rights and this Liberal government will be there to protect them.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a Canadian citizen, André Gauthier, has been detained for

over three years now, first in Dubai and now in Oman. The authorities in Oman are now in the process of deporting him to Dubai, where he could face life in prison, at his age, in a country with a poor human rights record.

Canadian authorities promised his family they would intervene. When will the Liberal government finally take concrete action in this case? The life of a Canadian is at stake.

[English]

Ms. Pamela Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Global Affairs Canada is aware of a Canadian citizen detained in Oman. Our officials are closely monitoring the case and consular services are certainly being provided.

I, personally, have been actively engaged on this case, including with representatives of the Government of Oman. Beyond that, I am unable to disclose any further details.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here is how the government responded to my question yesterday:

With regard to pipelines, especially pipelines that cross provincial borders, it is up to the federal government to do the work.

For Ottawa, doing the work means always saying “yes” to pipelines, every time, no exceptions. In light of the B.C. Court of Appeal ruling, we are worried about the energy east project resurfacing in Quebec.

Will the government promise to never revive the energy east project in Quebec?

● (1505)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that question is hardly appropriate, since there is no energy east project currently before us. Until there is a project proposed to us, we cannot give our opinion or take a position.

What I can say is that we take our responsibility to the environment very seriously. We are making sure that good projects move forward, while safeguarding good jobs in Canada. That is our priority. We are moving forward in the right way with all projects in Canada.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is funny how their good projects are always in the industries that pollute the most. Since 1956, Ottawa has always said yes to the oil industry's pipeline requests. The government always says yes and only yes.

Quebec does not want any more pipelines full of dirty oil. Quebec is saying no to energy east, and if Quebec does not want it, then neither does the Bloc.

It is great that the project is not on the table, but the government needs to commit to keeping it that way. Will the Prime Minister commit to never reviving energy east? Will he make that solemn promise today?

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are honouring our economic and environmental commitments. We are investing in clean technologies and renewable energy. We are supporting our traditional resource industries as they become more sustainable, and we are encouraging innovation. We are helping more Canadians get into zero-emission vehicles, and we are reducing the dependence on diesel in our rural, remote and indigenous communities.

We are the only party that has a credible plan to fight climate change and reduce pollution while growing the economy. That is exactly what we will continue to offer.

[*English*]

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, last month, the Minister of Natural Resources said that a final decision would be made by June 18 regarding the Trans Mountain pipeline. Now we see the project in peril yet again, thanks to the provincial government of British Columbia.

We have already spent billions of dollars to buy this pipeline and we cannot wait for another year in court. We need action now. Let us stop this charade and get the results that Albertans and Canadians need, which is of course the immediate approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Could the minister confirm that we are still on track for June 18?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to meet our duty to consult and to respond to what we have heard from indigenous groups, with advice from the federal representative Justice Iacobucci, we communicated to indigenous communities that a decision on TMX could be made by June 18. Our goal is to make a decision toward the end of this period.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Elizabeth Cabezas, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Ecuador; the Honourable Andy Daniel, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Saint Lucia; and Mr. Edwin Tong, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Health of the Government of Singapore. They are here, along with other parliamentarians, as members of the International Grand Committee on Big Data, Privacy and Democracy.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 32

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.) moved that a ways and means motion to introduce an act to implement the agreement between Canada, the United States of America and the United Mexican States be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1515)

Before the Clerk announced the results of the vote:

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I want to check to see if my vote was registered in favour.

The Speaker: The clerks did not see the hon. member stand during the yeas or nays. Would she like to indicate what she intended to vote?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I did stand, and if it was not registered, I am registering yea.

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 1319*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Alghabra
Allison
Anandasangaree
Arnold
Arya
Badawey
Bains
Barrett
Beech
Bennett
Bergen
Berthold
Bibeau
Blair
Boissonnault
Boucher
Bratina
Calkins
Carrie
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Clement
Cormier
Dabrusin
Davidson
Dhaliwal
Diotte
Dreeschen
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Egliniski
El-Khoury

Albas
Aldag
Alleslev
Amos
Anderson
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barlow
Baylis
Bendayan
Benzen
Bernier
Bezan
Bittle
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Bossio
Brassard
Caesar-Chavannes
Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Clarke
Cooper
Cuzner
Damoff
Deltell
Dhillon
Doherty
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Ehssasi
Ellis

S. O. 57

Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Falk (Provencher)
Fergus
Finley
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Fuhr
Garneau
Genuis
Gladu
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Graham
Hajdu
Hardie
Hehr
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Joly
Jowhari
Kelly
Khalid
Kitchen
Kusie
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lebouthillier
Leslie
Liepert
Lloyd
Lockhart
Longfield
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Maguire
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)
Monsef
Morrissey
Murray
Nater
Ng
Obhrai
Oliphant
O'Regan
Ouелlette
Paul-Hus
Peterson
Philpott
Poilievre
Qualtrough
Ratansh
Reid
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Saroya
Schiefke
Serré
Shanahan
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Spengemann
Strahl
Tabbara
Tassi
Trost

Eyking
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Fillmore
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Gallant
Généreux
Gerretsen
Godin
Goodale
Gourde
Grewal
Harder
Hébert
Hoback
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jordan
Kang
Kent
Khera
Kmiec
Lake
Lametti
Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lefebvre
Levitt
Lightbound
Lobb
Long
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Martel
McColeman
McDonald
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz
Nassif
Nault
Nicholson
O'Connell
Oliver
O'Toole
Paradis
Peschisolido
Petipas Taylor
Picard
Poissant
Raïtt
Rayes
Richards
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Sarai
Scarpaleggia
Schmale
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sopuck
Sorenson
Stanton
Stubbs
Tan
Tilson
Trudeau

Van Kesteren
Vandenbeld
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Virani
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Vandal
Vaughan
Viersen
Wagantall
Waugh
Weir
Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
Zahid

NAYS

Members

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Beaulieu
Blaikie
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Cannings
Choquette
Davies
Dubé
Dusseau
Fortin
Gill
Hughes
Jolibois
Kwan
MacGregor
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Duvall
Garrison
Hardcastle
Johns
Julian
Laverdière
Manly
Mathysen
Moore
Pauzé
Quach
Rankin
Ste-Marie
Thériault

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the consideration of Commons Business No. 30, I move:

That the debate not be further adjourned.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the Chair will have some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in this question period.

The hon. opposition House leader.

● (1520)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am really disappointed. We have had such a short amount of time to debate this motion, and it is very disappointing to see a motion like this to extend the hours. Even though we have already indicated that we have some understanding of it, some of the other parts of the motion are disturbing. We have not had solid answers to some of our questions. It is disappointing to see this debate being shut down.

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I would therefore like to ask the hon. government House leader if she could please assure us that she will adopt our amendments and, as we only have two supply days left as Conservatives, that she would allow those supply days to continue into the evening sitting. I think that would be fair and reasonable, and it would show that there would be some co-operation, as opposed to just giving us a very short day and not allowing the opposition to do our job, which is to hold the government to account.

I understand that the hon. government House leader is ramming this through, but could she give us assurances that she will not shorten our ability to hold the Liberals to account?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opposition House leader's acknowledging the importance of extending hours so that we can discuss important legislation that actually benefits the lives of Canadians. Most of the motion is exactly, word for word, the motion that has been submitted in previous parliaments. Within the extension of hours motion, members who will not be running again will be provided time to make a speech, because it is important that they do so.

When it comes to the opposition days the member is referring to, within the Standing Orders, a portion of those days can be allotted to Wednesdays and Fridays. My intention will always be to provide them on longer days. As long as we can advance government legislation, I will ensure that we are able to find a collaborative way forward. If that is not the desire of the opposition, then I am restricted to limited tools and limited days to provide those days. I encourage the opposition House leader, as well as her colleagues, to let us know how much time is needed so that bills such as Bill C-81 can be returned to the Senate. There is no reason we cannot have that finished today so that it can receive royal assent.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am saddened by this. As I mentioned in the speech I was not even able to complete on this motion that strips the opposition of any of the rights and tools we use to hold the government to account, previous times this had been raised four weeks prior to our adjourning, the Liberals and Conservatives, combined, skipped over 200 opportunities to speak on behalf of their constituents.

In other words, there was a speaking order. When it came to the Liberals, they simply had nobody standing up at all to speak on behalf of their constituents, on behalf of Canadians. We have always been in favour of working hard, but the NDP historically has been the only party that actually shows up to work during these midnight sessions.

Last time, there were 200 times the Conservatives or Liberals did not show up for their speaking spots. The New Democrats did not miss a single speaking spot. Every single time we were assigned the ability to speak, we spoke out on behalf of our constituents.

Given the precedent, can the government House leader assure us that the Liberals will actually show up to work this time?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will not be debating this motion after today, but I have good news for the NDP House leader. He actually gets to continue his speech, so he will receive 20 minutes like any other member would. He will also be entitled to his 10-minute question and answer period. I know that my parliamentary secretary is looking forward to asking him at least one

or two great questions. I do not want him to be misled in believing that he would not have that opportunity. That opportunity will be provided to him.

What I do know is that we have debated this motion. It is a motion that has been seen in this chamber before. It is important that we get to government legislation that would benefit and impact, for the better, the lives of Canadians.

When it comes to the member's reference to members speaking up for their constituents, of course all members of Parliament want to speak on behalf of their constituents. That is what we were elected to do. We will always be part of the debate, but sometimes what happens, especially when it comes to the NDP on legislation such as the CUSMA, which we will see coming forward at some point, is that the New Democrats will not want to see it advance, so they will want to keep talking about it. For the government to see it advance, we share our time with members of the NDP so that every single one of its members is able to speak.

The New Democrats could choose to allow legislation to be called to a vote so that we could advance to the next stage and see more legislation advance so that we are benefiting more Canadians. Unfortunately, the New Democrats have taken a page from the Conservatives' handbook. Rather than actually serve Canadians, they would rather play partisan politics.

• (1525)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current government has shown a great deal of disrespect for the opposition. In particular, we see the regular scheduling of opposition days on Wednesdays, when, because we have caucus meetings in the morning, we have very little time to actually debate the proposals coming from the opposition. A simple, reasonable aspect of this motion would have been to allow those opposition day debates to continue into evening sittings so that even if they tried to schedule an opposition day for us to have something like two hours of debate, at least we would be able to take advantage of the evenings as well, given that the evenings would be available for government orders. The Liberals do not have the minimal respect for the opposition to allow that to happen either.

It is clear, and has been clear for the last three and a half years, that the current government does not believe in the role of the opposition. It simply wants an audience. Will the government House leader see some reason here, recognize the important role the opposition plays in our democracy, and allow the extension of hours to be available for opposition days as well as for government orders?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I have had to say this to a Conservative member in the past. The Conservatives do not speak for me as an individual. I am on the record, not only in this House but outside this chamber, talking about the importance of our democracy and the role the official opposition plays, as well as the third party and independent members within the chamber, including the members of the Green Party. I recognize that all members are elected to represent their constituents, and I have said that in this chamber as well as outside the chamber. The member, frankly, should apologize for putting words in my mouth, because that is totally untrue and is not a fair representation of my position.

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The Conservatives have never let the facts get in the way, so let me share some facts. In the last Parliament, 11 opposition days were provided on Wednesdays, and five were provided on Fridays, out of 88 opposition days. In this Parliament, there have so far been 79 opposition days. To prove that the member has totally misled Canadians, none of them have been on Wednesdays, and two have been on Fridays. Those are the numbers, and the member should check them out.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we just had a vote in this place, which is the first step on the road to ratifying the new NAFTA. The NDP has rightly expressed some real concerns about the nature of that deal, as we have expressed concerns about a number of other trade deals the Liberals and Conservatives together have negotiated over the span of a number of governments. The reason that is relevant to this debate about extending the sitting hours is that the government, once again, seems to be in a major rush to make a big mistake, which is to ratify this agreement prior to the issues with the agreement being resolved in neighbouring countries.

We do not actually know what the final agreement is going to look like, yet simply because the Vice-President of the United States is coming on Thursday, the government is in a hurry to ratify, just as it was in a hurry to ratify CETA, even though we know that Britain is still working out whether it is going to be part of the European Union. Canada was ratifying CETA long before Europe and long before it resolved whether one of our major trading partners was even going to be part of that block. This insane rush to get ink on deals, without any regard for the real content, has been a problem for Canadians, who have lost employment to these kinds of deals over the last decades. I am not prepared to support a motion that is going to help the Liberals ram through ratification of a deal we do not even know the details of.

While the reasons the New Democrats have opposed some of these measures in the past stand, we have a particular reason this time to be opposed to longer sitting hours, and that is because the government is trying to create an opportunity, with the Conservatives being complicit in ramming this through Parliament, invoking a special kind of closure that only works when two parties agree to it, to make a big mistake faster, and that is something I simply do not support.

I want to know why the government is concerned about extending sitting hours to accomplish something that would rush a deal, the details of which we do not even know. I would like to hear what the House leader has to say about that, frankly.

• (1530)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: First, Mr. Speaker, our question and answer session right now is with regard to the extension of hours so that we can sit longer and have more time for debate.

What the member has just confirmed is that there is no trade deal the NDP will ever support. New Democrats do not seem to understand that Canada is a trading nation. Canada has 36 million people. We have a huge land mass, but we are very small when it comes to the number of people. Our companies have not only great solutions for Canadians, they have great solutions for the whole world.

When it comes to the CETA legislation, that legislation has actually helped small businesses expand into international markets and has created jobs in my riding of Waterloo, has—

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, along with his hon. friend from Avalon, not to speak when someone else has the floor.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the member for Avalon was getting excited, because companies in his riding have also benefited from this trade deal. Members from different parts of the country, especially from the east coast, have had challenging times when it comes to the economy. When we sign deals that allow those businesses to grow through innovation and trade, and they create jobs at home, members get excited, as they should. I would hope that the member for Elmwood—Transcona would take some time to learn about the companies in his riding that are benefiting from that trade deal. If they are not, we should definitely connect them with the Trade Commissioner Service so that they can continue to create more jobs, as Canadians have been doing from coast to coast to coast. Over a million jobs have been created by Canadians for Canadians since our government took office. These trade deals are working.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader obviously has a lot on her plate. I can see why the minister got quite angry at one of the previous Conservative speakers, because the government has not been in control of its own agenda. It has constantly found ways to stall legislation. It constantly has mismanaged the House's schedule. Unfortunately, we are at a point where, before we even hit June, the government is seeking to extend the sitting hours.

The Conservative House leader has made a very reasonable request of the government, because the House leader for the Liberal government has asked to extend sitting hours early, before we are even in June. It is very important for the government to show respect not just for this House but for Parliament, and when a reasonable request is made, we would hope that the government would be reasonable and allow our voices to be heard on our own opposition motions.

Will the House leader offer extended sitting hours for opposition days?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. I will say that we have endeavoured to manage the House's time by working collaboratively with opposition parties. There are examples of where we were able to succeed, and there were opportunities which, unfortunately, the opposition did not want to take us up on, but that is the opposition's prerogative.

I have the utmost respect for this chamber. I have the utmost respect for all members of Parliament and all responsibilities within the chamber. Any good government should have a strong opposition. It is important that a government be held to account, but it is also important that we debate legislation and be able to call legislation to a vote.

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I agree that we do need a lot more regard and respect in this chamber. I know there have been many times and many occasions where it was not felt that such regard and respect were in this chamber. I recall budget day not too long ago. Canadians from coast to coast to coast sent emails to my office about the fact that because the opposition members were so busy banging on their desks, they could not hear the Minister of Finance deliver a budget that was going to benefit them. Mr. Speaker, you were not able to get any order in this chamber because of the lack of regard and respect, which is unfortunate.

When it comes to regard and respect, it is a two-way street. I will do my best to respect all roles. I will do my best to find better ways forward. The extension of sitting hours is another way to ensure that members can speak to legislation to advance the concerns of their constituents.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in dealing with this process, I would like to ask the hon. government House leader this. This is the eighth year in which I have had the honour to serve the constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands. We had only one June in that period when we did not sit until midnight. It was June 2016. Oh, that glorious month of June 2016.

In any case, I do not recall a single other time when the motion to extend the sitting hours has been put through with time allocation on the debate to go to extended sitting hours. I do not have any recollection of any other time when we have had this process that we are experiencing today. We have never actually started extended sitting hours before the month of June, to my recollection.

I wonder if the government House leader can explain what has gone wrong in the process. What we know to expect from government at the point when we are about to rise for the summer is that things get jammed up and we sit until midnight. I am wondering how it happened this time that we have time allocation on the motion to sit until midnight.

• (1535)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the leader of the Green Party actually has a seat that is now closer to you so that she can hear a lot of what is taking place here. I know she stood up on numerous occasions referencing Standing Orders because it gets so loud in this chamber.

I am not going to speculate as to what is taking place but it has definitely been a challenge advancing important legislation. I know it has been a challenge on multiple occasions but I will endeavour to keep an open door policy so that we can find a way forward.

I do appreciate the member rising and sharing some of her history within this chamber. I am not sure that I remember it the same way. I was not a sitting member, but as an observer of the House, I know that the former Conservative House leader, Peter Van Loan, was notorious for using these tools. I recognize that sometimes there are challenging times. I have tried to take a different approach, but when that approach does not work, I seem to mimic some of his actions. It seems that the Conservatives are quite appreciative of that. That is why it is important that we extend these hours.

I will just say really quickly that the leader of the Green Party on occasion has not been able to speak to legislation but she shares a

really important perspective and represents many Canadians. I have always tried to extend some time to ensure that she can get her comments on the record. She was the only member of her caucus but now it has doubled, which is amazing. We hope to still keep hearing from her because she does excellent work and represents really important concerns and comments on behalf of Canadians. We need to hear more of that.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just referenced the record, if we want to call it that, of Peter Van Loan with regard to time allocation or closure. The Liberals campaigned against it. Their platform stated how differently they were going to govern and how they would never use time allocation or closure. This is the sixth time they have used closure, which means that nothing else happens and the debate is over. It is the most draconian method of time allocation.

The Liberals have invoked time allocation and limited debate 59 times. The member can talk about how she wants to hear from the leader of the Green Party or how she wants a better House of Commons for all of us, but for most of this Parliament, she is the one who has been cutting off debate. With 18 days left, now she is going to keep an open mind about the future and how she will operate in the future.

I want to correct the record. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan made some excellent points about cutting short the supply days, and the government House leader very indignantly told us that she had never scheduled an opposition day on a Wednesday in the entire time of this Parliament. In the last six opposition days alone, three of them were on a Wednesday and one on a Friday: Wednesday, March 20; Wednesday, May 1; Wednesday, May 15 and Friday, April 5. That is just in the last period.

Maybe the member will get up and apologize for breaking her campaign promise to Canadians and for misleading the House on the last number of opposition days.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, when our Prime Minister says that in Canada diversity is our strength, he is not only talking about the shells we occupy but he is also talking about the diversity of opinions, regions and experiences, and the list goes on. There is definitely a diversity of interpretations right here, because what we said in the campaign was that we were against the improper use of omnibus legislation and the improper use of time allocation.

Under the previous government there was no desire to consult and ask. We were told how many days would be given, and that was it. If we did not comply with the hon. Peter Van Loan, then he would use his tools. I have tried to ask how much time is needed for debate. Sometimes I have received answers and sometimes I have not. Members can see clearly that there are times we receive answers and there are times we do not.

When it comes to Bill C-81, I publicly state that we have received amendments from the Senate. The minister has now stated that we will be accepting all those amendments. There is no reason we should have to use time allocation, yet we are not getting commitment from the official opposition that it will let that legislation go.

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The legislation has been scrutinized. It has been to committee, returned to this chamber and been through all stages in the Senate. It has come with amendments, which we have accepted, yet the Conservatives will not let that legislation go. Therefore, there is no way for us to get that legislation to a vote if I do not use those tools.

The members opposite need to take partial responsibility and understand why those tools are being used. We could advance, and if they do not want to, it is their prerogative and the choice they are making. However, I will ensure that the government advances the mandate that Canadians gave us. When it comes to Bill C-81, we are talking about a more accessible Canada. Who could be against that?

• (1540)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the government House leader likes to talk about her government's mandate, but I would like to remind her that her government was elected by a plurality. In fact, she would do well to remember that 61% of Canadians voted for MPs who sit on this side of the House. We have rights, as opposition members, to hold the government to account and to identify legislation when it has problems. This motion is in effect going to strip away our rights to hold the government to account, so I have big problems with that.

It is quite obvious that these extended sitting hours are because the government is rushing headlong into trying to get the ratification agreement for the new NAFTA put through before we recess for the summer. What is the government going to do if Democrats in the United States delay ratification in Congress or stop it all together? What is the government's position going to be in that eventuality? I do not think it has thought that eventuality through, and I would like an explanation from the government House leader of what the government is going to do if that scenario plays out.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is important to note that the NDP House leader stated that we are giving too much of our time to NDP members and that they have had to speak so much to represent their constituents. Now another NDP member is reminding me that the NDP received a plurality of votes and should be able to represent its constituents.

I have said from day one that all members of Parliament should be able to represent their constituents. It is important that we are able to have meaningful debate so that we can listen to what Canadians are saying.

When it comes to improving legislation, the government, under the Prime Minister, has accepted more amendments than any government before it, because we want to ensure that we advance good legislation that works. In addition, not only have we accepted amendments through the committee process within the House of Commons, but we have accepted amendments from the Senate. We recognize that when the Senate scrutinizes legislation, it can benefit more Canadians.

We are seeing results because parliamentarians are being empowered to do the work they are here to do. We have increased resources to committees because we know it is important that they be able to scrutinize legislation and bring in witnesses.

When it comes to the NAFTA or CUSMA legislation the member is referring to, this question and answer period is not necessarily for that legislation. I encourage him to talk to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on this.

I can also let him know that we have considered all eventualities. The minister has been quite clear that since the steel tariffs have now been lifted, we will be introducing legislation. Today's ways and means motion has provided a way for us to do that.

We have already said that we will be closely watching what the United States and Mexico are doing, because this is a deal that impacts all three countries and we are looking for a win-win-win. However, it is really important that the NDP understands that Canada is a trading nation and it is okay to support trade deals.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question relates to the number of sitting days. We have 19 days left, and it is really important to recognize that Canadians have an expectation that governments work consistently from the day they are elected up until the next election. There is an expectation that when the House is sitting, we continue to move forward on positive public policy.

Could the member provide her thoughts with respect to how important it is that we work hard right to the very end? If that means we have to sit additional hours that last into the evening, as previous governments have also done, members on the government side of the House are prepared to do so.

• (1545)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for Winnipeg North for his excellent work within the chamber and in his riding. He works really hard to ensure that the voices of his constituents are heard, and he has spoken to many pieces of legislation. He is quite informed, as he spends time reading legislation; he recognizes the history of a lot of the bills we are putting forward and how Canadians can benefit from them.

I believe we need to work really hard all the way to the end. I know Canadians work really hard day in, day out, and there is no reason we cannot do the same.

I recognize that extended hours are quite straining, not only for members of Parliament but also for our teams, as well as for the pages and the administration that helps the House of Commons function. I thank them for their great work.

At the end of the month, we will be returning to our ridings to speak directly with Canadians so that we can ensure they are being represented. There are really important pieces of legislation that need to be advanced, and if we can find a better way to advance them and in less time, then it would be great for us to do so.

I can promise members that my door is open, and I look forward to hearing from the opposition. If its members have better ideas regarding how to get out of here earlier, I welcome any constructive feedback.

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Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up where the hon. government House leader left off with respect to the resources used when we extend the hours in this place. I note the pages, the staff and others have to be here for that particular period of time.

There are a couple of pieces of legislation that I know concern constituents in Whitby. I have received emails about them. One is Bill C-81. During debate earlier today, we heard an assurance that this piece of legislation will be passed.

If we are going to be extending House hours and using more resources, I would like reassurance from the government House leader that the pieces of legislation that are important to Canadians, which we have been sent here to debate and discuss, are going to be passed in a timely manner before the House rises.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member for Whitby is hearing from constituents when it comes to Bill C-81 and other pieces of legislation. We will be debating that legislation tonight and we will have extended hours. If the member has not had an opportunity to speak to that legislation, I look forward to working with her to ensure that she is provided the opportunity to represent the voices of her constituents.

I want to see Bill C-81 receive royal assent. This is an important week when it comes to persons with disabilities. It is the third year that we have celebrated National AccessAbility Week, and I know there are good people on the Hill who came to see the Minister of Accessibility speak to this legislation.

I want to see it advance, and when it comes to other pieces of legislation, if I cannot find a way forward through working with the opposition parties to be able to advance that legislation, I will use the limited tools I have available. Every time I use those tools, I can assure members that I use them with regret. I do hope we are able to find a better way forward.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, what we really are seeing is a scandal-ridden government that is in its final days and has mismanaged the House entirely. Bill C-81 is another example: The government's response to the Senate amendments only came to us on a Thursday before we rose for the one-week break. We came back after the constituency break, and we have not had a chance as caucus to look at the government's response. What did the government members do at the last minute? They brought the legislation here today.

This is an important piece of legislation, and the government has done virtually nothing to help persons with disabilities. In fact, it has done everything it can to hurt them. We all remember what the government has done to people with diabetes, and we know what it has done to individuals who were working at Library and Archives. This is the problem with mismanagement.

I know that my hon. colleague, the government House leader, is well staffed, and maybe this is why we are getting short opposition days. She is maybe experiencing Wednesdays differently from the way we experience Wednesdays. However, of the last six opposition days, three were on a Wednesday and one was on a Friday: Wednesday, March 20 was an opposition day; Wednesday, May 1

was an opposition day; Wednesday, May 15 was an opposition day, as was Friday, April 5.

I would like the member to correct the record and admit that she has consistently given the opposition short days so that we cannot do the job we need to do, which is holding the Liberals to account.

● (1550)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the opposition House leader definitely experiences things very differently. When it comes to Bill C-81, I encourage her to talk to people from the communities that are going to benefit from that legislation. I know there are people on Parliament Hill right now who just heard her comments. She seems to be a little confused as to what she is referring to. This is historic legislation, and the amendments that came from the Senate were probably given. It is true that the Conservatives never would have accepted amendments from the Senate. The difference is that we accept them quite often, because we know they improve legislation.

Where the Conservatives would have said no really quickly, we actually pondered the legislation. When it comes to Bill C-81, people seem to know that the Conservatives support the legislation but will not let it come to a vote, because the Conservatives will put partisan politics ahead of Canadians every single time.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Call in the members.

● (1630)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*Government Orders**(Division No. 1320)*

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Baylis
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bibeau
Bittle	Blair
Boissonnault	Bossio
Bratina	Caesar-Chavannes
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Eyking
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Freeland
Fuhr	Gameau
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Graham	Grewal
Hardie	Harvey
Hébert	Hehr
Hogg	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Jordan	Jowhari
Kang	Khalid
Khera	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Soeurs)	
Monsef	Morrissey
Murray	Nassif
Ng	O'Connell
Oliphant	Oliver
O'Regan	Ouellette
Paradis	Peschisolido
Peterson	Petitpas Taylor
Picard	Poissant
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Rioux	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Rota
Ruimy	Rusnak
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sorbara	Spengemann
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Whalen

Wrzesnewskyj
YoungYip
Zahid — 156

NAYS

Members

Aboutaif	Albas
Albrecht	Alleslev
Allison	Anderson
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold
Bezan	Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boucher	Boudrias
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brousseau
Cannings	Caron
Carrie	Choquette
Clarke	Cooper
Davidson	Davies
Deltell	Diotte
Doherty	Donnelly
Dreeschen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Eglinski
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Finley
Fortin	Gallant
Garrison	Généreux
Genuis	Gill
Gladu	Godin
Gourde	Hardcastle
Harder	Hoback
Hughes	Johns
Julian	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kniec	Kwan
Lake	Laverdière
Liepert	Lloyd
Lobb	Lukivski
MacGregor	MacKenzie
Maguire	Manly
Martel	Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen	May (Saenich—Gulf Islands)
McCaughey (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Moore	Motz
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	Obhrai
O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Paupé	Plamondon
Poilevrie	Quach
Raitt	Ramsey
Rankin	Rayes
Reid	Richards
Sansoucy	Saroya
Schmale	Shipley
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Strahl
Stubbs	Thériault
Tilson	Trost
Trudel	Van Kesteren
Vecchio	Viersen
Wagantall	Warkentin
Wagha	Webber
Weir	Wong
Yurdiga — 129	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

RESUMING DEBATE

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Government Orders

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby has 10 minutes remaining.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would again like to say hello to the deaf community, the people who have been here all day listening to the debates. We welcome them.

I would love to be able to say that we will be sitting to midnight until the third week of June because the Liberals have suddenly realized that they actually have to put into action the democratic reforms they promised back in 2015, that they actually have to have proportional representation, as the Prime Minister said in 2015 when indicating that that election would be last one under first past the post. If the government were saying, “Gosh, we forgot that promise and want to come back to sit until midnight” we would be overjoyed. We would be saying it was great.

If the Liberals said that we have to sit to midnight until June 21 because they suddenly realized there is an affordable-housing crisis in this country and that there are literally hundreds of thousands of families who are struggling to keep a roof over their heads, tens of thousands of families out on the streets, and the government wants to resolve it and build housing now and put a roof over everybody's heads, the New Democrats would be overjoyed to sit until midnight. That would be the case if the government said so, but it has not.

If the Liberals said about pharmacare, “Gosh, there are millions of Canadians who cannot afford their medication and are struggling to take the medication their doctors have prescribed to them, so we are going to keep a promise and bring pharmacare in now,” we in the NDP would say, “Yes, absolutely, we are prepared to sit to midnight until June 21 to bring in pharmacare.”

None of those things are on the docket. There is some important legislation, all of which could have been improved if the Liberals actually listened. All of it could have been improved if the Liberals accepted amendments from the opposition.

We were just talking about the accessibility act earlier today. The disability community put forward very strong recommendations for changes and amendments, as did the NDP, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh in particular, all of which were ignored and left on the table. The government has simply refused to improve any of the legislation before the House and is refusing to take any of the actions it committed to back in 2015.

I mentioned democratic reform just a few moments ago. We remember the solemn promise at the time that it would be the last election under first past the post. If so, we would now be dealing with an election in which every vote would count, and coming out of that election we would have a parliament that was actually representative of Canadians' views. My colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford mentioned earlier today in the House that 62% of Canadians did not even vote for the current government, and yet the government has 100% of the power. That is why the government can impose its closure motion, and now this motion that strips the opposition of all of its rights.

For what reason is the government doing that when it has failed on so many counts?

I cannot even begin to talk about the whole issue of the climate emergency. The NDP offered a very substantive motion just two weeks ago. In offering that motion, the member for Burnaby South was very eloquent. There was a whole series of measures that needed to be taken. It was a climate emergency. It needed to be done and accomplished immediately, and those measures were set out very carefully by the NDP. The government voted against it. Then the Liberals brought forward a climate emergency motion that is basically a narrative of what Canadians know to be true, but does not in any way address the fundamental problems that Canada will be facing if we do not contend with climate change.

I mentioned in the House a couple of weeks ago what we have seen in just our lifetime in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The month of August used to be a time of sunny skies and blue skies, but for the last few years has been choked with smoke from the hundreds of wildfires that erupt on Vancouver Island and in the interior of British Columbia.

• (1635)

In the last three years, elderly people have had to stay indoors. I was with a youth group just two weeks ago. Its members talked about how some people in their 18, 19, 20-year age group were forced to wear gas masks because of the intensity of the smoke. They talked about the inability of people to even go outside. That is happening in our lifetime.

This is why we offered the climate emergency motion, which was substantive and would have changed the way the government acts. It stated that instead of building pipelines, the government needed to invest immediately in renewable energy, yet the Liberal government voted against it. It voted against all those aspects. It wants to go ahead full bore on a pipeline that British Columbians do not want and that will accelerate climate change. The government postures and says that it will and put a price on carbon, but all the large emitters are exempt.

Coming back to the motion, it is the posturing that is the most disturbing about all of this. The government is saying that we need to sit until midnight right through until June 21. There are some valid pieces of legislation that we are happy to facilitate through. However, for the most part, the government wants to work hard on making the government look good as opposed to doing the right thing. That is the fundamental problem.

I guess that is the difference between the NDP caucus and the direction the Liberal government has taken. We offered a substantive motion on climate emergency that would force the government to act and seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, the government voted that down and offered something that was simply a statement of the situation as all Canadians know it to be.

Canadians know we are in a climate emergency, because they have seen first-hand the record level of floods. They have seen first-hand the forest fires that have choked various parts of the country, including my region of New Westminster—Burnaby in the Lower Mainland. People now have to stay indoors for much of the best part of the year. The summer months, which used to be glorious in my region, are now fraught with almost killer air quality. It is not an easy situation at all for people with health problems to go out and deal with that smoke.

Government Orders

Last August, we saw the killer heatwave that killed dozens of people in Montreal and southern Quebec. The Toronto Star did what I thought was an important article on the number of heat-related deaths that would have occurred in southern Ontario. Because statistics are kept differently, it is quite possible the death toll was very high in southern Ontario as well. The reality is very clear. There is a need to act on the climate emergency.

I spoke earlier about the housing crisis we were living through. The government needs to act. The housing crisis is striking many regions of the country.

I have spoken before about Heather, who is struggling to find affordable housing for her family. Hers is just one of the many families that are finding it almost impossible to keep a roof over their heads. We are in a crisis when it comes to affordable housing and the government should be acting.

When we talk about pharmacare, it is indeed a crisis. I have spoken many times about Jim, who is right outside the Chateau Laurier, begging for money so he can get the \$580 a month he needs for the medication that keeps him alive for his family. The government does not see that as an emergency either.

That is the fundamental difference. The government is rushing through a motion that binds the opposition. It takes away the opposition's rights and the ability to hold the government to account. The government has offered a couple of substantive pieces of legislation, which would have been supported by all members of the House anyway. However, for the most part, the emergency of ensuring we have medication for all in the country, the emergency of ensuring people have a roof over their head, the emergency that comes with climate change and the emergency that comes from the appalling state of indigenous communities not being supported by the government are all left aside.

The government is saying that we are going to sit until midnight for the government's sake, not for the sake of Canadians. Canadians will be able to judge the Liberals on October 21.

• (1640)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many aspects of the member's speech both now and prior to question period to which I take exception. One is with respect to responsibility even for opposition members. I am going to get the opportunity to expand on that.

Could my colleague across the way give the NDP's perspective as to what it believes its responsibility is in supporting legislation and getting it through in a timely fashion?. Is there any responsibility from his or his party's perspective to assist in the passing of government legislation? Does he feel there is any obligation there at all?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, our role in the House has always been to take our responsibility seriously and to make legislation better. That has been our role historically since the very foundation of our movement.

As the member well knows, the NDP has made a difference in a whole range of areas. The NDP was the first party in the House to raise the issues of pensions and unemployment insurance. Tommy Douglas, our founding leader, brought medicare to Canadians.

Our role is to push the government to be better. What I have found frustrating over the last four years is the government's refusal to be better when we offer amendments to legislation. Many amendments to improve legislation have been thoughtfully provided by the NDP, most often because we have listened carefully to witnesses who have come to committee at report stage. We incorporate their ideas into making legislation better. Each time over the last four years, the Liberal government, acting like the Conservative government before it, has refused to entertain amendments from the opposition.

That does not make government better. That does not make legislation better. That puts us right back in the realm of dark partisan politics, which is unfortunate. Canadians do not want to see that. Canadians want to see better legislation, legislation that is improved, and parties working together. We have not seen that from the Liberal government and that is a direct contradiction to what the Prime Minister promised.

• (1645)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has been here quite some time. We were both elected in 2004.

He quite rightly pointed out some important pieces of legislation. I have a feeling of frustration on this side of the House because the role of opposition is to work to make legislation better, but also to have time to debate it. This is all about that. We can go back and forth.

During our mandate, 97 bills received royal assent. With the present Liberal government, something like 60 bills have received royal assent. It has been the worst functioning government since the 1930s.

There is some really important legislation and we are now stuck with only a few days left in the House to get them put forward and debated properly.

Even with the increased time for sitting, does my colleague think we have enough time left to properly debate these bills? Does he think Canadians are starting to pay attention? The Liberal government is obsessed with selfies and its image, but it is not doing the work that Canadians expect it to do? Could my colleague please comment on that?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish my colleague a happy anniversary. June 28 will be his 15th year in the House. I have often enjoyed our differences and sometimes our similarities when speaking to issues.

However, he is right on the account that the government is such a pale imitation of what it purported to be back in 2015. I remember, as all Canadians do, the government and the Prime Minister talking about a new era in Canadian politics. They said that there would be collaboration on the floor of the House of Commons, that there would be democratic reform, that there would be housing for people dealing with housing issues, that there would be pharmacare and that the government would attack climate change. Instead it is giving all the big emitters a get out of jail free card when it comes to climate change emissions. The government made all kinds of commitments that it has sadly failed to meet.

Government Orders

The most egregious is the refusal to work with the opposition. Every member of the NDP caucus takes his or her work seriously. In every case, when a bill has come before the House, the NDP has offered very thoughtful amendments to improve legislation. I could give a 14-hour filibuster on all the improvements suggested by NDP members. We did the work, gave it to the government and recommended it be incorporated in legislation. Witnesses agreed. The said to take the NDP amendments to make the legislation better so it would do what it purported to do. After four years, it has been a complete and abject failure. The government refuses opposition amendments; it is just what it does.

The Conservative government before it did the same thing. A dozen times legislation was rejected by the courts because the Conservatives refused the NDP amendments. Now we have bad legislation pushed through like a bulldozer by the Liberals again, without taking the amendments that would have made that legislation more sound, better and actually do what it purported it would do. It is sad.

It is a sad commentary on the government. However, as I mentioned before, on October 21, Canadians will judge it on that record.

• (1650)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also find it a bit rich when we hear the Liberals talking about the opposition delaying bills. I will provide a concrete example.

When the House was debating Bill C-69, our colleague from Edmonton Strathcona, who worked so diligently at committee on that bill, proposed many amendments seeking to bring that environmental review legislation in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These amendments were moved at committee only days after the Liberals had voted in favour of Bill C-262.

It is wrong for us to be accused of holding up the legislation. We were doing the hard work of listening to witnesses at committee and bringing forward amendments to make the bill more in line with indigenous rights, for which the government had already signalled its support.

For my friend from New Westminster—Burnaby, that is just another example of where we have tried our best. We listened to those witnesses at committee. Time and again we tried to insert those amendments that were directly attributable to concrete evidence heard at committee only to see it fail both at the committee stage and when the bill was reported to the House.

Could my colleague comment a bit further on our efforts through this 42nd Parliament to improve those bills that have been backed up by solid witness testimony every step of the way?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for his terrific work in the House of Commons. This is his first term, but we would not know it from the depth of the work he has done and the substance he has offered on the floor of the House of Commons. One would think he is a member of Parliament who has been re-elected numerous times. I thank him for his terrific work.

He is absolutely right when he says that with respect to any area in any bill, the NDP members have offered honest and thoughtful suggestions to improve a bill and make it do what the title purports it would do. Often, the government puts forward legislation and when we look at the title, we think it is going to make a big difference, but when we read the bill, it is, sadly, a real letdown because the legislation does not back up the intent of the title. Over this particular four-year period, the job of New Democrats has been to improve legislation through the hundreds, if not thousands, of amendments we have brought forward for each bill, each one of them thoughtfully considered and carefully drafted, always with the support of witnesses, experts and Canadians who believe that the legislation should be better as well. However, these amendments have been systematically rejected over four years.

The member for Burnaby South understands and if he is elected prime minister on October 21, we will see a different approach in the House of Commons. We are going to encourage amendments from opposition members and actually consider their merits. That is going to be a sea change in Canadian politics, I think a welcome one, because it will make for better legislation and better government in this country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I get under way with my comments, I want to reflect on the previous speaker's comments and address many aspects of them during my speech.

If we look at what has transpired over the last number of years, we have seen a great deal of change in committees. I sat in opposition when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, and I understand very clearly that when he was the prime minister, opposition members' amendments were never passed at committee. It just did not happen, unless one were a government member. Opposition members did not have their amendments passed during the time I was here under a majority Stephen Harper government.

However, to try to give the impression that this government has behaved in the same fashion is just wrong, because it is just not true. This government, on multiple pieces of legislation, has not only approached standing committees in a different fashion from the previous Stephen Harper government, but also, members will find that the current government has accepted numerous amendments to our legislation, whether they be from New Democrats, Conservatives or even the Green Party. That is something we did not witness under Stephen Harper, but something that we have seen here.

Also, in response to the opposition's effort to claim there has been no change, we can just look at the parliamentary secretaries. When I had sat on the procedure and House affairs committee, the Conservative parliamentary secretary was there and led the committee. As the parliamentary secretary related in regard to that particular committee today, I do not even attend that committee.

There is a substantial difference between this Prime Minister and Stephen Harper. There is a lot more transparency and accountability with this Prime Minister than the former prime minister on a number of different fronts.

Government Orders

However, for those who might be following, we are having this debate because the government has decided, as previous governments have done in the past, including Stephen Harper's, that as we get into June, there will at times be a need to have extended sitting hours. There is nothing new in that. As I said, Stephen Harper did so, and prime ministers before him have also done so. We have extended hours because, like Canadians, we believe that we should continue to work every day that we sit, and if we have to put in extra hours to pass more legislation, why not?

It is interesting listening to the Conservatives talk about last-minute legislation. What do they expect? We are now at the end of May. Do they just want the government to shut the doors and stop debate on all legislation? Maybe the NDP and Conservatives would like to operate that way, but we as a government are committed to working hard for Canadians every day, and members will see that with the different types of initiatives we have taken, whether it be legislative action, budget actions or just trying to build consensus.

Today is an excellent example, because we saw a lot of games being played by the opposition parties. They ask why we bring in time allocation or closure, and they challenge us, especially me when I stand to talk about the benefits of using time allocation. However, so that those listening can understand what is actually taking place, they need to recognize that there is legislation the government has introduced that the NDP will never, ever support, unless we delete the entire bill by way of an amendment. That is an absolute guarantee: there is legislation the NDP will never, ever support.

● (1655)

The trade agreement is a good example. We have had a number of trade agreements from this government, and every time, the NDP members vote against them. If it were up to them, agreements would never be allowed to go to a vote. Equally, there is legislation here that we have introduced that the Conservatives would never, ever support and have voted against. They will go out of their way to prevent the legislation from passing.

We could have the Conservatives saying no to legislation, with the NDP, the Greens and the government saying yes, but if the Conservatives wanted to, they could prevent the legislation from passing. All they have to do is to speak to the legislation, propose an amendment and speak endlessly. We had a good example of that today.

We are talking about disabilities and Bill C-81. What are the principles of the bill? The main principles are inherent dignity, equality, opportunity, barrier-free government, autonomy, inclusive design and meaningful involvement. This is legislation that every member in the chamber, I believe, will vote in favour of. No one is going to dispute it.

Then we had the first Conservative speaking to the legislation, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, who spoke for 95 minutes—

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: And the Conservatives say hear, hear, Mr. Speaker.

I am not new to a political chamber. I have been doing this for close to 30 years. I know what a filibuster is. The Conservative Party of Canada did not want to pass that legislation this morning, and that is really what the debate was about. The member stood because his party did not want to see that legislation pass this morning.

We know that the House has the potential to pass things through—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1700)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am going to point out that if the opposition members were not shouting out, the hon. member would not have to speak as loudly. I want to ask everyone to maybe keep the tone down and let the hon. parliamentary secretary give his speech.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we had a very good example this morning with the member across the way.

Contrast that to another example where we had legislation which members of the New Democratic Party recognized that they actually liked. I think it was Bill C-37. I could be wrong on that but if members did a quick check of Hansard, they would be able to find out when members of the NDP supported time allocation. They wanted us to pass that legislation. They recognized the value and importance of that legislation. That is not the only time they did that. The NDP members on a couple of occasions have recognized that they like the legislation and want it to pass and have therefore supported our bringing in time allocation.

What we know is that all parties in this House actually support the concept of time allocation, if it is deemed necessary. Even when I sat in opposition, Peter Van Loan would bring in time allocation, and I remember standing in my place and supporting it, because if one is not getting the support and co-operation from opposition parties in particular and from the government at times, one may need to use time allocation. A lot depends on what is happening in the opposition benches.

I know the government House leader continues to want to work with opposition members. If the government House leader asks how many speakers a party would like to put forward on something or how quickly might we be able to get a piece of legislation through, it is not some sort of trap for the opposition parties. It is to allow for more debate on issues which the opposition members would like to have more debate on.

There are bills that are relatively non-controversial, like Bill C-81, which is historical legislation. I am not going to say that members should not be debating the bill, but based on my 30 years of parliamentary experience, when the will is there to see a bill pass, it passes really quickly as opposed to there being a filibuster. Maybe it would have been better to allow Bill C-81 to actually pass today. I would argue that would have been the right thing to do.

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I listened very closely to the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan across the way. All he would say is that it will pass in due time and before the next election it will be passed. He indicated his support for it on behalf of the Conservative Party. The member is playing a game and he knows it. If the Conservative Party really wanted to, that bill could have passed and we could have been debating something else right now. We needed to get an indication to help facilitate debate inside the House.

There are many issues that I would like to debate and, in good part, I have been fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity to do that. The NDP House leader talked about an issue which I am very passionate about: pharmacare. That is not an NDP issue, although the NDP tries to claim it as one. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is an issue today because we have a Prime Minister who is committed to ensuring that we expand our health care system. That is the reason the NDP is talking about it today. It was years ago, when we first came in as government, through a standing committee that the idea started to really flourish.

I participate in a caucus and I have many discussions with my colleagues. We understand the value of it. We understand that we have to work with many different stakeholders. Then the NDP members catch wind of it and all of a sudden they say that they to get out in front of the Liberals on it. That is balderdash.

•(1705)

The NDP does not get credit for something of this nature. If anyone should get the credit, it is Canadians. It is Canadians who have been communicating, whether through the Prime Minister or through members of our caucus, about the importance of pharmacare. That is the reason we have prioritized it. We are looking forward to the report we will be getting toward the end of June.

NDP members talk about housing as if they are leading the file. Who are they kidding? I enjoy listening to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. He is one of the most able-minded individuals I know, and he understands the issues of housing in Canada.

In the last federal election, the commitment the NDP made with regard to housing pales in comparison to what this government has put into place. I find it somewhat humorous that the NDP has attempted to stake claim to an area in which this government has moved forward.

From day one, whether in regard to budgetary measures or legislative measures, this government and the Prime Minister have been focused on Canada's middle class. Let us talk about our first piece of legislation. Bill C-2 provided a tax cut to Canada's middle class. Hundreds of millions of dollars are going into the pockets of Canadians. At the same time, the legislation allowed for a special increase in tax for Canada's wealthiest 1%. By the way, the Conservatives and the NDP voted against that.

That was a legislative measure. In our very first budget, we committed to a tax-free Canada child benefit program. Again, this is putting hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of almost nine out of 10 families, although I could not tell members the actual percentage. That initiative literally lifted hundreds of thousands of

children out of poverty, and the Conservatives and NDP voted against it.

That is why I say that from day one, this government, whether through budgetary measures or legislative measures, has been very active at ensuring we continue to move forward. However, in virtually every initiative we have undertaken, and Bill C-81 is more of an exception, opposition parties have fought us.

Let us recall the last federal budget. Before I comment on some of the content of it, do members remember the day of the federal budget? It was not a good day for parliamentarians. The Minister of Finance wanted to address the House and Canada. All sorts of stakeholders were waiting to hear about the budget. Do members remember the behaviour of members of the official opposition? They were yelling and slamming their desks. They did not want the Minister of Finance to be heard. In my 30 years of parliamentary experience, I had never witnessed that sort of inappropriate behaviour coming from the official opposition. It was embarrassing.

The Conservatives are very focused on trying to discredit the person of the Prime Minister. We can hear it in their speeches. It is the personal attacks, whether directed at the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance. That is fine. It is the Stephen Harper type of politics, with more and more of Doug Ford's style getting into their caucus and in their policies. It is scary stuff.

One member opposite said that he is going to join our caucus. I believe that could happen sometime soon. If I were to speculate on the Conservative leadership at the end of the year or in 2020, I am thinking it could be Doug Ford, Jason Kenney, maybe the opposition House leader, and I do not know who else.

•(1710)

The bottom line is the Conservatives are so focused on character assassination instead of being a constructive opposition party. That is okay, because as they focus on that negativity, we will continue to focus on Canadians. The results are really showing in a tangible way.

I made reference to the hundreds of thousands of children, and there are also hundreds of thousands of seniors who have been lifted out of poverty as a direct result of this government's actions. In the last three and a half years, we have seen one million new jobs created by working with Canadians. We have seen incredible investments in infrastructure. In the last budget alone, there is a commitment to municipalities. In Winnipeg, I believe it is about 35 million additional dollars. If members were to drive around some of our streets, they would get a better appreciation of why that is such an important investment.

Government Orders

I started off talking about the historical legislation of Bill C-81. We have indigenous legislation that is before the House on language and foster care. These are critically important issues. It is historic legislation. These are two pieces of legislation that we still need to pass. That is why I am here standing in my place saying that we still have 19 days to go. Unlike the Conservatives and the New Democrats, we are prepared to work until the very last day. We are prepared to work late. We have a legislative agenda and we are committed to passing that legislation. We know that this government works for Canadians in every region of our country every day.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, my friend's comments were even more ridiculous than usual.

When the government insists on debasing our institutions through its corruption, we will hold it to account, whether it is budget day or any other day. That is exactly what we did and what we will continue to do. Canadians expect us to defend the integrity of their institutions, whatever the issue of the day is.

I want to respond to some of the things the member said about Bill C-81. I think he should know better than to present misleading information about what actually took place with this bill.

The government waited until very late in the life of this Parliament to bring this bill forward. It rejected multiple opposition amendments at committee that would have strengthened this bill. The government therefore sent a flawed bill to the Senate, which necessitated amendments to be proposed by the Senate, which meant that after amendments were proposed, the bill would have to come back to the House.

Still, when the bill came back to the House, the government did not bring the bill forward at the earliest opportunity. It could have been brought forward last week. The government could have used Standing Order 53 to try to expedite it. I suspect there would have been interest in doing that from this side of the House.

However, to expedite the debate beginning, because the debate has to take place, the government chose, after all these mistakes, to bring this bill forward for the first time this morning. Absolutely, the opposition is prepared to debate and highlight the areas in which the government has fallen short, and ultimately to support the bill's passage. That is a certainty.

The member accused me of filibustering, but I think he knows that if I was trying to filibuster something, I would still be talking on it right now. I gave a speech. I delivered important points about the government's failures on the bill. Why is the government so upset? It did not want the bill to be criticized.

We support the bill but there are things that the stakeholder community believes needed to be included in it that were not included. The importance of the topic is precisely why these points have to be made. If it was not an important topic, we would not need to talk about it. However, given the critical importance of the topic, we needed to talk about it.

Could the member tell us why the government failed to bring forward this bill yesterday or last week? Why did it fail to bring forward the bill at the earliest opportunity it could?

•(1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have been a parliamentarian for almost 30 years. Most of those years were in opposition. I can tell the member that I know how to recognize a filibuster when I see a filibuster.

At the end of the day, the member will have to reconcile within his House leadership team why the Conservative Party chose not to pass Bill C-81 this morning. To try to imply that there are endless members who want to speak to it or that it was necessary to prolong the process, I would welcome a debate where we could both go into a community and have that endless debate. I feel very comfortable with the experience I have. He would have to justify it within his own House leadership.

For me, personally, I look at the behaviour of the official opposition. Let us keep in mind that the official opposition, on several occasions, has become tired of sitting and has attempted to adjourn the House. The opposition will cause the bells to ring to prevent debating bills or will attempt to adjourn for the day. They would adjourn debate on other pieces of legislation. These are all tools that are used to prevent legislation from passing.

I will give the Conservatives this much. They are very good at being the opposition and I hope they are going to stay in opposition for many years to come.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a quote from a debate that occurred in the House not too long ago.

It is a government that since it acquired a majority has had a different attitude in the House of Commons. It is one where it feels it does not need to consult with people, that it can just walk over some very basic democratic principles. It is one that does not understand the need for diligence. It is one that does not understand the need for working with people or working with members of Parliament. In dealing with important legislation...the government has failed on so many counts.

The government, by once again relying on a time allocation motion to get its agenda passed, speaks of incompetence. It speaks of a genuine lack of respect for parliamentary procedure and ultimately for Canadians. It continues to try to prevent members of Parliament from being engaged and representing their constituents on the floor of the House of Commons.

Who said that? The member for Winnipeg North. He said it on June 3, 2015, when his party was in opposition, shortly before the election. Regardless of what he says now, it is clear that he is talking out of both sides of his mouth, saying one thing when he is in opposition and the opposite when he is in government.

That is not all. They did the same thing with omnibus budget bills. When the government was in opposition, in June 2015, it promised to do things differently from the Conservatives.

I am sorry if I take the member's comments with a grain of salt, but, time and again in this House, the member has completely contradicted what he called for when he was an opposition member.

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[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the NDP research bureau needs to be a little more transparent and accountable for the information it is providing to the member. What it is not telling the member is that, when I sat in opposition, on several occasions I said that at times there is a need to use time allocation. That is when I was in opposition. I said that because I witnessed the opposition, which happened to be the official opposition at the time, behaving in such a fashion that the legislation would never pass, just like New Democrats today. In the last four years, they have supported time allocation. They supported time allocation when they wanted legislation passed.

The government has a lot of priority legislation. Some of that legislation New Democrats do not want to pass, some of that legislation the Conservatives do not want to pass, and if the opposition buckles down on its position, then the legislation will not pass unless time allocation is brought in. That is the reason time allocation is a useful tool to use at times. I have said it on this side of the House, and I said it when I was in opposition. There is no change.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Could he tell me how many bills were passed in the 42nd Parliament? I would also like to know how many bills are currently being studied in committee and how many are in the Senate.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. We have seen dozens of pieces of legislation pass through the House. We have three bills currently in committee and a dozen bills in the Senate. There are a number of substantial pieces of legislation. I referenced a couple of them myself that will have a profoundly positive impact in my own riding of Winnipeg North. I am speaking particularly of the foster care legislation and the indigenous languages legislation.

When we look at the total legislative package of this government and take a holistic approach, we have done a fabulous job of bringing forward legislation that is very progressive in its nature, complemented by a budget that supports the legislation. Overall, we have seen the benefits by looking at factors such as reducing poverty, a million jobs and so forth.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague pointed out that there are legitimate tools the government needs to use in order to pass legislation. He has talked about time allocation, extending the hours and things like this, but the frustration on the opposition side is that, if we count them, there are 20 bills the government wants to move forward and there are only 20 days remaining.

He brought up the example this morning of Bill C-81 regarding accessibility, saying there has been some obstruction on this side. I was in the House earlier today and would have liked an opportunity to speak to the bill. As many people in the House know, I have a son

who has been diagnosed on the spectrum, and it is a very important bill. Sixty amendments were put forward at committee, and the government chose to include only three. Our job is to make it a better bill, and if we can do that, all of us win. I commend the government for bringing this legislation forward, because it is important legislation, and I will be supporting it. If it is not a perfect bill, it is a start, and we can move forward with that.

There are 20 days remaining, and there are 20 bills. Does my colleague really think there is enough time to properly debate these 20 bills in the next 20 days? Does he not think the government should have had better organizational skills to get these important bills passed?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that if members were to review Hansard, they would find that legislation can pass very fast in the House. It can pass from second reading to committee stage to third reading virtually in one day, if it is deemed to be supported by both sides of the House through unanimous consent.

I am very sensitive to the Bill C-81 issue. If every member of the House were to speak for one minute, that would be 338 minutes. In terms of speaking, it is just not practical. That is the reason why we have caucuses and why we go to committee. There are plenty of opportunities.

I believe that those who want to get engaged could bring it to their House leadership, and even the independents are always afforded the opportunity if they go through the House leadership teams. It does not mean they have to go through the House leadership teams, but if it is something important, that is one of the things I would recommend. However, it is not compulsory. Everyone has the opportunity to stand and address the House when the floor is vacant.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we resume debate, I should let the member for Beauport—Limoilou know that he will have five minutes to begin his speech before I interrupt him so the House can proceed with private members' business. He will have 15 more minutes to finish his speech and another 10 minutes to answer questions when we resume debate.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House. I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable.

I would also like to acknowledge the many residents of Beauport—Limoilou who are watching this afternoon's proceedings as usual. I would like to thank them for a wonderful riding week last week. I met with several hundred of my constituents, many of whom attended the 17th Beauport business network breakfast. The network is doing very well. We will soon be holding a local press conference to announce that the network is going to have its own independent board of directors. That will give Beauport's business people a strong voice for dialogue with their elected representatives. Back home, I often joke that I am getting my own opposition up and running.

Private Members' Business

All joking aside, following the three “Alupa à l'écoute” public consultations that I held, I want to tell those watching us today that I will hold a press conference in a few weeks to announce the public policy that I am going to introduce with my leader when we form the government in October. This policy will help seniors return to the labour market, if they so wish, and alleviate the labour shortage.

This evening we are debating the motion moved barely 24 hours ago by the government, which would have us sit until midnight every evening from Monday to Thursday, starting next Monday. The government feels compelled to make up for its complacency over the past few months. It was caught up in several scandals that made the headlines, such as the SNC-Lavalin scandal. It is waking up and realizing that time is passing and it only has 20 days to complete its legislative agenda. There is a sense of panic. Above all, when the session comes to an end, they do not want to be known as the government with the poor legislative track record.

I would like to quickly talk about the government's bills. My colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles talked about the number of bills the government has passed so far. This time three and a half years ago, in the final weeks of the Conservative term under Mr. Harper, we had more than 82 bills that received royal assent, and five or six other bills on the Order Paper. So far, the Liberals have passed only 48 government bills that have received royal assent, and 17 are still on the agenda. They do not have very many bills on their legislative record.

For three and a half years we have heard their grand patriotic speeches and all the rhetoric that entails. During the election campaign, their slogan was “Real change”, but with so few bills on their legislative record, their slogan rings hollow. What is more, their bills are flawed. Every time their bills are referred to committee, the government has to propose dozens of amendments through its own members, something that is rarely done for government bills.

Next, let us talk about electoral partisanship. The Liberals made big promises to minority groups in Canada. Three and a half years ago, the Prime Minister boasted about wanting to advance reconciliation with indigenous peoples. However, the Liberals waited until just a month before the end of the 42nd Parliament to introduce Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages, in the House. Even though the Liberals are always saying that the government's most important relationship is the one it has with first nations, they waited over three and a half years before introducing a government bill on the protection of indigenous languages. I would like to remind members that there are over 77 indigenous languages in Canada. Once again, we see that the Liberals are in a rush and stressed out. They want to placate all of the interest groups that believe in them before October.

What about the leadership of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons? From the start, three and a half years ago, she said that her approach was the exact opposite of the previous government's, which she claimed was harmful. Nevertheless, she forced sixty-some time allocation motions on us. When it came to reforming the rules and procedures, she wanted to significantly reduce the opposition's power.

● (1730)

We want to stand before Canadians and ask questions and bring to light the reason why debates will go until midnight. The reason is that the Liberals were unable to properly complete their legislative agenda and move forward as they should have.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member will have four minutes and 45 seconds when debate on this matter resumes.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should recognize that one in four Canadians is living with diabetes or pre-diabetes, and, without treatment, diabetes can result in life-threatening complications, and that diabetes awareness and education can help identify early signs of diabetes and prevent onset for millions of Canadians, and that as the birthplace of insulin, Canada should be a leader in diabetes awareness by declaring November of every year as Diabetes Awareness Month.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Motion No. 173, which seeks to raise awareness and education of diabetes as an important step in defeating this terrible disease that impacts the lives of so many Canadians.

More than 11 million Canadians are impacted by this epidemic. Every three minutes, another Canadian is diagnosed with this terrible disease, which is a major cause of strokes, heart attacks, kidney failures and lower limb amputations. The rate of diabetes is extremely high for our first nations population living on reserve.

Diabetes occurs when a person's body is unable to produce or use insulin, the hormone that controls blood glucose levels. If left untreated, serious complications can occur, which can even lead to premature death.

Awareness and education cannot only help these people remain healthy, but it can also help to identify early signs of diabetes and prevent onset for millions of Canadians. This is why I am introducing my motion to mark November as diabetes awareness month. With a month dedicated to public education about the influence of diabetes, Canadians have an opportunity to grow and learn.

This important public health issue is already being recognized by domestic and international groups.

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November, in particular, is a good choice as World Diabetes Day is presently held globally every November 14 and is recognized as an official United Nations day. This is the world's largest diabetes awareness campaign, reaching a global audience of over one billion people in more than 160 countries. The campaign draws attention to issues of paramount importance to the diabetes world and keeps diabetes firmly in the public and political spotlight.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects Canadians of all ages. Each year, close to 200,000 Canadians are newly diagnosed with diabetes and approximately 90% of those are type 2. Presently, about three million Canadians are living with diagnosed diabetes. With the growth and aging of the Canadian population, the number of Canadians living with diabetes is expected to continue to increase in the coming years.

Some Canadians are at increased risk of diabetes, such as South Asians, first nations and Métis people and immigrants. There are higher rates of diabetes among Canadians with lower incomes and education.

Type 2 diabetes and many other chronic diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases, are largely preventable. Scientific evidence demonstrates that by eating healthier, increasing physical activity, moderating alcohol use and not smoking, the onset of many chronic diseases can be prevented or delayed.

That is why the public health community in Canada and internationally has moved away from disease-specific approaches, instead adopting approaches to address the common risk factors for chronic diseases. The World Health Organization's global action plan for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases 2013-2020 is a blueprint for such an approach.

Complex public health challenges such as chronic diseases, including diabetes, defy single solution approaches. No organization, institution or sector of society acting alone can solve this challenge on their own. All segments of society, communities, academia, the charitable and not-for-profit sector and the private sector must work together if we are to be successful.

Educating and encouraging policies that support people with diabetes and those working to prevent it has been my priority since being elected in 2015.

As a health care professional for 18 years, I came to Ottawa well aware of the burden that diabetes had placed on our country and was very motivated to work toward finding long-term solutions.

That is why I was honoured to become chair of the all-party diabetes caucus. There we have learned more about the extreme hardships and enormous demands on our health care system caused by diabetes.

In November 2018, we engaged fellow parliamentarians to participate in "Diabetes Day on the Hill" in order to raise awareness of diabetic risks to Canadians and to build support for an updated comprehensive national diabetes strategy. Last year, a diabetes mobile screening unit was brought in to emphasize the diabetes prevention aspect.

● (1735)

Locally, in my community, I sponsored a similar proclamation for the City of Brampton in 2017. There has been increased interest among local stakeholders and community organizations in acting on diabetes during this time and throughout the year. Many cities and municipalities observe November 14, and now it is time to raise awareness across the country.

When looking at the increasing personal and economic hardship that diabetes had on families and the negative impact on our health care system, it became clear to me that something more had to be done and that our national strategy on diabetes had to be updated. That was why I encouraged the Standing Committee Health, which I am very proud to serve on, to help find new solutions. I am grateful that my colleagues from all parties share my beliefs, which is why they agreed to study the diabetes strategy in Canada and abroad.

Diabetes is a complex disease with many causes and risk factors, so our study was comprehensive. We heard from many expert witnesses, patients and international experts on how Canada could best address the diabetes epidemic. It is clear that Canada needs a framework to coordinate the efforts of the provinces and territories to treat diabetes, to share best practices, to integrate the perspectives of the patients and to leverage opportunities for partnerships.

The World Health Organization recommends that every country implement a national diabetes strategy. However, Canada has been without one, despite having one of the highest rates of diabetes among the world's most developed nations.

After this study was completed in April, I was honoured to sit by the chair of the Standing Committee on Health in this chamber as he tabled a report. It called on the government to make such a strategy for our nation and take firm action toward diabetes prevention and support. In total, we made 11 recommendations to the government. This report will go a long way in combatting diabetes.

This report was a first step; my motion is the next. Furthermore, I have taken many more steps over the years to raise awareness for fellow Canadians about diabetes.

In 2017, I travelled extensively to consult medical professionals about how best to meet the needs of those suffering from diabetes. This gave me even greater insight into how diabetes impacted communities in different regions of Canada. The result of this was the publication of the report "Defeating Diabetes", which promotes healthy eating as a prevention method.

In October 2017, I represented Canada, along with a colleague, at the Global Diabetes policy forum in Italy. Thirty-eight countries were represented. We talked about the best way to tackle this growing issue. I also attended the World Congress of Diabetes in Calcutta, India. Through engagement with international leaders, we were able to compare research and assess our commitment to the fight against diabetes.

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Based on these experiences, it is my strong belief that increased awareness and education is a necessary first step in reaching our goal of a national strategy to slow the incidence of diabetes and eventually eliminate it. I also believe that to succeed, we must all work together regardless of our political affiliation.

Among many formal events that have allowed me to learn more about this disease, I also successfully initiated small-scale projects and challenges, which have encouraged my colleagues and residents of Brampton South to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

In November 2016, I published tips for MPs for staying healthy. In January 2017, I organized and encouraged 40 MPs to post healthy New Year's resolutions.

During the 2017 Diabetes Day on the Hill, I challenged my fellow parliamentarians to defeat diabetes one step at a time. Nearly 100 parliamentarians accepted the challenge and wore a pedometer for 10 days to log their efforts to be healthier.

● (1740)

The Government of Canada is also investing in innovative community-based programming and public education to test and scale up projects that help to prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes and encourage healthy living choices. By coordinating efforts across governments, we are beginning to see that progress.

Early in our mandate, the Government of Canada took action to help Canadians eat healthier. As I mentioned earlier, healthy eating is very important in helping to prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes. Earlier this year, I am proud to say this government updated and published a new Canada food guide, based on the best evidence available, to promote healthy eating. Also, just last year, federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation released "Let's Get Moving", a new common vision to address physical activity and reduce sedentary living. This work represented an important milestone for governments and was the culmination of three years of work by officials, including working with federal, provincial and territorial health officials, the non-government sector and indigenous organizations.

The provinces and territories are also key partners in health surveillance to better understand the impact of chronic disease and risk and protective factors. For instance, in collaboration with all provinces and territories, the Public Health Agency of Canada conducts national surveillance of diabetes and 20 other chronic conditions to support the planning and evaluation of related policies and programs. The pan-Canadian health inequalities reporting initiative includes new insights into how diabetes impacts different groups of Canadians in different contexts, and products including an interactive online data tool and a narrative report on key health inequalities in Canada. This initiative is a partnership between the Public Health Agency of Canada, the provinces and territories, Statistics Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Information and the First Nations Information Governance Centre.

The government collaborates with the jurisdictions on digital health through Canada Health Infoway. Specific to diabetes, Canada Health Infoway has collaborated with our provinces and territories on remote patient monitoring. In addition to collaborating with our provincial and territorial partners, the Government of Canada

recognizes that innovative solutions and partnerships with health and other sectors are needed to better address the complex challenge of chronic disease prevention, including diabetes. This approach is rooted in the idea that we are all working towards a shared goal of producing better health outcomes for all Canadians.

However, more can always be done. Let us combat this disease and its life-threatening complications by making our citizens familiar with diabetes warning signs, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices and making it possible to access the best quality of care.

In closing, I would like to thank my colleagues from all parties for their support on this issue, which has been so important to me for much of my adult life. I want to thank them for their non-partisan and collaborative support to improve awareness and education and in this way improve the lives of so many Canadians suffering from diabetes. I believe we can achieve some great things here if we work together and keep the best interests of Canadians in mind.

Canada gave insulin to the world, improving the lives of millions of people. There is no reason we cannot lead the fight to defeat diabetes. This is why I am tabling Motion No. 173 to designate the month of November as diabetes awareness month in Canada and respectfully ask for the support of all my colleagues in this Parliament.

● (1745)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Brampton South for this motion and for her tireless advocacy on behalf of those suffering with diabetes.

I was on the health committee that brought forward that unanimous report with recommendations. One of those recommendations was that the government support Diabetes Canada in its diabetes 360° plan. Diabetes Canada approached the government to ask for \$150 million, which is the amount it would cost to implement the plan, and the government gave zero dollars.

Can the member explain why the government did not give Diabetes Canada support for its 360° plan?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her support for the 360° strategy. I have worked on that with the health department. We have to do our part. Maybe this time there are other important issues and we have been working hard on those. I am a big supporter of the diabetes 360° strategy, which is a framework for nationwide collaboration to reduce the burden of diabetes on Canada and Canadians.

I hope my colleague and I will be able to work together on that issue and that next time we will be successful.

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Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague for her hard work on the health committee. It is a privilege to serve with her on that committee.

Diabetes is a very common illness affecting many Canadians, and there is much to be done when we approach this issue from a health perspective. One of the things we as a House ought to look at are the foundational issues beneath this. The issue I want to talk about is universal public pharmacare.

At the health committee we heard heartbreaking stories of people with diabetes who simply cannot afford the insulin and medical devices they need, such as the glucose monitors, insulin pumps and insulin, which we have heard is more expensive today than it was when it was invented many years ago.

New Democrats are proposing a national comprehensive universal public pharmacare system, so that all Canadians can get the diabetes treatment they need without regard to their ability to pay. I am wondering if my hon. colleague shares that opinion. Would she agree with the NDP that we need to bring in public pharmacare so that all people suffering from diabetes in Canada today can get the treatment and medicine they need without regard to their ability to pay?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Speaker, I am very thankful for my colleague's support. Right now the Government of Canada is making investments in research, prevention and early detection of diabetes. We have taken good steps already in improving nutrition labelling and banning industrial trans fat. That is a big step we have already taken, but there is always a need to do more.

We heard from witnesses at the health committee that 22% of people are not getting their prescription medications, which are absolutely necessary for diabetes. Untreated diabetes leads to serious consequences and even life-threatening situations.

As the member knows, the prescriptions that are needed are covered in some provinces and not in others. We give 11 recommendations at the health committee, and that is why this motion is for awareness and education. I urge my colleague to work together with me to combat this serious issue.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Motion No. 173 designating diabetes awareness month. The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should recognize that one in four Canadians is living with diabetes or pre-diabetes, and, without treatment, diabetes can result in life-threatening complications, and that diabetes awareness and education can help identify early signs of diabetes and prevent onset for millions of Canadians, and that as the birthplace of insulin, Canada should be a leader in diabetes awareness by declaring November of every year as Diabetes Awareness Month.

[*English*]

It is a pleasure to rise to speak on this very important topic. We have already heard that the health committee, of which I am a member, studied diabetes and came up with 11 fulsome recommendations. As part of raising awareness about diabetes, I want to explain the different types of diabetes that exist. There are type 1, type 2 and gestational diabetes.

Type 1 is an autoimmune disease in which an individual's immune system attacks and destroys the insulin-producing cells of the pancreas, thereby leaving the individual dependent on an external source of insulin for life. Type 1 diabetes typically arises in individuals under 40 and makes up about 10% of people with diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes is a metabolic disorder that occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin and the body does not properly use the insulin it makes. While the onset of type 2 diabetes typically occurs in adults over 40 years of age, it can occur in younger individuals and is seen even in children and youth. Approximately 90% of people with diabetes have type 2 diabetes.

Then there is gestational diabetes, which occurs when hyperglycemia develops during pregnancy. Although elevated glycemic levels disappear following delivery, women diagnosed with gestational diabetes are at increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes within five to 10 years.

We talked a bit about the recommendations that came from the health committee, and I want to get into the diabetes 360° plan. It is an excellent, very cohesive plan. The 360° comes from a series of targets that include the figure of 90%.

The first is to have 90% of Canadians live in an environment that prevents the development of diabetes. We know some of the causal factors: fitness and activity, reducing obesity, diet, etc.

The second is to have 90% of Canadians aware of their diabetes status. There is simply not enough screening across the country, and many people who have type 2 diabetes especially are unaware. I appreciate that the member for Brampton South brought Diabetes Canada here with testing kits for all parliamentarians, so we can know that we do not have diabetes.

The third is to have 90% of Canadians with diabetes engaged in preventing complications. Those with diabetes who either do not adequately take their medications or do not watch the other causal factors can have many health complications, resulting in amputations, hospitalization and very serious chronic consequences.

The final target is to have 90% of Canadians who are engaged in preventing complications achieving improved health outcomes.

That is what this diabetes 360° plan is all about. The experts at Diabetes Canada, through consultations with stakeholders, put that together. The goals are worthy.

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That said, I have to point out the hypocrisy of the Liberal government. It is not the hypocrisy of the member for Brampton South, because she has definitely been an advocate for this. After unanimously recommending that the government fund this plan, for which they were asking for \$150 million, the Diabetes Canada folks said in the summary of the plan that an investment of \$150 million would save \$20 billion in prevention alone.

• (1755)

It is unthinkable that the government gave zero dollars for this in budget 2019. It is absolute lack of recognition of the fact that 11 million Canadians have diabetes or pre-diabetes, a third of the population. It is a huge issue. It would have paid for itself. There was a \$19.8 billion deficit in budget 2019. This failure to make an investment in the health of Canadians was a big miss on the part of the government.

The other thing I would say is that diabetes is a disease where if someone does not have the medication they need, including syringes, as we heard a lot of testimony about at the health committee, they can really suffer and develop chronic, disastrous results. It seems that a government that would buy heroin and syringes for drug addicts but not support syringes and medication for people with diabetes is just not fair. It just does not seem right. I am not arguing that one is not worthy; I am just saying that it does not seem fair, especially when the prevention of diabetes is critical to maintaining health.

One of the things that was interesting in this diabetes 360° report is the inequities of diabetes. Interestingly, first nations people living off reserve are twice as likely to have diabetes. South Asian adults are 2.3 times more likely than white adults to have it. Black adults are 2.1 times more likely than white adults to have it. The marginalized populations are especially at risk of diabetes. I think there is something to be done there as well.

In terms of what actions we should take to try to eliminate diabetes, prevention, physical activity and addressing issues like food security and knowledge about nutrition are important, as is screening, so that people are aware of their diabetes and are getting the right treatment. Many people suffer from the shortage of doctors across the country, which is something that needs to be addressed. We certainly cannot begin to address people's diabetes problems if they cannot even get to see a family doctor. I would say that research as well is important.

There is good news on the horizon. Simon Fraser University has been doing research in this area and developed what looks like a computer chip, but is really an injectable stem cell patch. The stem cells retrain the body to secrete insulin correctly. This is currently in clinical trials, from babies to adults, and four of these treatments will eliminate diabetes in a person. This is fantastically interesting research and something that would revolutionize the costs in the health care system and the lives of people living with diabetes. It would just be an amazing thing.

One of the things that will be required as we move forward is to make sure that we are still investing in that kind of research, and once that research comes to fruition that we can commercialize it and get it into the health care system really quickly.

There are also medical devices, like meters that monitor people's glucose levels, and insulin pumps that automatically deliver it, that could really transform an individual's ability to live with diabetes in a way that would certainly allow them to be much more normal.

The other issue I want to address in the last minute is my concern that the government did something with the disability tax credit that was not good. Members will remember that 80% of the people with type 2 diabetes who were approved for that tax credit, suddenly, last May were unapproved. Although we raised numerous objections, only 50% of those cases have been reconsidered. If they are not approved for the disability tax credit, people cannot be approved for the disability pension plan. There are a lot of people out there who are suffering.

One of the recommendations from the health committee is to reduce the amount of time required to be eligible for the disability tax credit. That is something we would like to see the government do.

In summary, I am happy to support this diabetes awareness month and to continue to work across the aisle to make sure that we can eradicate this disease in Canada.

• (1800)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise on behalf of my New Democrat colleagues and support this motion that would declare November of each year as diabetes awareness month.

Canada's New Democrats strongly believe that the federal government must do more to support Canadians living with diabetes, particularly those who incur significant out-of-pocket costs as a result of this chronic disease. If we failed to ensure that every Canadian living with diabetes can afford to access insulin, it would certainly be a missed opportunity on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin in Canada.

However, the reality today is that many Canadians living with diabetes are unable to afford the medications, devices and supplies they need. This cost-related non-adherence can lead to avoidable complications and needless mortality. It also adds unneeded costs to our medical system.

Canada's New Democrats believe there is an urgent need for a universal, comprehensive and public pharmacare plan to ensure that all Canadians have access to the medications they need when they need them. This must include coverage for diabetes devices and supplies, such as test strips, syringes, insulin pumps and continuous glucose monitors, in addition of course to life-saving insulin.

Individuals with diabetes cannot regulate their blood sugar properly. Diabetes causes many physical health issues and is the cause of death of more than 7,000 Canadians every year. It also affects the mental health of people who have diabetes, as well as their families.

Most people in Canada, over 90%, living with diabetes have type 2. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body does not respond properly to the insulin it produces. Treatment includes medication and lifestyle changes to diet and exercise routines.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas stops producing insulin. Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented. Someone with type 1 diabetes will always have to use insulin, either through daily injections or an insulin pump.

In 1921, Dr. Frederick Banting, Charles Best, James Collip and their supervisor James Macleod discovered insulin in a University of Toronto laboratory. This discovery revolutionized the treatment of diabetes worldwide and remains among the most celebrated medical discoveries in Canadian history. However, today many Canadians living with type 1 or type 2 diabetes are unable to afford the medication, devices and supplies they need.

According to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Canada, a population-based study in Ontario that tracked 600,000 patients found that roughly 830 young and middle-aged patients die each year from lack of access to insulin. On the other hand, according to a brief from the 100 Campaign, Santé Diabète, T1 International and Universities Allied for Essential Medicines, as many as 5,000 deaths in Ontario alone could have been prevented by universal drug coverage for people with diabetes.

Here are some key facts and figures.

The prevalence of diabetes in Canada has doubled over the last decade. In Canada today, 11 million people live with prediabetes or diabetes. Every three minutes, someone in Canada is diagnosed with this progressive chronic illness.

The life expectancy of a person with diabetes is shortened by an average of 13 years. By 2028, it is estimated that over 13 million Canadians, or 32% of our population, will have diabetes or prediabetic conditions. Diabetes contributes to 30% of strokes, 40% of heart attacks, 50% of kidney failures requiring dialysis, 70% of non-traumatic leg and foot amputations and the largest proportion of cases of blindness in people under the age of 50.

The full cost of diabetes to the health care system in 2018 is estimated to be an astounding \$27 billion. If the proliferation of this disease continues, by 2028 the price will exceed \$39 billion.

More disturbingly, a recent report by the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions found that 57% of Canadians with diabetes reported failing to adhere to their prescribed therapies due to affordability issues related to medications, devices and supplies.

People living with type 1 diabetes can pay on average up to 17% of their annual income on diabetes. People living with type 2 diabetes typically pay on average up to 9% of their annual income. About 18% of people with diabetes report having difficulty getting insurance because of their disease.

● (1805)

That puts into perspective the government's delay and failure to bring in national universal and comprehensive public pharmacare, which has been called for by the NDP for several decades now. The Liberals promised to bring it to Canada in 1997 and have done

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nothing but talk about it for the entire four years of their administration. While the Liberals have dawdled, Canadians have become sicker and many have died. That is why it is a shame that the Liberals have refused to pay attention to the urgency of universal pharmacare that the New Democrats have repeatedly brought to the House.

Internationally, although the World Health Organization recommends that every country have a national diabetes strategy, Canada's previous strategy fizzled away in 2013, this time under the Conservative watch, following a scathing report on its under-performance by the Auditor General.

Canada's New Democrats believe that the federal government must support the development and implementation of a new national diabetes strategy based on the diabetes 360 framework that was developed in 2018 by Diabetes Canada and dozens of other stakeholder groups, and should facilitate the creation of type 1 diabetes and indigenous-specific strategic approaches, with the latter to be led and owned by indigenous communities.

Furthermore, Canada's New Democrats believe that the Government of Canada must support indigenous-led diabetes programs, services and research priorities and prioritize food sovereignty; provide access to appropriate care, treatment options, traditional healing and medicine; and raise awareness about gestational diabetes and the increase in diabetes among young indigenous women. Diabetes is rising fastest among indigenous people in this country, and primarily among indigenous women.

In addition, Canada's New Democrats believe there is an urgent need for a national approach to pharmacare that would ensure that all Canadians living with diabetes have access to the medications they need when they need them. This must include coverage not only for insulin but also the devices we talked about.

Our health committee heard heart-rending stories from real people about their challenges living with diabetes, people who have woken up in intensive care and did not know how they came to be there, because they went into a diabetic coma when they were sleeping. We heard stories about people who said that by landing in intensive care for three days, they cost the system more money in those three days than the cost of providing them free insulin for their lifetime.

We heard stories from Rowan Burdge of British Columbia, who said that she had to leave Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan after discovering big differences in what provincial health plans cover. Again, the Canada Health Act is supposed to provide equal coverage for Canadians as one of its bedrock five principles so that all Canadians everywhere can get the coverage they need. However, that is not the reality in Canada today, because successive Conservative and Liberal governments have failed to enforce the Canada Health Act or bring in universal pharmacare.

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Rowan told us that she spent more than \$70,000 over the last 10 years just to keep herself alive with the insulin she needs to treat her type 1 diabetes. She said that she had extended health benefits through her job but that her plan excluded insulin, and her additional insurance is capped at \$7,000 annually for her treatment needs.

Charlene Lavergne has been living with type 1.5 or type 2 diabetes for 43 years. She told us:

I'm 63. [If I had universal pharmacare coverage] it would mean that I could look forward to seeing my four granddaughters [grow up] and I could live with less anxiety and less stress. I would know that it was there for me. I wouldn't have to scramble. I wouldn't have to just about sell my socks for stuff. Having the right insulin too; that's the key. I need to have the right insulin, not the cheapest stuff on the market.

Basically [public pharmacare]...would give me hope, and it would give me a little bit more cash so I could eat.

Those are the kinds of stories we are hearing from real Canadians. This is who the NDP fights for. This is why we will not stop until we bring universal comprehensive public pharmacare to every Canadian, just like the NDP brought health care to every Canadian.

• (1810)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Motion No. 173 speaks to an important public health issue that affects millions of Canadians from coast to coast. Motion No. 173 calls on the Government of Canada to recognize the month of November every year as diabetes awareness month. Canada has a proud history in the science related to diabetes with the discovery of insulin, dating back to 1920. This motion proposes that we continue to be a leader in diabetes prevention, awareness and education to help prevent or delay the onset of this disease for millions of Canadians.

While the focus of this motion is for one month, diabetes has implications for the health of Canadians all year long. Raising awareness and helping Canadians understand what they can do to avoid the onset of diabetes is both timely and important. Diabetes happens when the body loses its ability to produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that controls blood glucose levels. When it goes undetected, or if action is not taken to keep it in check, serious complications can happen. Even worse, for some it can lead to premature death. This being said, it is possible to remain healthy with diabetes, when a person has access to the information and tools to manage it.

We know that there are three types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is not preventable. Gestational diabetes occurs in pregnant women and usually disappears after delivery. Approximately 90% of diabetes cases in Canadian adults are type 2. Type 2 diabetes is preventable through changing behaviours, such as healthier eating and being physically active.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, about 3 million or 8.6% of Canadians have diagnosed diabetes. A further 4.1% of Canadians have an elevated blood glucose level, which can be a precursor to this chronic disease. The pan-Canadian health inequalities reporting initiative, a research collaboration among federal, provincial and territorial governments and other partners, also tells us that some Canadians are more susceptible to diabetes than others in the general population. For example, this study tells us that men, Canadians over 40, first nations and Métis, and Canadians

with lower income and education levels have higher rates of diabetes than other Canadians.

We know that people living with diabetes can face greater challenges to fully participating in the economic and social life of Canada. What we also know is that type 2 diabetes shares a set of risk factors with other chronic diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular disease. These risk factors can be addressed by making changes in our everyday life, which means that something can be done to delay or prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes.

Motion No. 173 speaks of the importance of awareness and public education to help prevent diabetes. Helping Canadians learn more about the positive impacts of healthy eating, physical activity, not smoking and drinking less alcohol in preventing chronic diseases, such as diabetes, is what a diabetes awareness month could be all about.

However, is it enough to simply know that eating better and being physically active can help prevent diabetes? We need to ensure that Canadians of all backgrounds and in all regions have the opportunity to access healthier foods; we need to help them find the time to be and stay more physically active, and help them stop smoking.

The Standing Committee on Health recently released a very informative report called "A Diabetes Strategy for Canada". Very astutely, the committee recommended that the Government of Canada "explore options to improve public awareness and education on diabetes, particularly through community programming, including public awareness of the relationship between nutrition and diabetes."

I am pleased to say that this government is taking a comprehensive and proactive approach to promote healthy living and prevent chronic diseases, such as diabetes, as proposed by my colleagues at the health committee in their recent report. This comprehensive, overall approach includes policies, activities and investments that would help Canadians sit less, move more, eat healthier foods and stop smoking.

If the House concurs, a diabetes awareness month could play a key role in helping Canadians access more information on diabetes that our government makes available and activities to help Canadians lead healthier lives. For example, this government has been working with the provinces and territories to collect surveillance data on chronic diseases and their risk factors, and in learning how diabetes and its risk factors may impact different groups of Canadians.

Private Members' Business

•(1815)

The government also invested \$47 million in 2017-18 through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to advance research on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of all forms of diabetes. The government is working with research partners on diabetes-related research activities through CIHR's pathways to health equity for aboriginal peoples initiative, Canada's strategy for patient-oriented research, and a new partnership to defeat diabetes with JDRF Canada.

Knowing about one's risk for chronic disease, such as diabetes, is also key to helping people take action to prevent illness. The Public Health Agency of Canada, in collaboration with partners, developed and promotes a diabetes risk questionnaire called CANRISK. This tool helps Canadians understand their level of risk in developing pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes.

The Government of Canada is also investing in innovative community-based programming and public education to test and scale up projects that help prevent chronic diseases, such as diabetes, and encourage healthy living. Through its healthy living and chronic disease prevention multi-sectoral partnerships program, the Public Health Agency of Canada has not only invested \$112 million, but also leveraged \$92 million in non-governmental funding in 49 projects across Canada to give these projects greater reach and impact. Over 1.9 million Canadians who have participated in projects funded through this program have become more physically active and are eating more healthy foods. Some projects have helped Canadians stop smoking, which is important.

One project of note is providing funding of \$25 million over five years to Participaction to increase the daily amount of physical activity among Canadians. Participaction is engaging communities across the country through events, a national and fun multimedia and digital campaign, and regional partnerships to get Canadians to move more and sit less where they live, work, study and play.

Early in our mandate, this government took action to help Canadians eat healthier. As I mentioned earlier, eating healthier is very important in helping to prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes. Through the healthy eating strategy, led by Health Canada, we have eliminated the use of trans fats and are working to improve nutrition labelling on food, among other actions. I am proud to say that earlier this year, the government updated and published a new Canada food guide, based on the best evidence available, to promote healthy eating.

The Government of Canada also works to help Canadians who may need greater assistance to access healthy food and to gain food literacy knowledge, skills and practices. We continue to support programs such as the Canada prenatal nutrition program and nutrition north Canada, and we continue to work on improving these programs to make healthier foods more available and more accessible.

We know that smoking is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes, as it can increase blood glucose levels and lead to insulin resistance. We recently announced a renewed Canada's tobacco strategy, which establishes a number of activities to achieve a target of less than 5% population-wide tobacco use by 2035.

As I mentioned earlier, we know that some Canadians face greater challenges than others to delay and prevent chronic diseases, such as diabetes, and to live as healthily as possible when living with diabetes. This is especially the case for first nations, Métis and Inuit populations.

Our government recognizes the interplay of a number of factors that contribute to the high rates of diabetes in indigenous communities. My honourable colleague, the Minister of Indigenous Services, is working closely with provincial, territorial and indigenous governments and partners to address the prevention and management of chronic diseases, in particular diabetes, and to support indigenous-specific approaches.

For example, in 2018, through extensive collaboration, a guidance framework entitled "Preventing and Managing Chronic Disease in First Nations Communities" was completed. This framework provides broad direction and identifies opportunities to improve the access of first nations individuals, families and communities to culturally relevant services.

Motion No. 173 reminds us that we can all do more to communicate actions to help delay or prevent disease onset. It reminds us that we can do more to create the conditions in all of our communities to make the healthy choice the easy choice for all Canadians.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Brampton-South for bringing the motion before the House, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about this important issue.

•(1820)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for using her private member's hour to put forward Motion No. 173. Dedicating November as an awareness month would bring much-needed attention to this terrible disease, which inflicts millions around the globe.

Everyone in this chamber knows someone who has either type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Diabetes is not something that is happening to other people in some far-off place; it is happening right here in our own communities. We know how the disease negatively impacts their quality of life, and in far too many circumstances it can lead to serious medical conditions.

Private Members' Business

While we still do not have a cure, in most cases people are able to treat and manage their diabetes. Due to the generosity of Canadians, millions of dollars in research have helped scientists and doctors make significant medical breakthroughs. Their discoveries have resulted in new and innovative therapies for the prevention and treatment of diabetes. It is my sincere hope that one day we can develop a cure and alleviate entirely the suffering of those who struggle with this disease.

While some progress has been made, the number of people across the world suffering from diabetes has quadrupled in the past 30 years. In many respects, we are failing to reverse this trend. Even though preventative measures such as having a healthy diet and staying active are good deterrents, there are still no guarantees.

For those who have diabetes, the insulin and the specialty diets people must eat can get very expensive. There are significant costs people must absorb, and that is why I found it disturbing when the Liberal government started to deny diabetics from claiming the disability tax credit. While proclaiming a diabetes awareness month is good and all, when rubber hits the road, the government has unfairly treated thousands of Canadians who suffer from diabetes.

I want to share the story of a young lady who came to my office in Brandon. Kelsey Levandoski contacted me after the Liberals denied her claim for the disability tax credit. Kelsey was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 8, and she knows first-hand the challenges of living day to day with her diagnosis. She reached out to seek help and to try to convince the government to fix the mess it created.

Kelsey was frustrated to see her claim be denied, but she was also thinking about others who found themselves in the same situation. In fact, she mentioned that she was worried about those with lower incomes. She was concerned about how they would be able to manage after this very ill-thought-out decision.

While she estimates that managing type 1 diabetes could cost up to \$1,500 a month, through her health coverage at work, she is still spending \$300 out of her pocket. She must purchase syringes, insulin, glucose meters and test strips to manage the disease. After totalling that up for the entire year, that is a tremendous cost for a person to absorb.

Kelsey followed the regulations and after consulting with her doctor, she met the criterion of 14 hours per week laid out by the Canada Revenue Agency. For some unknown reason, and after dodging a multitude of questions, the Liberals still have not given us any reason for why they denied her and many others.

If the Liberals thought they could get away with it, they were sadly mistaken. While they attempted to dodge responsibility and pretend there was nothing to see here, they were quickly called out. It was soon afterwards that despite their denials, they had indeed changed how the CRA applied the eligibility criteria.

Even the Senate committee on social affairs studied this issue and tabled a report with 16 recommendations calling on the government to simplify the application process and clarify the eligibility criteria. I sympathize with and understand the frustration of many Canadians when the Canada Revenue Agency does not provide any justification for why they were denied.

While the Senate report was issued over a year ago, still nothing has been done. It begs the question: What will it take to get the Liberals to start acting on the recommendations?

• (1825)

The Liberals completely ignored the concerns of Diabetes Canada and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and they are continuing to drag their feet. They have given the cold shoulder to those who are clearly eligible to claim the disability tax credit.

While we succeeded in overturning CRA's decision for Kelsey, it is unfathomable that the Government of Canada would treat people like this. I thank Kelsey for bringing this issue to my attention. The total sum may not seem like a lot of money to some, but to her and many others, it certainly is.

I was taken aback by those who reached out to my office to express their anger at the Liberals over this decision. I was also very moved that Kelsey's father took the time out of his busy schedule to come to my office to let me know that he appreciated all that we did for his daughter. I never thought we would ever see the day when the government thought it was okay to give million-dollar handouts to big corporations and yet think it would be okay to target those who lived with diabetes.

While I will always go to bat for my constituents, I want this issue resolved and fixed immediately. Just yesterday, there was a media report that the disability advisory committee was demanding CRA explain why there was a 53% spike in rejections for various individuals claiming the disability tax credit. According to the committee, it has documentation that says the number of rejected claims for disability tax credits rose by 53%.

To fix this injustice once and for all and to ensure the Liberals never treat diabetics like this ever again, my friend, the Conservative member from Calgary Shepard, introduced the fairness for persons with disabilities act. His legislation would amend the Income Tax Act to reduce the number of hours necessary to be eligible for the disability tax credit and to expand the activities that could be used to calculate that time.

These common sense changes would improve the existing law, as it would say, in black and white, that people who managed their illness at least three times a week, for a total duration averaging not less than 10 hours a week, would be eligible for the disability tax credit. Furthermore, it would list that the intake of medical food and medical formula could be used to calculate the total time needed to manage the disease.

The bill would be enshrined into law so that someone like Kelsey would never have to worry again about a future Liberal government denying her ability to claim this tax credit. It would assist thousands of Canadians who suffer from diabetes and stop politicians stripping them from accessing this tax credit.

That is where we find ourselves.

Private Members' Business

I hope the hon. Liberal member moving this motion is taking her own government to task in how it has treated diabetics. If the Liberals will not listen to me, Kelsey or even Diabetes Canada and the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, I implore them to at least listen to their own caucus members.

A diabetes awareness month is a start, but it is not the end. It will not immediately help those who need it and it certainly will not get the Minister of National Revenue to do something about it. However, I am in support of diabetes awareness month being put in place.

I want my Liberal colleagues to go into caucus tomorrow morning and get their government to expedite the changes for which my friend from Calgary Shepard has called. They should stand up for their constituents, stand up for what is right and stop reading the talking points the Prime Minister wants them to articulate.

Treating diabetics with respect and allowing them to claim the disability tax credit is not a partisan issue. Let us pass this motion and hopefully by next week, we can stand in the House and tell Kelsey and all Canadians who suffer with diabetes that we have heeded their call.

In the short time we have left before Parliament ends, we should rise to the occasion and not take no for an answer. Canadians are watching and they expect results.

• (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time provided for the consideration of the motion has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 30(7), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Motion No. 111 under private members' business.

* * *

[*English*]

MENNONITE HERITAGE WEEK

The House resumed from February 27 consideration of the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands has eight minutes left from his original speech.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is great to be here today. Everyone should be celebrating Mennonite heritage week.

As I get a little further in my political career, I tend to focus a little less on policy and more on the people it impacts. Certainly, I have a large Mennonite community in my riding. These folks have very similar qualities. A lot of them come from a rural background. Many of them immigrated here from Europe about 100 years ago. They are known for being frugal, thrifty and generous. As well, they are known for being inventive and entrepreneurial. Typically, they are known for having a very deep faith.

I want to thank my colleague from Abbotsford for bringing forward this motion and giving me a few minutes to speak it.

I would like to speak about one person who I met over the years. He is a leader in the community in Swift Current and comes from Mennonite heritage. His name is Frank Rempel. He was born in 1924, which puts him in his 95th year. The other day I was talking to him while he was driving down the highway. He was frustrated because he was only able to go 103 kilometres, trying to stay under the speed limit on a Saskatchewan highway. His comment to me was, "I'm thinking that maybe I need to buy another airplane and fly it", so he did not have to go as slow.

He is one of 10 children born in Swift Current to a Mennonite family. He was born in the time of the three bottom plow, which was pulled behind the oxen. It typically had three blades and turned the ground over.

It was a time of celebration for many people. Families were big in those days and Christmas was a time for family gatherings. It was also a very difficult time in our part of the world as we moved into the 1930s, with the tumbleweeds, dust and dirt on the fence lines. Certainly, Mr. Rempel lived through that.

In those days, family was really all people had. They had very little beyond that. The kids went to school and learned to get along there, usually in a one-room schoolhouse.

Mr. Rempel started to work when he was very young. At 14, he went with his father and brother to Coaldale, Alberta to stack hay all summer. That is what they did to make enough money to keep their family on the farm. They did trapping in the winter and things like that. He said that at the age of 14 or 15 he learned how to make a saddle, which he sold to his brother. That was when he learned about the word profit. He is a very successful business person, so he learned that word well.

He travelled to and worked in many different places. In 1942, he met a young woman named Helen. He was 18 and she was 14. He had to wait, and so he did. He went out and did some things, like breaking in horses for a while. He said that after one particularly bad result, he was left wondering where he would have ended up if that had been his very last ride. In 1944, he rekindled that relationship. In 1945, he bought her a ring. In 1946, they were married. In 1947, they started a family.

After moving around a little back and forth, they resettled in southwestern Saskatchewan in 1953. He began a job as a mechanic. He got involved in his church a bit more. He stepped out in faith, bought a lot and built a grocery store. He and his wife sold the only truck they had to raise the money. It was all of \$550 to buy the lot so they could begin to build their own business.

He has some great stories in his book called *About our Father's Business*. There are great stories about learning how to sell cookware, going out and selling it to housewives and being able to use that to keep his family going. They built the Hillcrest Shopping Centre and moved into that. He sold cars as well to keep it going. He mentions that he took the Dale Carnegie course along the way and thought that made a huge difference in his life. He did well at the store and in 1964 he and his wife sold it.

Private Members' Business

• (1845)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it happens, but not often, that an NDP MP stands in the House and thanks a Conservative member of Parliament, and it is even rarer that a politician stands in the House of Commons and acknowledges their ignorance. This evening, I am going to do both.

I want to thank the sponsor of Motion No. 111, the MP for Abbotsford, whom my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona told me is a “good egg”. His motion calls for the establishment of Mennonite heritage week and has given me an opportunity to find out more about the Mennonite community and its history in my riding and my province. In that research, I discovered how unaware I was of the many ways the Mennonite community has made a positive difference in the lives of the people of Saskatchewan, and specifically the lives of the people in my riding of Saskatoon West.

I am going to focus on one aspect of the motion, which says that we will celebrate during Mennonite heritage week “the richness of the Mennonite culture, their role in promoting peace and justice both at home and abroad”.

To save face just a little, it is not that I was unaware of the work I am about to highlight in my community, but unaware of the fact that many programs there have their very beginnings in the Mennonite community.

This year, 2019, the private refugee sponsorship program turns 40. For 40 years, Canadians have been opening their hearts, communities and their wallets to help refugees from all over the world come to Canada and start new lives. It is a program that has been modelled by seven other countries in the world. Today, the private refugee sponsorship program has welcomed and settled over 275,000 people over and above those refugees assisted by our government.

In 1979, the international development and relief agency of the Mennonite Central Committee negotiated a groundbreaking agreement to help Ottawa match Vietnamese families with private sponsors and bring them to Canada as permanent residents. This sponsorship agreement was signed in March 1979, and many would remember why many in Canada, including those from the Mennonite communities, were seized with this work.

After the Vietnam War, over one million refugees fled the war-ravaged countries of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Those Vietnamese who took to the ocean in tiny, overcrowded ships were dubbed the “boat people”. The survivors sometimes languished for years in refugee camps. It was because of the response and the leadership of the Mennonite community in Canada that we were able to welcome over 60,000 refugees. It led the way for other churches and other communities to privately sponsor refugees to come to Canada. It was a first. Today, our ability to reach out to Syrian refugees as Canadians is because of the leadership of the Mennonite community, which sought a way to help those suffering from war to come to Canada and to safety.

In 2014, the Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan celebrated 50 years of great work and service to communities across Saskatchewan. Thanks to the coordinating efforts of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, that history of great work has been preserved and is accessible on the Internet to everyone, even

politicians in need of an education. This resource, where I learned of an organization I have worked with throughout my entire career at the United Way and now as a member of Parliament, had its roots in the Mennonite community.

For 21 years, the Global Gathering Place has been providing support and an array of services for newcomers, immigrants and refugees in Saskatoon. The Global Gathering Place is an important settlement service in my community and a critical organization that helps newcomers succeed, and it was started by the Mennonites in Saskatchewan. I am ashamed to say that I did not know of its beginning in the Mennonite community. However, 21 years ago, the MCC of Saskatchewan, with a small amount of funds, a box of toys, another box with coffee and supplies and one awesome woman, Belma Podrug, who started out as a volunteer on the steering committee, started the Global Gathering Place.

• (1850)

The Mennonite Central Committee of Saskatchewan supported the Global Gathering Place under its umbrella for several years until it became a stand-alone organization. To her credit, and lucky for us, Belma is still at the helm. The organization has grown a lot, providing more support to more newcomers, thousands of people, each and every year. Throughout my career at United Way and now as a member of Parliament, I have come to count on Belma at Global Gathering Place to help me help others.

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank is another initiative with its roots in the Mennonite farming community, and is rooted in the values of peace, co-operation and respect for human rights. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank started as the Mennonite Food Bank and in 1983, 15 other churches and faith-based organizations joined together and created the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. During the 50th anniversary of MCC in Saskatchewan, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank's work in Saskatchewan was celebrated, including the over \$1.76 million donated to the work of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank from Saskatchewan, including over \$500,000 from Mennonite churches.

This May, I was pleased to have a walk-and-talk meeting, walking and talking because I was in a rush and they were too, with Sol, Janessa and Holly who are constituents of mine and university student volunteers from World Renew, one of the partners with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. They came to remind me that they plan to vote in the next election and they wanted to know if I supported the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and Canada's role in international development. They pressed me to continue to advocate for and support Canada meeting its international commitment to development funding of 0.7% of our GDP. I said I would. I want to thank Sol, Janessa and Holly for keeping the pressure on governments to follow through on this important commitment, and for their personal commitment to Canada's leadership in international development.

I want to close with my gratitude for the work of the Mennonite churches and the Mennonite Central Committee to support those in prison, human beings who many of us choose to forget.

The Micah Mission is an ecumenical, non-profit, faith-based organization in Saskatchewan that provides support to currently and formerly incarcerated people. The mission's beginning came out of the restorative justice work of MCC of Saskatchewan. The work has been done since 1974. The work is done predominantly on a volunteer basis. Some 50-plus volunteers offer their compassion and over 3,000 hours a year of their time to three programs that make up the Micah Mission ministry.

Person-to-person and community chaplaincy programs connect volunteers with individuals both within and outside correctional institutions, through visitation opportunities and support for transition back into the community. A third program, circles of support and accountability, works with people who have been incarcerated as sexual offenders and are transitioning back into the community. The intention is to address the risk of reoffence while keeping both the community and the formerly incarcerated individuals safe.

I have barely touched on the impact of the Mennonite community in Saskatoon West, but just thanking the community seems sort of small in comparison to the impact. I have never been a very good closer in ending my speeches. I would never make a very good salesperson. I thought I would close with the words from Ryan Siemens, who, during the 50th anniversary of MCC Saskatchewan, wanted to thank the Mennonite community for all its work.

He said:

Your ongoing support makes this possible. But it wouldn't happen unless folks felt a call in their lives to meet Christ in this surprising way. Yes we hear how the media portrays inmates, but when the stigma is removed, when the labels have been dropped and you are visiting, drinking coffee and eating a chocolate bar, you will see the person across the table is a human being, made in the image of God, in need of friendship and forgiveness, community and hope, just like the rest of us.

● (1855)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am really happy to stand in this place today and speak in support of Motion No. 111, which was introduced by my colleague, the member for Abbotsford. The motion would establish the second week of September as Mennonite heritage week.

I am particularly pleased because of the way the motion came up in the House of Commons. I did not know if I would have the opportunity to speak. I am so grateful that it has come up today and that I could be here.

So much of what I have done in the House of Commons over the last 10 years has been pretty confrontational. Whether my job has been in government or in opposition, it has usually included mentioning other parties' names and talking about what they have been doing to hurt the country and what we have been doing to help the country.

Today, I am just going to talk about a wonderful group of people, the Mennonite people. It is not going to be partisan at all. It really feels good to be able to do that. I am especially proud to be able to speak about Canadian Mennonites and to be able to honour them, highlighting the wonderful things that Canadian Mennonites bring to our culture in Canada and truly bring to the world.

I am going to be speaking a bit personally about how important this motion is to Canadian Mennonites. I am from southern

Private Members' Business

Manitoba and I am a Mennonite myself, although I never really had thought about myself as a Mennonite because I grew up in a Mennonite community with Mennonite parents but we always went to the Pentecostal church. Growing up in Warren, Manitoba, and going to the Pentecostal church, we were not quite considered Mennonites. We were a little charismatic. Of course, there is a range but Mennonites are very humble and are not overly expressive. We were seen as being a little bit out there, being Pentecostals.

As my hon. colleague from the NDP just talked about, what it really came down to was our faith in Jesus Christ, our belief in loving God, in serving God, and our common beliefs around our Christian faith. As I grew up, I was part of the Pentecostal church and many of my friends were part of the Mennonite church. We really were brothers and sisters in our faith, as well as many of the things that we believed were important.

It is only as I have gotten older, even being a member of Parliament here, where every day any time I can, I tell somebody that I am from a Mennonite background and talk about things like our history, our music, our food, our culture, our sense of humour and our compassion. When I say "our", I mean so many good Mennonite people that I know. I am immensely proud to be a Mennonite, and so proud that this motion was brought forward.

When my colleague, the member for Abbotsford, was first talking about bringing this motion forward, we sort of joked about it, because Mennonites are typically very humble and do not want a lot of attention brought to themselves. If people were to look at the history of Mennonites, they would see how they have been victimized, persecuted and have risen above that persecution, but they have never asked for an apology or restitution. They never want accolades. They just want to put their head down, put their shoulder to the wheel, as it is, and just keep working hard for their families, for their community, for their God, for their country.

When the member for Abbotsford talked about bringing this motion forward, we sort of chuckled because we really were not sure if he was fully serious. We are Mennonites after all; we do not have Mennonite heritage week. However, I am so happy that he was serious. We very much support him in this motion. Even though Mennonites are humble people, I am really happy we can talk about Mennonites to the extent that we are today.

I want to talk briefly about some of the struggles that Mennonites had to face. Mennonites have migrated across Europe. They came out of the faith of a man named Menno Simons. Mennonites believed, and still believe, that baptism should happen as an adult, because adults can decide if they want to follow the Christian faith and want to be baptized. They are also very strong believers in peace, passivism and not going to war.

For those reasons, over many years, they had to migrate across Europe because they were persecuted. I want to talk a little about the struggles they had, because they were brought to Canada. In order to have a clear understanding around the struggles of the Manitoba Mennonite community specifically, I want to talk briefly about the history of them.

Private Members' Business

●(1900)

The very first group of Mennonites arrived in Manitoba from eastern Europe during the summer of 1874. Some of them are probably my ancestors. I am a fourth generation Canadian. My grandmas and grandpas arrived here when they were a year old or so, probably before 1874. They settled on reserves east and west of the Red River.

Between 1923 and 1929, over 25,000 Mennonites managed to immigrate and although more wanted to come, in 1930, the Canadian government closed the door to Mennonites. It goes without saying that our modern Canada was built by immigrants, many of them fleeing war, strife, persecution and economic devastation.

The Mennonites are certainly among that group of people who came to find refuge in Canada and it is the reason that Mennonites have been at the forefront and leading the way of private sponsors and helping refugees who are coming to Canada now.

Among other things, Mennonite church organizations, private business owners and in my riding of Portage—Lisgar, many private individuals have banded together and are supporting refugees who are fleeing from persecution in the Middle East and in other areas because they have such a strong sense of what it means to be persecuted the majority of times because of their faith. They have been at the forefront of welcoming refugees to Canada and helping them.

There are two particular groups of Mennonites that arrived in southwest Manitoba, 14 families in one and eight in another. These Mennonites arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs and Bibles in their hands. Although they had no money, they still managed to secure land without making so much as a down payment. Instead, they promised half of their gross annual income until the purchase price and interest were covered.

That is the way Mennonites did it then and do it now. They will set their mind to do something. Possibly it is a problem that they themselves need solved. They will find that solution.

I think of so many industries in my riding, for example. Mennonites who are farmers might have a problem with their equipment or something that is not working properly. They are incredibly innovative. They find a solution and they create a gadget to fix their combine or other type of tool. When a neighbour sees it, he will ask if one can be made for him because he really likes it. They sell it to a neighbour and before long, usually within just a few years, there is another small business that has sprung up out of the Mennonite community. Their expansion through southwestern Manitoba saw the creation of communities like Winkler, Plum Coulee, Rosenfeld, Altona. Many of those are in my riding of Portage—Lisgar.

I want to touch briefly on a couple of things. Mennonites not only have been through so much persecution, but one of the things that make Mennonites unique is Mennonite food. I do not know any other culture where a meal is deep-fried dough, which is called rollkuchen, and watermelon, which is *arbus* in German. Rollkuchen and *arbus* is what we would eat for supper, deep-fried dough and watermelon. If the dough was not sweet enough, we would dip it in a

bit of syrup which is very good. Wareneki is cottage cheese which is boiled. We would have that with schmaundt fat and farmer sausage.

I also have to talk about the sense of humour of Mennonites and their love for music. At a Mennonite funeral we hear the most beautiful music ever from the congregation.

I want to close with some headlines from a wonderful website called The Daily Bonnet. This is Mennonite humour. If people are Mennonites they will get these headlines. I will not try to explain them, but I will read the headlines from The Daily Bonnet written by Andrew Unger from Steinbach: “Sound of Knacking Zoot Used as Mennonite Mating Call”; “Quilt Cartel Jacks up Prices at Mennonite Relief Sale”; “Left Lane Between Steinbach and Blumenort to be Designated ‘Slow Minivan Lane’”; “New Bothwell Resident Arrested for Putting Processed Cheese on His Burger”; “Mennonites Rush to Get Their Cars Outside During Hail Storm”.

●(1905)

This is a good headline: “Dating Mennonite Couple Solidify Relationship By Sharing Co-op Number”. “Knackzoat Found in Last Summer’s Jean Shorts ‘Still Perfectly Edible’ Says Local Man”—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, time is up.

●(1910)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, can I ask for unanimous consent for one more?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to give one more?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Candice Bergen: *Danke schön.* That is Mennonite for one more. “Google Honours Mennonites with Farmer Sausage Logo”, which is not true.

I am so proud of Mennonites.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to recognize and support Motion No. 111 to declare the second week of September as Mennonite heritage week, an overdue recognition of the Mennonite communities and their important contributions to Canada.

Mennonites fled Europe as refugees. They fled persecution. They fled because they had beliefs that others did not. They were persecuted because they were pacifists and they moved from one country to another. In 1566, the Mennonites were scattered over Germany because of the persecution of their culture. The very first group of Mennonites to arrive in Manitoba came from eastern Europe. When I go door to door and meet many Mennonites in my community, they say proudly that they came from Ukraine and can share that history. As we know, many Mennonites came from Russian-occupied Ukraine, where their homes and properties were confiscated.

Mennonites arrived in reserves in 1874. They had a special agreement with the Government of Canada and settled on reserves on the east and west sides of the Red River. In 1923, the federal government opened its doors to Mennonite immigration and communities were eager to find new lives on the Canadian Prairies. Between 1923 and 1929, over 25,000 Mennonites managed to immigrate to Canada.

Through selfless action, the Mennonite community is known for its service to the community. Mennonite families and organizations have worked tirelessly to settle newcomers to Canada and their work deserves to be recognized and appreciated. These are people willing to give of their own time, their own savings and their own dedication. They go out of their way to help other refugees and immigrants settle in Canada.

In fact, the Mennonite community is one of the largest private refugee sponsorship groups in Canada. Today, almost 200,000 Mennonites call Canada their home. Winnipeg has one of the largest urban Mennonite populations in the world, with more than 20,000 Mennonites and 45 Mennonite churches. There are over seven in my riding alone.

Many of my constituents in Kildonan—St Paul's Mennonite community have a dedicated history of supporting and welcoming newcomers, sponsoring hundreds of new Canadian families since the private refugee sponsorship began. Many families are very concerned about the individuals fleeing the United States and looking for a haven in Canada, with tolerance, being open-minded and questioning why anybody would want to block the border at Emerson or look at somehow blocking people from coming to Canada, saying that their history and tradition is one of opening their arms and welcoming people to Manitoba, not blocking them. I find this particularly heartwarming and fitting, given that this year is also the 40th anniversary of the private refugee sponsorship program.

By the end of the Vietnam War, the Mennonite Central Committee negotiated a groundbreaking agreement with Ottawa to match Vietnamese refugees with private sponsors and brought them to Canada as permanent residents. Based on these agreements, the federal government introduced the private refugee sponsorship program, allowing groups of five eligible to sponsor refugees directly. Even now, there are families and organizations asking if Canada would increase the number of refugees and private sponsorships that Canada would take.

From 1979 until 2018, approximately 12,000 people arrived in Canada through MCC Canada's private refugee sponsorship program. That is a program that helped individuals with intense needs, with no cost to government, often providing the supports necessary for those families to be on their feet and proudly paying taxes within months, something we can aspire to and support 100%.

●(1915)

It is only through dedicated partners, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, that our Liberal government was able to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees who were escaping conflict. Many of them live in Kildonan—St. Paul, and many of them are members of the local Mennonite church. They are active members and volunteers, building community hand in hand. As noted by a Winnipeg Free Press article published on the anniversary of the private refugee

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sponsorship program, “many of us...at the time also came as immigrants to this country and in refugee-like situations.... [We're] absolutely paying it forward.” That is a philosophy we see in Kildonan—St. Paul.

Winnipeg's Mennonites have contributed greatly to Canadian society, helping to build our city and grow our multicultural community. The Mennonite community in Winnipeg built the Mennonite hospital, now known as Concordia Hospital, which is in northeast Winnipeg. It was run, funded, carried and supported by the Mennonite community. Unfortunately, it is now going through drastic changes, and many members of the community are looking to support that facility, as it has been very special to them from the time they created and supported it.

In my hometown of Winnipeg, the Mennonite community has established many well-known, reputable manufacturing companies, such as Price Industries, Loewen Windows and Palliser Furniture. They make a point of providing an opportunity for indigenous people, refugees and women to work. The charity and goodwill of Mennonites, and their ability to help, occurs not only at home with charities but also in the workplace. Some of us may have taken a Triple E motorhome or trailer on a camping trip or have put in excellent Loewen windows or doors, which are perhaps, I would argue, the finest in the world.

I remember listening to a group of these very entrepreneurial business owners from the Morden-Winkler area. They made a commitment to create a job for every single graduate from their local high schools. That became a reality. Instead of watching young people move away from their communities, they built the resources and built the dream. They have probably doubled the population in their cities since they came to me. At that time, I was the provincial minister of industry, and we were looking to support the Mennonite community with its growth strategy. It is about compassion, entrepreneurship and making a difference.

Time-honoured, community-oriented, Mennonite-operated companies like the ones I mentioned have made contributions to small communities and large communities alike. In fact, one of them is part of a brand new industry. It is called Delta 9, and it is growing, very successfully, legalized cannabis in my area. We were very happy to help it out as well.

It is incredibly fitting that the second week of September was chosen to be Mennonite heritage week, as it is the traditional time when the Mennonite Central Committee's relief sales are held every year in Canada and the U.S. It is my hope that during this time, as we celebrate Mennonite heritage in Canada, we will work together in service of our communities and celebrate our diversity.

Hon. Jane Philpott (Markham—Stouffville, Ind.): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House to speak in support of Motion No. 111 put forth by the member for Abbotsford, which would declare the second week of September as Mennonite heritage week, as a time to recognize the contributions Canadian Mennonites have made to building Canadian society.

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In supporting this motion, I will share some details of Mennonite contributions to the history and heritage in my riding of Markham—Stouffville. Our region had been home to indigenous peoples for thousands of years. In fact, one of the largest Huron-Wendat villages in North America stood on the boundary between Markham and Stouffville some 500 years ago.

Then in 1804, settlers, including Abraham Stouffer, his wife Elizabeth and her brother Peter Reesor, arrived from Pennsylvania. They transported their families and possessions in four large covered wagons, each drawn by four to six horses. They brought pigs, fowl, sheep, cows, oxen, housewares, farm implements and homemade food for the six-week journey.

They followed a path forged in 1615 by French free-spirit voyageur Étienne Brûlé. Within 10 years, another 55 families arrived from Pennsylvania and settled into the community. The vast majority of those families were Mennonite. The federal government soon abbreviated the name of the town to Stouffville to honour Abraham Stouffer and his family.

The early history of Markham—Stouffville is the story of Mennonites and pacifism. They were the first conscientious objectors in Canada's pre-history. In the War of 1812, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe exempted them from military service under the Militia Act of 1793. Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe was more interested in taking advantage of the significant Mennonite farming skills than in recruiting unenthusiastic soldiers. Mennonites helped our country's early leaders learn the gifts of tolerance and forbearance to develop a more broad-minded country.

In modern times, as we confront existential threats like climate change, economic inequality, racism, violence and global instability, Mennonites offer us a blueprint to live productive lives full of hope, meaning and purpose. Specifically, they challenge us in five important ways.

Number one, Mennonites are known for addressing issues on both a local and a global scale. The Stouffville Care & Share Thrift Shop collects and sells local thrift goods, with all funds raised supporting local and international development and peace projects. Residents benefit from more choice and lower prices. At the same time, all funds raised support international development and relief. Everybody wins.

Number two, Mennonites move beyond their own personal stories of persecution and injustice to help the persecuted and afflicted. Abraham Stouffer's ancestors were expelled from Switzerland in a climate of religious intolerance in 1709. That was the backdrop for a life of courage and faithfulness. Today, Mennonites in Stouffville have an inspiring track record of supporting the persecuted through their work with international refugees. During the Syrian refugee crisis, 1,500 refugees were resettled by Canadian Mennonites over just 12 months, from 2015 to 2016. Mennonite commitment to religious freedom is borne out in words and actions.

Number three, Mennonites work together collaboratively on common goals with a shared sense of purpose. They work in partnership and community. This is a model for how we, in the House of Commons, could work better across party lines to deal with the entrenched challenges of our generation. We can learn and then

practise an ethic of caring and sharing our hardships with friends and neighbours, to improve our quality of life and increase our sense of community. As parliamentarians, we can follow Mennonite examples of barn-raising collaboration to bring effective solutions to our most pressing challenges.

Number four, Mennonites have modelled the importance of working through shared values. The transformative power of shared values brings a sense of urgency, belonging, legitimacy and healing to our communities. Our shared values allow us to build communities grounded in compassion and service. For example, a local Mennonite woman in Stouffville recently received a provincial Trillium grant to build a three-season structure to host indigenous reconciliation programming, including the KAIROS blanket exercise workshop.

● (1920)

Number five, we can celebrate the Mennonite model of a strong work ethic and sense of industriousness. For over 200 years, Mennonite farmers have tilled the soil of Markham—Stouffville, managing farm resources, taking risks, growing food, feeding cities and raising families. Seventy-five farms, many of which are run by Mennonite farmers, are now part of the Rouge National Urban Park, our country's newest national park, which will hugely benefit from Mennonite industriousness and superior farming skills.

My riding of Markham—Stouffville has vastly benefited from 200 years of Mennonite industriousness and community. Mennonites built a community with deep interlocking roots. Their zeal for justice and peace translated into lives of service, compassion and mutual assistance. The crest of the top of the Whitchurch-Stouffville coat of arms is the dove of peace, another Mennonite contribution to our rich town history.

Finally, while my husband and I were both raised in the Presbyterian Church, we started attending our local Mennonite congregation a few years after we moved to Stouffville. We eventually became members of the Community Mennonite Church, because we were inspired by the focus on peace, social justice and care for the environment.

With that, members can understand even more of why I am happy to stand in support of Motion No. 111 to establish Mennonite heritage week so we can honour the important legacy that Mennonites have made to Canadian history and culture.

● (1925)

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank all my colleagues in the House for engaging in this discussion about the motion that would declare Mennonite heritage week the second week of September. I appreciate the different perspectives and the diversity of the Mennonites that have been highlighted and profiled in the House.

In my closing remarks, I would like to profile how the Russian Mennonites, which is where my family fits in, came to Canada. They came to Canada through an organization called the Mennonite Central Committee, which is the pre-eminent relief organization for Mennonites. Virtually every Mennonite denomination around the world is a member of this organization, which we refer to as MCC.

It is a global inter-Mennonite, non-profit organization that strives to share God's love and compassion through relief, development and peace building. Its mission is perfectly expressed in the words of Menno Simons, a prominent figure during the Reformation after whom the Mennonites are named. His words and Gospel message have been paraphrased and put to music by my good friend and well-known Mennonite composer, Larry Nickel.

True evangelical faith cannot lie sleeping
For it clothes the naked
It comforts the sorrowful
It gives to the hungry, food
And it shelters the destitute.

It cares for the blind and lame
The widow and orphan child
It binds up the wounded man
It offers a gentle hand...

Abundantly we have received
And gratefully we will respond
With true evangelical faith...

Founded in 1920, MCC's original goal was to provide food to starving Mennonites in Soviet Russia and Ukraine. In Canada, a few years later, MCC took on the job of resettling Russian Mennonites who were facing persecution and starvation and found themselves displaced in post-World War II Germany and elsewhere.

The story begins with a man by the name of C.F. Klassen, a visionary Canadian Mennonite leader who recognized the plight of the Mennonites in Russia and embarked upon a mission to colonize the homeless Mennonites in Canada. His Motto in German was *Gott kann*, or God can. In other words, with God, nothing is impossible.

C.F. Klassen travelled to Germany, seeking out displaced Mennonites and offering them help through MCC. His son and daughter-in-law, Herb and Maureen, later retold his story. The eager refugees gathering around Klassen bombarding him with questions were surprised to discover that he could tell them all about their relatives in Canada, which town or village they had settled in, what they were working at and the names of their children. How could this be?

They also heard that Klassen had already helped thousands of Mennonites flee Russia during the 1920s. He had a difficult task, often involving difficult citizenship issues and tricky negotiations with government authorities in trying to get Mennonites' permission to come to Canada.

Klassen's name now became a harbinger of hope for thousands, as they passed through war-torn west Germany with those words on their lips, *Gott kann*, God can. When all human efforts failed, he pointed people to a God who always cared for the orphan, homeless and the destitute. Although he often spoke to military and government officials regarding his peoples' plight, he brought

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compassion, care and understanding to each one he met, especially those in the refugee camps.

I will close by noting that when I gave my original remarks, as usual when one tries to summarize the history of a group of people, a number of key contributors fell through the cracks. I mentioned athletes, musicians, artists, writers, business people and politicians even who had distinguished themselves in Canada who are all Mennonites. However, I missed a few very important ones, for example, Grammy Award-winning operatic tenor Ben Heppner and concert and recital soprano Edith Wiens, both being products of British Columbia; and, finally, author Rudy Wiebe, who is known for his novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.

I am very grateful for the support I have received in the House for declaring the second week of every September Mennonite heritage week.

• (1930)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 29, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business.

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[*Translation*]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, moving a motion to extend the sitting hours of the House is not a great way to close out the last session of the 42nd Parliament of Canada. We are not opposed to working late every evening. We want to work and make progress on files.

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Once again, we take issue with the means the government is using to get all members to work a little harder because the session is ending and these are the last days of this Parliament. The other items in the motion do not concern the extension of sitting hours. We take issue with the government's approach, which prevents the opposition from doing its job properly. It is handcuffing the opposition and moving the government's agenda along as quickly as possible, not based on what parliamentarians may have to say, but on what the government wants.

This is not new to us, given how the government has handled the legislative process throughout its mandate. The government has been unable to advance a decent legislative agenda. I am the opposition agriculture and agri-food critic. I spoke to my predecessors, and we have been waiting for the Minister of Agriculture to introduce a bill to improve the lives of Canadian farmers since my appointment two years ago.

When I look at all the agriculture documents and bills this government has introduced since it was elected in 2015, it is clear to me that the government has achieved nothing. Absolutely no legislation was proposed to improve the lives of Canadian farmers.

However, numerous bills were introduced. Now, the government is saying that the situation is urgent and that we must move quickly and pass this legislation. A number of bills were not passed by the government, and now time is of the essence.

Of all of the bills that were not passed, some never even moved forward. We have, for example, Bill C-5, introduced on February 5, 2016; Bill C-12, introduced on March 24, 2016; Bill C-27, introduced on October 19, 2016; Bill C-28, introduced on October 21, 2016; Bill C-32, introduced on November 15, 2016; and Bill C-33, introduced on November 24, 2016. The Liberals have had four years to move these bills forward.

All of a sudden, the government claims that these bills need to be passed urgently. After the vote this evening we will debate Bill C-81, which was introduced on June 20, 2018. It has been nearly a year. We are being told that this bill is urgent and must absolutely be passed, but the government was unable to bring it forward earlier.

If this is so urgent, why did the government not bring up this bill more regularly in the House? Why did we not talk about it on a regular basis? All of a sudden, we need to pass it quickly because the Liberals have realized that they are going to run out of time. The government was unable to manage the House. It was unable to give parliamentarians an opportunity to do their work and to speak about important bills. The Liberals have realized at the last minute that they have forgotten this and that. There is an election coming up in the fall and now parliamentarians have to do the work to pass this or that bill.

The government chose to impose late sittings on the House for 18 days while also moving a time allocation motion, which means that we will not even have the chance to talk about it for long. If we refer to the Standing Orders, the government could have extended sitting hours for the last 10 days of the session, as provided for in our normal parliamentary calendar. That is what it could have done, and it would have been entirely doable.

I would like to talk about one of the Standing Orders. Even though the standing order that governs the extension of sitting hours in June has been in effect since 1982, it is not used every year. In some cases, special orders were proposed and adopted instead, usually by unanimous consent.

● (1935)

Parliamentarians are here to represent the people in their ridings. According to the Standing Orders, anyone who wants to change the rules to move things along has to seek the unanimous consent of the House.

Unfortunately, this government does not really seem to care about unanimous consent. It does not really seem to care what the opposition thinks or has to say even though, just like MPs on government benches, we represent all the people of our ridings. The least the government could do, out of respect for Canadian voters, is respect people in opposition. We have a role to play.

Unfortunately, our role is not to agree all the time and say the government is doing a good job. On the contrary, our role is to try to point out its failings so it can improve. Basically, the opposition's role is to make the government better by pointing out its mistakes and bad decisions so the government can reflect on that and find better solutions for all Canadians. However, the government does not seem willing to take that into account.

On top of that, there are two opposition days left. I mentioned the negative effects of the motion. The government is proposing to extend the hours in the House, but what it failed to mention is that it is going to deny the opposition the opportunity to have two full opposition days to address situations that are very troubling to Canadians.

For instance, during a normal opposition day during which we might hear from a number of stakeholders, we could have talked about the canola crisis, which is affecting thousands of canola producers across Canada. This crisis, which involves China, is costing Canadian canola producers billions of dollars. For all members who have canola farmers among their constituents, it would have been an opportunity to express the concerns of their fellow citizens and farmers in their regions. Perhaps we could have convinced the government to take action, such as filing a complaint through the World Trade Organization to condemn China's actions or appointing an ambassador, for example. As peculiar as it may seem, Canada currently has no representative in China to speak with Chinese authorities.

We could have had such a debate here in the House.

The one thing that the members across the aisle seem to have forgotten is that members of the House are not the government. The government is the ministers, the cabinet members. In this chamber, people have the right to speak their minds in the hope of swaying the government.

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It is true that the government is formed by the party with the most members elected to the House, but it is also up to backbench members of the ruling party to try to persuade their government and speak for the people they represent, such as the farmers in their ridings. Sadly, the members on that side of the House seem to be divorced from reality. They seem to be blind to the government's desire to crush Parliament, to crush the MPs who are trying to do a good job of representing the constituents of every riding. I think that is a real shame.

We have absolutely nothing against extending the sitting hours of the House, but if it is intended to cover up the government's mistakes and its inability to properly organize the work of the House, then I think that is disgraceful.

The government is using this kind of motion to not only make us work more, which, as I mentioned, we agree with, but also deprive us of our last remaining tools, like the voting marathons everyone remembers. We held those voting marathons to make the government realize it cannot do whatever it wants in the House of Commons. The House of Commons is not the tool of the government. This motion to extend the sitting hours also prevents us from using that tool, which was a powerful means for us to send the government a message.

After making such grand promises of transparency and openness, this government has failed spectacularly to deliver. Sadly, its latest motion on the rules of the House just proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that it has no respect for the work of the House. It saddens me to see a government ending its term on such a sour note.

• (1940)

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always listen very carefully to my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable.

He spoke about unanimous consent a little earlier, but I do not really agree with him. He said that we do not have to agree, and so I agree that I do not agree with him.

He spoke about extended sitting hours. Is he aware that, in the 41st Parliament, the previous government, which was a Conservative government, adopted a motion to extend sitting hours on three occasions? We had extended hours from June 11 to 21, 2012, from May 22 to June 19, 2013, and from May 27 to June 20, 2014. Could my hon. colleague from the Conservative Party explain why the Conservatives used this measure at the time?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, as I already stated very clearly, we have nothing against extending the sitting hours of the House in order to do more work and improve the lives of Canadians.

The problem is that the government wants to extend sitting hours because it was incapable of properly managing the work of the House. That is the problem.

I must also say that on those three occasions, we never limited the duration of opposition days. That never happened. They should perhaps take a closer look and go over things a little more.

We also did not prevent opposition members from using the tools they need to have their voices heard. They are not just extending hours, they are suppressing the opposition's right to speak. That is

what my colleague should realize when she looks at the analyses, instead of simply reading the lines she is provided.

We respect the work of Parliament.

• (1945)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I have the utmost respect for what my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable has to say, I cannot help but smile as I watch the Liberals and Conservatives bickering over procedure, when both parties are beating the record for time allocation and extension of sitting hours.

However, I agree with the hon. member on some aspects, including the Liberal government's inability to advance a proper legislative agenda.

My question for the hon. member has more to do with political acumen. Normally, this is part of the process in the House. It usually covers the last two sitting weeks of the House, during which it is possible to extend the sitting hours to try to get through as many bills as possible. The government is proposing twice as much time. The word “propose” is a euphemism. The government is imposing twice as many weeks.

Does the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable really believe that the Liberals need twice as much time to advance a rather light legislative agenda, or does he think they want to end the Parliamentary session two weeks early?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières. I appreciate that he agreed with me on some points.

I also understand that, unfortunately, in this type of debate, we will never know whether the NDP would use time allocation because it will never form government. I can understand, then, why he is a bit jealous of our exchanges.

My colleague from Trois-Rivières does seem to have a knack for guessing the government's intentions. Listening to the Prime Minister answer questions day after day, it becomes clear just how much he is looking forward to a vacation. He seems tired of answering questions. He must be tired of hearing the questions, but we never get answers.

Every day and every week since January, the opposition parties have been scoring points while the Liberals have been losing them. We are winning every week in the House. I think the Liberals are looking forward to a vacation. Personally, I am looking forward to October 21, when we can give them an extended vacation.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak this evening. I am always proud to speak on behalf of my constituents in Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, whom I am proud to represent.

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I would like to tell my colleagues who are here this evening that I am proud to represent Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and also Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand and Rosemère. We have been dealing with flooding again this year, but we are working hard for our fellow citizens.

Today I am debating Motion No. 30, which is very important. This motion is about how the House will operate from now until we adjourn for the summer. This is important because it will allow us to make progress on files that are important to Canadians, including the people of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. These issues are the reason Canadians elected us.

Motion No. 30 will enable the House to act on the excellent work our committees have already done. I want to emphasize that this work is not carried out solely by committee members from this side of the House. This work is carried out by all parties and all individuals on committees so that proposed legislation can come back to the House and be voted on before we rise for the summer. This is very important.

There has been a lot of talk during today's debate about how the government's legislative measures have reflected only what the government wanted to do. My participation in committee activities and the work I have been able to accomplish there have taught me that, most of the time, committee members work well together. They collaborate, they set partisanship aside to some degree and, more often than not, they are able to compromise. At least, that was the case in the committees I belonged to.

I had the opportunity to sit on the Standing Committee on International Trade for two and a half years. We always agreed with members from across the aisle on free trade agreements, whether with Europe or Asia or NAFTA 2.0, on which we worked very hard. There is only one party we never agree with when it comes to such deals.

I was also a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for two and a half years. It is a non-partisan committee whose goal is to ensure that official language minority communities are properly represented. I can assure the House that there was no partisanship. In my new role as deputy whip, I am now a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where there is a little more partisanship. Let us speak plainly.

If we do not adopt this motion, if we do not extend the sitting hours of the House, we will end up in a situation where all the work we have done will basically be lost before the fall election. That is why it is so important that we adopt Motion No. 30.

I want to highlight some of the important work done by the committees. I want to point out that during the 2015 election, the Liberal Party, of which I am a proud member, promised to strengthen parliamentary committees. We promised to have more respect for the fundamental role that parliamentarians play on committees in order to hold the government to account.

That commitment, included in the mandate letter of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, means that parliamentary committees are freer and better equipped to study legislation. Among the many changes that were made, committee chairs are now freely elected by the committee members. They are not appointed by

the government. Voting is now done by secret ballot to allow members to vote freely for their selection for chair.

Now parliamentary secretaries also sit on committees, but as non-voting members. They can contribute to the discussions if necessary. They are present, enabling them to stay abreast of the committee's work. Since they do not have the right to vote, no one can accuse cabinet of interfering in the work of the committees. The standing orders that made these changes official were passed in June 2017. I believe, and I think most members would agree, that committees can now act more openly, more transparently and more freely.

I would like to briefly go over some of the major bills currently before Parliament that might not be voted on and passed by the end of the session if this motion is not adopted.

● (1950)

I will start with Bill C-92, an act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. This bill sets out the legislative framework and the principles needed to guide work among first nations, Inuit and Métis nations, provincial and territorial partners, and the Government of Canada to achieve truly meaningful reform in child and family services.

The purpose of this bill is twofold. First, it affirms the rights and jurisdiction of indigenous peoples in relation to child and family services. Second, it sets out principles applicable, on a national level, to the provision of child and family services in relation to indigenous children, such as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity and substantive equality.

Bill C-92 is a milestone piece of legislation that would have significant impacts on the lives of indigenous youth, their families and their communities. It is an important step in advancing meaningful reconciliation and in implementing the vital recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The second example that I would like to give is, in my opinion, the most important bill for Canadians, and that is Bill C-97, budget implementation act, 2019, no. 1. This bill will affect Canadians across the country. It seeks to respond to Canadians' most pressing needs. For example, buying a house or condo is probably the most important investment most Canadians will make in their lifetimes. However, many Canadians are not able to enter the market. That is why, through budget 2019 and with Bill C-97, the government will build on Canada's national housing strategy and take action to improve the affordability of housing, especially for first-time homebuyers.

Our government also wants to make sure that Canada's seniors have more money in their pockets when they retire. That is why, with Bill C-97, the government is proposing to enhance the guaranteed income supplement earnings exemption by providing a full or partial exemption on up to \$15,000 and extending it to self-employment income.

Government Orders

This proposal was very well received by seniors in my riding. We have a labour shortage and we have seniors with incredible expertise. If seniors are able to work one day a week because of this measure, so much the better. Our society as a whole will reap the benefits. These seniors will pass on their knowledge to everyone around them and will have the opportunity to work if they so desire. It is a way for them to meet people, network and maintain friendships.

This is a very important measure for me. It will put more money in the pockets of eligible seniors who work. I want to reiterate that this measure was very well received by seniors in Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Another measure concerns electric vehicles. We want to electrify transportation. The \$5,000 federal subsidy has made a huge difference in my riding. The Quebec government already gives an \$8,000 subsidy, and when you add the \$5,000 from the federal government, it is incredible. That will considerably reduce green-house gas emissions.

All of that can be found in Bill C-97. It is absolutely crucial that we pass Motion No. 30 today so we have enough time to pass all this fantastic legislation. It is worth reiterating that this budget implementation bill is entirely consistent with the current government's agenda, which differs significantly from the previous government's agenda. We are steering Canada in a direction that will truly reduce inequality. We always talk about the middle class, but we have created one million jobs and have lifted 300,000 children out of poverty, not to mention the adults. We are the ones who have reduced inequality. We have the strongest economy, and the unemployment rate is at its lowest in over 40 years.

• (1955)

The previous government had very little interest in this important societal objective, namely reducing inequality in this country. On the contrary, during the Harper decade, inequality in Canada actually increased. The two examples of bills to be implemented, and also of budget items, will help us go even further.

These are two bills among others that we would like to pass before adjourning. For all these reasons, it is truly important that we pass the motion now to let us sit longer and ensure that we complete the work entrusted to us by Canadians.

I would also like to take a few minutes to speak about the amendments to the motion that were moved yesterday. I know that there has been a lot of discussion about the amount of time spent on government business compared to that spent on opposition motions and days. This is not about who gets what; the goal is to ensure that we can place more items on the agenda. That is why it is important to ensure that we sit longer into the evenings so we can do more.

The items I am talking about are the ones that all members from all parties in the House collaborated on in committee. This is why I personally cannot support the amendment. I do not think the amendment is particularly positive, because it does not address what we need to do, which is to examine more bills. Instead, it would proportionally increase the time available to each political party, which unfortunately reflects the partisan nature of this debate.

• (2000)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 8 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the

question necessary to dispose of Motion No. 30 under government business.

[*English*]

The question is on the amendment. Shall I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Chair read text of amendment to House*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

• (2040)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 1321*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Alleslev
Allison	Anderson
Arnold	Ashton
Aubin	Barlow
Barrett	Benson
Benzen	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Boucher
Boulerice	Brassard
Brosseau	Calkins
Cannings	Caron
Carrie	Chong
Choquette	Clarke
Cooper	Davidson
Davies	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeschen	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseau	Duvall
Eglinski	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Gallant	Garrison
Généreux	Genius
Gladu	Godin
Gourde	Hardcastle

Government Orders

Harder	Hoback
Hughes	Jolibois
Julian	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lloyd	Lobb
Lukiwski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Maguire
Martel	Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Moore	Motz
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	O'Toole
Paul-Hus	Poillievre
Quach	Ramsey
Rankin	Rayes
Reid	Richards
Sansoucy	Schmale
Shipley	Sorenson
Stanton	Stetski
Strahl	Stubbs
Tilson	Trost
Trudel	Van Kesteren
Vecchio	Viersen
Wagantall	Warkentin
Waugh	Webber
Weir	Wong
Yurdiga — 111	

NAYS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Barsalou-Duval	Baylis
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Boudrias
Bratina	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Cormier	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Eyking	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Freeland
Fuhr	Gameau
Gerretsen	Gill
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardie	Harvey
Hébert	Hehr
Hogg	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Jordan	Jowhari
Khalid	Khera
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Manly	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)

May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCrimmon	McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mihychuk
Monsef	Morrissey
Murray	Nassif
Ng	O'Connell
Oliphant	Oliver
Ouellette	Paradis
Pauzé	Peschisolido
Peterson	Petitpas Taylor
Picard	Plamondon
Poissant	Ratansi
Rioux	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Rota
Ruimy	Rusnak
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sorbara	Spengemann
Ste-Marie	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Virani
Whalen	Wrzesnewskyj
Yip	Young
Zahid — 163	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.**Some hon. members:** Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

● (2050)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 1322)***YEAS**

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baylis	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle

Government Orders

Blair	Boissonnault	Berthold	Bezan
Bossio	Bratina	Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Boucher
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger	Boudrias	Boulerice
Champagne	Cormier	Brassard	Brousseau
Cuzner	Dabrusin	Calkins	Cannings
Damoff	Dhaliwal	Caron	Carrie
Dhillon	Drouin	Chong	Choquette
Dubourg	Duclos	Clarke	Cooper
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Davidson	Davies
Dzerowicz	Easter	Deltell	Diotte
Ehsassi	El-Khoury	Doherty	Dreeschen
Ellis	Eyking	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Eyolfson	Fergus	Duvall	Eglinski
Fillmore	Finnigan	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fisher	Fonseca	Fast	Fortin
Fortier	Fragiskatos	Gallant	Garrison
Fraser (West Nova)	Freeland	Généreux	Genuis
Fuhr	Garneau	Gill	Gladu
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones	Godin	Gourde
Goodale	Gould	Hardcastle	Harder
Graham	Grewal	Hoback	Hughes
Hajdu	Hardie	Jolibois	Julian
Harvey	Hébert	Kelly	Kent
Hehr	Hogg	Kitchen	Kmiec
Holland	Housefather	Kusie	Kwan
Hussen	Hutchings	Lake	Lloyd
Iacono	Jordan	Lobb	Lukiwski
Jowhari	Khalid	MacGregor	MacKenzie
Khera	Lambropoulos	Maguire	Martel
Lametti	Lamoureux	Masse (Windsor West)	Mathysen
Lapointe	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	McCauley (Edmonton West)	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Moore
Leslie	Levitt	Motz	Nantel
Lighthound	Lockhart	Nater	Nicholson
Long	Longfield	O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)	Pauzé	Plamondon
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Manly	Poilievre	Quach
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)		Ramsey	Rankin
May (Cambridge)		Rayes	Reid
May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)	McCrimmon	Richards	Sansoucy
McGuinty	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	Schmale	Shipley
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès	Sorenson	Stanton
Mihychuk	Monsef	Ste-Marie	Stetski
Morrissey	Murray	Strahl	Stubbs
Nassif	Ng	Tilson	Trost
O'Connell	Olipphant	Trudel	Van Kesteren
Oliver	Ouellette	Vecchio	Viersen
Paradis	Peschisolido	Wagantall	Warkentin
Peterson	Petitpas Taylor	Waugh	Webber
Picard	Poissant	Weir	Wong
Ratansi	Rioux	Yurdiga— 119	
Robillard	Rodriguez		
Rogers	Romanado		
Rota	Ruimy		
Rusnak	Sahota		
Saini	Sajjan		
Samson	Sangha		
Sarai	Scarpaleggia		
Schiefke	Serré		
Sgro	Shanahan		
Sheehan	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)		
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sikand		
Simms	Sorbara		
Spengemann	Tabbara		
Tan	Tassi		
Vandal	Vandenbeld		
Vaughan	Virani		
Whalen	Wrzesnewskyj		
Yip	Young		
Zahid— 155			

NAYS

Members

Abouttaif	Albas
Albrecht	Alleslev
Allison	Anderson
Arnold	Ashton
Aubin	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu	Benson
Benzen	Bergen

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

ACCESSIBLE CANADA ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-81, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin has 11 minutes left in his debate.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to continue the speech I was making earlier. It is a little strange to continue after seven hours. I feel like I need to reiterate what I said before, but I will not tell all of the stories I told before.

Government Orders

It is very important to reiterate for people just tuning in to the debate on Bill C-81 that this is a rare situation in the House of Commons, in that the government has put forward legislation and all of the parties are supporting it. We have a great opportunity. As we are having the debate and as we are discussing the pros and cons of the legislation before us, stakeholders know that this bill will in fact pass. What we are doing right now is an important part of the process. It is an opportunity to have a conversation about it in the House of Commons and to bring up some of the concerns that stakeholders might have.

We are dealing with a bit of an odd situation this time around in that the purpose of the debate is to bring forward concerns and have the opportunity to talk about what we have heard from stakeholders. Most times we have the opportunity to actually ask the government questions in the process of the debate. However, what we have noticed over the last couple of hours of this debate, and anticipate tonight in the debate, is that the Liberal members of Parliament are not going to speak. They did not speak earlier.

There is an interesting consequence of that. I am being heckled by the government House leader right now saying that they want the bill to pass. However, everybody in the House knows that the bill is going to pass. What we have before us now is an opportunity to debate the merits of the bill as amended, to talk about the benefits of it, to maybe talk about some of the challenges that have been brought up by stakeholders and have the opportunity to ask each other questions.

We would hope there would be Liberal members of Parliament willing to stand up to speak to the merits of the bill and then to take questions from the opposition members, from both the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, who have valid concerns that we have heard from stakeholders. These concerns will not be a surprise to the government, because the government has heard those concerns at committee.

The bill has been before committee. Stakeholders have reached out to members of all parties, presumably, to make their views known. There are still some concerns that remain. I will speak to a couple of those concerns. Most of the concerns revolve around the question of whether the bill, as supported by all parties, will create real action, meaningful action and have a meaningful impact for Canadians with disabilities.

While everybody agrees that the bill should be passed now so that we have something before the election, that this is indeed a step forward and everybody in the House agrees that this is a step forward, many of the stakeholders expressed concerns that the bill in fact could have been better.

This is an important part of the conversation, to have this discussion in the House of Commons and be able to go back and forth, talking about how we, as parliamentarians, might make life better for Canadians with disabilities, even moving beyond this bill. Some of us will be here in the next Parliament and will have further opportunities to improve the lives of Canadians with disabilities. This debate is an important part of the process. However, we do not have the opportunity, interestingly, in this debate to actually ask the government questions, because the government is not putting up any

speakers in this conversation. That seems rather odd, given that everybody in the House knows that this bill is going to pass.

I would point out one of the questions from stakeholders. I will not even put it in my own words. I am going to refer to a brief from ARCH Disability Law Centre, which was posted after the Senate committee passed its amendments. In this brief, while the ARCH Disability Law Centre urged parliamentarians to pass the bill and, again, all of us are in favour of doing that, it stated:

A number of weaknesses remain in Bill C-81. One such weakness is the use of permissive language “may” rather than directive language “shall” or “must”. This language gives government and other bodies power to make and enforce accessibility requirements, but does not actually require them to use these powers. For example, the Bill allows the Government of Canada to make new accessibility regulations but does not require them to do so. Therefore, there is no assurance that such regulations, a cornerstone for advancing accessibility, will ever be made.

● (2055)

It goes on to state:

In addition to the amendments, the Senate Committee reported 2 observations to Bill C-81. The first addresses the concern expressed by many in the disability community that federal funding may continue to be spent on projects that perpetuate barriers. The observation encourages the federal government to ensure that any federal public money should not be used to create or perpetuate disability related barriers when it is reasonable to expect that such barriers can be avoided. The second observation emphasizes the importance of training in achieving a barrier-free Canada. It encourages the government to create standardized, effective training to ensure that all persons in Canada can expect the same level of access to all government services.

The brief from the ARCH Disability Law Centre goes on to say, “ARCH is pleased that in response to submissions by disability communities across Canada, the Senate made a number of important amendments to strengthen Bill C-81.”

Members from all sides of the House who have spoken to this have commended the Senate committee for making those amendments and the Senate for passing them.

Of course, at that time, the Senate had not passed the legislation, but the brief from the ARCH Disability Law Centre urges the Senate and the House of Commons to act quickly to allow enough time for the bill to finish its journey through the legislative process, before the fall federal election is called.

That journey through the legislative process includes debate in the House. The bill was amended, it has come back before the House and we have an opportunity to debate it.

Again, the government is in full control of the House agenda. The government has used closure dozens of times to limit debate in the House and to force votes. It can certainly do that in this case if it chooses to do so. However, there is absolutely no question that the bill will be passed within the next couple of weeks for sure. It could be passed this week if the government so chooses to ensure it does get passed this week. However, there is absolutely no question and no debate that I have heard among parties, at least the parties that have official standing in the House, that the bill will pass. The bill has unanimous support in the House and it will absolutely pass and become the law of Canada.

Government Orders

It has taken three and a half years and four different appointments to the disability file, with respect to ministers in charge of this file, by the government. It is unfortunate that it has come down to the last month the House is sitting to get the bill passed. In fact, it is unbelievable. It is also unbelievable that after all that time, we are sitting in the House of Commons and we are being denied, as an opposition, the chance to question government members of Parliament on important views and important questions that stakeholders have with regard to the bill.

I am sure government members will have questions of me, and I am glad to take those questions. I would really like to have that opportunity. I cannot refer to the presence of government members in the House, but earlier today there had to be a quorum call to get the right number of members in the House to continue the debate.

My hope is that over the course of the next three hours, given that we are staying here later to discuss and debate legislation on the government agenda, government members will stand, debate the legislation, speak to the merits of it and then take questions from members of the opposition on it.

It is really important to me to reiterate the fact that when the legislation was before the House, we supported it then. We supported it at each reading. At committee, the Conservative members moved more than 60 amendments, amendments that had been brought forward by stakeholders and the Liberal government accepted three of the over 60 amendments.

I am getting corrected. Apparently, a Liberal member is now correcting me, saying it is actually 70 amendments. I do not know who is heckling me over there. It is hard to tell.

• (2100)

The fact is that we moved over 60 amendments and three of them were accepted. Those amendments were put forward by stakeholders. It is an important part of the debate to have the opportunity.

If the hon. government House leader wants to speak, Madam Speaker, perhaps she could get up at some point in this debate and defend her government's legislation and answer some questions from members of the opposition. She is heckling across the floor.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: I've been told to shut up by your colleague.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. There is a lot of going back and forth. I can assure government members, including ministers and parliamentary secretaries, that they will have an opportunity to ask a question.

The hon. member has 15 seconds to wrap up.

Hon. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, 15 seconds just to say we support the legislation. We want to see the legislation pass and it will pass with the support of all parties. We hope to have the opportunity to ask some questions of the government to address some of the outstanding questions that stakeholders have.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again, I will just remind members that they have plenty of time to ask

questions and comments, so please refrain from shouting at the person who is talking or other people. That will work out a lot better.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport.

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what is really happening here is that we are drawing out debate on legislation that as the member says, we all support.

There have been people here from the disabled community throughout the day and they are still here tonight, which is good to see. However, it is difficult to see them having to stay here and listen, knowing we will pass the legislation. It is unfortunate that this has happened. It is truly important historic legislation that we all want to come to fruition. I hope we can wrap up this debate so we can make this the historic law that it is.

• (2105)

Hon. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, it is an interesting assertion that the member makes, and we have heard it made by Liberal members before, that because the bill will pass, we should not debate it. The Liberal government has a majority in the House. If we did not debate legislation that we knew would pass, we would never debate any legislation in the House.

My hope is that the member will take an opportunity to stand and speak in support of the legislation. When she does, I might ask about the fact that one such weakness, as pointed out by stakeholders, is the use of permissive language "may" rather than directive language "shall" or "must". Then after she speaks, we might also have the opportunity to ask her to reassure stakeholders that this will not impact the ability of the legislation to have meaningful action that would benefit their lives.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin is a very strong advocate for the disability community and has spoken passionately many times in the House. Having worked with the disability community as well, I share his concern and I share his passion.

I am glad to see he is provoking the debate tonight. He is right to say that members of the deaf community are here, that they are listening, and we salute them. Their presence here is extremely important.

In the 15 years I have been here, disability discussions have been marginalized and put off. Therefore, discussing this throughout the evening is an important step to take.

As the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin mentioned, we need to speak about disability issues. The Liberals need to defend a bill that is so weak compared to what it could have been.

The member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin understands fully how in the United States the Americans With Disabilities Act, passed under former president George Bush, was a sea change in disability rights. There was an obligation on government to provide disability services and provide access. I would like the member to comment on that difference.

Government Orders

We have a very weak bill before us tonight that would permit the government to provide accessibility, as if members of the disability community do not require anything more than some permission from the government. That is not the case. We have seen strong compelling legislation in the United States. Would the member prefer to see an approach that is strong and rigorous like we see with the ADA?

Hon. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, I love the question, a question from a member of the New Democratic Party for a member of the Conservative Party, talking about how we can create better legislation despite the fact that I believe both of our parties will support it and ensure it passes before the House. However, the conversation tonight is about how we can make it better, which is the point of debate in the House of Commons is. It is always the challenge to do better and raise the concerns.

One of the things the Senate committee did right, and a proper amendment that we all looked at and believed needed to be made, was the measure to include recognition of American sign language, Quebec sign language and indigenous sign language as the primary languages for deaf people in Canada. It is one step forward, but many other things could have been done to give the legislation more teeth and have more impact for Canadians. This is an opportunity to talk about that.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak in favour of the bill, the proposed accessibility Canada act.

I ran in 2015. I was a filmmaker, and it kind of destroyed my business. However, I took a job after that with Nanaimo Foodshare, doing work with people with diverse abilities, as they like to say, rather than disabilities, and people with barriers to employment. I worked with a group called the Self Advocates of Nanaimo, and I would like to give a shout out to my friends Kara, Crystal, Pat, Barb, Sara and Charmaine. They had a saying “Nothing about us without us”.

Advocacy groups have asked for more input on the bill, saying it could be better. However, I am glad to see we are making this historic change. I hope we can improve the bill at a future date.

• (2110)

Hon. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, that was not really a question. However, it is questions and comments, and so that is fair. I welcome the hon. member to the House. It is always a big moment to get elected, especially in a by-election when we kind of get the shining moment to ourselves.

I love the fact that the member is using one of his earliest opportunities to bring up this point. One of the great learning experiences for me as a parent of a child with autism who is non-verbal is to have the opportunity to hear from people with autism who are verbal, such as the Self Advocates, who are just amazing people. They have taught me so much by articulating the very views that the hon. member is bringing forward. Even though my son is non-verbal, that is challenging me to pay more attention to his voice. He has something to say, but we have to be patient. We have to wait sometimes and hear what he has to say in different ways.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, this has come up many times over the debate today, but I want to stress the

fact that we are debating this because our stakeholders have told us that there are shortcomings within the legislation. As much as we support Bill C-81, there is no question that our stakeholders have told us there are still some gaps that they would like addressed. This was very clear when we had every opposition party in the House agree on more than 60 amendments to the bill. However, the Liberals at committee voted down each and every one of those amendments. In fact, we sat until midnight to try to get this through committee as quickly as possible. Therefore, I am thankful the Senate agreed with our amendments and that the minister has agreed to support some of them.

However, one amendment was not supported, and that was the fact that there were too many doors to try to address an issue. That was from stakeholders. For example, there is the Accessibility Commissioner, the CRTC, CTA, the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board. There will be no consistency in how these regulations or complaints will be addressed.

I would like my colleague to address one of those major concerns as brought up by our stakeholders.

Hon. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, in our experience, and in my life experience working with people with developmental disabilities, one of the things that has been repeated time and again is that so many people are dealing with so many challenges that consume their lives and create a busyness to try and address those challenges, the last thing they need is confusion over a bureaucratic process that is difficult to navigate to get to the place they need to get the help they need.

This is about creating and offering help to people. We all need help at different points in our lives, and we hope the system will be designed to help us access that help when we need it and in the way that we need it. The proposed legislation complicates that. We have heard that from stakeholders. Again, it would be nice to have the opportunity to ask some of the government members about that.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to what I think is one of the most important pieces of legislation that this term of Parliament is managing. I pay my respect in particular to David Lepofsky, a lifelong friend who I first worked with when I was the chair of the accessibility and advisory committee at the City of Toronto. We tried to push forth as many progressive and enlightened ideas about how to make sure that people with disabilities, in the full range of what that means, had access to not just the city and city government, but participation in our communities in ways that we can only learn about if we sit in concert with people with disabilities to understand the various challenges that are required.

Government Orders

I would like to say this. If this was the only piece of legislation that our government had dealt with regarding disabilities, it would be a good piece of legislation. However, I also want to bring to the attention of the House all of the other measures we have taken across other forms of legislation and other forms of programs that I think are contributing to a change in this country and give people with disabilities the absolute place of citizenship they deserve simply by being Canadian.

For example, one of the requirements of the national housing strategy is to overshoot and make accessible housing a stronger requirement than it is in any provincial or municipal building code across this country. Of all units built as affordable housing in this country, 20% must be built to a universal design standard. A universal design standard is something that often brings to mind people who use mobility devices. However, the reality is, and we have heard it from the members opposite, that disabilities are much more complex, diverse and subtle than simply the ones that spring to mind in a stereotypical way. Therefore, a universal design is being brought to bear through the national housing strategy, which is also enshrined in a human rights approach to housing so that we make sure that we build housing for everybody when we use public dollars to create affordability. In the housing sector itself, some of the most progressive organizations in this country have pushed back against it for being too expensive. The cost of not doing it is what is too expensive. The cost of not making sure that when we use public dollars to build housing we build it for everybody is critically important to understand.

Additionally, when we look at other issues, such as the passengers' bill of rights, there is a nod to it. When we talk about the income supports that are designed to lift individuals out of poverty, we know that poverty impacts people with disabilities in ways that are far more complex and far more serious than simply addressing poverty for poverty's sake. Therefore, some of our programs have been intentionally designed to make sure that those programs are also stepped up.

I will provide an important example around public transit. Our investments in public transit are designed on a per-ridership basis and are invested into communities that provide transit right now. As well, they are designed to make sure that accessible transit is spoken to, not only in terms of providing new service, which is critical, and making sure things like elevator programs and subway stations in the city of Toronto are eligible to receive federal funding, but also that repairs to accessible buses are eligible.

We know that many communities have made the initial investment to get accessible community buses or DARTS into various parts of this country. Some of those communities were investing the first time with new dollars, but without the operating dollars for investment, they were losing that service to disrepair. One of the reasons we changed the infrastructure program to include state of good repair for public transit was specifically to address the issue of the fragility of some of those accessible buses. We need to make sure that accessible transit is available in many more communities right across the country.

We have also included active transportation in the infrastructure fund. This is important because we have built cities and communities across this country that do not accommodate mobility. Not every city

in this country has a dipped curb at every intersection, which should be a standard design right across the country. There is also the retrofitting of traffic lights and intersections for people who require audible assistance to get across intersections. All of these things are part of what active transportation now funds. It is not just the big-ticket items of big subways, big pipes or big sewer plants, it is also the fine-grain infrastructure of cities that have to be built to accommodate everybody in this country. Our national infrastructure program accommodates that.

To speak specifically to the legislation here today, I want to explain, from the perspective of someone who is a parliamentary secretary and has to manage the flow from parliamentarians to minister's offices and manage the way in which amendments come forward, why it appears sometimes that an opposition amendment that is accepted eventually by the government is not accepted in its written form and has to be woven into the legislation because legislation often covers more than one bill and more than one form of federal regulation.

• (2115)

If the legislation is not written in a particular way, gaps are created within the system and those are the loopholes that quite often create the cracks that people fall through. For example, when we talk about the words "shall" or "must", in drafting when I was a councillor at city hall we always looked for the words that were operative or provided permissions as opposed to instructions and tried to tighten legislation as much as possible.

With the federal drafting guidelines, because of the shared jurisdiction in many components of this bill with provincial, federal and municipal jurisdiction, and sometimes indigenous governments, we cannot force federal laws into those areas. We have to literally fit federal laws into those areas. That is why some of the language had to be fine-tuned to make sure it was consistent. We could not get to that in time for the committee. As the opposition has said, there have been 70 amendments. It is good in spirit, except in principle. We had to workshop and wordsmith them into the legislation to make sure they were operable across all the clauses, all areas of federal jurisdiction and all the intergovernmental realities this legislation governs.

On that point, when the legislation went forward to the Senate, we were still working with the spirit of those amendments knowing that senators were going to be working on them as well. We were having dialogue with senators about what amendments might be coming forward and how to fine-tune them to better fit them into the legislation, as well as looking at what legislation might come back to this House and whether it would have to be fine-tuned after having gone through the screen of the Senate.

It is a complex process of forming the language around the legislation. If it is not done properly, unintended consequences can have real impacts. On this issue, impacting people with disabilities unintentionally is doing harm to a community that has already suffered enough. Getting the law right was just as important as the timing of that legislation.

Government Orders

I do not really care who puts the legislation around the deadline to make sure that some of the elements of this bill must be enacted by a certain point in time. It does not really matter to me whether it is an opposition member, a Senate member, a government member or a bureaucrat who comes up with the notion. The idea is that we have to work together to evolve it into the right language and the right legislation.

We have taken the good advice of the opposition, the stakeholders and the senators and come up with an excellent bill that moves this agenda forward in a progressive and smart way, in the right way for people with disabilities.

As part of this process, the opposition has asked why it has taken so long. When one is in government, one is criticized for doing one of two things by one of two ways. One is either told that this was rushed to the House and time was not taken to consult, and one should have slowed down and consulted with stakeholders before bringing the legislation forward, or else one is criticized for consulting too much and not getting it to the House fast enough.

On this particular issue with landmark legislation, our government deliberately chose to consult widely across all of government. We chose to consult with provincial, municipal and indigenous governments. Fundamentally and most importantly, at the centre of every one of those consultations were the people with lived experience. We decided deliberately that because of the complexity of the community, the difference in geography of this country and the different reaches and federal regulations that had to be addressed through this legislation, that consultation ahead of introduction was critically important.

In fact, my conversation with David Lepofsky first started when we began to look at this legislation three years ago. It was not even a responsibility of the file I was carrying at the time. However, having come from the city, I had some experience with how legislation moves forward with government and I knew some of the experts in the field, people like Sandra Carpenter and others we had worked with previously with the city. I knew that if I could establish those relationships, bring them into the consultation, make that conversation robust, check with ministerial staff and my colleagues, monitor the work on committee and do the consultation properly, that we would get as big and strong a bill, as well as the most robust set of changes possible. That is why I thought consultation was important.

The opposition asks why we are waiting until the third year of our term to get through the House, and it is for that reason and that reason alone. It is not a sense of not having an urgency to address these issues. It is important to address them and the urgency is important, but getting it right is just as important. It is about having time to make sure that the Senate can give it a second look, that the committee has a proper process and that people with disabilities are involved. It is also about taking a look at what the committee did and the lessons that were learned. For example, making sure we had an inclusionary process, sign language, Braille and all the different forms of accommodation, including time for people with intellectual disabilities to speak without having the clock run out on them. It also includes making sure we had different ways of reaching out to these communities. This was the work of a Parliament seized with this issue and a government that seized this issue. As a result, it has the legislation here today.

● (2120)

The last point I want to address is this notion of why the Liberals are not all standing up and speaking one at a time. Every one of us has a story we could tell about the experience we have had in our families, our communities and our political life as we have come to a stronger understanding of some of the challenges we face or others face in our communities or in our families. There are disabilities in so many of the stories of people who sit in this legislature and it is one of the reasons why so many people are engaged in this file the way they are engaged. It comes from a very good space.

The reality is that as a government we are trying to get this to a vote. The longer I speak, the further away the vote is. We know that we are coming to the end of a term of Parliament and we know that things can happen that interrupt any single process, so we are nervous that we would not get this to a vote. We want this to come to a vote as soon as possible. We know that there are people in the galleries who have come here to watch the vote so that they can be present at the time when this historic legislation is passed.

The reason we are not standing up to repeat the points and to go on with the points endlessly and make the same point over and over again is not because we are afraid of the opposition. None of us on this side of the House is afraid of the opposition. We have dealt with the opposition members for four years and we know exactly where we stand with them. There are good voices, good questions and good points to be made and listened to and the legislation can always be made better; no one is saying that is not true. At the end of the day, we want this vote to happen and to happen in a way that shows that the whole country is behind the transformation of the approach to the rights of people who have disabilities. The whole country is behind the response that we all share to make sure that accommodation is not just reasonable but is progressively realized in a way that respects the dignity and the human rights of all the individuals involved.

I know that we will be revisiting this issue because disability and approaches to disability change over time. We need a fluid and flexible law that allows us to do that. Many of the elements that the community wanted in the legislation are going to be captured in regulation so we do not have to go through a three-year process to make changes to do the right thing, in the right way, in the right time frame. Ministers will be able to do that after the community and people have come forward and asked for those changes. The regulations can be changed without going through a robust, time-consuming and expensive parliamentary process. I am very proud of the fact that the legislation is good, but I am equally proud of the fact that the regulations are just as strong and provide that flexibility and ingenuity to make sure we can respond to the needs of these communities and the individuals as quickly and as effectively as possible, but from a perspective of the Human Rights Commission.

I said that the last point would be my last one, but I failed to address this in my general comments and I want to address it.

There are two approaches that are contemplated when looking at how one adjudicates or forces the government through complaint to respond to shortcomings in our system. One is to have the one-door approach; the other one is for everybody to have shared responsibility.

Government Orders

If, for example, the CRTC does not properly regulate new technologies to make sure they are accessible to and usable by all Canadians, we could have a single office that people go to in order to complain and then the office would have to manage the conversation and the process with the CRTC, or people could set it directly at the door of the CRTC and the CRTC could respond.

What we have in the design of this legislation is the best of both worlds. We have clearly an advocate that is housed at the Human Rights Commission that is part of the process of evaluating the implementation of this bill and the corrections to this bill and creates a living office to make sure this legislation is living and responds in real time to people's needs. However, they also have charged every single federal authority that touches the lives of Canadians with the responsibility that all of us have, which is to make sure the accommodations are progressive, beyond reasonable but effective to make sure people's human rights and dignity are fully respected. I do not think we are going to get a slower, more bureaucratic response. What we will get is a faster, more effective response by having the process established at every single federal institution, because every single federal institution has a responsibility to make sure all Canadians' rights and dignities are respected.

I am proud to be supporting this legislation. I am proud that our government has taken the time to get it right and to work with the communities, the individuals and the advocates involved. I am glad that we have had good input from the opposition and robust debate. Better is always possible. On this file, better must be achieved as a possibility because that is the goal here: how to make sure the rights of every Canadian, regardless of the physical circumstance he or she is born with or acquired, be respected with dignity and how to make sure the federal government responds to complaints and concerns effectively, quickly and in a progressive way.

• (2125)

I am proud our government is the government that has brought this forward. I am proud that we will be passing this legislation, and I am proud to be sitting in the House to vote on it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I go to questions and comments, prior to the member being recognized, the government House leader actually accused me of being biased and she acknowledged it. I want to say that she may have been busy at the time, but I did recognize a member from each of the parties during the questions and comments. I do not know why the government House leader would say such a thing, given the fact that there was one woman and no other women stood on the other side.

During a 10-minute question and comment period, the party actually giving the speech will get at least one question. That means there were four questions, and at about one minute each, that is about eight minutes. Sometimes it is a little difficult to cut someone off at the one-minute mark.

Given the fact that we are sitting late and that we are nearing the end of the session and people may be getting antsy, I would ask members to be very patient, but also to recognize that other people want to participate. There have been quite a few people who want to participate, and I would ask people to try to keep their questions and comments short.

On that note, I would expect that the hon. government House leader will actually apologize for her comments.

The hon. government House leader.

• (2130)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what you heard, but if you would like an apology, you know that I have no problem apologizing. All I was trying to reiterate was that there was the ability to ask the question, but if you would like an apology, Madam Speaker, I apologize.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would just say that this was not quite sincere. Actually, the government House leader indicated that there would be enough time. There was not enough time. There was just a little over a minute for the member to respond to the previous question. If there had been 58 seconds left, then there would have been time, but even if he had ended at 40 seconds, there would not have been enough time for another question.

I am here and I am monitoring the clock. I am being very cognizant of people who are getting up. Should people want to get up the next time around, there will be an opportunity, but I do want to say that I did ask the government House leader if she was referring to me when she said that I was being biased, and she did say yes. Again, I very well know what I am talking about.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, Hansard will definitely show the record. I am sure that you do know, and I have full confidence in anyone who occupies that chair.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am not going to keep going. There are other members here in the House who did hear it.

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie has a point of order.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Speaker, I want to address what I just heard happen here. You did get up and indicate what you had heard from the government House leader. I was here and I heard it too. Many other members heard her refer to you as biased, and when you questioned whether she actually had referred to you as being biased, she indicated yes. I heard it and I know many others did. I do not really believe that what you got was an apology: "If you heard it differently than I did, or if you experienced it differently than I did, I apologize." You might want to ask the member again to apologize properly for calling you biased, because I did hear it very clearly.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Thank you very much.

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader has a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think I can provide a little clarity on the issue. As you know, when a member stands and gives a 20-minute speech, what usually takes place is that if an official opposition member speaks, it then goes to the government, typically, then it would go to the New Democrats, and often it will come back to the government.

Government Orders

The government House leader honestly believed that this was what was going to happen, and I think that is what was being referred to. It was not meant to be a negative reflection on the Chair; we just expected that this question would be coming to us.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the point of clarification by the hon. parliamentary secretary. It is up to the Chair, when people want to ask questions or make comments, as to the selection. There is no specific order. However, the government got a spot, the NDP got a spot, the Conservatives got a spot, as did the Green Party. The rotations will vary depending on how many people get up and when they get up. On that note, we will continue now with the debate.

• (2135)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, my apology was sincere and I wholeheartedly apologize. If I have offended you in any way, that was not my intention. I sincerely am sorry.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I accept the apology.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the way you have just adjudicated and comported yourself in this House. It was admirable, unlike some of the behaviour we have seen. It should not have come to that.

I want to let my colleague from Spadina—Fort York know that there is a young gentleman from the Maskwacis area in my riding who is deaf. He came to me seeking my help and guidance some time ago. The translator he was provided with understands the dialect and intonations. Even in sign language, much like in English, French or other languages, there are dialects or differences. He had an understanding with his provided interpreter, but when he applied to go to school to get a journeyman welder certificate, the college wanted to use a different service provider to provide interpretative services, who did not have the same dialect, and that was creating issues when it came to the ability of the student to understand in the terms and conditions that he was used to.

Is there anything in the legislation or were there any amendments to this bill, either at the House stage or at the Senate stage, that could have or should have been taken into consideration so that a constituent such as mine would have been able to use the interpreter he wanted for his educational purposes?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, this illustrates exactly the complexity of the challenges we are dealing with. It sounds like this is a provincial college that is making a decision as to what constitutes reasonable accommodation, and we do not have jurisdiction over how provincial governments provide the service. That is a provincial issue, and that is why there are many provincial accessibility acts across the country.

That being said, it also clearly illustrates that as we understand and broaden our comprehension of not just what constitutes a disability but what constitutes proper reasonable accommodation, we are going to have to have a program that is as flexible, dynamic and diverse as the community of people with disabilities. In this case, there are learnings at every opportunity for us to do better. When we talk about this process, one of the reasons we did not lock everything into

legislation was that to make changes like that on the fly would require us coming back to Parliament, introducing a bill, getting it through the Senate and having it come back for royal assent.

That is why many of the things around the flexibility and fine-tuning of accommodation, the assessment of what constitutes reasonable accommodation and how we provide that accommodation systematically across the country are left to the regulations in this bill so that we have a much more fluid and dynamic way of remedying situations like the one the member referenced, which deserve to be remedied in the terms that he identified.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, my sister-in-law was born deaf. My wife grew up with her. They were one year apart, first speaking their own form of sign language as infants and then learning ASL. My wife is fluent in American sign language and I have taken a course in it. I have become very aware of the beauty, the power and the independence of sign language as its own independent language. It is an integral part of deaf culture, and it is as full and expressive a language as any other.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague has any thoughts on the movement to have sign language in Canada recognized as an official language so that all people across this country, whether living in Quebec or any other province, would be able to access full government services in the language of their choice, their native language, in this case sign language, just like anybody else would in English or French. Does he have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, what we know, and we know it through this Parliament in particular, is that language is culture. Culture is expressed in language, but also human experience is defined by language.

When the member raised the point of how important it is to be able to communicate with people in their culture, in their language, as a way of not only recognizing the value of the community that speaks with this technique but also recognizing the culture of the community as it presents itself to itself, this is fundamental to the dignity of the people who identify as such.

I have no personal problem with the suggestion. However, working that into the way in which we have worked today, occupying a seat in the press gallery to make sure that those who are with us today get the services they deserve, we have not thought all of those things through, and the complexities of those thoughts require us to do much more work than simply passing legislation. We have to change the way we practice the delivery of government.

As technology arrives, as the communities gain their full place, politically in our communities, as much as they do through legislation, that is a conversation that will grow and become stronger, and we will see it become not an accommodation but rather part of the fabric of our country.

I wholeheartedly support the initiative, but the complexities of it give rise to concerns in terms of full implementation.

Government Orders

• (2140)

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. parliamentary secretary's presentation, and in particular how he noted that we are almost taking a whole-of-government approach to disability, from the national housing strategy to our infrastructure investments.

He noted that 20% of our national housing strategy, one in five, is going to be dealing with barrier-free design or universal design. I think that is so important. I spent eight months in the hospital when I had my spinal cord injury. I did not need to spend eight months there. However, there is no room anywhere in the community to be able to find that housing.

Could the hon. parliamentary secretary speak to how the national housing strategy dovetails with many of these Senate amendments and how it will allow more people with disabilities to take part in their community, to live in their community and to thrive in their community?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, as we evolved and conducted hearings and consultations around this, the learnings were shared across cabinet and shared across caucus. It started to inform our approaches to other policies we were developing, because we knew that this legislation was coming.

What we are seeing is an all-of-government approach that has not been perhaps as surfaced or as easily identified as intentional, but I think we are seeing it there. The housing policy is a really critical one.

My father was an architect, my sister is an architect, and my daughter is in the process of becoming an architect. Of the three of them, only one has ever been taught universal design as a requirement of getting an architecture degree. The very profession that defines the space we live in does not teach accessibility as a standard requirement in any architecture school in this country, except for one, the Ontario College of Art and Design. They did it, not because they were thinking about training future architects, but because the design courses there are for everybody. As a university that has embraced a whole series of very progressive approaches to how we bring culture to life, that is one of the cultures it is bringing to life, and it is the only architecture course in the country that teaches universal design as a requirement for graduation.

Every architecture school should do that, because every building that is built in this country should accommodate every Canadian who is going to use it, especially the public ones.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, this question will not surprise the member, having just listened to my speech. I will take advantage of asking about this assertion from ARCH:

One such weakness is the use of permissive language “may” rather than directive language “shall” or “must”. This language gives government and other bodies power to make and enforce accessibility requirements, but does not actually require them to use these powers.

What would the hon. member say to address these concerns?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, I addressed that directly in my comments on the way federal legislation is drafted. Quite often we are dealing with legislation that straddles jurisdictions. When we

use instructive language like “must” or “shall”, as opposed to “may” or “should”, we sometimes end up in constitutional battles with provinces, who think we are enforcing federal standards in areas of provincial responsibility, and we fight in court about what should and should not be done.

With respect to the right to housing legislation and the amendments that are coming forward, we sat in on that process with the drafters, both at the Privy Council Office and within the Department of Justice, and also with lawyers from the various housing departments. We have struggled with what the language needs to be. The prevailing view within the federal legal system is that permissive language keeps us out of court and jurisdictional squabbles and puts us in a much better operational place. Where we get more specific is in the regulations, and I think they are going to be the most important part of the bill.

ARCH is a legal aid clinic in Ontario that is now threatened with having its funds cut because the Ford government is cutting legal funding right across the board, particularly for clinics that do class action support and work. I happen to know this because my mother was part of the legal aid system in Ontario and started that clinic. I have also worked very closely with that clinic as a city councillor.

We cannot allow the legal voice of this community to be silenced, and I hope the Conservatives opposite will talk to Doug Ford—

• (2145)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry. I allowed some extra time for the member to finish, but I was not sure when he would wrap up his comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Foothills.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to the Senate amendments with regard to a barrier-free Canada and this legislation, Bill C-81.

As a member of the HUMA committee, I worked very hard with my colleagues from all parties to see this legislation through. I know there has been lots of discussion tonight about why there are so many Conservatives and members of the NDP and the Green Party speaking to this legislation. Now we have had a Liberal get up to speak about it. Many of us worked so hard on this legislation and we all want an opportunity to speak to it and the amendments put forward.

As I said several times today, this was a unique piece of legislation when it came through the committee. When I say it was unique, I mean that the members of the opposition parties, the Greens, Conservatives and NDP, almost tabled identical amendments. There were more than 60, almost 70, amendments that were almost identical word for word. It is pretty rare, I would say, when three opposition parties are so in sync with feedback from stakeholders. We absolutely support the intent of Bill C-81 and have all voted in support of it through the process.

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Our opportunity here today is to talk about and shed light on some of the shortcomings of this legislation and highlight our hope that whomever is in government after the election this fall, they will work hard to address some of these gaps in Bill C-81 to try to strengthen the bill and meet some of the concerns that are still out there and that have been raised by our stakeholders, and certainly by members on the opposition benches.

I do have to admit that I am pleased that the minister has said she will support the more than 10 amendments brought forward by the Senate. I think these do go a long way toward addressing some of the key concerns raised by stakeholders during the discussion and debate at committee stage. However, I am a little frustrated that although we are supportive of Bill C-81, there are a lot of gaps and shortcomings in it as a result of the Liberal members on that committee not supporting our amendments. I think they supported three that dealt with grammatical changes to the legislation, and not really anything definitive or of any substance. However, the Senate's coming forward with these amendments, I think, is certainly a step in the right direction.

What makes me proud of the opportunity to speak on Bill C-81 is that it certainly continues the legacy of one of my favourite politicians, our former finance minister Jim Flaherty. He left a lasting legacy in the House and I think almost all members in this Parliament would agree. Mr. Flaherty brought forward the registered disabilities savings plan and the enabling accessibility fund. They are two key pillars and historic policies that have made significant differences for people across the country with disabilities. In fact, the minister of accessibility said at committee that these policies were a game-changer for Canadians with disabilities, who are able to live much easier lives as a result of these programs. Certainly, in saying that I think some of the policies and steps in Bill C-81 are going to build on that legacy, which is one of the reasons why the Conservative Party will be supporting Bill C-81, as we have through every step of this process.

I had the opportunity earlier this year to travel to Israel with a group of disabled Canadians from Ontario on a trip that was organized by Reena and March of Dimes. This was a unique experience for me and some of my colleagues. We have all had experience working with people with disabilities and critical organizations in our ridings, but this was the first time I have had an opportunity to spend an extended period of time with the people from these groups, Reena and March of Dimes, on such a long trip from Toronto to Israel and then while touring Israel. We saw how behind we are in Canada in removing barriers for people with disabilities. The whole idea of this trip was to see what Israel is doing to address some of their issues. It really was eye-opening to see what legislation and policy, and individual businesses, NGOs and charitable groups are doing to address their issues.

• (2150)

One facility that we toured was almost like a small town specifically for people with disabilities, where they had started small businesses that people with disabilities were able to operate and raise money. This reminds me of my colleague from Carleton and his opportunities bill, which he tried to put through earlier in this Parliament. His bill would have addressed something similar.

One of the examples in this community was a wine-making facility. The grapes were brought in and crushed to make the wine. Olives were brought into another area to make olive oil. The grinder was rejigged to make it accessible for people in wheelchairs. We were all given an opportunity to try it, and it was not easy. It was a challenge for us.

It just goes to show that when we allow groups and organizations that opportunity and ingenuity to really take things on themselves, and also put policies in place that encourage the removal of those barriers, it gets to the essence of Bill C-81.

I am also proud to say that on that trip I made some lifelong friends, people like YaYa and Joshua. If Joshua is watching tonight, I have not forgotten his invitation to tour his apartment in Toronto. I am really looking forward to doing that later this summer.

To see the excitement in the eyes of these Canadians as they toured Israel and saw some of the opportunities that are available there for people with disabilities but are not available to them here in Canada really showcased the fact that we have some work to do here in Canada. I am hoping that Bill C-81 will take us in that direction.

I do want to stress the fact that we do support Bill C-81, but we do want to take the opportunity in these discussions tonight to highlight some of the concerns that stakeholders have raised about the bill.

The first and almost unanimous one from stakeholders was the lack of any timelines within Bill C-81. I am happy to see that in one of the amendments by the Senate, they have asked that Canada be barrier-free by 2040.

As opposition members, we put forward an amendment asking for Canada to be barrier-free by 2021. The Liberals voted against that amendment, saying that having deadlines in the legislation as a result of these groups would not help federal departments be proactive in removing barriers until the very last minute.

I would argue that if we do not have a deadline, if we do not have metrics involved to measure success, how are we going to know if we are achieving anything? To see that timeline of 2040 in the Senate amendment is critical. I am pleased to see that the Senate paid attention to the amendments that we brought forward at committee, and from stakeholders.

I am going to talk about three or four amendments out of the more than 60 that were brought forward. Again, these came directly from stakeholders, directly from witnesses that provided critical testimony at committee.

The first one is critical. The minister and my colleagues across the way in the Liberal government have talked about a no wrong door policy. I appreciate what they are trying to say and their nice language. However, stakeholders are arguing that they do not want no wrong door; they want the right door. They want one door.

The issue here is that when people with disabilities want to file a complaint and have an issue with a federal department or a regulation that has been imposed, they may be confused about where to go. We certainly heard that from stakeholders.

Government Orders

If I am a Canadian with a disability and have an issue, I could go to the accessibility commissioner, the CRTC, the Canadian Transportation Agency, or the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board. The idea that the Liberals have put forward is that if people go to the wrong door, they will be redirected to the right door and that that door will help them with their concern or complaint, or their issue with the regulation.

• (2155)

My concern with having all of these different bureaucracies deal with a complaint is there would be very little, if any, consistency on how the complaint would be handled. If I go to the accessibility commissioner, would my concern or complaint be dealt with in one manner and if I go to the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board, would that complaint be dealt with in a different manner? If the CRTC puts forward one regulation or guideline on a barrier, would that be the same regulation or guideline as the CTA would put forward?

I will argue, and I think anybody who has dealt with the bureaucracy in government knows, that the more cooks in the kitchen, the more unlikely there will be any consistency in that recipe. Therefore, I am hopeful that, through the discussions we have had in these debates today and going forward, this will be one element of Bill C-81 that my colleagues across the way, or whoever is in government after October 21, will work hard to try and address.

This is not an amendment that was just raised by the Conservative, NDP and Green members who participated in the debate on this issue at committee. It was brought forward by just about every single stakeholder who provided testimony at committee.

I want to take a brief minute to read a quote directly about this issue. It is from a person who has been mentioned many times today, David Lepofsky. He is the chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance and is renowned in Ontario for his advocacy and work for people with disabilities. Ironically, he was also on our trip to Israel. The man is an unbelievable resource when it comes to Israeli history. I certainly enjoyed riding on the bus with him and picking his brain.

His comment on this is:

The federal government response to date has been inadequate. It simply said, "We'll have a policy that there will be no wrong door. Whichever agency you go to, no matter how confusing it is to figure it out—and believe me, it is confusing—if you go in the wrong door, we'll send you to the right door. Problem solved." No, it isn't, because all that does is fix the problem of which door you go in. It does not solve the substantial problem that happens once you're inside that door. It means we have to lobby four agencies to get them up to the necessary level of expertise. It means we have to learn four different sets of procedures, because they may all use different procedures once you get inside the door. It means we have to go to agencies that may not have any expertise in disability and accessibility.

Further on he comments:

The fact is simply that the design of this bill, splintering among these agencies, serves only two interests: the bureaucracies that want to preserve their turf and those obligated organizations that would rather this law have weaker standards, slower implementation and weaker enforcement. That is not consistent with the federal government's commendable motivations and intentions under this legislation.

That is a direct quote from Mr. Lepofsky, the chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, one of the foremost experts in Canada. He is talking about Bill C-81, the

barrier-free Canada act, and his concerns with this key part of the legislation.

We are not raising this issue to try and delay this process. We are discussing these issues tonight to try to ensure we find ways in the future to strengthen this bill.

The next issue I want to raise which also was not addressed in the amendments that were brought forward by the Senate but was certainly a key amendment we brought forward at committee is the fact this legislation allows exemptions for different federal departments. We have heard tonight, and my colleague in his speech talked about it, that the government wants to ensure that every government department meets these regulations and standards.

The first problem with that is there are no regulations and standards in this legislation. It is very weak when it comes to any sort of metric to measure accountability or success. It also allows any federal government department, and this relates to only federally regulated entities, to request an exemption. Federal government departments would not have consistency across the board on how they implement whatever regulations or standards a future government imposes.

• (2200)

In my opinion, the federal government should be the one that is taking the lead and setting the example. Our hope in the committee, when we discussed this, was that the federal government would pass Bill C-81 which would send a message to the private sector and other entities across Canada that the federal government is taking this on and that they should be doing much the same.

What kind of message does it send to our stakeholders who took a lot of time out of their busy schedules to participate in this process? It sends the message that this is historic legislation but we are not going to ensure that it is measured the same across the government. Various departments, for whatever reason they bring forward, can request an exemption that could be granted by the minister. This sets a very poor example. We put forward amendments at committee to remove the ability for federal departments to request an exemption and those amendments were denied.

I am hoping we have a third chance. That was also discussed at the Senate but was not included in its amendments. I am hoping that we also have another opportunity in the future to address the exemptions. If we really want to talk about legislation that is historic and is a game-changer for Canadians with disabilities, we have to ensure that the federal government, and every department within that government, meets those standards. We cannot have a different playing field across the federal government. It again adds to that concern when it comes to the four different departments and those four different levels of bureaucracy that are going to be handling concerns and complaints.

The other issue I want to address as part of the discussion is the standards or the lack thereof. There are unknown timelines, no metrics to measure success and no accountability. We talked in committee about those things being added in the future.

Government Orders

My message today for my colleagues in this House is let us not forget that part of this bill. We do not want to pass this bill, have it get royal assent and then have it sit on a shelf somewhere. There is a lot of work left to put the meat on the bones of Bill C-81. I want to encourage my colleagues that we pick this up in the fall to ensure that we do that.

To that point, I want to mention a quote from another stakeholder who brought this forward. This is from Michael Prince, a professor of social policy at the faculty of human and social development at the University of Victoria. He said:

This bill, to me, with respect, reflects that it was written in the bubble of Ottawa. This is written from the point of view of traditional management focus, organizational focus. This is not people-centred. This is about departments making sure that in the negotiations and drafting of this bill, exemptions and deals were cut.

Further on he said:

This is basically a machinery-of-government bill. There's not much social policy or public policy in this bill. This should be about people front and centre. I get that we have to have administrative enforcement and compliance, and on that note I'd like to see a lot more about incentives and education.

That again just goes to the fact that there are concerns from stakeholders with this bill.

My colleague from Edmonton—Wetaskiwin talked a great deal about permissive language. I will not go into that in detail as my colleague has already done that.

What has been talked about is that the motto of Canadians with disabilities has been “Nothing about us without us”. All of us in this House can agree with that. It is very important that we all support Bill C-81. We are doing that. It is also important that we remember that phrase “nothing about us without us”. We have to ensure that Canadians with disabilities are included in this bill. Unfortunately, in my opinion, many of the concerns that they raised, which we tabled as part of those dozens of amendments, were not passed and were ignored. I am hoping as we move forward we will remember “Nothing about us without us”.

● (2205)

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility (Accessibility), Lib.): Madam Speaker, “accessibility” is the important word here.

I am very proud to be part of a government that is bringing in this groundbreaking legislation, and I am proud to be here knowing that all parties are in support of this legislation. However, this is not the only positive step we have taken as a government.

I do not have a question, but I want to comment on some of the other achievements our government has made for persons with disabilities since we came into office.

We have a Minister of Accessibility. This is the first time the federal government has designated a minister responsible for accessibility, which is a major step forward. We have talked about the accessible Canada act tonight, and ahead of it receiving royal assent, we are proactively starting to recruit the Canadian accessibility standards development organization, CASDO, board, a CEO, as well as a chief accessibility officer. We have set aside \$290 million in funding, which is committed over six years, to further the objectives of the legislation.

I wanted to highlight that. There are more things I could highlight, because it is important to make sure that people understand all the great things that are happening in the government.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comment from my colleague, but my argument is that we are not talking about the other things that your government has done—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the hon. member to address his questions and comments to the chair and not to individual members.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I apologize.

My intervention this evening was to talk about the concerns within Bill C-81. There is no question that I would say that I talked about the legacy of Jim Flaherty with the registered disability savings plan and the enabling accessibility fund. The previous Conservative government had a very strong track record when it came to legislation to address people with disabilities. However, the focus tonight is addressing some of the shortfalls within Bill C-81, and that is my discussion this evening.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank a number of members in the deaf community who are here with us tonight: Lisa Anderson-Kellett, Frank Folino, Jessica Sargeant, Wyatt Scott, Darryl Hackett and Robyn Mackie. These are members of the community who are watching this debate. It is very important that they be here, and we welcome them.

The member for Foothills raised an important point about disability tax credits and the registered disability savings plan. What we have seen under the government, sadly, is a real attack on people with disabilities when it comes to their right to the disability tax credits and the registered disability savings plan. I have certainly experienced in my riding that people with disabilities who had been part of the disability tax credit and the RDSP for years were all of a sudden being cut off, and CRA takes them on. CRA does not seem willing to take on overseas tax havens or big corporate tax loopholes, but it is attacking people in the disability community, and it is costing people with disabilities enormous amounts.

I want to get the member's comments on whether he has experienced this in his riding as well and that the government is being very mean-spirited, in fact, through CRA and has hurt people with disabilities.

● (2210)

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, my colleague's question is getting a little off the Bill C-81 discussion, but I will say that when we look at the Auditor General's report on the call centres with the CRA and seeing millions of calls dropped, there is certainly a concern with how we are servicing all Canadians and not just Canadians with disabilities. However, I would like to keep my focus tonight in respect to the people who are watching and who may be here this evening on Bill C-81.

I would not call Bill C-81 an attack on people with disabilities. I think, as they would say, it is a step in the right direction. The interesting comment I have heard from stakeholders and those who have discussed this with us is that it is better than nothing.

Government Orders

When it comes to legislation, I think we really want to do things right. I did not work extremely hard to get elected to have royal assent on legislation that is better than nothing. I wanted to be here to ensure that when we enact legislation it is the best we can possibly do. However, one of things that we are seeing with some of the concerns that I have raised this evening is that, in some ways, it is not better than nothing. In some ways, it would actually make life more difficult for people with disabilities.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a father of an adult child who has both cognitive and mobility disabilities. Our daughter, who is now 30, will live with us for the rest of her life. When I read Bill C-81 and think about a barrier-free Canada, I think of barriers in terms of accessibility, but also barriers to opportunity. I hear time and again that we are at the eleventh hour and we are trying to get this done just to get something done, which is better than nothing. It is a step in the right direction, but I would say that we are trying to do the best we can to remove all barriers so that regardless of the disability or encumbrance, people are able to realize every opportunity that comes their way.

One of the things I have noticed in Bill C-81 is that there is no mention of first nations. It is a marginalized community and it is not recognized in Bill C-81. I wonder if my hon. colleague could comment as to why first nations are not mentioned in Bill C-81 and if it was an oversight or intentional.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, that was not something I had time to raise in my speech, but the member is exactly right. There were stakeholders at committee who raised this very issue. For example, Mr. Neil Belanger, the executive director of the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society, was at committee. They were consulted as part of the process of developing Bill C-81, but when he looked at the bill when it was first presented, first nations were not mentioned anywhere in the legislation. My colleague, the MP for Battlefords—Lloydminster, put forward amendments to try to include first nations as part of Bill C-81, but they were refused by the Liberal members on the committee.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Madam Speaker, the Insurance Brokers were on Parliament Hill today, which reminded me of the member for Foothills because I just renewed my insurance with Dusyk & Barlow.

One of my constituents, Michael Huck, a tireless advocate for people living with disabilities, made a submission to the standing committee studying the accessible Canada act. One of the points he emphasized was the importance of promoting this legislation after it is passed so that employers know about it. He also emphasized the importance of recognizing designated entities who are doing a good job of creating a barrier-free environment.

Those of us on the opposition side are often skeptical of government advertising, but I wonder if the member for Foothills would agree with supporting efforts to promote the accessible Canada act.

• (2215)

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I may owe my colleague from Regina—Lewvan some money for promoting my family's business in Regina, in Wascana, right beside the office of the Minister of Public Safety. There is a hole cut in the wall so we can spy on him when he is in the riding. I am kidding.

Yes, I would absolutely agree with my colleague from Regina—Lewvan that communicating Bill C-81 is going to be integral to ensure that every federally regulated entity in Canada understands what is going to be asked of them as part of this legislation. What is also important is that they understand that there are no regulations or standards included in Bill C-81 as of yet. It is pretty much a blank slate and that is going to cause a problem with business owners or departments not understanding what is going to be asked of them. When this is given royal assent, there is really nothing enforceable on that first day.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on this debate. This is not a debate that is inappropriate, quite the contrary. I will give two reasons why. The discussions and debates we will be having this evening, tomorrow and so on throughout the week are so vitally important.

First, the issue of disability rights in this country has been a marginalized discussion, certainly for as long as I have been in Parliament. We have not had full evenings of debate. We have members of the deaf community here this evening, and they are watching, to see what it is that we bring up about Bill C-81 and how we can improve it.

Second, as the parliamentary secretary said earlier, the issue of regulations and how to improve the bill are extraordinarily important.

The reality is the discussions and the debates that we have on this issue, far from shoving it under the carpet, are vitally important to getting the kind of bill that actually makes Canada more accessible. The government is patting itself on the back tonight, saying that we have bill, and it is weak but the Senate did improve it. The point is exactly thus, the fact that the bill was so weak to begin with that the Senate has already managed to improve it means that if we worked hard and assiduously over the next few weeks, we could make this bill better still. We could actually make it accessible.

The problem for anyone who is aware of the situation for people with disabilities in our country, the appalling situation that people with disabilities live under and the lack of accessibility, means that we have a duty to get this right, not just shove it under the carpet and move on to something else, saying that it is a weak bill that needs more improvement. The reality is we have a responsibility.

I hope that the government takes that responsibility seriously over the next few days as we sit until midnight to actually make those improvements. The government rejected over 100 amendments from the opposition. There was no willingness to improve the bill, despite the fact that there were so many witnesses who came forward and suggested, in very concrete terms, how this bill could be improved.

Fortunately, we have some Senate amendments that add, very appropriately and very importantly, the recognition of American sign language and *la langue des signes du Québec* as languages that are used by the deaf community. It is very important communication. I know only rudimentary American sign language, but the beauty of the language, when someone is fluent, is quite extraordinary to watch. It is something I deeply appreciate.

Government Orders

As other members of Parliament are sharing their experiences, I would like to share my experiences, coming in as the executive director for the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and working over the years to try to improve accessibility for the services that we offered across the mainland of British Columbia.

As members know, the situation of people with disabilities in this country is dire. Half of the homeless, and the growing number of homeless that we see in our country, are people with disabilities. Half of the people who have to go to the ever-increasing lineups around food banks in this country, just to make ends meet, are people with disabilities. The absence of services means that in many parts of this country, people with disabilities have to hold bake sales to try to fundraise, to get the accessible tools, essential tools, such as a wheelchair.

In Canada, we are far behind the rest of the world in terms of accessibility issues, and Canadians with disabilities pay a terrible price. When I was executive director for the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I would often drive up early in the morning to get to work. Sometimes, as I came to that building on the west side of Vancouver, there would be a woman or man from the deaf community who had spent the night under the awning at the back of the building, because they had no place to live. They had no place to go, so they went to the one place where they knew services would be provided.

We would try to sort out their situation, to help them, to provide the services they were not getting from a federal government and, at the time, the B.C. Liberal provincial government that simply did not seem to care about housing as a human right.

• (2220)

That is my experience of the disability community, people who are incredibly resilient, but have received very little of the supports that they should be getting as Canadians with rights.

We talk about the billions of dollars given to the corporate community, overseas tax havens and \$4 billion for a pipeline. The government seems willing to unleash the faucet as far as resources go, but people with disabilities have been starved of resources for decades and it is time that it changed.

When I was at WIDHH, we worked with other organizations, the Coast Mental Health, the B.C. Paraplegic Association and the CNIB. We created the first province-wide employment program for people with disabilities, the B.C. Employment Network. We established that because we knew that people with disabilities have so much to contribute, but so often doors were shut in their face for employment because there was no bridge, no way for those people with disabilities to get in to see a potential employer, to go through an interview, to learn the job and then to contribute to that business.

When we started the B.C. disability employment network, we started creating those bridges. That meant for a deaf British Columbian when they went to a job interview, there was a sign language interpreter. We have many talented sign language interpreters in this country and they could assure that there was a contact and communication with the employer and then training to make sure that the person learned the job.

For people in wheelchairs, the B.C. Paraplegic Association was a pioneer in this respect. Often it would mean nothing more than simple ramps and accessible doors that allowed people with disabilities to enter and leave the workplace. We provided that bridge, those supports.

For a wide range of other disabilities, we provided those supports to make sure that there was a contact made with the employer. The employers may not have been ready initially to provide those resources. The fact that they were provided for them allowed them to get to know those Canadians with disabilities in a new and meaningful way. What happened? Time after time those employers hired the people with disabilities. Once those people with disabilities learned the job, they stayed longer in employment, so it was a win-win situation by establishing that bridge and making sure that those people with disabilities had access to employment and access to that workplace so they could contribute for many years.

That is my experience in terms of people with disabilities, but let me talk about my experience in another country and that was the first time I went to the United States with a better understanding, thanks to people in the deaf community, of what it meant to have disabilities.

My first trip to Seattle really opened my eyes in terms of how far ahead the United States is in terms of where Canada is. I did not have that much money, we were working at WIDHH, but went to a conference in Seattle and I stayed at a very low-end motel called the Jet Motel. It is the far end of the strip at the Seatac International Airport. It was far away from the airport, a very cheap and low-grade motel. In the room the shower was completely wheelchair accessible. I asked at the front desk about a TTY to communicate and was told there was TTY and a whole range of other accessibility supports. I said, "This is a low-end motel. Why do you have all this?" They told me it is because it is the law. It is the law to have accessibility for Americans everywhere in the United States.

Even in some of the highest-end hotels in Canada, we do not achieve that degree of accessibility because it has been built on a volunteer system. We have not built the kinds of accessibility that are so vital to ensure inclusion and to ensure that people with disabilities everywhere in this country can contribute to their full potential. That is what makes me so sad about Bill C-81.

• (2225)

The Liberals are applauding and patting themselves on the back for what is such a small first step. It would not even have been as good as it is without the incredible pressure, thankfully, from people with disabilities who were saying that it was not good enough and applying more pressure to ensure that things improved. Instead of seeing it as something inclusive that all members of Parliament could participate in and accepting the over 100 important amendments and improvements offered by the opposition parties, the amendments were systematically rejected and the potential for an improved bill was lost.

Government Orders

We had something that could have moved us so far along, closer to the model in the United States, where there is an obligation, a duty, to ensure accessibility, and where there is transportation and accommodation right along the line, with an insistence and obligation to open doors for people with disabilities. We could have had that. All of us would have been overjoyed in the House to adopt such legislation. However, the involvement of the opposition parties was stymied. The many amendments that came forward often very thoughtful, extremely well researched and well crafted. They were simply rejected out of hand.

When it comes to Bill C-81, we have a bill that had tremendous potential. That potential has been lost so far because of some government intransigence. People with disabilities in this country deserve better. We have heard some remarkable stories tonight of people who have family members and close friends with disabilities and who have been in the workplace. We have members of Parliament who have disabilities and understand them first-hand. We have far fewer members of Parliament with disabilities than we should have. If this Parliament actually reflected the real division of the population and the number of people with disabilities across this country, we would be talking about having dozens of people with disabilities in the House of Commons.

I see in the gallery members of the deaf community who are extraordinarily eloquent. I hope one day some of them will be on the floor of this House of Commons contributing to its work and making sure that we do build that inclusive society, because that is what would make such a fundamental difference.

We had the bill brought forward by the government. We had some debates initially. As a number of my colleagues have pointed out, everyone supported the principle of greater accessibility. There is not a single member of the House of Commons who said that in principle they disagree with accessibility. Every single member from every single party and every single independent member stood together to say, "Yes, on principle let us pass this, because we all support the principle of accessibility. Let us get it to committee, let us hear from witnesses, let us hear from people with disabilities and let us make a difference there."

That is when it really came off the rails. It was at that point that many amendments were offered. There were nearly 120 from four of the opposition parties. Those amendments, which were brought forward in a thoughtful and honest way, were turned down.

The bill came back to the House. A number of us, including the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, raised those issues. When witnesses were speaking to the importance of ensuring that this be an obligation, and not just something the government can pick and choose and give exemptions to whole ministries, why not ensure there is a framework and some standardization? A number of my colleagues have spoken to that as well.

● (2230)

When those questions were asked, the government's response was that it was just going to pass the bill through. Then it went to the Senate, and fortunately the Senate started setting some clear objectives. Its members talked about recognizing American sign language, Quebec sign language and indigenous sign languages. Those were all important components.

In the debate we are now faced with, members of the opposition are recognizing that we have made some progress and want to make some more. They want to make the bill even better. They want the bill to put us close to the standards we see in places like the United States. Let us make the bill such that when travellers with disabilities check into a motel, even if it is a low-end motel at the far end of an airport strip in an international airport area, or take any type of transport or deal with a government ministry, they will feel they are a part of those things and not see barriers that stop them from actively accessing and being part of society.

The figures are grim. It is a fact that in our land, where we are seeing increasing concentration of wealth, more and more Canadians are struggling. As I have mentioned before in the House, Canadian families are now struggling with not only the worst debt load in our history, but the worst debt load in the history of any industrialized country. That is the legacy of the last four years.

When we are dealing with this situation, it would seem important that we take a more dramatic step to bring the bill forward and improve it, as it impacts people with disabilities above all others. The lineups at the food banks across this country are getting longer, tragically, yet it is estimated that half of the people in those lineups are people with disabilities.

Is the bill enough? Well, it is only a start. We need to make it even better. We have a number of weeks in which we can do that. When I think about the growing number of homeless people in our country, half of whom are people with disabilities, I remember, as I mentioned, the tragic cases that I would see on occasion when I walked into the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the morning. Some people simply did not have a place to stay and went to the institute because they knew they would be helped.

We have to ask ourselves if we are doing enough in Bill C-81, with the Senate improvements, to actually make a difference in their lives. That is the real question we have to ask ourselves honestly, as parliamentarians. This is not a time for any of us to rest on our laurels and simply say there are some good things in the bill and that it is sufficient. Given the dire situation of people with disabilities in this country and what they mandate us to do as members of Parliament, we have a responsibility to go much further.

Earlier tonight, a Liberal speaker talked about regulations, and a number of members of Parliament have raised the notion of having very strong and robust regulations. We also have the ability and opportunity to improve the bill. We have a responsibility to about 15% of the Canadian population. These are people with disabilities who are not, in any number, represented in the House, but who came to committee, offered suggestions and asked for improvements, and who found that the government was not willing to listen.

Here, as parliamentarians, we have the responsibility to listen. We have the responsibility to speak out. We have a responsibility to question the government about why it did not accept amendments and did not make the bill stronger. Even with the passage of the bill, why are we still so far behind what the Americans with Disabilities Act offers to Americans with disabilities?

Government Orders

Canadians with disabilities deserve better. It is true that we will be voting in favour of the bill, but it is a lost opportunity if we do not take the time that remains in debate to make the bill better, to make the regulations stronger and to make the bill more reflective of what Canadians with disabilities truly need.

• (2235)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech and would characterize it as a lament for a bill that perhaps could have been much better. He commented on the self-congratulations by government members in the various speeches we heard earlier tonight. The member for New Westminster—Burnaby commented on the fact the Liberals seemed extraordinarily pleased with their track record on persons with disabilities. Could he comment on that track record, particularly the attention given to the treatment of disabled Canadians by the Canada Revenue Agency in regard to RDSPs?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that is an important question, because it goes beyond the intent of the bill into what is actually taking place on the ground for people with disabilities. The member raised the disability tax credit and the registered disability savings plan. Over the last two years there has been a crackdown by the current government on the number of Canadians who have access to the disability tax credit and the registered disability savings plan. We have people with disabilities coming into my office who have been on the disability tax credit and the registered disability savings plan for many years who were cut off all of a sudden, or the government has told them they have to go through the long process of requalifying by going back to their doctors. It is simply unfair to force people with disabilities to go through that, when their situation has not changed, yet we have seen that happen repeatedly. The financial cost is enormous. The disability tax credit is non-refundable, as the member knows. It is not perfect, but at least it is something, as is the RDSP. The government's withholding it from people who qualify shows a tragic myopia as to what people with disabilities really need in support.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate all evening. One of the issues I was wondering about and would like to invite my colleague's comments on is this.

My colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, tabled a private member's bill, Bill C-384. In that bill, she called on the government to create a one-stop shopping system for individuals with disabilities to access federal government programs, such as the Canada pension plan disability benefits, the disability tax credit, the registered disabilities savings plan, the veterans disability pension plan and the opportunities fund. That is to say that instead of having to go through multiple application systems within the federal government, filling out all the forms and providing verification for their disability, they would only have to do it once. Once they had done that, they would then be able to qualify for all of those programs under the federal government's jurisdiction. Sadly, the private member's bill proposed by our colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, was defeated by the government members. For the life of me, I do not understand why the government would create barriers to people with disabilities' access to critical programs that all Canadians should have easy access to. That streamlining process would also reduce the bureaucracy within government.

Could my colleague comment on that?

• (2240)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver East is a strong advocate for people with disabilities in her riding. I understand how sincere she has been in working to help advance the rights of people with disabilities in her riding and right across the country.

This is another example of just talking the talk. The government brought forward the bill but is not going to improve it, yet it claims it has done something for people with disabilities. Yes, it has, but as I mentioned, there is less access to the registered disability savings plan and there is less access to the disability tax credit.

The point that the member for Windsor—Tecumseh raised when she brought forward her excellent private member's bill was to make it easier, not harder for people with disabilities to attain their rights. The government said no to that.

How can we possibly imagine, understanding a day in the life of a person with disabilities in this country with so little access to accessibility, making it harder for them to go from one agency to the next to try to cobble together the various programs? It just shows again a lack of understanding of the challenges that Canadians with disabilities face, and I am saddened by it.

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member thanked the many people in the gallery from the deaf community and there are others in the gallery as well that represent persons with disabilities, and I too thank them. What they truly want is for us to move forward and pass this historic legislation as soon as possible and start helping people with disabilities.

Let us move forward and make the difference that is needed for people with disabilities in Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian: That is the problem, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals say they do not want to have any more debate on this because the more debate and discussion there is, the more the shortcomings and the lack of follow-up by the government become evident to the public. That is the problem.

The Liberals should be thinking in the interests of Canadians, not in the interests of the Liberal Party. If they were thinking in the interests of Canadians, they would be seeking to get the strongest regulations possible. If they were thinking in the interests of Canadians and Canadians with disabilities, they certainly would have accepted the over 100 improvements that were offered by people with disabilities to members of the opposition to bring forward at committee. Each of those amendments was denied.

If the Liberals are truly interested, and I certainly hope they are, they will also be listening to the voices and the comments that people have made about improving this bill, making sure that the bill is better. It is not too late. There is an opportunity. We can do things better for Canadians with disabilities.

Government Orders

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, one of the Senate amendments related to looking at intersectionality in this legislation. Persons with disabilities, persons with racial backgrounds, women, individuals of racial minorities do face disproportionately negative impacts related to their disabilities.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague, who supports this piece of legislation, could speak to the specific improvement from the Senate amendments to this legislation around intersectionality.

• (2245)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, many Canadians admire the member for the public stance she has taken, and I am one of them. She has been a very passionate advocate for people with disabilities in this country and I commend her for her work.

She has also pointed out one of the Senate improvements. She is absolutely right to say that the issue around intersectionality and how that has an impact on Canadians with disabilities needed to be highlighted. That principle does help to improve the bill. She is absolutely right about this.

There are further improvements we could make to the bill. We could strongly advocate for some strong regulations that would help to reinforce what the Senate has offered.

I would hope that in the course of this debate the government would make solid commitments about the kinds of regulations that it would bring forward so that Canadians can be reassured that the weakness in the bill that was partially addressed by the Senate can be improved even further by strong regulation.

BILL C-81—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the debate tonight, it is clear that the opposition will not let this legislation move forward. I just want to reassure Canadians that we will use whatever tools are necessary to ensure that we take this important step forward. Yes, there is more work to do, but this is historic legislation that needs to be passed.

Therefore, I would like to advise the House that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the consideration of certain amendments to Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada.

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

It is unfortunate that the opposition finds this humorous. This legislation is not funny. It is important and in the best interests of Canadians.

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates the notice from the hon. government House leader.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Whitby.

SECOND READING AND CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-81, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to speak to Bill C-81. I know that we have had a number of individuals who have spoken to this piece of legislation. Even with their criticisms of the legislation, there has been a camaraderie in the House to see it move forward.

One of the reasons I came to be a member of Parliament was to make sure that we were moving forward with legislation that would help those who are most marginalized and vulnerable in our society. I think this legislation does that.

Before I go on, I want to give thanks. We are sitting extra hours and it is almost 11 p.m. I want to thank the pages who are here, one of whom brought me some water which is most appreciated because I will be speaking for 20 minutes. I want to give a special thanks to the individuals who are giving the interpretation up in the gallery. I think that is really important and it speaks to one of the Senate amendments. I want to thank everybody here who is helping to ensure that this beautiful place, the West Block, operates in a fashion that allows us to continue this really important debate.

I want to thank a couple of people who are in the gallery, Nevin and Kyle. They have been with me this evening. They walked me over here. Speaking so late in this place, it could be a bit difficult for individuals to be here. They decided to come here with me tonight. I really want to thank them for being in Ottawa.

When talking about this specific legislation, Bill C-81, with members in this place and the other place, committee members, stakeholders, witnesses, all Canadians, it really speaks to what our democracy is about. It is about the ability for Canadians and legislators to come together to bring forward a piece of legislation that will allow everybody in Canada to feel that this country is more inclusive and that they see themselves in this piece of legislation.

It is not necessarily only individuals who have disabilities, but it is all Canadians who can be proud of this piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation that will identify, remove and prevent accessibility barriers, level the unemployment gap and create more inclusive spaces for Canadians within the federal jurisdiction.

I want to applaud the government on this particular piece of legislation. Of course, I was a former member of the government and I appreciate this piece of legislation because it is not just about disabilities.

I have said on my Facebook page and my Twitter feed that I want Canadians, who are watching the individuals in this place from all across Canada, to pay attention to this legislation. It shows the leadership of Canada in this particular area. It shows that not only in the federal jurisdiction, but within workplaces, communities and schools, we need to make our spaces more accessible. We need to make them more inclusive. It is also a demonstration of the collaborative approach where we have hundreds of stakeholders who appear before committee and hundreds of stakeholders who have written in. Many people from my town of Whitby have written and I am going to take the time to name those individuals.

Government Orders

● (2250)

Often we see form letters or campaign approaches to writing members of Parliament. When we look at them and every one is exactly the same, we think that maybe those individuals did not take the time to research or look at the particular legislation when they were writing about. However, we have to look at this with a different lens, which I am happy to do. These individuals took the time to write to their member of Parliament to say that they wanted to ensure the proposed legislation was passed before the House rose. They wanted to ensure that their Canada include them.

I want to thank Thalia Liam Sang, Beverley Dooley, Shafaq Butt, Sylvie Boucher, Jacinth Spenler, Chris Gervais, Fiona Casey and Madison Taylor for taking the time to write me as their member of Parliament and to say that their Canada included them. Their Canada includes people who have disabilities. They want to be represented by their member of Parliament for Whitby. However, to be clear, this seat is a borrowed seat. I have said that I am not running again. I am contemplating whether I will run as an independent, but this is a borrowed seat. Therefore, this seat belongs to the people of Whitby, and I am responsible for ensuring their voices are heard. I am more than pleased to mention these names in this place.

As I have said, I have put this out on my social media platforms and a few people have responded. Dawn Campbell responded on Twitter and said that we needed to push the government.

Government members should not sit in their seats and feel comfortable. I have always said that when people come into my office, I should not feel comfortable. I should be very uncomfortable. The people of Canada and the people of Whitby hold the most powerful voices. They hold the most powerful tool to ensure their governments do what they want to see happen. Their votes are the most important tool they have.

However, Dawn Campbell wrote to me to say that she that digital accessibility was important. I sat on the INDU committee and listened to testimony of individuals who had visual impairments. They still get reports that are not written in Braille. It is 2019. How is that a thing in 2019 that a person could write to the Government of Canada and not get reports written in Braille? If any other constituency in the country were not able to access information from its government in a language that was accessible to it, it would be a little excited about that and would make some noise about it.

On that point, I want to applaud the Senate. For the people in Whitby and across Canada who are watching, one of the Senate amendments was to ensure this legislation would include the use of American sign language, Quebec sign language and indigenous sign language. I have to applaud the government for accepting the amendments. It ensures we have truly inclusive legislation. I do not want to throw shade on the government, but when we talk about diversity being our strength, it has to be more than just a checkbox.

● (2255)

People cannot look at the federal government and think that this is just about a check box. It is about actual active inclusion. Active inclusion involves ensuring that individuals with disabilities in politics, in business, in their communities have access to everything we take for granted on a regular basis.

For example, if a business is going on a company retreat and that retreat is not accessible to every employee, it make the person feel less included in the corporation. It makes those individuals feel like they do not belong. What happens with those individuals? They go to work one morning feeling 100%. When they go to the retreat and find they cannot access it, that feeling goes down to 80%.

I want to reference the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin who talked his son Jaden. I have the ability to speak in the chamber about the fact that our differences make us unique. The member did that quite eloquently today. I want to thank the member because it reminded us of the fact that our differences may make us unique.

When we go to our company retreat and it is not accessible for those with disabilities, how does that make one feel? How does that make one participate in meetings, or events or other circumstances around that business? I had the opportunity of being the parliamentary secretary for international development minister. It allowed individuals to give their full selves. They are allowed to raise their hands and say that it is not accessible. They are allowed to raise their hands and say that this is not appropriate. This place has the largest megaphone in the country. I want to thank the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin for his comments earlier today.

I also want to thank the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility. The member of Parliament for Delta had the opportunity to come to Whitby. While she was there, she said something really profound. It made me believe with my whole heart that Bill C-81 was not just paying lip service to people with disabilities, but was really trying to change the status quo, change the landscape of Canada around accessibility issues, not just in Parliament but in businesses, in communities and in schools across the country.

She said that living with a visual impairment had given her the tools to allow her to see what other people could not see. I want members in the chamber to understand this. The Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility is visually impaired, but her life has been built around the ability to see what others cannot see, because of that impairment. Her environment gives her the experience and the skills to talk about legislation like Bill C-81.

● (2300)

When others in companies talk about return on investment or talk in communities or schools, they are able to see things we cannot see. When we talk about making sidewalks more accessible for persons in wheelchairs, it is also making it more accessible for moms. I am a mom of three. It allows my child to ride up the ramps with the bike. It allows seniors to go up with their walkers. It makes communities better.

I would be remiss if I did not speak to one of the greatest organizations in Whitby, brought forward by the former member of Parliament for Whitby, the Hon. Jim Flaherty, the Abilities Centre in Whitby. It is an icon in our community, one in which individuals are not made to feel like they need to be accommodated by our community but are welcomed in our community. I am very proud of that place.

Government Orders

I also want to talk about a couple of other individuals in Whitby, Allyson Partridge-Rios and her husband Andy. They volunteered for me. They are great individuals. Alison has cerebral palsy and epilepsy and Andy has an acquired brain injury. Before I came here, I worked for 10 years. I had a company that was a health care-based research management firm. I was the co-chair of Canada's first epidemiology study around neurological conditions. I worked with individuals who had Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, brain injuries, cerebral palsy. I saw what these individuals could contribute to our community.

They contribute not a disability, but an ability to bring their experience to everything we do, to bring their knowledge, their experience, their insight to our policies, to our return on investment for our companies and to our communities. Alison and Andy wanted me to mention that this legislation would give them peace of mind. It would help ensure inclusivity and accessibility, while supporting each other with their diverse needs. We are discussing exactly that today.

I also want to mention an individual in my riding, Niki Lundquist. She has been a great supporter, a great friend and she has never ceased to speak out about issues that are important to the people of Whitby. She never ceases to speak out about issues that are relevant to ensuring our community is better-off.

I will take this last minute to speak for Nikki. Nikki wants to ensure this legislation passes. She wants to ensure we do everything possible to look after those in our community who are most vulnerable, ensuring they have the support of their government.

• (2305)

I will not have the time to speak to the Senate amendment about intersectionality, but my constituents have spoken to it. They have done so in a way that allows us to understand that as individuals with different intersecting identities move forward throughout our country, they are challenged. With the amendments, this piece of legislation would make it a more inclusive, a more accessible and a more Canadian place.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to questions and comments, I have a reminder to all hon. members.

Of course it is always an honour when we greet Canadians here to view the proceedings here in the House of Commons. I wish to remind hon. members they are not permitted to bring specific attention to members in the gallery either by name or through gestures. Certainly, when that time is needed, members have made general comments about paying tribute to guests who happen to be visiting Parliament Hill and so on, so this is a way they can bring acknowledgement in a general way to our special guests who come to see us here in the House of Commons.

We will now go to questions and comments.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not going to be a super tough question. Full disclosure: the hon. member for Whitby is a good friend of mine and has been for the last four years as we have worked together on things that we very much care about. She spent her life before politics helping the most vulnerable.

One of my favourite sources of wisdom is John Wooden, a former basketball coach, and one of his pieces of advice was to “surround yourself with smart people who'll argue with you.” That advice is more welcome with some people than others. I very much welcome that advice. I really appreciate the fact that when I sit down and chat with my friend, I may not always agree with her but I am always challenged by her in terms of her ideas.

The question I have is relevant to her situation and her experience here after four years. What we have seen with this legislation is the ability of associations coming together and finding common ground. I would like the hon. member to comment on what lessons we can learn here in this place about the importance of working together on issues like this and finding that common ground in the best interest of Canadians.

• (2310)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy sparring with my colleague, if I may so, and he has taught me so much about being in this place. I really want to thank him as it might be one of my last chances to publicly do so.

I want to apologize for drawing attention to people in the House. I wanted to say that they were here in Ottawa and not necessarily in this place.

I mentioned in my speech that this particular piece of legislation brought together the ability to show leadership by stakeholders, the committee and members in this place across the aisles and in the other place, and not just in terms of federal jurisdiction but in terms of Canada at large. As well, we need to ensure persons with disabilities have access and that we honour them in a way that is inclusive and respectful of their ideas and perspectives they bring to not just our policy but our businesses, schools and communities.

It was a collaborative approach that allowed us to see the best of ourselves in this place. It allowed us to work together, talk among each other and say that we agree to disagree but we are going to have common ground. I believe that the member—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the debate on this important bill has been so good and so positive and I am really grateful for all of the MPs who have participated.

In 2013, I was sworn in as minister of state for social development and had the privilege of working with and under the former member for Whitby, the late Jim Flaherty, who was a huge champion for people with disabilities. That was reflected in each and every budget that Conservatives delivered from 2006 right up until 2015.

When I worked on that file, one of the things I was so incredibly inspired by when I worked with people with disabilities, who have amazing abilities, is the focus on the abilities that these wonderful Canadians bring to us in every aspect of life. I remember very clearly that so many of them would tell me that they want to get to work, they want to work, they want the opportunity to have jobs, to participate in the workforce and contribute with their ideas and skills. We have seen some great examples of that over the years.

Government Orders

I am wondering if my colleague from Whitby, who is fortunate to live in the community where the Abilities Centre is located, can talk about people with a wide variety of abilities being involved in the workforce and how we can help them do more of that.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, there are great examples in Whitby. The Tim Hortons in Whitby employs many individuals with various levels of ability in employment. Speaking now not as a member of Parliament, but providing research as my background is in research, we know that individuals with disabilities tend to give more to corporations. They tend to be dedicated, trustworthy and able to be relied upon. I want us to stop talking about these individuals as if they are somewhat different from us. They are better and I want that to be acknowledged in this place.

Before I close, I want to thank Laura and Frank on Twitter for reminding me that services for the deaf are critically important in making sure our spaces are more inclusive.

● (2315)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is May 28 and the hon. Andrew Telegdi, who served in the House as the member of Parliament for Kitchener—Waterloo, was not only a friend but a mentor and family. My favourite quote of his that I appreciated was “My Canada is an inclusive Canada”.

When we talk about Bill C-81, I would love to hear from the member what she believes about inclusivity, that if this legislation is passed sooner than later, how it will benefit not only her community but communities across the country, that as much as it is only a step in the right direction, it is an important step that we should be able to take as soon as possible and why this legislation should pass sooner than later. I know that talking is important, but I believe that actions are more important and I would love to hear her perspective.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the question from the hon. government House leader, whom I have had the tremendous opportunity to work with over the last three and a half years. She is a brilliant individual and, if I could be permitted to say so, I do love her.

She is absolutely right. My Canada is an inclusive Canada because this is what we are defined by. This is why this piece of legislation is a leadership moment for Canadians. This is why this legislation is not just a leadership moment for our 42nd Parliament; this is a leadership moment for all Canadians, for all businesses, all communities and all jurisdictions to look at what our federal government is doing and say, “Hey, I want to do a bit of that. I want to make my business more inclusive. How can I do that?” It is to ask the tough questions of how they can be a bit more.

With the Senate amendments around intersectionality, around putting timelines and around making sure we are held accountable, this is what makes this piece of legislation better. It is because there is a collaborative approach. It is because the government has accepted amendments. It is because we have listened to Canadians, to stakeholders, to Canadians who have written to us and to individuals from both sides of this chamber to make this piece of legislation better. This is what our democracy is about. It is about looking after the most vulnerable in our community. This is why I am here.

It is about understanding that the marginalized and those who feel that they are on the periphery of a political process can be involved and can actually see themselves, and not just through the cameras; through social media and through our voices, they can see themselves in here. Even though they are not here, they can see themselves through their members' voices. This is what we should be most proud of in being in this place.

I applaud the government for this piece of legislation and for accepting the amendments that the other place has brought forward.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see the clock and it is extremely late. I appreciate that as I look around, I see many people who have been here all day. Although we cannot recognize them, I note they are here in Ottawa. I welcome them, and I want to thank them for everything they have done, as they have sat through this debate and listened to what we have put forward.

Before I get into my speech, I want to thank the member for Whitby for her comments, because she triggered me into thinking about something I discussed today.

Today I had an opportunity to meet with the Canadian Paralympic Committee. I met a gentleman by the name of Tony Walby, who is on the board of directors for the CPC and is also the chair of CPC athletes' council. We had a great discussion, and we talked about disabilities.

Mr. Walby was a judo athlete, and he unfortunately developed a visual and hearing impairment and was no longer able to compete as an athlete in judo. Now, after getting onto the CPC's board of directors, he is doing tremendous work with the organization.

In the conversation we had, we talked about disabilities. He said to me that disabled people do not want to be called “disabled”, and I agree with him 100%. Calling them “disabled” makes people believe there is an impairment and a challenge. They are not disabled. They are the same as everybody else in the world; they just happen to have a disability that impairs what they do. That is an important thing we need to point out to all Canadians.

I will start with that. I appreciate the comments I have heard tonight, and, again, I appreciate the comments from the member for Whitby, who spurred me to put that out there.

I am happy to be back here today to discuss amendments that were put forward by the Senate of Canada with respect to Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. It is always a pleasure to speak to important issues like this one, and I appreciate the work that has been done on the bill. I do think it will go a long way toward making a difference for Canadians living with disabilities.

The support evident from all parties gives many of us an opportunity to talk about some of the issues in the legislation that are important to each and every one of us.

Government Orders

When I first spoke about the bill in the fall, I had a few issues with it. Mainly, I felt as though it did not contain enough real, tangible measures to produce results for those in Canada who live with disabilities. The intentions were good; however, the legislation does not actually accomplish anything that will help people with disabilities and what they need. They wanted something that would have an impact on their lives, and I feel as though the amendments we are discussing today will help them going forward.

One of the biggest issues I had with the initial version of Bill C-81 is that I felt it was rushed. The Liberals took quite a long time in bringing this matter to Parliament, yet when the bill was first introduced, it fell short of many expectations that the Canadians with disabilities community had. Although the Liberals had years to consult, there were gaps in the legislation they put forward that needed to be addressed. While the bill is still not perfect, with many of my colleagues pointing out its many imperfections, I do feel that the amendments put forward by the upper house help to identify and rectify some of the gaps.

I am glad to see that one of the amendments made to the bill puts a specific timeline on the matter. By adding a specific year or period of time by which a Canada without barriers will be achieved, a sense of urgency is created. That urgency is necessary, as disabled people in Canada have been waiting many years for this legislation to become law. In this case, the bill requires a “Canada without barriers, on or before January 1, 2040.”

While this timeline might seem like a small part of this legislation, I feel that it is one of the most important aspects. Not only does it light a fire and force the federal government to get moving on the matter, but it also gives those who have been waiting for a Canada without barriers some hope that things will truly get done in the future.

I have always felt that an important part of what we do here in the House is to ensure that the outcomes of legislation we put forward are measurable. We want to be sure that we get results when we say we will get results, preferably before the deadline of January 1, 2040.

• (2320)

The one issue I do have with the timeline indicated in the amendments is that it is quite long. People in Canada who are living with disabilities want action and they want it now. There are people in this country who have lived their entire lives facing barriers each and every day and they want to know that their government is committed to addressing issues of accessibility in a timely manner. Setting a goal that is over 20 years in the future may give the impression that this is not as much of a priority as it should be.

We on this side of the House would have preferred deadline of 10 years, as we believe that it would be a reasonable timeline for achieving a Canada without barriers. We know that many times action does not begin until a deadline looms. We do not want this to be the case with removing barriers to accessibility, and the setting of the deadline 20 years down the road is concerning. I am hopeful that organizations will do everything to have accessibility measures in place long before that timeline expires.

One thing that we all hold dear in this beautiful country of ours is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It sets out what we as

Canadians and people residing in Canada can come to expect in how we participate in society and what rights we have as individuals. A number of the amendments in Bill C-81 seek to ensure the following:

Nothing in this Act, including its purpose of the realization of a Canada without barriers, should be construed as requiring or authorizing any delay in the removal of barriers or the implementation of measures to prevent new barriers as soon as is reasonably possible.

Simply speaking, this means that no agency in Canada would be able to create and set standards that are inconsistent with what is set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Furthermore, if barriers to accessibility can be removed before the legislated timeline of January 2040, they absolutely should be. There is no justification for delay.

Another measure contained in the amendments to Bill C-81 that I feel is essential to the success of the bill is as follows:

persons with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services and structures.

This is key. As members of Parliament, it is our duty to consult and work with those who are affected by legislation that we put forward here in Ottawa. It is only logical that when it comes to creating a law that will lead to a Canada without barriers, we speak to those people who actually face the barriers.

It is one thing to consult with disabled Canadians, but it is another to have it enshrined in law that they must be involved in the development of public policy that affects their everyday lives. The only people who truly know what challenges they face and need to overcome on a daily basis are those who live with disabilities or care for someone with a disability. I am pleased that it will now be a requirement that this community have a voice at the table going forward.

Another amendment to Bill C-81 addresses intersectionality. Intersectionality is defined as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination...combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.” This may apply to many aspects of our identity, such as race, gender and class, and it certainly applies to people in Canada who live with a disability.

Initially, intersectionality was not a key part of Bill C-81. Many disability advocacy groups across the country called for this aspect of the bill to be strengthened, and I am happy to see it included in the proposed amendments.

While it would be wonderful to say that we live in a country where discrimination does not exist, we all know that it is unfortunately not the case. Canada is a progressive country, yet unfortunately, there will always be some level of discrimination present in our society. I feel that people living with disabilities in Canada absolutely understand that, because they face a level of discrimination that most members of the House, including me, will likely never experience. Any legislation that we put forward and expect to become law needs to address the fact that discrimination happens and is inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

Government Orders

The amendment that addresses intersectionality is necessary. By incorporating intersectionality into the measures outlined in Bill C-81, laws, policies, programs, services and structures will be required to take into account the intersectional forms of discrimination faced by persons living with disabilities.

● (2325)

Ultimately, organizations would have to recognize and account for intersectional discrimination when formulating their accessibility plans. This may not be easy, but it is what disabled people need and deserve. They have every right to participate in society, just as anyone else does. Unfortunately, many are all too familiar with the layers upon layers of discrimination they might face just doing things like going to work, running errands or going to an appointment. As I previously stated, many advocacy groups have called for the inclusion and strengthening of intersectionality in this bill. I am happy to see that the amendments have provided for that.

One amendment to this bill that I personally heard some feedback on is with respect to sign language. Some members here may know my personal history. As has already been indicated to people, I am hearing impaired as a result of a hit and run that I sustained as a teenager. I am fortunate that it is a partial hearing loss. Although I can still communicate with spoken language, over the years I have been slowly teaching myself sign language. However, one must use it in order to keep using it. Unfortunately, I have not had that opportunity, so I have failed in much of what I know, but I am learning more. I encourage everyone who is listening here today to continue to learn sign language given how important it is.

Being hearing impaired makes it extremely challenging to communicate, not only in crowds, but also where there is background noise. It is frustrating when all I can do is smile and nod as if I heard the person speaking to me. There is a huge mental challenge in dealing with this issue. It is one that I go through at many meetings, and I know that people with hearing disabilities are challenged with it day in and day out.

Invisible disabilities are not as widely talked about when discussing Canadians living with a disability. When I go around the riding, oftentimes I talk to students about getting involved and the great things we do in this country. I ask them if they think I am disabled. Every now and then there is one person who puts a hand up because he or she thinks it is a trick question, but most of them say no. Then I tell them my story. I try to point out to them the fact that there are many people in this world who have invisible disabilities that we do not know about and do not talk about.

While physical health is important, so is mental health. Every person, from every walk of life, deserves to feel valued, loved and respected. We all have different challenges that we must face. However, if we can accommodate a group of people who typically feel marginalized, and allow them to feel included and appreciated, that is never a bad thing. By passing legislation that would create a Canada without barriers, it is my hope that those within the disabled community will feel recognized and heard. We see them, we care about them and we want to do what we can to make their daily lives easier.

The amendment to Bill C-81 that concerns sign language is crucial. It includes and recognizes the use of American, Quebec and

indigenous sign languages as the primary languages of communication used by deaf people in Canada. I am very glad that these languages have been included in this bill, as the deaf community is one that must be acknowledged when we discuss Canadians living with disabilities.

Some people do not realize there is more than one kind of sign language. There are many that exist around the world, similar to spoken languages. There are between 138 and 300 different types of sign languages used worldwide. The UN recognizes only 45 of them. Each language has its own unique grammar, syntax and vocabulary and is legitimate language in its own right. It deserves to be given the same status and recognition as any spoken language or other sign language. Therefore, I am pleased to see that both the Quebec and indigenous sign languages have been given representation in this legislation, because we need to represent Canadians from coast to coast, and not just those who might use the more common American sign language.

● (2330)

For the deaf community, using sign language can become part of a cultural identity. As a government, it is important that is acknowledged. We need to ensure there are high levels of standards for those who use sign language, whether it is ASL, Quebec sign language or an indigenous sign language. All Canadians should have the right to communicate in a way that works for them and to have their language recognized as legitimate and as having value.

Another component that was included in the amendments to this bill is one that would ensure the Canadian Transportation Agency, the CTA, cannot respond to complaints about barriers to accessibility by reducing existing human rights protections for passengers with disabilities. Those with disabilities, especially of a physical nature, understand how difficult travel can be. Air transportation in particular can be very cumbersome. Some cannot safely and confidently travel by plane at all due to such limitations as specialized wheelchairs and other necessary equipment.

I have a constituent who faces limitations when it comes to travel. I would like to read an excerpt from a letter that she sent to me, which outlines her struggles with travel. It reads, "My name is Kennen Dorgan and I live in your constituency. I commute from Grenfell to Regina three days per week to attend a fabulous program at the University of Regina called Astonished. My dream is to fly to Alaska to visit my sister. I have a complex physical disability and I use a wheelchair for mobility. I cannot sit independently from my wheelchair and airplanes do not have designated wheelchair spots. Every summer I spend at least 108 hours of challenging and exhausting driving time to visit with my sister in Alaska. A flight would take 15 to 20 hours."

Government Orders

Her letter goes on to say, “Despite the oversight of both the CTA and Transport Canada, there are no provisions to improve accessibility to aircrafts for travellers who, because of their disabilities and for safety reasons, cannot sit in a standard airline passenger seat and must remain seated in their personal wheelchairs. These individuals are prevented from travelling any way except by land vehicles.”

This young lady spends over 108 hours in a van every year so that she can spend time with her family. In fact, she and her parents are currently preparing for their annual drive up to Alaska. They will be leaving within the next couple of weeks. While the amendments to Bill C-81 may not specifically address her issue, I do feel it is important to present real life situations that are being faced by real Canadians who live with a disability, yet want to take a family vacation just like anyone else.

I also met a lady from Vancouver a few months back while I was travelling with my wife. This lady had her disabled adult son with her. She graciously shared her experiences of travelling with her son. It is not an easy thing to do. He loved to travel, even with his severe disability, on ships and on planes. She had to have a team of family members with her to ensure that her son could be carried from point A to point B. Oftentimes, in his wheelchair he could not access certain areas of the ship. It was the same for any portion that required travel by plane.

She made it work, as do many families who care for someone who lives with a disability. However, I could see that it was a major struggle.

While Bill C-81 may not address that issue outright, I do think it is important to bring attention to it as the amendments do touch on the rights of the CTA. Over the years, I have heard from a number of Canadians who struggle with travel, and I do hope that this amendment can be a starting point to address that issue going forward.

We have heard from many Canadians about this legislation, and many groups that are promoting this legislation. I support that, and my colleagues around this House support that movement. This is a first step. It is a first step to put forward legislation which, as we see with the amendments that have been made by the Senate, we can improve and start with a base. However, the base is the base. It needs to be advanced and it needs to be advanced as quickly as possible. The faster we do this, the faster we include people with disabilities with all Canadians.

● (2335)

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility (Accessibility), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for talking about his own disability. I did not realize that he was hearing-impaired. It is an invisible disability, and one that so many Canadians deal with all the time.

He underscored how it is important that we move forward fast. Does the member not agree that Bill C-81 is really a huge step forward and that we must move forward for all people with disabilities in Canada?

● (2340)

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for being here today at this late hour to listen to the debates and the discussions of the many important issues that are out there.

She is right, in many aspects, that we do have this legislation now. Unfortunately, it has taken three and a half years to get to this stage. Unfortunately, we are continuing to sit here and look at this, when it should have been put forward as soon as we were elected in 2015. With that said, we are advancing, and as we start with this legislation, I look forward to moving forward on that.

My biggest concern is that, with the timeline being 2040, it gives the government an avenue to back away from doing things. That is not acceptable for disabled Canadians. I want to encourage the government to continue to push this forward and advance this legislation.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's comments and especially his sharing his personal story and how he has sometimes struggled, but clearly he has been such a successful individual and such a great member of Parliament. I know we appreciate his contribution in our caucus and on our side.

I want to ask the member about children living with disabilities. He said he was a victim of a hit and run at a young age.

We introduced the registered disability savings plan, the RDSP, the first one of its kind in the world, which really helped caregivers who were concerned about their children, as well as young adults. I wonder if the member can talk a bit about what families are dealing with. That sounds negative, and I do not think it is negative. There is so much positive. Can he talk about what we can do?

We are hoping to win government in October; we are planning to. We want to carry on the legacy that the late Jim Flaherty left, whereby people who have a variety of abilities are the focus and are at the forefront of what we are doing, and their concerns are not just brought in when it is convenient or politically expedient.

What can we do to help families that are living with and dealing with disabilities, but have so many abilities and so much to contribute as families?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, my House leader is right. I have heard a number of people talk about how nothing was done until this legislation came here. As she has pointed out, the late Jim Flaherty put forward, year after year, continuous steps to advance families and people with disabilities. The tax credit has been a tremendous asset for those families that have had to deal with that.

As I mentioned, many people I have talked to and many patients in my previous practice have come in and asked for ways to get assistance that would help them deal with the challenges they have.

I am happy to say that I am a brand new grandfather of a 13-week-old young girl named Zella. We always expect to see that the child is going to be perfect. Unfortunately, that does not happen. Unfortunately, throughout life, children may sustain something like I did and it makes a big challenge for those families, whether those families are dealt financial hardships, time hardships or employment hardships.

Government Orders

These are all steps that we need to continue to look at. We need to look at how we can step forward as we talk about this legislation and advance that, so that not only do we help the disabled people, but we help the families that are committed to their own life.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the question and answer. They once again raised the question of the disability tax credit which is a gateway to many other supports that disabled Canadians rely on. Throughout the debate we have heard the government congratulate itself on a variety of things beyond this bill which still has not yet passed this House. However, it would be generous to say that the government's track record on disabled Canadians is mixed.

I wonder if the member could comment on the disability tax credit. Has he heard from disabled Canadians who have lost their credit and thus risked losing other supports tied to it, including the disability tax savings plan for which one would have to refund money and lose the plan if one no longer qualified for the disability tax credit, which the government has withdrawn from many Canadians.

• (2345)

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is right. The disability tax credit that is in place to help Canadians is one on which I and many of my colleagues have received letters in particular from patients dealing with diabetes and type 1 diabetes and the challenges they have had as they move forward. Some people may say that those people are not disabled, but they are disabled. They are dealing with an issue that has a huge impact not only on their life but also on the lives of their family members.

As these people move forward and step up to the plate, they fill out the paperwork that they have done in the past and now, all of a sudden, the present government has changed the rules and made some statements that have resulted in changes to their appeals. Now they are appealing and it is a big challenge for them. It puts a lot of stress on them. It puts a lot of mental stress on them and affects them in many different ways on how it is approved. The doctors who are dealing with them fill out the forms appropriately and put in the proper information. That should be looked at, as opposed to making a statement that comes from a civil servant.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments about his challenges with respect to his accident, and of course the stories about his constituents as well.

In an effort to ensure that accessibility is made more readily available for people with all kinds of disabilities, would the member support the idea of ensuring that there is one-stop access for disability benefit programs within the federal government? Instead of making a person apply multiple times to different departments for those programs, they would only have to do it once and submit, for example, one doctor's verification letter to indicate the disability that the person is identified with. It would make it easier for people to access those very necessary programs.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, I do want to point out to my colleagues who have said kind words about my personal life that I usually do not speak about my personal life. That is something that happened to me many years ago. As I said, I do not consider myself disabled. I do not want people to look at me as if I am disabled. I

have a disability but I am just like everybody else. I think that is what all disabled people expect and would like in this country. With that being said, I appreciate her comments.

I think it is important to recognize that when disabled persons are putting in forms to insurance agencies or wherever it may be, there is a huge challenge when they have to continually fill out forms. They fill out one form, then go back and get another form, and another form and another form. It is a big challenge not only timewise but also emotionally. It has a big impact.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, I will let the hon. member know that there are only about 10 minutes remaining in the time for Government Orders for the end of the day today, but he will have the remaining minutes in his time allotted when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

• (2350)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today and speak to Bill C-81, the barrier-free Canada act.

This proposed act aims to make Canada more accessible for all people but especially for those with physical or developmental disabilities. An act like this is essentially good. It works to ensure and enshrine the dignity of the human person. So often today we find that the inherent dignity of the human person is cast aside for various reasons, perhaps out of ignorance. More often than not, the victims of society's disregard for human dignity are those among us who have to deal with a physical or developmental disability.

I would like to share my earliest and first experience with someone outside of my house who has become family to me. I call him my brother. His name is Ian McCluskey.

Ian is 29 years old. He is a high school graduate. He is a brother, a son and in the last year, a very proud new uncle to Monrow McCluskey. Ian is compassionate and hilarious with a sharp wit. He is focused and smart. Ian also happens to have been born with Down's syndrome, but he is never less than, and he is a wonderful man. He is my brother and a really great guy. He has taught me so much about myself. Ian adds so much to the lives of everyone he has gone to school with, worked with, his biological family and his extended family, of which I am fortunate that Ian includes me as part of. He is certainly deserving of all the dignity of any person.

A society and a government's recognition of the dignity of the human person is a foundational building block for a just and moral society. This must be paired with the rejection of the idea that some people are worth less than others and can so easily be rejected and cast to the peripheries. That is why the bill before us is so important, because people are inherently good and worthwhile.

Government Orders

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, discrimination on the basis of disability. The Canadian Human Rights Act recognizes that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated without discrimination and, in particular, discrimination on the basis of disability. However, what are rights and freedoms, particularly human rights, without recognition of the value of people and their inherent dignity as human persons?

Sure, we can point at the natural law saying that as humans we have a set of universal rights that have always been dictated by our nature and the nature of the world, or we can say that we have rights because the state prescribes them to us. Either way, the fact remains that we must know the dignity of the human person if we are to be a just and moral society.

Over the last century, we have seen exactly what happens when a state throws human dignity away. We know the atrocities undertaken by violent regimes. Under those regimes, the people that this very bill pays special attention to would have been disposed of, because they were seen as worthless. Many members of the House were alive when this was happening in Cambodia. People with physical or developmental disabilities were killed wholesale. It is not like this was some far-off time. We do not have to try to imagine. The Cambodian genocide happened in the 1970s. Therefore, we do not have to think too hard or too far back. We know what it is like when the dignity of the human person is cast away. It happened, and we need to strive to make sure that it never happens again.

• (2355)

A massive part of making society more accessible is to remove barriers to community. People find their highest good when in community and are able to feel that they belong. Early in my life, in my own home, I learned from the greatest teachers I have ever had or will ever have, my mom Anne and my dad Chris. My mom is visually impaired and has dealt with blindness her whole life. In spite of the challenges that has presented her with, she is a university graduate and brilliant woman who has taught me more than any textbook or teacher on any number of subjects. I am sure my mom learns more and reads more in a week than I do over many months.

One very important thing my mom taught me about was this very subject: the value of community. My mom served as a director on the L'Arche board in my community. As many will know, L'Arche is the creation of Jean Vanier. He was able to experience this through his work with the intellectually and developmentally disabled before he recently passed away. He was the son of a governor general. After visiting asylums in France and seeing the suffering of the patients who were wholly excluded from society, Jean Vanier set out to build a community where people with and without intellectual disabilities could live and work alongside one another as equals.

His first community started in a rundown house northeast of Paris that was without electricity or running water. Vanier said of the two men who came to live with him in the first house, "What was

surprising to begin with was Raphael and Felipe had both been terribly humiliated, pushed away, put into an institution. Their families didn't want them anymore, and so I welcomed them. And then, this gradual discovery of how they were opening up, rejoicing, and becoming someone."

That first house eventually expanded, becoming the first of 154 communities across 38 countries that today form the network that I previously referenced as L'Arche International. By creating a barrier-free environment where these people could work and belong, Jean Vanier created a lesson for all of us, especially in this House, that lesson brought to me very early in life by my mom, a great teacher.

This bill is a step in the right direction, but comes after years of government foot dragging. The slow pace and generally lethargic attitude of the government when it comes to important legislation is, I would say, astonishing. That has had a negative effect on many people, like the people this bill makes provisions for.

We can look at the record of the previous Conservative government mentioned by the speakers before me this evening to see effective legislation that was passed in successive years to help people with disabilities. That Conservative government established registered disability savings plans. These plans allowed parents and the families of children with disabilities to set aside money for the future in an account where it can grow tax-free until it is needed.

I see that I have just a minute left before we adjourn. I am not through all of the remarks I would like to deliver, but I will say that this bill begins to address the dignity of the human person and that this is truly important. Human beings rely on all sorts of relationships, recognizing the necessity of collaboration. The spirit of this bill is commendable and a step in the right direction. It recognizes the inherent human dignity in people with physical or developmental disabilities and it is an important step in the right direction for all of us.

• (2400)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes will have 10 minutes remaining in the time for his remarks when the House next gets back to debate on the question that is before the House.

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I give notice that with respect to consideration of the Senate amendments to Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, at the next sitting of the House a minister of the Crown shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that debate be not further adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the Government House Leader for this additional notice.

It being 12 a.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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