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(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 30, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 30, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, two reports of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group.

The first report concerns the U.S. congressional meetings held in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., from November 26 to 28, 2018.

The second report concerns the U.S. congressional meetings held in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., from February 26 to 27.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled “Main Estimates 2019-20: Vote 1 under Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, Vote 1 under Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Vote 1 under Office of the Senate Ethics Officer and Votes 1, 5, 10 and 15 under Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada”.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, two

reports of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

The first is the 19th report in relation to Bill C-92, an act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. The committee has studied the bill and has decided report the bill back to the House with amendments.

With the introduction of Bill C-92, we mark a historic turning point for first nations, Inuit and Métis children and families. Bill C-92 would finally put in law what indigenous peoples across the country have been asking of governments for decades: that their inherent jurisdiction be affirmed so they can decide what is best for their children, their families and their communities. The amendments that we accepted at committee yesterday would strengthen the bill further. We will continue to listen to our partners on this important legislation.

The second is the 20th report, in relation to Bill C-88, an act to amend the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament respecting the main estimates, 2019-20.

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PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning to present a petition that has been circulating. It is not the first time I have presented it, but many Canadians are currently concerned about this issue.

The petitioners ask that the government take steps to stop the use of animals in the testing of cosmetics. The use of animals in this fashion is less regulated in Canada than in other countries. They call on Canada to stop the use of animals in research and testing and to protect animals from cruelty.

Routine Proceedings

●(1010)

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to present a petition on behalf of dozens of residents of New Westminster, Burnaby and Vancouver, British Columbia. The petitioners are joining their voices to the thousands of Canadians who have signed petitions thus far.

The petition was initiated by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver and sponsored by the Elizabeth Fry societies across Canada. The Elizabeth Fry Society in New Westminster is celebrating its 35th anniversary. All of them are calling on the Government of Canada to end discrimination against children in irregular situations.

As members know, for a wide variety of irregular family situations, a parent may be incarcerated or homeless or the child may be raised in a foster home, there is no provision in government services to ensure that all the benefits that normally go to other children in the country go to those children.

The petitioners therefore call on the Government of Canada to meet the criteria of the United Nations to recognize the barriers that exist in its own direct payment process to family systems and ensure that all children benefit equally from these benefits.

[*Translation*]

PROTECTION OF THE BANKS OF THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour and pleasure of presenting petition E-2010, which has been signed by 771 people. This online petition will be followed by a second paper petition, which will have about 1,600 signatures by the time it is certified by the clerk.

This petition calls for the restoration of the protection program for the riverbank between Montreal and Lake Saint-Pierre to protect residents from erosion. The St. Lawrence Seaway is a key economic driver, but riverside residents are grappling with significant damage.

We have requested a meeting with the Minister of Transport to discuss this issue, and we hope he will agree to meet with us and respond favourably to this petition.

[*English*]

EGYPT

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions.

The first petition is from a number of citizens, calling on Canada and other countries to escalate our concerns with respect to the recent events in Egypt and the violation of civil rights.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from students of LAWS 4903A at Carleton University, calling upon the Government of Canada to call for the full acquittal of Professor Hatoon al-Fassi from Saudi Arabian custody.

VISION CARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I present two petitions today.

The first petition is signed by hundreds of Canadians who are concerned about eye health and vision care.

The petitioners point out that the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double in the next 20 years. They note that it affects all segments of the Canadian population, but that Canada's most vulnerable populations, children, seniors and indigenous people, are at particular risk. They also note that a well-coordinated response involving governments, health professionals, NGOs, industry and individuals working collaboratively can facilitate the promotion of eye health and prevention of vision loss.

The petitioners therefore call on the government to commit to acknowledging eye health and vision care as a growing public health issue and respond to it, particularly with respect to Canada's vulnerable populations, through the development of a national framework to promote eye health and vision care.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is sponsored by the wonderful people at the EFry centre.

The petitioners note that Canada is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and that it has ratified it. Because of that, they say we are obligated to put the best interests of children at the forefront of all of our policies. They note that the housing first funds are one size fits all and only fund the adult individual, with no additional allocation for parents with children. They also note that many children are excluded from receipt of the Canada child benefit and child special allowances and that there is a significant variation in services and programs across the country.

The petitioners therefore call on the Government of Canada to ensure that the Canada child benefit and child special allowances apply equally to all children, that the Canada social transfers ensure that all children benefit without discrimination and that children from families of parents in special situations, such as incarceration or homeless, are not deprived of these funds as they are the most needy in our country.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a huge petition signed by hundreds of Cape Bretoners. It is very similar to the petition from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to support Bill S-214 and ban the sale and manufacturing of animal-tested cosmetics and ingredients in Canada moving forward. They are looking for similar legislation that has been passed in other countries, such as Switzerland, New Zealand, Iceland and Norway.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS****CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-93, An Act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-93. Motions Nos. 1 to 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 to 3 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Filomena Tassi (for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-93, in Clause 4, be amended by replacing line 26 on page 3 with the following:

(4.11) For the purpose of an application referred to in subsection (3.1), the Board may not require a person who makes the application to provide a certified copy of information contained in court records in support of the application unless the certified verification of the applicant's criminal records and information contained in the police records or Canadian Armed Forces records provided in support of the application are not sufficient to demonstrate that the person has been convicted only of an offence referred to in Schedule 3 and that the only sentence imposed for that offence was payment of a fine or victim surcharge or both.

(4.12) For the purpose of subsection (3.11), a person re-

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-93, in Clause 5, be amended by replacing lines 14 to 30 on page 4 with the following:

(1.2) A record suspension ordered under subsection

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-93 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

•(1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth) and to the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, we promised to legalize and regulate cannabis. In October, we kept that promise.

The goal was to be more effective in keeping cannabis away from our kids and reduce the illegal profits of organized crime. As L'actualité journalist Alec Castonguay recently noted, "Organized crime no longer has a complete monopoly over the cannabis market. It is losing its footing." That is great news.

That is not all. Bill C-93, which was strengthened by a few amendments made in committee, will enable Canadians with a criminal record for simple cannabis possession to have their record quickly suspended so they can move on with their lives.

•(1015)

[*Translation*]

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I have the pleasure of presenting a really important petition that should interest every member of the House of Commons.

We want to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. This petition was started by the Elizabeth Fry Society and has been signed by thousands of people. There is a loophole in the federal system. Because of this loophole, some children in need are missing out on family allowances and other federal benefits.

I hope the government will pay attention to this petition I am presenting in the House. I also want to take a moment to thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for the important work he is doing with the Elizabeth Fry Society. He presents petitions on this issue every day.

I hope the government will listen to everyone who signed this petition and act swiftly to help Canada's most vulnerable children.

[*English*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to table a petition signed by dozens of citizens from Nova Scotia, a petition that was launched by the Elizabeth Fry Society.

The petitioners ask that all children, without discrimination in any form, benefit from special protection measures and assistance and to 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 benefits under the rights of the United Nations convention.

I hope the government will listen to this and act.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition to the House signed by Canadians across the country who are calling on the government to uphold the rights of the child in accordance with our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In order to do that, we must provide affordable housing for families.

[*English*]

As we have seen from other petitions this morning, this is about the rights of children to be recognized in the allocation funds of government programs. They are being ignored now.

* * *

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]

Bill C-93 would allow Canadians with criminal records for simple possession of cannabis to get pardons from the Parole Board with no application fee and no wait time.

Getting a pardon means that if a prospective employer or a landlord runs a criminal record check, it will come up empty. That makes it much easier for people to find a job or a place to live. It also makes it easier to get an education, to travel or just volunteer with a kids' hockey team.

Members of certain communities, particularly people of African descent and indigenous Canadians, have been disproportionately affected by the counter-productive criminalization of cannabis that we finally ended last fall. That is why we have taken the unprecedented steps of waiving the fee and the waiting period.

[Translation]

Without this bill, applicants would have to pay a \$631 fee and wait five to 10 years to have their criminal records suspended. Bill C-93 will completely eliminate those obstacles.

Bill C-93 also eliminates the usual subjective criteria applied by the Parole Board of Canada. Usually, the Parole Board member who examines an application for pardon must take into consideration the good conduct of the applicant and determine whether a pardon would bring that individual a measurable benefit. However, no discretionary factors will be taken into account in applications submitted under Bill C-93.

[English]

Everything I have mentioned thus far, from the elimination of the \$631 fee to the elimination of the waiting period of up to 10 years and the elimination of subjective criteria, was in the original version of this bill. The public safety committee has studied the legislation and sent it back to us with several additional provisions that make it even stronger.

Thanks to an amendment from the member for Brampton North, a cannabis possession conviction will not count against an individual if that individual is applying for a pardon for other prior offences.

An amendment from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands ensures that cannabis possession convictions pardoned under Bill C-93 cannot be reinstated simply on the basis of the person no longer being “of good conduct”.

Incidentally, it is important to mention that when it comes to the permanence of pardons, it is worth remembering that half a million pardons have been issued in Canada since 1970, and 95% of them are still in effect.

Records are reinstated only in exceptional circumstances, such as the commission of a new offence, and the amendment from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands will make sure that for people pardoned under this legislation, that will no longer apply.

The bill also now includes an important amendment from the member for Toronto—Danforth, allowing people to apply for expedited pardons for cannabis possession even if they have outstanding fines associated with their conviction.

Why is that important? One of the main reasons people apply for pardons is to be able to get a job and earn a paycheque. That can be a catch-22 for people who need a pardon to earn money but need money to get a pardon. We were already waiving the \$631 fee and now, even if people still owe a fine or a surcharge, they can get their pardon anyway.

• (1025)

[Translation]

That brings me to the report stage amendments the government is presenting today.

The first relates to the amendment made in committee, which I just mentioned. As things stand, the applicant has to provide the board with police and court documents demonstrating the nature of the conviction. Under Bill C-93, the applicant must demonstrate that the substance in question was indeed cannabis and that there is no outstanding sentence associated with the offence.

Information about sentences can usually be found in court documents. Given that unpaid fines will no longer matter, we propose amending the bill such that court records are no longer required from applicants whose only sentence was a fine. That would address the committee's recommendation that the government find more ways to make pardons for simple possession of cannabis even more accessible. We continue to work with the Parole Board of Canada to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from this new system.

[English]

There was another amendment that was made at committee, and I thank the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner for proposing it. It won the unanimous support of the committee, and I understand why.

It is possible in certain cases that relevant police and court records simply will not be available, especially if a lot of time has passed. In those cases, the member's proposal was to let applicants submit sworn statements saying that their only conviction was for simple possession of cannabis. The Parole Board would then make inquiries and could issue a pardon if it were ultimately convinced. The principle of this amendment is in line with other measures in Bill C-93 that aim to make pardons for cannabis possession as accessible as possible.

The problem is that, unfortunately, it is not likely to work in practice. If someone has a criminal record that says “possession of a controlled substance” but there are no police or court records available to prove that it was cannabis, that person would submit a sworn statement. The Parole Board would then make inquiries, and the only inquiry it could really make would be to go back to the police and the court and ask them to double-check. When the response comes back saying, “We told you the first time, we don't have those records”, there would be no way for the board to be sure what the substance was. The person could still get a pardon, but he or she would have to follow the usual process.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, therefore, the use of sworn statements in this context would result in more work for Parole Board staff, as well as for local police and court officials, but not more accessible pardons for Canadians, which is the goal of this piece of legislation. That is why we are proposing to remove it from the bill.

[*Translation*]

This bill is a major step forward that will change the lives of Canadians who have been stigmatized by convictions for simple possession of cannabis. Four years ago, when some people wanted to maintain the prohibition on cannabis or just wanted to decriminalize it, which would have meant fining marginalized people, we proposed legalizing it, period.

We made legalization happen. I encourage all my colleagues to support Bill C-93 so that people weighed down by a criminal record for simple possession of cannabis can rid themselves of that burden quickly.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague mentioned the article by Alec Castonguay that appeared in *L'actualité*. In his article, the author wrote that legalizing marijuana has ultimately helped take drugs, or drug sales, out of the hands of criminals. I believe Mr. Castonguay, who is an excellent journalist.

However, I wonder whether the member, who is in government, has any additional information from the RCMP indicating the opposite, in other words, that organized crime has only become more organized and is doing even more business.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

To be very clear, our government's goal is to keep cannabis out of the hands of young people, and out of the pockets of criminals and organized crime. This has worked in other jurisdictions in the U.S. and elsewhere. That is exactly what we are doing here in Canada. I am confident that, in the months and years ahead, we will see the same positive results that have been recorded elsewhere. It is based on science, on the best research and on the experiences of other jurisdictions. I am confident that this is the best approach to take for our youth and for Canadians from coast to coast.

•(1030)

[*English*]

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation. I have met with various communities over the years with regard to not just the records themselves, but the inequity in terms of the prosecution related to cannabis offences. Over the years, we know there has been inequity in terms of when it has been applied and when it has not. God knows that if it had been applied 100% of the time, I would be one of the people asking for an expungement at this point.

As I look forward, one of the questions I have heard from numerous people in Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte is whether the pardon would help when they try to cross into the United States. I was wondering if the member knows whether there has been any communication with the U.S. on this and whether a pardon would

actually open the border to those who have been penalized for a cannabis offence, in some cases 25 years ago.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question and his honesty in the House. I appreciate that very much. Over the last four years, he has been a steadfast supporter of initiatives aimed at bettering the lives of youth all across the country, so I want to thank him for that.

One of the things I am really happy he brought up is that one main focus of the legislation is the fact that certain communities, particularly indigenous youth and racialized youth, have been overwhelmingly negatively affected by the previous regime that was in place. That is why it is necessary for us to put in place these changes, and also to choose the method of record suspension versus expungement. The reality is that, with record suspension, we would be allowing people to travel to the United States and other countries and have access to documentation that would allow them to show that the records were suspended, vis-à-vis an expungement, where after six months the records are completely destroyed.

I can reassure the member that we have been in contact with our American counterparts, and this would actually help travellers who have a record suspension on file.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been a member of Parliament for eight years and I have never been angrier studying a bill. Let me explain why.

The Liberal government did the bare minimum because Parole Board of Canada officials balked at the idea of doing more work, claiming their files were unreliable and not up-to-date, and the Board had yet to adopt 21st century technology. That is a sorry way to support marginalized people.

I have a question for my colleague and I thank him for his speech. He acknowledges that people were disproportionately targeted by laws that existed before cannabis was legalized.

In Bill C-66, the Liberals expunged the criminal records LGBTQ people received in the past in our country. Why not do the same here? Why create an arbitrary standard instead of doing right by everyone who was discriminated against?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. Unfortunately, the question is a bit disingenuous.

Our government has done more than what the NDP was proposing. We are the ones who wanted to legalize cannabis. The NDP wanted to keep fining young people, especially young indigenous people and young visible minorities, perpetuating the repercussions on their lives. We are the ones who made the best decision for young Canadians and I am proud of that.

•(1035)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, this morning, I will be speaking about Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis.

Government Orders

We are just a few weeks away from the end of the parliamentary session, the last one before the next election campaign.

We will all recall that, in 2015, the Prime Minister promised to be transparent. He promised an open government. He promised to save Canada from the bad Stephen Harper. He made many, many promises.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. There is a debate going on. The hon. parliamentary secretary and the member for Beloeil—Chambly had a chance to ask questions and get answers, even though they were not the answers they wanted to hear. I would ask them to respect the person who has the floor and is giving their speech at this time.

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

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, thank you for bringing some order to the House when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Border Security was arguing with the NDP. I am here to present our arguments.

I was talking about our Prime Minister, who made a lot of promises in 2015. Many Canadians put their trust in him; they saw him as a beacon of hope. Now, in 2019, it is clear that he made a lot of promises and ultimately did not achieve much.

Canadians are giving up. They are tired of seeing the Prime Minister dance around when it comes time to work. They are frustrated with seeing the Prime Minister talk when he should be taking action. They are worried that the Prime Minister is welcoming terrorists, contract killers and other criminals without lifting a finger to help victims of human trafficking and our veterans who gave everything for Canada. They are sick of seeing the Liberals go after law-abiding citizens and ignoring organized crime and ISIS traitors. They are sick of it.

They saw the Prime Minister go after women in his cabinet because they resisted. What was their crime? They wanted to obey the law. Canadians are sick of seeing this Prime Minister refuse to take responsibility for his mistakes, and this October they will take action. A number of Liberal members have already taken action, in fact. Several have already quit the caucus and many others have announced that they are leaving politics. Even the Toronto Star is touting a potential replacement for the position of prime minister and leader of the Liberal Party.

Before talking about Bill C-93, I have to say a few words about Bill C-45, because one complements the other. To give credit where credit is due, one of the Prime Minister's few accomplishments was passing Bill C-45. However, let's not forget that it was a botched bill. It was passed in the House and became law, but it was botched.

The Prime Minister decided that his commitment to passing Bill C-45 was a national priority. Everything was a priority. There was nothing more important in Canada than legalizing marijuana. Organized crime, violence against women and the economy paled in comparison to legalizing weed.

Now that Bill C-45 has been in force since October 2018, Bill C-93 is being introduced at the last minute, once again, at the tail end of the current session and Parliament. They want to rush to expunge

the records of people accused of simple possession of cannabis in the past.

Normally, an offender with a conviction on their record has to wait five to 10 years before applying for a pardon and pay a \$631 fee. Originally, the fee was set based on the cost to the Canadian government and to taxpayers. We agreed that applying for a pardon for simple possession of marijuana should be free, even though sound stewardship of public funds is a Conservative priority. One of the reasons we did not oppose this measure was that the committee learned that no more than 10,000 people would be eligible to apply for a pardon, costing taxpayers about \$2.5 million. That is what officials told us.

It is important to remember that the goal is to grant a pardon to those who have been convicted of simple possession of cannabis and do not have an extensive criminal record. We understand these convictions are often the result of youthful indiscretion. It was also explained to us that the indigenous and black communities are disproportionately affected and are less likely to have the resources to apply for a pardon. We are flexible on this point, and we accept the facts. There is no problem there.

However, there is a problem with the way Bill C-93 was crafted. Some of our amendments were accepted, and we thank our colleagues on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security for that. The fact remains that the bill still has a few flaws.

● (1040)

The Conservatives' amendments improved the bill's procedural fairness and require the Parole Board of Canada to include a review of the program in its annual report, which will enable us to review the legislation the year after it comes into force.

Currently, the record suspension process is a user-pay system. Earlier, the member mentioned the \$631 record suspension fee. Now that cost is estimated at \$250, which justifies the \$2.5 million I mentioned.

The other option, expungement, would involve minimal cost, but it would not apply to individuals charged with more serious offences who negotiated lesser charges or were in possession of a quantity above the current legal limit. In general, law enforcement organizations are in favour of record suspension for simple possession, but they want us to take into account individuals who pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of simple possession.

Tom Stamatakis, president of the Canadian Police Association, testified that, in those circumstances, it is possible that both the Crown and the court may have accepted the plea agreement based on the assumption that the conviction would be a permanent record of the offence and would not have accepted the lesser charge if they had known this would be cleared without any possibility of review at a future date.

That is why I moved a motion to amend the bill. This amendment would delete clause 6. The Canadian Police Association explained that the Parole Board of Canada must retain the discretion to conduct additional checks because every case is different. Clause 6 of Bill C-93, as it is currently drafted, does not enable the Parole Board of Canada to do its job properly.

Government Orders

In his haste to meet his self-imposed political deadline, the Prime Minister failed to consider the many concerns of municipalities, law enforcement, employers, scientists and doctors regarding the legalization of cannabis. Similarly, the Liberals introduced legislation that correlates with the legalization of cannabis in the last few weeks of this Parliament without listening to the main stakeholders, including law enforcement.

Now that cannabis is legal, the Conservatives understand that criminal records for simple possession of cannabis should not place an unfair burden on Canadians. However, we will be monitoring the implementation of the bill. We promise to determine whether it is working and whether it is fair when we take office in October.

As with Bill C-45, the Conservatives will also amend Bill C-93 in order to ensure that it effectively provides appropriate access to no-fee record suspension. We believe that Canadians should have timely access to no-fee record suspension and we will ensure that the law upholds the integrity of the Parole Board of Canada so that Canadians have their records suspended.

Come October, when we form the government, we will have a lot of cleaning up to do. Our priority will be the real needs of Canadians, including their safety and their prosperity. Everything we do will be for Canadians. When we go to India, it will not be to dance and wear costumes. When we go to Washington, it will be to work and to clean up the mess made of the new free trade agreement. When we invest taxpayers' money, I guarantee it will not be to reward murderers, terrorists or dictatorships that are detaining our citizens on bogus charges. We will also clean up the mess at our borders. We will prioritize new Canadians who obey Canadian laws, and we will crack down on those who cheat and jump the queue. As a government, we will show compassion to those in need, as well as taxpayers. We will take action to improve the environment, but not by dipping into taxpayers' pockets.

• (1045)

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the member with regard to his report stage amendment. The Conservatives are saying they are going to repeal a bill that provides for extended background checks for people to get firearms, yet in this bill they want to include an amendment that would allow the Parole Board to investigate applicants because of bad conduct and bringing the administration of justice into disrepute.

Can the hon. member tell this House what kind of conduct the Conservatives are talking about that would allow the Parole Board of Canada to justify denying someone's application?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. To ask that question is to answer it. That is precisely why the Parole Board of Canada must remain involved. If the board does not conduct criminal record checks of applicants, there would be no way of knowing who should get the expedited option.

The Canadian Police Association recommended that the Parole Board of Canada remain involved in the record checks. Otherwise, we are turning a blind eye and granting record suspensions with no

regard for what those individuals have done. I cannot answer the member's question. Employees of the Parole Board of Canada can answer that.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, we all know that the Conservatives have long opposed the legalization of cannabis. In fact, I was in this very House under the Harper government when it sought to increase penalties on Canadians for possession of cannabis. The Liberals voted for those increased penalties, by the way, in that Harper government. It is kind of an interesting discussion here today.

On this side of the House, New Democrats believe there is a fundamental problem with this bill, which is that now that we have legalized cannabis, the obvious legal consequence of that should be that Canadians who carry records for offences that are not longer illegal should have their records expunged.

There is a critical difference between expungement and pardon. Expungement erases a record; a pardon simply forgives it. If people in this country think that a pardon eliminates any record anywhere of a cannabis conviction, they do not understand how records are kept in this country. That is a fundamental problem.

However, the worst problem is that the poorest and most vulnerable populations in this country are still left with the obligation, under the Liberal bill, to apply for a pardon. Many people do not have the resources, the ability, the time or the inclination to do that. This bill is going to leave many Canadians, the poorest and most marginalized, walking around this country with the millstone of a conviction for cannabis around their neck.

Does the hon. member's party not agree with the New Democrats that we should expunge the records of all Canadians, so that they do not carry records for something the law currently does not and in the future will not regard as criminal in any sense?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

There is a fundamental debate about expungement and pardon. There is actually a big difference between the two. Expungement gets rid of the conviction, as though nothing had ever happened. A pardon sets aside the conviction and lets the individual apply for jobs, return to the labour market and have no further problems.

The Conservatives believe, however, that when marijuana was illegal, possessing and consuming marijuana constituted an illegal act. It was therefore a crime. We understand that it is now legal. However, at the time, it was illegal.

Government Orders

To grant a pardon means that the crime is in the past. Pardons will be provided at no cost and expedited. We are prepared to do that. That said, if an individual decides to continue down a path of crime and we want to bring up their former crimes, we should be in a position to do that. To eliminate the record completely would be saying that the individual never committed a crime, which is false.

[English]

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals, in the 11th hour, or the 12th hour actually, at midnight, have changed some of the proposals agreed to by the committee concerning some of the amendments.

With the amendment to 4(3.1), we talked about allowing those who cannot obtain records of any of the offences from the government, the courts, the police or whomever, being able to swear an affidavit to get this done.

I see the government has removed that. Motion No. 1, which it is proposing today, is confusing to me. How is it that we are still going to make it impossible for some of those people who have fallen through the cracks in that circumstance to receive a suspension?

Could the hon. member comment on that?

•(1050)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

One of the amendments we moved in committee, and which was agreed to, would allow people who were unable to obtain their documents to access them by providing a sworn statement.

The amendment proposed this morning by the government wants to prevent that and will continue to complicate the lives of the least fortunate. We really do not understand the government's position on this issue.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin today by quoting Solomon Friedman, a defence attorney who appeared before the committee.

I think that this quote clearly states what we think of this bill.

[English]

I should first note that Bill C-93 is better than nothing. But better than nothing is a mighty low bar for our Parliament. You can do better. You must do better. Instead, I would urge a scheme of expungement along the lines already provided for in the Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act.

I would add here that that was a bill presented by the government. He went on to say that the record of these convictions for the simple possession of cannabis “should be expunged permanently and automatically”.

I also want to read a quote from Elana Finestone, from the Native Women's Association of Canada:

Unfortunately, the effects of the bill will go unrealized for many indigenous women with criminal records for simple possession of cannabis. Simply put, the bill remains inaccessible for indigenous women who are poor and have administration of justice issues associated with their simple possession of cannabis conviction.

[Translation]

I must repeat what I said in my questions earlier. I have never seen such a sorry, pathetic attempt. I have all the respect in the world for

our public servants, and they told the committee that it was too much work for them. They said that there were no systems in place that would allow them to expunge criminal records for simple possession, as parliamentarians wanted. This is unacceptable, and this is a far cry from the Liberals' claims of “better is always possible”. As members can see in the quotes I read out, that certainly does not apply to this bill.

Furthermore, when the minister appeared in committee, he was unable to answer my very simple questions. The Prime Minister, the parliamentary secretary who just spoke, the Minister of Public Safety and the associate minister in charge of border security have all acknowledged, on different occasions, the impact that pre-legalization laws had on indigenous peoples, racialized persons, the poor and all marginalized Canadians. They all acknowledged this.

What the Liberals did with Bill C-66, which provided for the expungement of the criminal records of LGBTQ people, was a good, commendable thing. It was what a fair and just society should do. The Liberals expunged those criminal records.

Why did they not do the same thing in this case? I asked the minister that question. Unbelievably, he responded that Bill C-66 had to do with violating rights that were protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Excuse me, but that is quite an arbitrary criterion. I asked all of the witnesses who appeared in committee whether the law included the concept of injustice specifically with respect to a violation of our rights protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They all told me that it did not.

•(1055)

[English]

Not only did they say no, but Kent Roach specifically recognized that the minister's standard for defining historical injustice is nothing but a fabrication of the government, an arbitrary measuring stick that it put in place with Bill C-66, and now suddenly it does not want to follow through with Bill C-93 for these marginalized Canadians who, in a different way, have been victims of their own historical injustice.

I could not put it better than Cannabis Amnesty put it at committee when it quoted a Supreme Court decision that recognized that a law can be found to have been discriminatory even if the law itself is not discriminatory, but its application has been discriminatory. It is hard to find better examples in the history of our country than the war on drugs and the criminalization of simple possession of cannabis.

The minister, being unable to respond to those questions, led a parade of witnesses at committee who all agreed with the sentiment expressed in the quotes I shared with the House, that this bill is nothing more than an 11th hour attempt to check off a box and really does very little.

Government Orders

Putting the onus on marginalized Canadians is never going to lead to the kind of justice this bill purports to want to attain. Why? We just need to look at Bill C-66 and the expungement of the criminal records of LGBTQ Canadians. Seven out of the 9,000 some-odd Canadians who could have applied have applied. There are seven out of 9,000, and change. What would be different this time? We asked the officials and they were unable to provide us with an answer, except to say they are going to come up with creative ad campaigns using social media and things like that. It is unbelievable to think that we are going to reach the most marginalized in our society by coming up with fancy hashtags and buzzwords on social media. It is simply mind-boggling.

[*Translation*]

My speaking time at report stage is limited. I have just 10 minutes, but I want to talk about the amendments that were adopted.

First, there is the amendment proposed by the Green Party. To be clear, this amendment was proposed by the Green Party and then amended by the Liberals. At first glance, it seems well intentioned. It ensures that record suspensions remain in effect regardless of the good behaviour criteria that usually applies. That is something we support in principle. We support it because a record suspension can be revoked under these criteria, for a speeding ticket for instance. We can all agree that this type of assessment is profoundly unjust.

However, the Green Party's amendment amended by the Liberals omits a very important aspect. This is not just about good behaviour. Under this amendment, a Canadian whose criminal record is suspended under the terms of Bill C-93 and who commits a crime thereafter will have their criminal record suspension annulled and will continue to carry the burden of their criminal record for simple possession of cannabis. They will then be unable to make an application under the terms of Bill C-93.

This means that marginalized Canadians, who belong to the various groups that were just mentioned, could presumably benefit from the process set out in Bill C-93, but not if they commit a crime thereafter. Clearly, we are not pardoning the crime that has been committed, whether it is proven in court or not. However, we know that all sorts of factors could come into play, such as mental health, housing and the discrimination that exists in our legal system and our criminal justice system. This means that, whenever another crime is committed, the activity previously engaged in that is now considered legal remains illegal. That is utterly absurd and illogical. I have a very hard time understanding how a government that says it wants to help these people can go in that direction.

[*English*]

I could not believe what the member for Toronto—Danforth said at committee. I felt like I was in the last Parliament, with Vic Toews as Minister of Public Safety. At committee, I said that Canadians who obtain a record suspension for simple possession of cannabis should be allowed to keep that record suspension even if they have committed other crimes, because simple possession of cannabis is now legal. To paraphrase her quite accurately, she said that the NDP was trying to make it easier for murderers to obtain record suspensions. I invite Canadians to look at the transcript.

That is the kind of rhetoric that led to a change in government in 2015. We have a member of Parliament from downtown Toronto employing the same rhetoric as Stephen Harper's Conservatives in the previous Parliament. That is unreal. All we are trying to do is to ensure that the most marginalized Canadians with criminal records for simple possession of cannabis do not continue to be criminalized because they get caught up in the continuing discrimination they have to live with from our criminal justice system.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

I want to raise one last point because I have only a minute left. I want to talk about the administration of justice.

Representatives of various indigenous organizations talked to us about indigenous individuals who had a criminal record for simple possession of cannabis and who did not show up in court because the court was too far from where they live or because of any number of other factors one can think of that would interfere with getting to court. The representatives told us that these people, who get a record suspension—even though the NDP would have preferred an automatic expungement—these people cannot get a record suspension, much less an expungement, because they did not appear in court on charges of simple possession of cannabis, which is no longer a crime.

In conclusion, this government said it wanted to make things better, but it is a long way from delivering justice to the most marginalized members of our society.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, I have the utmost respect for him. However, I find it a bit rich for him to stand here today and complain about the Liberals bringing forward a bill that would allow pardons for people who have a criminal conviction for cannabis possession, given that in the last election the New Democratic Party ran on a platform to decriminalize marijuana. We went further and legalized it. If the NDP had been elected and had decriminalized marijuana, those individuals would be in a worse position than they are today. They would have faced fines and problems they do not currently face, but we went a step further and legalized cannabis.

Could the hon. member justify how decriminalizing marijuana would have put us in a better position than we are in today?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, the Liberals continue to relitigate, as it were, the last election to justify their failure to do better here for black Canadians, indigenous people and other marginalized Canadians who carry the disproportionate burden of criminal records for simple possession of cannabis.

Government Orders

Every single person who came to committee said that the Liberal government could do better. This was supposed to be a pillar of the Liberals' platform in the last election. This legislation is arriving one month before Parliament rises and several months before the next election, and we do not even know if it will make it through the Senate with all of the nonsense that goes on there. It is no wonder that the Liberals want to live four years in the past.

Those individuals who are marginalized will not be able to benefit from the scheme put forward in Bill C-93. The government could have supported the member for Victoria and all those who are fighting for these marginalized Canadians. These Canadians are not going to benefit from the rhetoric of the last election. They would have benefited from an automatic pardon, and even better, an automatic expungement. We are so far from the mark. It is so disappointing.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, the reality is that here on the opposition side, we are faced with rushing through another important bill. This is an extremely important issue.

As my colleague properly pointed out, it was a big item in the Liberals' election platform, and yet here we are almost four years into their mandate struggling to make sure they put in good legislation. As everyone in the House knows, it is the health and safety of Canadians that we are worried about, and we want to make sure that justice is provided to all.

The whole approach of the Liberals toward marijuana legalization has been highly criticized, whether it is roadside testing, worker safety, or things along those lines.

One of the Liberal amendments that passed at committee would allow individuals with unpaid fines and victim surcharges to apply for a record suspension under this legislation. This would create complications between the federal and provincial levels, particularly for provinces like Quebec and New Brunswick that collect fines. Officials at committee really could not answer how the provinces would enforce payment of fines once a record is suspended. Would my colleague be able to comment on this? Does he have any ideas that would help to resolve this inter-jurisdictional issue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Personally, I agree with letting people who have unpaid fines get a record suspension. That addresses one of the major flaws in the bill as originally written. Those fines are a significant barrier because, in many cases, people who need a record suspension to get a job do not have the means to pay the fines.

What I gathered from officials who appeared before the committee is that different governments handle this different ways but that they are still responsible for collecting fines. Personally, I strongly believe that it would be totally unfair if people who have unpaid fines and a record because of an offence that is no longer an offence, simple possession of cannabis, could not apply for a record suspension. I think eliminating that barrier makes perfect sense.

Before I sit down, I would like to respond to what my colleague said in his preamble. This bill is being rushed through at the last second, even though marijuana legalization was one of this Liberal government's flagship promises. Yes, the Liberals went through with

it, but I want to make it clear that they did not really hold adequate consultations. The work was botched at times. At the end of the day, this is a bill that is being rushed through at the last minute, despite having been on the government's agenda from the start.

• (1105)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to address Bill C-93 this morning. I found it actually quite excessive listening to my New Democrat friends on this issue. As the parliamentary secretary put it, I think it is important that we recognize that the NDP tends to grossly exaggerate its stand on a wide variety of issues. This is a good example of that.

In the last federal election, the New Democrats, under Mr. Mulcair, actually said that they were not in favour of the legalization of cannabis. That was their position. Now the member says that we should not hold them to account for what the NDP said back in the last federal election, but in the same speech, he said that he wants to hold us to account for what we said in the last election.

Let us talk about the cannabis issue. What did the government say back in 2015? The Liberals were very clear, and our leader was very clear, that we were in favour of the legalization of cannabis, because we wanted to protect our young people. We wanted to bring in strong regulations. We wanted to go after criminal activities. That was our justification for making that commitment to Canadians back in 2015. The Conservatives, on the other hand, wanted the status quo.

The NDP position was very clear. It did not want to legalize cannabis. It wanted to decriminalize cannabis. Reflect on that. I think the NDP is trying to find relevance in society today, because even the Green Party tends to outdo the NDP on the environment file. Many of the positions the NDP is adopting today are going to the Green Party. On this issue, it is following the Liberal Party. That is fine. We do not mind sharing our ideas with our NDP friends.

However, those following this debate should not be fooled by the type of information the New Democrats are providing on this issue. They argue for expungement, because they are grasping. A few years ago, they were not even in favour of the legalization of cannabis. During the 2015 campaign, we made a very strong presentation to Canadians, and Canadians accepted it, and now, through Bill C-45, we actually have cannabis legalized here in Canada.

Government Orders

The Conservatives and the NDP, that unholy alliance, I would argue, at times come together. The last few days, they have been saying, “Here we are with 18 days left to go in this session and the government is wanting to rush things through.” When we were elected, we made a commitment to Canadians to work hard every day. What do they expect us to do, say that with only 18 days left in this session, we are going to stop, as if there is nothing else for us to do?

From day one, with that very first bill, Bill C-2, to reduce taxes for Canada's middle class while at the same time increasing it for Canada's wealthiest 1%, until the last day we sit, this government's intention has been to continue to deliver for Canadians in a real and tangible way.

The legalization of cannabis took us a considerable amount of time. We cannot just bring in legislation and pass it. Legislation of that nature requires a great deal of background work, such as working with the many different stakeholders, provinces and indigenous leaders. We could not bring in this legislation before we even passed the other legislation.

This legislation is before us today because it is good, sound, solid legislation. This is the type of legislation that is going to have a profoundly positive impact on the lives of many Canadians. That is the reason we are debating it today.

• (1110)

Whether there are 16 days, 10 days or five days left does not really matter. At the end of the day, Canadians can know that this government will continue to work every day to advance good, strong social budgetary policies.

For individuals who have been convicted of simple possession of cannabis, this legislation would allow an expedited pardon for that particular conviction. It is as simple as that. This legislation would expedite it and ensure that there was no cost for receiving that pardon.

For those who have an interest in getting a pardon, this government has made it exceptionally easy for them to do. That is why this legislation is important. It is why we challenge all members of the House to support it.

With regard to the expungement argument being brought forward, a pardon is all that is required. It is far more than the NDP was prepared to offer in 2015. When its members say that it should be expungement, they should put an asterisk there to indicate that it is a lot more than what they were prepared to do back in 2015.

I know that the NDP had a change in leadership. I believe that the current leader says that the legalization of heroin and cocaine should be allowed. I believe that could be a potential election platform coming from the NDP. That is what its current leader has talked about in the past. Maybe the NDP might provide some clarity and transparency on that issue. We are glad that the NDP has accepted the idea of the legalization of cannabis.

The NDP had some influence with the Conservatives. Prior to the last election, the Conservative Party was outright against it. I remember the brochures, the propaganda and the myths being created. Even back then, the Conservatives were more focused on

being critical of personalities than on substantive policy issues. The Conservatives were against it. They did not want legalization, and I do not believe they even favoured decriminalization. After the election, they started to talk about the decriminalization of cannabis.

A few of them are saying that they started talking about it a bit earlier. In fairness to my Conservative friends, that might be the case. Having said that, who were the biggest benefactors? I argue that it was the gangs and the criminal element that were the biggest benefactors of the Conservative policy on cannabis. Stop and think about that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1115)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members of the official opposition that they will have a lot of time to ask questions and make comments when it is the correct time to do that. I ask them to hold on to their thoughts.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let us look at a school, for example. I have half a minute left, so I might have to continue my example during my answers. The bottom line is that I am concerned about young people. Prior to this government, Canada had the highest rate of consumption of cannabis by young people in the world. I am concerned about our youth in regard to the cannabis issue. I am very proud of the way this government has rolled out the legalization and would now provide a pardon. I encourage the Conservative Party to take that extra step and get behind the legislation. I thank the New Democrats. They are somewhat late, but at least they are onside today.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to point out to my colleague that even under former Liberal governments and Conservative governments, the trend line for years was actually going down. I think there was a 50% increase in use by 2015. It will be interesting to see if it has gone down since legalization, but my understanding is that it has not.

As my colleague points out, we are in the last minute here. Marijuana has been legalized since October 2018, and we are rushing to put the bill through as an important part of the Liberals' platform. However, the Liberals' tendency is not to listen to stakeholders. I wanted him to comment on the Canadian Police Association, which suggested two amendments calling for the Parole Board to retain limited flexibility and discretion to conduct investigations to ensure that the small number of applications from habitual offenders were vetted. This would ensure that individuals would not take advantage of a process that was clearly not intended for their cases. This could include looking into court records to determine if an individual was charged with something more serious, such as trafficking, and pleaded down to simple possession.

The member knows that the health and safety of Canadians is what all of us want to look after. Sometimes these more hardened criminals have pleaded down. For some reason, the government did not accept those amendments. I wonder if the member could explain why.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that the Parole Board has some discretion to look at reversals. I made reference to schools. When cannabis was an illegal substance, young people were recruited by gang members or the criminal element. As an example, in Winnipeg's north end, 14-year-old and 15-year-old teenagers were recruited to take cannabis into the schools to sell that merchandise. They would take some profit from it for themselves. That young person was put on the wrong road, and ultimately, the criminal element received the proceeds from that.

That is one of the primary reasons it was so important for us to go the way we have in the last couple of years. It is about improving the conditions for our youth, going after criminals and bringing in strong regulations. It will not get any worse with the number of Canadian youth participating in cannabis consumption.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague opposite why the NDP's position is drawing so much ridicule today.

The fact is, the people we are talking about today are the ones who are being unfairly penalized. Our position was that their criminal records should be expunged. The Liberal government told us it wanted to make marijuana legal in Canada. What was the result? The Liberals will never get me to believe they cared about the situation of the people we are talking about today. All they wanted to do was please the general public, which does not face excessive criminalization, and above all pander to their investor friends and help them make lots of money.

Today, it is clear that the offence of simple possession of cannabis will come back to haunt someone if they commit another offence. Was this a simple oversight or do you just not give a damn?

• (1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member that he must address the Chair. I am sure that when he said “you”, he was not suggesting that I do not give a damn.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I focused some of my attention on that issue because it is important that those who are following the debate understand where the NDP members have come from. At the end of the day, they did not support the legalization of cannabis. Now, to overcompensate, they have come up with expungement and are trying to come across as if they are championing something, which is just not right.

This is a government that not only brought in the legalization of cannabis but that is dealing with it in an appropriate way through a pardon system. I believe that a vast majority of Canadians understand that and support it. People should realize that as much as the NDP has tried to stand on a high pedestal at times, in this case, there is no pedestal to stand on.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-93, an act to provide record suspensions to individuals with convictions for simple

possession of marijuana. While I agree in principle with the intent of this bill, I believe it is flawed and in need of further amendments.

Based on what we heard at committee, Bill C-93 was rushed, lacked consultation outside of the government and fails to achieve its objectives. This seems to be the theme with the current Liberal government. We know that with this bill, the government meant to provide a no-cost, simple process for those with convictions for simple possession of marijuana to obtain a record suspension. It also hoped to remove the stigma of a criminal conviction for this offence.

Using the evidence and testimony of experts at committee, we should be able to show a clear benefit to those targeted by the legislation. However, despite the minister's best intentions, I am not sure any of these objectives were achieved. Even after two Conservative amendments were accepted by committee, one of which was removed this morning, the bill is only less bad; it has a long way to go.

To make a good decision on this legislation, the committee needed evidence and information from departments and agencies working on criminal records and record suspensions. The bill should not have been a surprise to anyone. The Prime Minister announced his plans for marijuana legislation in 2015. Clearly, some kind of amnesty or consideration would take place to try to balance the old and new realities that were occurring. The issue was raised in the House and by the media as legalization was occurring and after the legislation was passed. The government repeatedly told Canadians that it would bring in amnesty after legalization. On October 18, 2018, the Minister of Public Safety said he would make things fairer and remove the stigma.

That is why it is so confusing. No one had any clear idea how many people would be eligible or would benefit, how to implement it or how much it would cost. When we asked officials how many people would be eligible, officials and the minister provided their best guess. That work would be challenging and time-consuming. Convictions are not listed as simple possession of marijuana. As the minister noted, in order to know who would be eligible, officials would need to know who had a record for possession of illegal substances and which of those was for simple possession of marijuana.

According to testimony at committee, Canadian conviction records do not generally say “cannabis possession”. That is not the language used. Rather, they say something like “possession of a schedule II substance”. Then the police and court documents have to be checked to find out what the particular substance was. Therefore, the blanket generic approach is not all that obvious, given the way the charges are entered and records are kept in the Canadian records system. Doing this for every drug possession charge that potentially involves cannabis would be a considerable undertaking, even if all the documents were in one central computer database. Additionally, many older records are paper copies kept in boxes in courthouses and police departments across the country.

Government Orders

We also do not know how many individuals the government expected to apply for this record suspension. Public Safety officials stated:

It's very difficult to know who has possession for cannabis offences, so we can't just go into a database and say this is how many offences there are. We've extrapolated from statistics collected by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, and their figure is upwards of 250,000 convictions for the simple possession of cannabis. That is a starting point. The number of people expected to apply is much lower.

The official, appearing before the public safety committee, went on to remind members that people can get that pardon solely if their only offence is for possession of cannabis. While people may have that offence, if they also have other offences on their record, they would not be eligible. She admitted that it was not an exact science, but the department had extrapolated from the figure of 250,000 and estimated that 10,000 would apply.

Outside experts have suggested that a significantly higher number of approximately 500,000 people in Canada have a record for cannabis. How many of those people would benefit from this? The minister and officials could not say. How much will taxpayers pay to provide a record suspension to someone who committed a minor offence? The minister and officials have guessed that to be about \$2.5 million.

It is hard to understand the cost evaluation for a new process for an unknown number of people. We asked the minister to provide the committee with details of how the government reached its costs. The minister committed to providing that before we had to vote on the matter at committee, but here we are today and we have still not received that breakdown.

• (1125)

If costs are higher than the anticipated amount that was presented to us by the minister, the Parole Board will have to pass it on, either to taxpayers or to applicants in another process.

One thing the committee heard from almost all the legal witnesses was the challenge of obtaining record suspensions, especially for individuals who could benefit from this record suspension the most. The process to apply can be quite onerous for individuals who are not necessarily legally or administratively savvy. They need to obtain a record of their conviction from the court of jurisdiction.

Once they have proof that all fines or sentencing conditions have been met, people will then be required to have a records check done by a police department, as well as an identity confirmation by way of fingerprints. None of these requirements are free, and they could potentially cost several hundred dollars. To put it simply, those most impacted probably do not have the means to pay. It is quite clear that the people the minister and his colleagues are saying they are going to be helping continue to face potentially insurmountable hurdles.

The Native Women's Association of Canada stated that the effects of the bill “will go unrealized for many indigenous women with criminal records for simple possession of cannabis. Simply put, the bill remains inaccessible for indigenous women who are poor”. The Canadian Association of Black Lawyers stated, “The suspension of the record will almost seem like a token gesture”, and went on to point out that “for many who are coming from extremely poor areas

and families who don't have the means to push them forward, this is a huge stumbling block.”

Part of the title of the act is “no-cost, expedited record suspensions”. This is clearly not the case. There will be a cost to the applicant, and it clearly will not be fast, as it takes multiple trips to police stations and courthouses just to get the information to file an application.

Witnesses told us over and over again that the only way to remove these convictions was to expunge them. Legal experts noted that a record suspension would be set aside if an individual had any future charges. Border crossings would continue to be an issue, as the U.S. may have the old records of people's convictions, even if they have been suspended. We were also told that an expungement would certainly be more closely aligned to the proposed values of the Liberal government. The government claimed it was legalizing marijuana because it would remove the black market, decrease use by children and reduce consumption. The plan it implemented would not accomplish any of these objectives, and Bill C-93 would not accomplish any of the minister's objectives, as he said it would.

The minister told us in the House that the effects of an expungement or record suspension were identical, so it really did not matter which one the government picked. Since it was a lot of work for the government to figure out which individuals had criminal convictions for simple possession of marijuana, it would go with record suspensions. It was clear that this made it easier for the government and not for those who had convictions.

I believe in redemption, but I know that redemption is earned not through the generosity of the minister, but by the person who seeks it. I am not sure the redemption in these cases will result in benefits to very many Canadians.

I was initially pleased that the committee agreed to make some minor improvements to this deeply flawed piece of legislation. Conservative amendments addressed a serious gap that had been missed. What happens when the courts do not have people's records? Records are lost, destroyed and may not be found. When an individual is seeking to follow the minister's challenging application for the not-so-free, not-so-easy process and cannot get the basics for an application, should that individual be ignored? I say no. We proposed an amendment, but this morning it was deleted and replaced by something else that does not cover it.

Unfortunately, we are not able to eliminate clause 6, which would limit considerations by the Parole Board when examining these applications. We should not be giving these record suspensions out to people who do not deserve them, and the only way to accomplish that is to ensure a thorough review. The Liberals, sadly, disagreed with that at committee.

In conclusion, this is not a good bill, as it only makes things very slightly better. Like most of the Liberal promises, it falls far short or is not as advertised. Too few Canadians would actually benefit from the intention of this bill.

• (1130)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are many problems with this bill, and I would like to thank my hon. colleague for pointing out a number of them.

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It has to do with the Liberals' excuses as to why they could not proceed with expungement, and with their acknowledgement that the system of keeping records in this country is completely haphazard. Records exist in courthouse basements and police departments. They are decentralized. They differ from province to province.

That is a shocking admission by a government. It is a shocking admission of dereliction of duty and incompetence. Frankly, it is a violation of fundamental public safety. In this country, after 150 years of Liberal and Conservative governments, are we here to tell Canadians that we do not have an efficient, centralized repository of criminal records in this country? Can police or volunteer organizations not even go to one local place and be confident that they will get a reliable source of information about a person's criminal record?

This bill before us, about which I have many concerns, almost pales in comparison to the underlying problem that has unwittingly been exposed by this whole debate, which is that we have a mess in terms of our criminal records in this country.

I am curious about my hon. colleague's comment on that. Are he and the Conservative Party—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have to allow for other questions.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Speaker, we have a great system now, but it is not historic. It does not go back and cover some of those areas in our records system as far back as the time some of these convictions occurred. That is part of the challenge with this particular legislation.

We have other gaps in services that could be provided to the Canadian public, much like our firearms legislation that is being proposed. When we think about it, that does not do anything to address the gangs and guns problem that we have in this country. It targets law-abiding citizens. The problem with the gap in services is that the policing community in this country does not have the resources or the lab capacity to actually trace crime guns. That is more of a systemic, underlying problem that has existed for decades.

We need to get modern. We need to get with the times on technology. Our system is okay now, but it does not necessarily cover records from decades back.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is one thing I can say. The Liberal Party and the government have been very consistent on this issue right from the beginning. We were in favour of legalization. We were in favour of regulation. We were in favour of making sure those who had simple possession convictions could apply for pardons.

It feels as though the NDP and the Conservatives are all over the map. At first, the Conservatives were putting out misinformation and using fear tactics prior to the last election. They were always in favour of criminalization and keeping it a criminal offence. Then suddenly they decided that maybe we did not have to be that hard on this, because maybe people wanted it. They started to change their position a little, saying that maybe decriminalization was the answer.

Now we are starting to hear the Conservatives talk about the most vulnerable in our community and how they are being impacted by this bill, which attempts to pardon individuals for simple possession.

I wonder if the member could comment. Could he at least stand up and say that he supports the legalization of cannabis and that he supports making sure pardons can be properly given to those who need them?

● (1135)

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Speaker, what I can say, and it has been consistent in the almost three years I have been here, is that the inconsistency of the Liberal government is the only consistency I have seen, both in its legislation and in its approach to things.

One of the things I appreciate, and one of the reasons I am a Conservative, is that the Conservative Party, in its application of the law, in its legislation and in its development of laws, cares for people. The importance of those who are underprivileged and the importance of caring for those who are marginalized has always been at the forefront of the responsibilities of Conservatives.

Regardless of what one's position is, one thing I know for sure is that this legislation does not meet the mark, because it still does not help those who would really benefit from the intent behind it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour today to rise to speak to Bill C-93.

Just picking up on the response to my last question, I would argue that the only party in this chamber that has had consistency on this particular file is the Liberal Party, and the government is advancing this legislation in a meaningful way. We have been criticized and attacked on a number of occasions for this happening in the dying days of this Parliament, as though somehow as we get toward the end of the session, we need to stop and give up because there is nothing left to do. They speak as though we have not done anything over three and a half years, yet poverty has been reduced by 20% in this country; the middle class received a tax cut; the economy is booming, and we have one of the fastest-growing economies in the G7; we have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I just want to remind the member for Cariboo—Prince George that somebody else has the floor at this point. If he wishes to make a comment or ask questions, he should wait until the appropriate time.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, to continue my point, I would say that this legislation has come forward in a manner that has allowed us to give it the thoughtful consideration it needs. We have studied it in the House and it has been studied at committee. Amendments were put forward. It has come back to the House, and there has been time for consultation. It is now time to take action to make sure that all people, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities, can get the justice they deserve, given that the criminalization of cannabis has changed significantly in the past year.

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I am pleased to have this opportunity to rise today at report stage on Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis. The purpose of the bill is plainly stated in the title. It would streamline the pardon application process for people who have been previously convicted only of simple possession of cannabis and who have completed their sentence.

Two main requirements of the existing process would be waived to make this happen: one, the current \$631 Parole Board application fee, and two, the waiting period to apply, which can be up to 10 years. As hon. members have heard since the bill was introduced, these requirements make life difficult for people who have been convicted of a relatively minor offence and who just want to get their life back on track.

The combination of the fee and the waiting period can be a serious obstacle, so we are getting rid of them. Allowing people to apply for a pardon faster and more easily would reduce barriers to their reintegration into society as productive, law-abiding, contributing citizens. It would also open all sorts of doors to jobs, education and housing.

It is time to move the bill forward. I am pleased to note that even stakeholders who have said they would prefer a different legal mechanism were clear that the bill is a positive step and should be passed as soon as possible.

The bill was passed at second reading with an overwhelming majority. From there, it went to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. As always, hon. members on that committee gave it their careful consideration. They heard from numerous witnesses, including government officials and the Minister of Public Safety.

Those hearings followed a study of the pardons system last year, during which the committee also heard from a number of stakeholders. Representatives of the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society gave powerful testimony about how a pardon can change a person's life for the better. In fact, when law-abiding people can put their criminal records behind them and move on with their lives, it is better for all of us and it is better for society.

Amendments have been made, and an updated version of the bill has now been reported back to the House for its final blessing.

For the most part, the committee's scrutiny and revision have produced a better and stronger bill. Bill C-93 would allow for expedited, no-fee pardons for people whose only conviction was for simple possession of cannabis. If their conviction was for an offence involving trafficking, production or exportation of cannabis, or something else entirely, they would not qualify. In those cases, they could still apply for a pardon once they have completed their sentence, via the usual route, with the fee and waiting period.

Criminal records often do not specify the exact offence. They may just say something like "possession of a controlled substance". To demonstrate that the substance was cannabis and that there is no outstanding sentence associated with the offence, people will generally have to provide police and court documents.

At committee, an amendment was passed allowing people to apply even if they have an outstanding fine. In recognition of that,

the government has introduced a report stage amendment removing the need to provide court documents for people whose only sentence was a fine. That is because, in that circumstance, the court documents mainly serve to show that the fine has been paid, and that would no longer matter.

There were other amendments adopted at committee that are worthy of our support. Among them was an amendment to ensure that a cannabis possession conviction does not prevent someone from getting a pardon for other offences, and an amendment removing the possibility that a pardon could be revoked for reasons of non-criminal "bad conduct".

Unfortunately, the Conservatives introduced an amendment today at report stage that would reinstate subjective criteria when processing a pardon for cannabis possession. Their amendment would mean that when people apply for a pardon for cannabis possession, the Parole Board would investigate them to make sure they are generally well-behaved. The board would also conduct an investigation to determine whether granting them a pardon would bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

● (1140)

With Bill C-93, we deliberately removed these subjective criteria from the process because they do not make any sense when we are talking about people who do not have convictions of anything other than simple possession of cannabis for personal use. The whole point is to let people clear their records with as few obstacles as possible. At the end of the day, that is what Bill C-93 is about. It is about fairness.

It is about providing a much-needed lifeline to people who want to contribute to their families, to their communities and to society but who have barriers in their path. With cannabis possession now legalized in Canada, we should do all we can to knock those barriers down. Bill C-93 is the right way forward to achieve this goal, and this is the right time to put it into effect.

Let us take the opportunity we have at report stage to ensure that a proper version of the bill moves ahead for a final vote in the House.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am wondering if the hon. member could speak to the importance of reducing the fee for someone applying for a pardon. The previous Conservative government increased the fee for a pardon to \$631, which made it prohibitive for many people, especially those most vulnerable, to even apply. I am wondering if my colleague could speak to the importance of having that fee reduced to zero.

● (1145)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, that is what this bill is really about in my mind, when I look at it. It is an opportunity for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities to successfully apply for a pardon and to have that pardon in place, especially and only if they have been charged and convicted for simple possession of cannabis.

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When we talk about the \$631 fee, the reality of the situation is that it becomes an impediment for many people in terms of the application process. We want these people, particularly the most marginalized, the people who need help the most, to have a pardon in place so they can go on and become productive members of society. We want them to be able to apply for jobs without having to worry about a conviction weighing over their head. We want them to be able to apply to help in community groups where a CPIC check is required. We want to make sure that they do not have to worry about that popping up and having to explain that.

That is where I see the real benefit of the reduction of this fee. It is for those people to be able to be active participants in our communities and genuinely contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about how Bill C-93 would allow some of our most marginalized citizens who may have this on their record to have a clear record, but Bill C-93 would not clear the record. That would be expungement; this is a suspension. I would ask my hon. colleague about suspension versus expungement. Bill C-93 would not clear the record. Perhaps he would like to clarify or restate his comments.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, the vast majority of people in the House know what a pardon is. When we talk about expungement, obviously we are talking about wiping the slate completely clear. We have heard why that is perhaps not the best route to go. For example, when people are travelling to the United States, if they have already claimed at a previous time that they had this conviction and now they are saying they do not, that could cause a problem for them.

As I said before, I find it remarkable that four years ago, Conservatives were spreading leaflets and propaganda trying to scare the public that the leader of the Liberal Party wanted to put cannabis into our children's schools. I do not know their position on that now. I think some of them might be in favour of legalization, and some of decriminalization. Now, all of a sudden, Conservative members are trying to be the champions of the most marginalized in our communities. This is ludicrous.

Both the Conservative Party and the NDP have been losing the battle on this, because they are completely inconsistent. They are all over the board on this issue.

The Liberal Party has been consistent from day one. We committed to legalization so that we could properly regulate cannabis and make sure we keep cannabis out of the hands of children, while at the same time making sure that the most vulnerable people in our communities are taken care of when it comes to the pardon system.

We have done exactly what we said we would do.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis.

I hate to say this, but I do support the bill in principle. It is a terrible bill. It has been pushed on us at the end of this Parliament. The Liberals have known this was coming up, but now they are

trying to ram it through. It reminds me of the NAFTA trade deal. It is not very good for Canadians.

The Liberals brought forward the marijuana legalization bill, Bill C-45, an act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other acts. It received royal assent in June 2018. The Prime Minister at that time wanted to push it through, but he had to set it aside until October 17 because there were so many complications. The Liberal government did not look at how complicated it would be for many jurisdiction across our country.

I never supported Bill C-45, and I still do not support it. It was badly thought out and badly written, probably worse than the bill before us. However, this is typical of the government. Again, look at what it did with NAFTA.

Yesterday, when the Prime Minister spoke about NAFTA, he said a deal was better than no deal. He did not say it was a great deal. Bill C-45 was his promise to the public. It was an election gimmick. It probably worked, but let us get back to Bill C-93.

No deal would be bad, therefore that is why I support this. The Parole Board wants to investigate a good portion of these applications, which its representatives said so many times at our committee hearings. It said that it did not have an electronic program. It also did not seem to be very interested in that and had not even looked at it. Many different witnesses said that the program to apply for a record pardon was too cumbersome.

A prosecutor in California recently said that when government used 20th century technology to tackle a 21st century problem, it would be the people who would pay the price. That is exactly what we are doing today. We still working with 20th century technology, most of it by hand.

Bill C-93 recommends that the Parole Board look at electronic means. It was my recommendation, and it was kept in the report. As mentioned earlier, the Parole Board could not tell us exactly how many people might apply for this. One figure was 250,000 and another agency said it might be closer to 500,000. The Parole Board said that it might get 10,000 to 12,000 people applying. It could not give us the cost. This seems to be a government agency where bureaucrats do not want to step out of their sandbox and modernize. It is not listening to Canadians to do what is best.

● (1150)

I would like to read about something that recently took place in the state of California, which legalized marijuana a few years ago. It is called the "Code for America's Clear My Record to revolutionize criminal record clearance practices". This article was posted on February 14 by Jails to Jobs magazine. It states:

Imagine the effect that automatically clearing hundreds of thousands of eligible criminal records would have on the lives of people who have them. Those unable to get jobs because of mistakes they made in the past would now be record free. Imagine that.

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Considering the hassle and expense that people must go through to clear their records, it almost seems unbelievable. But it's not. Technology has the capability to "download rap sheets in bulk, algorithmically, read them to determine eligibility and automatically fill out the petitions...."

However, we are not going that way. We made a recommendation, and I discussed it many times, but it was ignored by the Liberal government and the Liberal members on the committee.

Code for America launched clear my record. It was a program developed in the United States and it went online in California last year. California intends using this system to clear 250,000 criminal records for simple marijuana possession in one year. Here we are bringing in Bill C-93 with no real strong indication of going electronically in the modern age. I have made a recommendation, and I think it probably will sit in the background.

The whole discussion on Bill C-93 should have been about modernization and making it easy for the people to go on a computer, whether their own, or one through a social service agency or a legal channel, fill in the application, the history and make a declaration. Let the computers do a lot of the digital analyzing work of checking the records. The program could go on to interconnect with provincial court registries. The program could go on to interconnect with the RCMP. However, it is going to be done manually in the 21st century. I cannot understand why we would go that way when the technology is out there and proves it can be done.

I have come to understand the NDP's rationale for expungement. When I listened to my colleague from the NDP explain the rationale at the committee, it made sense in a lot of cases.

I started policing back in the sixties as a young man, and the marijuana movement was just starting. We were laying charges for simple possession of marijuana or maybe trafficking if a person had a certain amount. Expungement could work if that is the only record the person has.

However, my colleague from Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner and I have concerns. He is a police officer too. In a lot of cases, going back over the years, these simple records sitting in our record systems did not start that way. They may be simple possession charges today, but they may have started off as trafficking or obstruction charges, but they were dealt down by the prosecutor and a defence lawyer to simple possession charges. We are concerned with those charges. That is why the Canadian Police Association has asked that they be thoroughly reviewed.

● (1155)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his thoughtful work in public safety. He is one of the more thoughtful members in the House when it comes to the lives of people and the importance of people being able to move forward.

This bill would reduce the fee for a pardon from \$631 to zero dollars. Could he speak to the importance of not just the pardon but being able to apply for a pardon without having to pay a fee for it?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Madam Speaker, yes, the fee, as it is today, makes it very difficult for people with marginal incomes or from marginal backgrounds. That we all understand. However, the greater problem is that the bill does not go far enough to encourage municipalities across Canada or provincial governments to play ball

with what is in the bill and look at eliminating the fee for the criminal record. It could be \$75 and as high as \$150 in some municipalities. Then there is the fingerprint check, which could be another \$75 to \$150. Therefore, it has an impact. If we add that to the \$630, as my colleague said earlier, then it could be close to \$1,000, which is unacceptable.

This is to deal with a simple possession of marijuana record. If that is all that is in a criminal record, then it could be removed quite simply electronically. If we modernize our parole system, it could be done very cost-effectively and very quickly. However, if it remains the way the bill states it will be and it is left in the hands of the Parole Board, it will take too much time and people will still suffer.

● (1200)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very grateful for my colleague's service to our country as a police officer. He and I have had a number of conversations about the situations in which he has been involved. Very few of us could have endured what he did.

I would like to correct the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister who said yesterday that under Bill C-71, a permit would now be required to buy a firearm. That is an absolute falsehood. Here is a possession and acquisition licence, which one has to have after getting a test in order to buy a firearm, and this has been in place for a decade or more.

The Liberals across the way said over and over that legalizing cannabis would eliminate the illegal trade in cannabis, which is clearly nonsense. Does my friend have a comment on the relationship between the legalization of cannabis and the great increase in the illegal trade in cannabis?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind hon. members that they can refer to a document, but they cannot use one as a prop. This is just a little reminder for the next questions or presentations.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, the possession and acquisition licence, PAL, has been around for about 20 years now.

However, the current legislation will not decrease the criminal or backdoor marijuana trade. It will actually increase it.

I heard the parliamentary secretary say that it would stop the 14-year-olds and 15-year-olds from selling these things. However, the government put a little part in the bill saying that a 12-year-old would not be charged. If I were a criminal ringleader in organized crime, I would give all my drugs to a 12-year-old to take into the school and dispose of them for me, because no one will be charged. Therefore, the legislation is wrong. It was wrong when it was brought out. It was ill thought out. I still do not believe it is a good law for Canada.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis.

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In short, this bill creates an expedited pardons process for Canadians who have criminal records for nothing more than simple possession of cannabis. Bill C-93 reduces the usual fee of \$631 to zero. This is the most important aspect of the bill, especially for the most vulnerable in our society. It reduces the usual waiting period of five or, in some cases, 10 years, down to no time at all. It removes the usual subjective criteria, like whether a person is of “good conduct” or would get a “measurable benefit” and, thanks to an amendment made at committee by the member for Toronto—Danforth, it lets people get pardons for cannabis possession even if they have outstanding fines.

I would like to clarify an assertion that was made earlier in the House about the comments of the member for Toronto—Danforth at committee. She actually said that murderers who smoked pot should not be treated better than murderers who did not smoke pot. I just wanted to clarify that for the record.

Taken together, the various parts of this bill mean that people burdened with criminal records for simple possession of cannabis will be able to have their records cleared with no fee, no waiting period and no problem if they cannot afford fines or surcharges, and there is no possibility that their applications will be denied on the basis of subjective criteria.

That brings me to the amendment the Conservatives have introduced today. It does two things. The first is that it reintroduces subjective criteria for people seeking pardons for simple possession of cannabis. The whole point of Bill C-93 is that the process should be simple and straightforward. This change would undermine that objective. Ordinarily, Parole Board members, the same people who adjudicate parole hearings, review pardon applications and consider a variety of factors. They make sure that the applicant meets the basic eligibility criteria, like whether they have served their sentence and waited the requisite amount of time. They also consider subjective criteria, like whether the applicant has been of good conduct and whether granting the pardon would bring the administration of justice into disrepute. On the basis of all of these considerations, the board member uses discretion and decides whether the applicant will be pardoned or not.

The legislation we are debating today is designed to remove all subjectivity from the pardoning process for people convicted only of cannabis possession for personal use. As the bill is designed that way, the Parole Board's intention is not to use board members to evaluate applications. Instead, the board will just have staff check to make sure that the applicant meets the basic eligibility criteria, like confirming that their conviction was not for a more serious offence, like trafficking. It will be a quick, simple, administrative process with no discretion involved. That way, applications can be processed quickly and people will get their pardons quickly.

However, the Conservatives want to have the Parole Board spend time and energy conducting inquiries into the general conduct of applicants. I am not sure what behaviour they think would justify denying someone a pardon for activity that is now legal. I would really like to hear Conservative members give some examples of what kind of non-criminal conduct they think would be a good reason to make a person continue living with a criminal record for cannabis possession. I asked that question of the critic for public

safety earlier today during this debate, but have not yet had a response.

With this expedited process, we are only talking about people who have not committed any other offence. What non-criminal activities do Conservative members think are acceptable grounds for maintaining all the obstacles to employment, housing, education, volunteering and travel that a criminal record represents? I cannot think of a single one.

The same Conservative motion would also have the Parole Board consider, in each case, whether granting a pardon for simple possession of cannabis would bring the administration of justice into disrepute. Again, I can't imagine what circumstances they are thinking of. What is the scenario in which pardoning a person who has nothing more on their record than cannabis possession would bring the administration of justice into disrepute? What exactly would the Parole Board be looking for? We are not talking about murderers, sex offenders or drug dealers. They are not eligible to apply for this process. Instead, we are talking about people who did something that has been legal since October.

It seems to me that if the Parole Board were to review their application and reject it, that could bring the administration of justice into disrepute. However, for some reason the Conservatives have decided that they want people who are saddled with a criminal record for simple possession of cannabis, and who have likely been facing all sorts of obstacles in their daily lives because of it, to jump through even more hoops. It just does not make sense. It will also make the whole process take longer. Processing times for applications submitted under Bill C-93 should be pretty short, since there are no subjective criteria.

• (1205)

If the Conservative amendment were to pass, every application would be slowed down by unnecessary inquiries. As well, Parole Board members, who already have full workloads dealing with all sorts of challenging cases that require their attention, would have to spend time needlessly investigating people who once possessed cannabis, to make sure their conduct is acceptable and that the reputation of the justice system can survive their rehabilitation.

As members may have guessed, I will be opposing the Conservative amendment. I strongly support a straightforward process that stops treating people who are only guilty of cannabis possession with unjustified suspicion. I support waiving the application fee and waiving the waiting period. I support letting people get their lives back on track without insisting that they pay fines they may not be able to afford. I support having Parole Board staff process applications quickly for anyone who meets basic and objective eligibility criteria. I support skipping all the discretionary evaluations of good conduct and measurable benefit and whether the administration of justice might be brought into disrepute.

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We ran on a mandate of legalizing and regulating cannabis, because the old system of prohibition was a failure. We were not content to accept decriminalization, which really just means imposing fines on people in marginalized and low-income communities. We upheld our commitment and a new legal regime is now in place.

In conclusion, this bill is a critical companion to the legislation that legalized cannabis, and I ask all members of the House to facilitate the timely passage of Bill C-93.

•(1210)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have had a lot of discussion today about how people in our communities, particularly marginalized individuals, could really benefit from the fact there will be no cost associated with the application for a pardon.

I know the member spoke very passionately about how she wants to make sure that those people in particular are taken care of. How does she see this playing out practically? Does she believe this leading to an increasing number of people applying for pardons, and how will not having a penalty or application fee for applications for a pardon practically impact our society?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, studies have been done that show that when people are able to obtain a pardon, they are then able to contribute through employment, through being members of their community and doing things like volunteering, and being able to obtain housing. As a result, the net benefit to society is something like twice the cost of what a pardon would have been.

In my opinion, it was a very petty move by the previous government to increase the cost of a pardon to \$631. We are reducing it to zero. The \$631 would be prohibitive for some people. Making it zero and expediting the process means that some of these individuals who have perhaps been held back will be able to really get on with their lives in a meaningful way and contribute to our society.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the parliamentary secretary's speech that included some comments about the Conservatives and our remarks here in the House. I am not sure if the parliamentary secretary is aware of how the legal system sometimes works.

Sometimes what happens is that people who are guilty of more serious offences actually plead down. This is why we recommended two amendments. The amendments are not in fact Conservative amendments, but were put forth by the Canadian Police Association.

The two amendments call for the Parole Board to retain limited flexibility and discretion to conduct investigations and that the small number of applications by habitual offenders be vetted. This would ensure that these individuals do not take advantage of a process that clearly is not intended for their cases. Basically, I think we are in agreement in the House that they are not the people who should be taking advantage of this. The other thing is that this could include looking at court records to determine if an individual had been charged with something more serious, like trafficking, and had plead down to simple possession.

I hope that answers her question. Despite these amendments being very reasonable, the Liberals have not accepted them. The health and safety of Canadians could be enhanced if these two amendments suggested by the Canadian Police Association, not the Conservative Party, were accepted. If the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health is really serious about safety, why did the Liberals not accept these two amendments that would have made for a better bill?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, the government is certainly seized with the safety of Canadians. The Conservative members put forward an amendment, but those records may not exist. There is no way for the Parole Board to search through these records, which are often kept in county courthouse basements because they are not digital records, and there is no way of knowing whether someone pleaded to a lesser offence. It is certainly within the Parole Board's discretion if something comes up dealing with fraud. When someone has applied for a pardon, the board can revoke that pardon. From a practical standpoint, to obtain the kind of records the hon. member is talking about simply would not be possible.

•(1215)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise to speak to Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis. It has already been stated that the Conservatives, though having concerns about this legislation, will be supporting the bill. The bulk of my speech will be about some of the comments bandied about in this debate by the government side, which are disingenuous.

I will go back to the passing of Bill C-45, the legalization of cannabis bill, and some of the challenges being seen across our country. There are concerns that Conservatives and, indeed, opposition members on all sides of the House stated prior to the passing of Bill C-45. At the time, Conservatives felt it was a flawed piece of legislation that was passed hurriedly to try to tick off the box, so that the Liberals could say they have done what they said they were going to do in 2015. There were serious concerns then and there are serious concerns now.

Government members have said that Bill C-93 is just another example of how Liberals are being tough on organized crime and keeping drugs out of the hands of our youth, and yet they cannot provide us data as to whether the passing of Bill C-45 has actually minimized the proceeds going to organized crime, whether it has kept organized crime out of the legalized cannabis market or whether it has kept cannabis out of the hands of youth.

I will read a passage from Bill C-45, under part 1, "Prohibitions, Obligations and Offences". Subclause 8(1) states, "Unless authorized under this Act, it is prohibited... for a young person to possess cannabis of one or more classes of cannabis the total amount of which, as determined in accordance with Schedule 3, is equivalent to more than 5 g of dried cannabis". A young person in Canada is defined as between the ages of 12 and 18. By virtue of that statement in Bill C-45, it is legal for someone between the ages of 12 and 18 to have under five grams of cannabis.

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When members are in their ridings, we spend a lot of time working with many different groups. I, for one, have spent a lot of time with the educational and law enforcement communities, and Bill C-45 has done nothing to keep the proceeds of cannabis and marijuana from organized crime and nothing to minimize access by youth. As a matter of fact, it has probably made it easier. In some of the most marginalized communities, there is increased drug use because it is now okay for those aged 12 to 18 to have less than five grams of marijuana on them.

The Liberals have also said that Bill C-93 would provide barrier-free access for travel, but we already know that it would not clear one's record. The record still exists, as it is not expunged. Canadians travelling across the U.S. border or the borders of other countries are still subject to the enforcement of the rules and regulations of those countries.

• (1220)

When I was talking about Bill C-93, I canvassed our front-line officers, our law enforcement. When we talk about consultation, if we are going to be totally honest in this debate, the government likes to say it has consulted Canadians from coast to coast to coast, but it has not. Our front-line officers asked us to put forth reasoned amendments, and a colleague across the way just said the Liberals would not support that.

When I was preparing for this, I talked with some of my friends who are on the front lines. They said that, in reality, for the last 10 years, most seizures have been treated as non-seizures. Therefore, this may have an application for those who were charged maybe 20 or 25 years ago, and it might help some people in our most marginalized communities, maybe first nations or our black community, as I believe the NDP talked about. This might assist them, but it would not impact those who have been charged in recent years, perhaps in the last decade leading up to October of last year.

Cannabis is often called a gateway drug. Our colleagues from Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner and Yellowhead themselves were on the front lines in law enforcement for many years and have served our country and our communities valiantly. Therefore, when they offer comments and real-world experience with respect to this, I tend to listen.

I also know, from working with some of my friends in coordinating law enforcement agencies and front-line workers, that possession is often a gateway charge. Law enforcement officers may not have all the information they need to make a complete case, so they will charge people with possession to be able to build a case.

It has also been noted that, many times, in a major trafficking case when the worst of the worst are before the courts, they will plead down to possession. That is why, going back to my comment about listening to our front-line workers, those who have been charged with protecting us and keeping us safe and sound, we must always do whatever we can to provide them with the tools required to do their job so that we and our friends, families and communities can remain safe and sound.

I will go back to Bill C-45. Bill C-93 is another failed piece of legislation where the government did not provide adequate thought and did not listen to the consultations. Bill C-45 was the same. It did

not arm the communities and municipalities with the required tools. The number one cost in most communities is with respect to policing. The government did not arm them with the tools to be able to pay for the increased costs of policing. It did not arm our front-line officers with adequate training for the roadside tests in the rush up to October. What is impairment? Is it one joint? Is it two joints? What is impairment under the influence of cannabis? Indeed, we are now seeing charter challenges because of the flawed testing equipment the RCMP forces have been outfitted with.

As I said in the preamble to my speech, the Conservatives will be supporting this piece of legislation as we move forward. Our colleague across the way will probably challenge where the Conservative stance is on this. I think the confusion lies in that this is another piece of flawed, rushed Liberal legislation that the government is trying to move forward. It is saying that it is doing this, but it is not putting the resources and the work behind it. It is not listening to the people who will be in charge of implementing this legislation, and this is causing concern.

Our job as the opposition is to challenge and to question. That is what we are doing. We are speaking for those who do not have the floor. There are 338 members of Parliament elected to be the voice of their communities, and that is what we are doing.

• (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the Conservative Party will be supporting the bill. I too believe that it is good, solid legislation. It was good that we had consultation. I think the member across the way is underestimating how much consultation and work went into the legislation, even prior to its introduction in the House. We have very capable civil servants.

Despite the discouraging things I am hearing from the opposition, I note, more as a cautionary thing, that we need to recognize that we have some of the best, if not the best, civil servants in the world. Our civil servants do a phenomenal job of providing the information necessary for us to make good, smart decisions.

The bill today is a good example of this, whether in the forecast of the number of individuals who will get a pardon or in the flexibility built within the bill. The purpose of this legislation is to provide an expedited, no-cost pardon for simple possession. That is really the core of the legislation.

Would the member not agree that now is the time to pass the legislation, as we have now legalized cannabis in the country? That has been widely supported. Is it the Conservative Party's intent to leave cannabis legalized in Canada?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, the bulk of my presentation was about some of the disingenuous comments that were being made by the government on both Bill C-45 and Bill C-93.

Government Orders

I talked about Bill C-45 and the comments that Bill C-93 will, once passed, facilitate barrier-free movement and barrier-free access to education. However, there will still be challenges in that respect because there is no expungement. I also talked about the comment that Bill C-45 has impacted organized crime. The government does not have data for this. It does not have the data or the proof to say that Bill C-45 has limited our youth's access to drugs. Those are my challenges with Bill C-45 and Bill C-93.

I always enjoy this debate and the back-and-forth conversation. It is respectful. However, if we are going to debate this issue, at the very least we should talk facts, not use disingenuous rhetoric.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Contrary to what many stakeholders have been calling for, the Liberal government said no to expunging records for simple possession of cannabis. This will continue to harm many people in marginalized communities for years to come. We in the NDP are very disappointed by this, given that the Liberals claim to care about people who are discriminated against, excluded and marginalized. In that regard, the bill is flawed.

Why did the Liberal government not listen to stakeholders?

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I have stood in the House a couple of times in this debate and talked about expungement versus suspension. I heard another disingenuous comment from our colleagues across the way that Bill C-93, which is being rushed through, will somehow provide barrier-free access to travel and barrier-free access to educational, volunteer or employment opportunities. However, there would still be a record. The bill would not clear the record.

For educational opportunities, the courses people want to take or the country they want to enter, expungement would absolutely clear the record 100%. With suspension, there is still a record.

I appreciate my hon. colleague's comment. Again, what we have heard is just another disingenuous comment from our colleagues across the way.

• (1230)

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House and add my voice to today's report stage debate regarding Bill C-93, the government's cannabis pardon legislation.

Let me say at the outset that I will continue to use the term "pardon" in my remarks, rather than "record suspension".

I also want to take this opportunity to thank my hon. colleagues for their contributions to the bill. I appreciated the thoughtful discussions we had on Bill C-93, both in this chamber and at committee. Those discussions and the close scrutiny the bill has undergone have helped shape the version that is now before us.

For those convicted only of simple possession of cannabis, Bill C-93 would streamline the process for getting a pardon in two main ways: It would waive the normal waiting period of up to 10 years,

and it would eliminate the \$631 application fee. In other words, under Bill C-93, people in this group would be eligible to apply for a pardon immediately after completing their sentence, and they would not need to pay the application fee.

The ultimate goal is to make it easier for them to reintegrate into society and have a better shot at a happy, productive and fulfilling life. Indeed, in the words of the Minister of Public Safety, the bill would have "life-changing impacts for people dealing with the burden and the stigma of a criminal record for cannabis possession." I cannot overestimate just how significant a pardon is for those with a criminal record.

Registered nurse Louise Lafond explained it eloquently and succinctly in her testimony before the committee last December. Speaking on behalf of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, Ms. Lafond compared the ability to apply for a pardon to "being able to turn that page over. The X [the criminal record] is still there, but they are able to pursue paths that were closed to them."

That is why this bill is so important, and I am pleased that the review process at committee has resulted in a slew of worthwhile amendments. I commend the committee for working together so harmoniously to adopt those amendments. The already solid bill that was introduced by the Minister of Public Safety is today even better as a result of this tremendous work.

In particular, the changes strengthen the fairness aspect that is at the heart of the bill. One example is the series of amendments proposed by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth and adopted by the committee. These amendments, all of which are connected, would allow people to apply for record suspensions even if they have outstanding fines associated with cannabis possession.

To be clear, those fines could still be enforced civilly, but the individual in question could have the criminal record set aside. As my hon. colleague said, those individuals "might have difficulty covering those costs, and that could pose a barrier to people who are applying for record suspensions." It is a concern that has been raised by advocates and stakeholders, and it has now been addressed by the amendments in question.

Amendments introduced by the member for Toronto—Danforth also waive all waiting periods associated with cannabis possession convictions, even if people have other convictions on their record. They would still have to wait the full waiting period for those other offences, but if those waiting periods have all elapsed, they will not have to wait any additional time due to their conviction for cannabis possession. In other words, if a fine for simple possession of cannabis is still outstanding, that would not stop someone from being able to proceed with a pardon application.

Government Orders

Another important amendment was moved by the hon. member for Brampton North. As originally drafted, Bill C-93 allowed a member of the Parole Board of Canada to refuse a pardon application on the grounds that a conviction for simple possession of cannabis is relevant to good conduct. This could have created a situation where someone with a theft conviction from five years ago is denied pardon because a board member determined that a conviction last year for simple possession of cannabis demonstrated poor conduct.

With cannabis possession now legal in Canada, and people now freely, openly and legally consuming cannabis, that is unfair and, quite frankly, absurd. It goes against the government's intention to ensure that convictions for simple possession of cannabis do not continue to create barriers to reintegration.

● (1235)

I am so pleased to note that this part of the bill was amended at committee. The amendment would ensure that a conviction for cannabis possession was not taken into account as part of the good conduct review for people seeking pardons for other criminal offences. Ultimately, this would mean that people with other convictions on their records would not have convictions for simple possession of cannabis affect their ability to obtain pardons for other offences. This would be good for the applicant. It would also be good for society.

This brings us to the report stage amendments we are debating today. The first has to do with an amendment at committee by the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner. The amendment would allow someone who had checked police stations and courthouses for records and come up empty-handed to provide a sworn statement that he or she had been convicted of only simple cannabis possession. Unfortunately, it would then require the Parole Board to check those same police stations and courthouses to ensure that the records were not there so that the board could be satisfied that it was truly only a simple cannabis possession charge. Under this amendment, the board would still need to see the record. Having local police and court staff perform another search in the same place would be a duplicative waste of effort. While well-intentioned, this amendment should be undone by the report stage amendment.

I would like to once again thank my hon. colleagues for their efforts in getting us to this point in the process on Bill C-93. I strongly support this important piece of legislation in its current form, and I encourage all hon. members of this House to do the right thing and pass it at third reading when the time comes for a vote.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I served together on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for a number of years, and he is a very honourable gentleman. However, he is part of a government that believes in policy-based evidence-making.

My colleague from Cariboo—Prince George asked for data, and I wonder why the government, when it legalized cannabis, did not look at other examples.

A CBC article from May 28 reads:

Marijuana grown in Colorado, the land of legal weed, is being smuggled out to states where it is still illegal...

[T]he government's goal was to regulate and tax a drug that was already widely used and to squeeze out dealers and traffickers in the process.

But law enforcement authorities in the state say legalization has done the exact opposite.

It goes on to say that the illegal trade in marijuana, whether it is legalized in Colorado, is “being driven by criminal organizations that grow weed in Colorado”. Furthermore, residents of Colorado are preferring to buy illegal cannabis, because it is often cheaper than legal cannabis.

Can my friend provide any data whatsoever to show that what happened in Colorado will not happen in Canada? In fact, it is happening in Canada right now.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have certainly worked well on many topics at the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

The law was only passed last October, and there is still a lot of data collection to take place. We also know that what was there prior to that law being passed did not work. It has not worked for generations. I can recall my days in the early seventies when people who used cannabis were stigmatized. At the time, people called them hippies, or whatever. A lot of them are my friends and are people who are in good standing in society today. We know that we have to do things better, because some of them have criminal records that prevent them from doing good things in life.

There is still a lot to do. There is still a lot to learn and to possibly modify as we go along. However, it is the right path, and I am confident that this is good for society.

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech.

There are some interesting ideas, but we in the NDP are having a hard time understanding the Liberal government's persistent refusal to expunge records for simple possession of cannabis.

There is a difference between suspension, pardon and expungement, which completely erases the record forever. We think that should be a priority for certain marginalized communities and for certain individuals who are discriminated against in our society. They could run into problems in the future when they are seeking employment, applying for education programs or travelling to certain countries.

Why did the Liberals refuse to consider expungement, which is much more definitive and would have helped these individuals?

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Government Orders

We chose to suspend rather than expunge criminal records for simple cannabis possession. People will not have trouble getting a job with a record suspension unless they commit other offences. Suspension is the simplest and quickest way of doing things. It opens doors for all those who want to pursue a career and live the same way every other member of society does. We believe that this will solve the problem.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to Bill C-93, which I think is a critically important bill for many Canadians who have been concerned about, and fighting for, an effective, rational drug policy in this country for the last 50 years.

To give a historical perspective on this issue, in 1972, almost 50 years ago, we had the Le Dain commission in this country, which examined drug policy. One of the core recommendations of that commission, which thoroughly examined all the issues concerning drug policy in Canada, was that Canada should immediately move to decriminalize cannabis. It made other recommendations as well for sensible, evidence-based drug policy. Of course, at that time, from 1972 all the way to 2015, successive Liberal and Conservative governments utterly refused to even take the next logical step of decriminalizing cannabis, leaving 400,000 Canadians to acquire criminal records from 1972 onward for the simple act of possessing and consuming cannabis for personal use. The NDP, of course, took the Le Dain commission's recommendation very seriously, and from then on, in every single federal election since 1972, advocated and campaigned on taking cannabis use out of the Criminal Code. We pursued decriminalization, because the only other option at that time was criminalization.

In 2015, of course, the Liberal Party decided on an abrupt change of policy. I would add that in the previous Parliament, the Harper government actually introduced legislation in the Criminal Code that would punish cannabis users even more harshly, and the Liberals voted for it. That was in 2014, I believe. At that time, that was the version of the Liberal Party. We are used to members of the Liberal Party saying one thing in an election and doing another. We cannot really count on what they say day to day. However, in 2014, they wanted to punish cannabis users criminally even harder. In 2015, the Liberals had a magical change of heart, and suddenly, 45 years after the Le Dain commission, and many elections after the New Democrats urged them to decriminalize marijuana and they refused to do so, and after they made punishment more severe for people in Canada who used cannabis, they had a magical epiphany and decided that they would legalize it.

I was struck by the comments by the hon. parliamentary secretary to the House leader, who saw fit to attack the NDP for not immediately jumping to legalization in our campaign and staying with our historical position of decriminalization. He pointed out that this was somehow a contradiction for us, when, in fact, it was his own party that campaigned and championed the criminalization of cannabis for most of the last 50 years, until it thought that there was an obvious electoral advantage in changing its position suddenly.

The same member also stood in the House and attacked the NDP for exaggerating issues in debate, as we often do, as he said. He went

on to accuse the NDP of seeking the “legalization of heroin and cocaine”. Those were his exact words.

I am shocked by that characterization. First of all, it is a complete exaggeration of our position. It is the kind of political wedging, simplification and attack politics by the Liberals that we often see from the Harper Conservatives, which is why I think the Liberals are so sensitive to that issue. Of course, the NDP is taking the firm position that with Canadians dying by the thousands from opioids in this country, from a poisoned, toxic street supply, we are looking at saving lives by bringing a safe supply to these people through a highly regulated and medically driven process to decriminalize the purchase of drugs and put it through the medically regulated system. That is what we are actually saying, but he wants Canadians to think that we are championing heroin and cocaine. That kind of right-wing, Republican, U.S.-style wedge politics does politics a disservice in this country, and he should be ashamed of himself for it. Frankly, with the people dying in this country, it is disgusting to hear that kind of language coming from the Liberal Party of Canada in 2019.

• (1245)

The issue before us, of course, is what to do with criminal records for cannabis offences, now that certain cannabis offences, namely possession and use of cannabis, no longer exist. The NDP's position is simple. We have examined this issue in great detail, and as the most progressive, consistent party on progressive drug policy in this country for 50 years, we are very familiar with the issues and the pros and cons.

We are proposing that the only fair, just, effective and efficient way to deal with Canadians who are saddled with and harmed by criminal records for cannabis offences that no longer exist is to have an automatic expungement of all those records so that Canadians no longer have those records as millstones around their necks, preventing them from getting jobs, preventing them from volunteering with organizations, and in some cases, preventing them from travelling.

The Liberals have refused to do that. Instead, they have tabled a bill that rejects expungement and instead requires Canadians to apply for pardons. This bill makes two amendments to that process. It waives the \$631 fee, which the Conservatives jacked up in the last Parliament to make pardons more difficult for people to get. It also waives the five-year waiting period. Both are positive, I suppose.

However, a pardon is not the same as expungement. Expungement removes the offence and allows Canadians to treat the offence as if it never occurred. A pardon, though, means that the offence still exists, but it is forgiven. The difference is that if there is an expungement of the record, a Canadian, when asked by an employer or a U.S. border official, “Do you have a criminal record?”, could say, “No, I do not.” That is versus, “No, I don't have a criminal record for which a pardon has not been granted.” That is what a Canadian has to say to an employer or to a volunteer organization or to a U.S. border guard when granted a pardon.

Government Orders

Here are the problems with the bill. First, it would not help marginalized Canadians, who we know are disproportionately impacted by criminal records for cannabis. This process would still require Canadians to apply for a pardon, and we all know that many cannot, many will not and many are not able. There are 400,000 Canadians carrying criminal records today, and the estimate we have is that between 10,000 and 70,000 Canadians are expected to apply for pardons.

The Canadians who are most needy, the people who are most deserving and in need of a pardon, the poor, the young, the indigenous, the racialized and rural Canadians, would probably not get a pardon, because they would not be able to actually navigate the system to apply for a pardon. The pardon was described by Senator Kim Pate, in studying this bill, as “punishingly complex, bureaucratic and time-consuming.” Problem number one with this bill is that would still leave many Canadians, the most needy, without a pardon.

Second, the record would be pardoned, not extinguished. A pardon still exists in the records. This bill would remove a record from Canada's CPIC system, but it would not remove records from provincial and municipal databases. The record could still be seen. It could still be acted upon.

I would ask Canadians what they would rather say about their cannabis records: “I do not have a record” or “I do not have a record for which a pardon has not been granted”. I think the answer is obvious.

Third, the record could be resurrected in a future criminal proceeding. It is not as if the record would be gone forever. If a person had a cannabis record pardoned, it could still be brought up later in a future criminal proceeding.

Fourth, Bill C-93 would apply only to those convicted of simple cannabis possession, meaning that anyone with a prior record, suspension, or crime related to possession would be unable to use this provision. Again, it is narrowly restricted.

Finally, U.S. border officials would still have access to this record if there was a pardon. If someone is sitting in a lineup at the border, and a U.S. border guard asks if that person has a cannabis record, and the answer is, “No, I do not”, the person will likely be waved through. However, if someone says, “I don't have a criminal record for which a pardon has not been granted,” the guard is likely to flag that and go into the system. U.S. border guards would still have access to the record in the system.

The Liberals say that they cannot change this. However, the Liberals provided an expungement in this very Parliament for people who had been convicted of homosexuality crimes. They just did an automatic expungement for anyone who was convicted of those crimes, which we no longer regard as crimes.

However, they say that is too complex to do for cannabis offences. That is fundamentally untrue, and I look forward to hearing the Liberals explain why. Do they think there is a fundamental difference between those two offences? The offences once existed; they do not now. The records should be treated equally. They should be expunged for all Canadians.

● (1250)

I look forward to answering questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, something puzzles me about the position of the New Democrats on this issue and perhaps the hon. member can clear it up for me. The NDP have called for the decriminalization of certain substances, more than just cannabis. However, the way I see it is that decriminalization leaves the production and the profits in the hands of criminals. I have not been able to rationalize that.

Maybe the member can explain what the New Democrats actually mean or intend by decriminalization.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, of course, the debate fundamentally shifted after the 2015 election, when legislation came before the House to legalize it. I and all my NDP colleagues voted in favour of the Liberals' bill to legalize cannabis.

Our position on decriminalization was a position, politically, that we had taken for the last 45 years. This was when the Liberal Party was in favour of criminalizing cannabis and other drugs. I would ask the member to explain this. Why was the Liberal Party so in favour of criminalizing cannabis use right up until 2015? Why, in 2014, did Liberals think that cannabis should be criminalized and, in fact, punishment should be increased? That is how they voted in the House in 2014.

The Liberals have to explain their about-face and curious position. They have to explain why in the 1970s, 1980, 1990s and 2000s, they were content to let so many Canadians get criminal records for simply using cannabis. We will take no lessons on this side of the House from the Liberals on drug policy.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some individuals with simple possession charges have them because they pleaded down from more serious offences. Does the hon. member then have a strategy to prevent former drug dealers from getting a free pass because of this bill?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, Canadians are entitled to be assessed based on their criminal record. I do not think anybody has the ability to look behind that and determine how that record came to be. The official judicial record of a person is what the court system, the prosecutors, the defence attorneys and the accused, ended up agreeing was the appropriate offence. We have no problem dealing with a person's record on the face of it.

However, I will say one thing about records. After 150 years of Conservative and Liberal governments, it is quite shocking that witnesses have told the justice committee and this Parliament just how disorganized our criminal record system is and that we do not have one centralized reliable, consistent place where a person can go look for records. Instead, we are looking in the bottom of courthouse basements, in police departments, in municipal places of businesses and federally.

Government Orders

It is very concerning to me that both those parties, over such a long period of time, have neglected to ensure that basic public safety. Because the integrity of our justice system has been so sloppily administered, our police and volunteer organizations cannot even reliably go to one place to see what a person's criminal record is. That it is a clear breach of public safety and it shows the incompetence of successive administrations.

It has shown itself in this debate. One of the excuses the Liberals give for not expunging records is that they do not know where they all are and how can they expunge them if the records are all over the place. They again are putting the onus on people, the most vulnerable and needy people, to apply to get their records expunged instead of just expunging it, which is the only rational response to treat an offence that society no longer views as a criminal act.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway. I was staggered to learn that the Liberal solution was to issue pardons that would only temporarily eliminate criminal records. If a person whose record was suspended were to commit another offence, his or her record would be resurrected. These are like zombie records, coming back from the dead.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the impact this could have on marginalized populations.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: That is exactly the problem, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals have commented and tried to give credit to the hon. leader of the Green Party because they accepted an amendment that would not allow a previous cannabis pardon to be resurrected in the case of subsequent bad conduct. However, it would allow that record to be resurrected if there were a subsequent criminal proceeding. That is not good enough.

A cannabis offence that is no longer illegal should be expunged. It should be thrown in the trash heap of history where it belongs. It is no longer an offence, just like those old crimes of buggery or being caught in a bawdy house. This Parliament recognized that those crimes should not have been offences then, and they are not now. Therefore, we expunged the records of anybody who had been convicted of them. We should do the very same thing for cannabis.

People who use cannabis have had their civil and constitutional rights abused in the same way and it should not be allowed to stand. The NDP will continue to fight for those people.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here we are again, days away from rising and returning to our constituencies for a summer of gauging the opinions of those in our communities, and the Liberals are back at their same old game, rushing legislation through the House without consulting relevant stakeholders and, more important, not even listening to relevant stakeholders. As a result, Bill C-93 will fail to accomplish its intent, the typical Liberal way.

There is a cascade of failures. Let us look at how we got here.

Back in 2015, the Liberals said that the current approach was not working. They said we had to take the profits away from organized

crime and take it out of the hands of our youth. They said that the approach of previous Conservative and Liberal governments was not working to decrease the use of marijuana by our youth.

If we look at statistics from 1980 by Statistics Canada, they show that minors represented 22% of marijuana users. By 2015, only 5.8% of marijuana users were aged 15 to 17. Their whole approach to this was based on a premise that was false and misleading.

Right now, there is absolutely no evidence that it has taken the criminal element out of it. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that it is increasing. The demand is out there. When regular marijuana users want it, instead of going to government facilities, quite often they go back to where they have been getting it over the years.

This is a huge cascade of failures and the government made the decision to move forward with Bill C-93, proposed legislation that places a focus on expediting the process for providing pardons to individuals convicted of marijuana possession charges prior to the implementation of Bill C-45, the Cannabis Act, which officially legalized cannabis possession on October 17 of last year.

The Liberal government is rushing, with days left, to clean up the mess it made with the rolling out of its marijuana legislation. It was simply not prepared for the effects of its legislation on marijuana on our judicial process, and this is its last-ditch attempt at putting together a piece of shaky legislation before the House rises, which is just in a matter of days. We do not have a lot of time to look at the bill.

My constituents have felt the effect of the Liberal government's failure at providing effective processes since the rollout of Bill C-45 last October. For example, as I said earlier, the Prime Minister has been claiming for what is now years that legalizing marijuana will keep marijuana out of the hands of our kids.

In Oshawa, there have been two instances of marijuana edibles finding their way into one elementary school and parents are very upset. They are saying, as a result of this, these grade 6 students reported feeling dizzy and euphoric. More and more of these stories are rolling out. Stories have been reported, it seems like on a daily basis, from coast to coast to coast. The government is now trying to make up for these obvious mistakes with this poorly drafted policy, pushing it through the House before the House rises.

In my riding, considerations for workplace safety are really important. These are non-existent with the Liberals. Many of my constituents work blue collar jobs. Not providing proper workplace safety measures to go along with the legislation endangers workers and could potentially result in serious injuries or the death of Canadians as a result of the government's inability to effectively roll out workplace safety provisions.

Government Orders

How about tests available to law enforcement in determining whether a driver is impaired by marijuana? It has been obvious that the science is not there yet. These tests are far from being perfected. It is obviously not safe to get behind the wheel while impaired by the effects of cannabis, yet the government passed its legislation anyway, without any consideration as to how law enforcement would combat drug-impaired driving. Until the time that such tests are perfected, roads could become much more hazardous than before.

• (1300)

For this bill we are talking about today, Bill C-93, it is the stance of the Conservative Party that there should be an expedited process in place to offer record suspensions for those convicted of marijuana possession before October 17, 2018.

I am going to focus on the notion that the current government is clearly out of touch with the reality of everyday prosecutorial practices. In the current form of Bill C-93, even those who are truly responsible for more serious drug crimes will be able to have their records suspended, and not just simple possession offenders. A critical consideration that the Liberal government has evidently ignored, despite testimony on it at committee, is the process of offering a less serious conviction, such as marijuana possession, in exchange for co-operation by more serious drug offenders, such as those charged with the intent to sell illegal drugs. Out-of-court plea bargaining agreements occur on a regular basis. As a result, many individuals who are truly responsible for more serious drug crimes end up pleading guilty to simple possession charges. If Bill C-93 were to pass in its current form, and obviously it will, without provisions taking this issue into consideration, we would be suspending the records of individuals who should not have that option available to them in the first place.

A very important stakeholder came to committee and the government ignored what he had to say to improve the bill. Tom Stamatakis, the president of the Canadian Police Association, stated:

[I]t is possible that both the Crown and the court may have accepted the plea agreement based on the assumption that the conviction would be a permanent record of the offence and would not have accepted the lesser charge if they knew this would be cleared without any possibility of review at a future date.

The fact is this concept is simply logical. Canada's Crown prosecutors are tasked with upholding the laws passed by Parliament. What prosecutor would offer a plea bargain agreement to drug dealers, knowing they would later have their offence suspended? What the Liberals are proposing with this bill is to throw out all of that prosecutorial history that has been there for decades.

To solve this problem, my Conservative colleagues moved amendments to Bill C-93 that had been proposed by the Canadian Police Association. Had those amendments not been voted down, they would have granted the Parole Board the power to open inquiries on any factors that would bring the administration of justice into disrepute, such as suspending the record of drug dealers as a result of prosecutorial plea bargaining practices. The reality is that there were two amendments. The first would restore the Parole Board's power to make these inquiries to determine the applicant's conduct since the date of their conviction. The second would restore the Parole Board's power to make inquiries with respect to any factors that it may consider in determining whether record

suspension would bring the administration of justice into disrepute. These were common-sense ideas put forth by the men and women on the ground who are going to be tasked with following through with this cascade of marijuana legislation, most of which was poorly thought out. The amendments would ensure that these individuals not take advantage of a process that clearly was not intended to be used in their particular cases.

This is just another example of the Liberal government seemingly making every attempt to let criminals get away with their illegal actions. It is despicable. I speak on behalf of my constituents when I say it is unacceptable that the current government is not taking this issue into any consideration whatsoever.

Let us talk for a moment about the costs of this. I think nobody in the House would want to see marginalized Canadians not given access to these record suspensions. The reality is this. The minister was asked to come up with some numbers to let Canadians know how the government came up with the estimated cost of this. Unfortunately, the minister utterly failed to provide how this process was put forth and how it would apply to Bill C-93. He promised to provide the numbers by the time we vote on this legislation. Has that occurred? Absolutely not. Has anyone seen these processes? We have seen the estimates, we have seen the numbers, but we really do not know how much it will cost Canadians. Therefore, the answer here is no.

• (1305)

Would anyone be surprised that perhaps even he does not know? I think the answer might be no.

I see that my time is up.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member say something earlier in a question and repeat it in his speech, which I think is extremely misleading when one talks about statistics. The Conservatives are really good at this. He said that 20% of users of cannabis in 1980 were youth and now only 6% are, as though the numbers have somehow gone down. However, all that percentage describes is the proportion of people who were using cannabis. It does not actually talk about the overall number. Using the stats he cited, the number of youth using cannabis could still have doubled or tripled, but they only represent 6% of users now versus 20% back then. I am assuming his data is correct.

I have a real concern with how he comes into the House and uses this information to suggest that usage among youth has actually gone down when in reality we know that it has not. Canada is or was the developed country with the highest percentage of youth using cannabis.

Could he please try to justify how he can come in here and use this stat as though it somehow indicates that consumption among youth has gone down when in reality it has not? He is just playing with the numbers to show how it has shifted in terms of how much usage there actually is.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the non-question. He has been in the House repeating falsehoods over and over again.

I took the information from a December 18, 2017 CBC article written by Kathleen Harris of CBC News.

The member is grasping, accusing and trying to distort the statistics out there. The reality is that he is not fooling anyone. The Liberal government is the most incompetent government out there for producing results. At this time in our previous Conservative government's mandate, I think our government had 97 bills that had received royal assent. The Liberals might have 60 bills; they cannot get anything through.

We have days before the House rises. This bill was a major promise by the Liberals. On this side, we can all agree that this has been a disaster. The Liberals are rushing through legislation and not consulting. The next government, which will hopefully be a Conservative government as of October, will end up fixing the huge mistakes of the Liberal government.

● (1310)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend mentioned the earlier legislation that made marijuana legal and the impact it had on the business community in his area. There are a number of small contractors throughout my riding who have been told very explicitly by their insurance companies that they need to have a form of drug testing because of this new legislation and the concerns the Insurance Bureau of Canada has. Would he like to comment on that?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his service. Everyone in the House knows this member has served in the police on the ground and has credibility when it comes to this topic.

What he said is quite right. I talked about it because my community of Oshawa has historically been a blue collar community, with people who work with dangerous machinery. When the Liberals brought this forward, the reality is that they did not think it through. They did not think about how it would affect our ingrained systems in Canada or about how things are different here from the United States, for example. In the United States, different jurisdictions can force mandatory drug testing. They can even have the police do blood samples on the side of the road.

Again, the Liberals were not even thinking about these issues when they brought forth their initial marijuana legislation. It is important that I brought that up. How did we land here with such a disaster? Here we are stuck at the very end of the Liberal government's mandate having to pass an important piece of legislation. At the end of the day, I think members on all sides of the House will be supportive of this legislation's intent, but it is not going to do what Canadians expect it to do and what it should do.

I thank my colleague from Yellowhead for bringing up this very important issue that is going to affect workers moving forward.

Government Orders

Again, it will have to be fixed by the future Conservative government.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been looking forward to this debate. I would like to paint a bit of the context in which this legislation will play out in my community.

Every time a bill comes forward in the House that addresses the issue of drugs, whether illegal or now legal, the residents of Abbotsford take notice. If we were looking for two communities in British Columbia that are most impacted by gun, gang and drug-related crimes, those communities would be Surrey and Abbotsford. I mention Surrey because there are three or four Liberal MPs in the House from that community, but who have done virtually nothing to address the plague of drug and gang crime.

We have lost so many young lives, young kids, who are getting into the gang lifestyle because of how attractive it seems, and because of the profits generated by drug trafficking, they are killing each other as they compete for territory.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1315)

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I am listening to my Liberal friends heckling me about something as serious as the deaths of young men in my community and the community of Surrey. There have been so many. Those Liberals are scoffing about it. I am appalled. That is the state of the Liberal Party of Canada today under the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Let me get back to the legislation at hand.

Bill C-93 addresses a very small part of the recent marijuana legalization that the Liberal Prime Minister undertook.

Members may recall that the Prime Minister made a host of promises during the last election. He promised to balance budgets. Did he do that? No. We now know we will not balance our budget for at least another 20 years. He promised to run small deficits, which ended up being humongous deficits. He promised electoral reform. Do members remember that? He went on and on and on.

There is one promise that he did deliver on, the legalization of marijuana. I opposed that, because I believe that allowing young men and women to purchase and consume marijuana poses a huge risk to the mental health of our future generation, and I mean that seriously. This is not something that should be scoffed at—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Ed Fast: I am still hearing from the Liberals, Mr. Speaker. They are still heckling. I cannot believe this. They do not care for Canadians. This is about keeping our communities safe.

I was opposed—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If I could interrupt the hon. member for a second, I thought I would read from this wonderful book that is given to each and every one of us when we first get elected. I will quote from page 1332, where Standing Order (16)(1) states, “When the Speaker is putting a question, no Member shall enter, walk out of or across the House, or make any noise or disturbance”. That applies when someone is speaking as well.

Government Orders

Therefore, I want to remind members on both sides, whether they are heckling the hecklers or the hecklers are heckling the person speaking, that it is a disturbance. I want to make sure that you all understand what a disturbance is. That is my interpretation of what is in the standing order.

I will let the hon. member for Abbotsford continue.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, it is very kind for you to acknowledge that what has been happening in the Liberal benches is inappropriate. The Liberals can do better.

I opposed the marijuana legalization legislation. It represents a huge risk to the mental health of future generations of Canadians. Even though the legislation does not allow children under the age of 18 to purchase marijuana, it does allow them to possess marijuana. That is the craziness of it.

We know from medical research that Canadians under the age of 25 who consume marijuana run a huge risk of mental impairment in future years. Why would we take that risk? That was why I opposed the legalization of marijuana.

Now that marijuana is legalized in Canada, there is a step that the Liberals did not consider as they were ramming through marijuana legalization. What would happen to all those people who were convicted of possessing small amounts of marijuana, simple possession, over many years, people who now want to know why, now that it is legal, they are still saddled with a criminal record.

Canada has a system under which record suspensions take place. This legislation is about that. Just so everyone understands, Canadians already have the right to apply for record suspensions, or pardons as they used to be called. That is already in the law. However, there is a cost and there are some conditions to do that.

For example, before people can apply for a record suspension for simple possession of marijuana, they have to wait five or 10 years, whatever the term is. They need to have served their sentence, whatever that is. They will have to pay a fine, if it was levied. Then they have to pay a fee of \$631. There is a problem with that.

I am not against middle-class Canadians or wealthy Canadians being required to pay for the cost of something that will clean up their record so they can get jobs. If people have a criminal record, even it is for simple possession of marijuana, that can disqualify them for a host of job opportunities. Why would we want to saddle young Canadians or middle-aged Canadians with that burden?

However, the cost of \$631 to apply for a record suspension disproportionately impacts negatively poor Canadians. We heard at committee that minority groups like black or indigenous Canadians felt they had borne the brunt of the war on drugs and were disproportionately affected in society by simple possession charges that remained on their record. These are often folks who cannot afford the \$631.

It is for that reason that I do support the legislation. I do not in any way support weakening our drug laws. In fact, they need to be strengthened. I do not for a moment believe we should be weakening the protection of young Canadians against marijuana usage. We want to ensure our children grow up with healthy brains, with minds that are keen, that allow them to engage in our workforce and be

productive members of our society. Fortunately, this legislation does not undermine any of that. However, we want to ensure that legislation like this is properly considered.

When I look at the amendments proposed by the Conservatives at committee, they were reasonable amendments. They would ensure that there was still an ability for those who had serious drug offences that may have been pleaded down to a charge of simple possession could be captured and that it would be taken into consideration before a record suspension would be granted.

● (1320)

What did our Liberal friends do? They voted down that amendment, a very reasonable amendment about the protection of the public, about public safety. Of course, as might be expected, when Liberals are faced with that kind of a decision, they side with the criminals, not with the potential victims of those crimes.

The legislation before us is relatively benign because it actually does not create record suspensions. It would ensure that the process for applying for a record suspension for simple possession of marijuana would be simplified and would not cost Canadians who might not be able to afford the \$631, something that might prevent them from securing a record suspension.

For all those reasons, I will be supporting the legislation. However, I want to make it very clear that the Conservatives will continue to stand up for the safety of Canadians. We will continue to advocate for stronger criminal justice legislation to ensure our country remains safe. That is the responsible and accountable thing to do.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the member opposite, a couple of things come to mind.

The most important one is in relation to what the Conservative Party is trying to tell Canadians. The Conservatives have been all over the map on the issue of legalization of cannabis. At one time, it was an absolute no-go area. Then they turned it into a decriminalization issue, which in my opinion was an even worse thing to do than what was already in place. Time does not allow me to expand on that.

Today, I cannot help but think that if the Conservatives were in government, their intention would be to repeal the legislation that legalizes cannabis. I am very interested in the member being transparent and open with Canadians on this point.

Is it the policy of the Conservative Party to reverse its position yet again? If Conservatives were to form government, would they make cannabis possession a criminal offence? Is that the party position or is that just his personal position?

● (1325)

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I have never heard fake news like that before.

Government Orders

Our leader has been very clear that we will not recriminalize marijuana. We have, however, made it clear that we believe the Liberal government rammed through the legislation without consulting properly with stakeholders, without taking into account public safety. We will ensure that we remedy the flaws in that legislation, as we will ensure we remedy the flaws in Bill C-93, hopefully implement the amendments we proposed at committee, which the Liberals voted down, eminently reasonable amendments to the legislation. That is what we will do.

I would encourage that member to not get into this whole process of perpetuating fake news. The Liberals do it enough. That member does not have to add to that. It is a disgrace to the House.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the House is speaking about marijuana this morning. In my region, in Fort Albany, Chief Leo Metatawabin has just declared a state of emergency over the devastating impacts of the opioid crisis.

In our northern communities, opioids are destroying families. There are no resources. We have seen the horrific opioid deaths across the country. Much of this is under provincial jurisdiction. However, in our northern reserves, they have to look to the federal government for action to help in dealing with the horrific impacts of the opioid crisis. They are not seeing action, action that would save lives, action that would restore families being broken by the drug crisis.

From his experience in the west, could my hon. colleague tell us what we need to do to ensure we have the on-the-ground resources right now to help the communities that are facing the devastating impacts of the opioid epidemic?

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, the member's question was very well thought out and compassionate. My region of the country, which is the greater Vancouver area, has a very serious opioid crisis, about which I believe the member knows. I believe everyone in the House would want to bring to bear the resources required to address this issue. It is a complex issue. It is an issue on which the Liberal government has been completely absent. "Missing in action" are probably the appropriate words to apply to the Liberal government when it comes to the opioid crisis.

The legislation before us does not deal with the opioid crisis. It deals with record suspensions related to marijuana convictions, ensuring the process for securing a record suspension is simplified and made less costly for those in Canada who would not otherwise be able to afford it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, we are talking about Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis.

This bill seeks to make changes to the pardon process and eliminate fees for Canadians who were convicted of marijuana possession before cannabis was legalized in October 2018.

Now that cannabis has been legalized, this bill seeks to help Canadians who were convicted of something that is now legal by allowing them to apply for a record suspension without being subject to the usual waiting period or fees. For the information of those watching at home, offenders currently have to wait five to 10 years

after serving their sentence, depending on the type of conviction, before they can apply for a pardon. They also have to pay about \$600.

This enactment amends the Criminal Records Act and makes reference to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Narcotic Control Act and the National Defence Act.

We are days away from the end of this Parliament and this government, which was elected in 2015. At the time, the Liberal government made a lot of promises to get elected. Only one of those promises was kept, namely to legalize marijuana. It seems that was important to Canadians. During the next election campaign, in September, the Liberals will brag about their record and say that the only thing they did was legalize marijuana.

Today, the Liberals are doing things at the last minute again after dragging their feet for three and a half years. I recently made a speech in which I referred to the fable of the ant and the grasshopper, but I will not get into that again. We know that the grasshopper represents the Liberals and the ant represents the Conservatives, diligent, hard-working people who are ready to take the bull by the horns. We will have to fix the mess the Liberal government has gotten us into.

I would like to remind hon. members that Bill C-45, the cannabis legalization act, had two objectives, namely to protect our young people and to eliminate organized crime. I must admit that those are commendable objectives. However, the Liberal government sped up the process. We question their motives, but I will not get into that.

I believe they were serious about what they wanted to achieve, but the actual process of legalization was botched because the Liberals rushed the process. In Quebec, they rushed the process so much that the shops selling cannabis have to close for two to three days a week due to poor management and inadequate supply. That is a testament to the government's improvised approach.

Furthermore, a number of news articles are saying that organized crime is thrilled that the Liberal government is promoting this product, which, in my opinion, is harmful to young people 25 and under, but let us not reopen that debate. They Liberals have a majority and they legalized marijuana, and now we have to live with it. We will need to assess and deal with the consequences.

In an effort to eliminate organized crime, the Liberals are promoting cannabis. Who benefits from this promotion? The answer is organized crime, because there is not enough supply and cannabis has been trivialized. Young people are hearing that there is nothing wrong with cannabis and that it is good for you.

I will read an article by Antoine Lacroix that was published in *Le Journal de Montréal* on May 16 entitled "Spike in Cannabis Poisoning in Kids since Legalization", Conservatives are not making this up.

● (1330)

Hospitals are becoming increasingly concerned.

Government Orders

A large increase in the number of children with cannabis poisoning since legalization is worrying medical experts, who are calling on parents to make sure that their pot products are out of reach.

"This is not something we saw a lot with kids under the age of seven. Before 2016, it would be once every three years"...bemoaned Dr. Dominic Chalut, an emergency room physician and toxicologist at Montreal Children's Hospital.

I did not say that he was a Conservative. I just gave his title. He is a doctor, an emergency room physician and toxicologist at Montreal Children's Hospital. I think he is credible. I am not making this up.

The article continues:

Dr. Chalut thinks that the phenomenon will get worse once edibles are legalized in Canada, even though they are already easily accessible.

The Liberals believe they have everything under control since cannabis was legalized, that organized crime is out, that all is well and that Canadians are not dealing with a dangerous product. I have to wonder how reliable and stringent they are.

I will continue:

Impact also felt at Sainte-Justine

On Wednesday, the [Montreal Children's Hospital] called on parents to be vigilant. Since October 17, 2018, 26 children have been treated for poisoning, compared to "a handful per year" previously.

Sainte-Justine Hospital has also seen a twofold increase in poisonings in the past year.

It is important to keep in mind that marijuana was legalized less than a year ago.

"The trend is rather alarming, and we are seeing an uptick in the number of cases. We are going to have to pay very close attention to this", said Dr. Antonio D'Angelo, a pediatric emergency doctor.

Experts point out that an amount that causes minor symptoms in an adult can have significantly more adverse effects in a child.

We stated that when debating Bill C-45.

In the worst cases, children went to intensive care to be treated for cannabis poisoning. The symptoms include convulsions, vomiting and drowsiness. The [hospital] reports that the youngest patient was under a year old.

The Quebec Poison Control Centre is asking people to be cautious, as they are seeing a sharp increase in poisoning among adults and children.

On October 17, 2019, Ottawa will legalize edibles, such as gummy candies and pot brownies, across the country. The provincial government, on the other hand, has not yet decided whether to authorize edibles.

Alarming statistics

I could go on, but I will get back to Bill C-93. I just wanted to set the stage.

As I said, Bill C-93 seems to be a rush job. Apparently that is the Liberal way: wait until the last minute and get it done in a hurry.

The Liberals were criticized for legalizing marijuana, but they did not learn from that experience. Now, yet again, they are scrambling to repair the damage they did.

We are in favour of pardons. We want to make sure the process is fair. I think fairness for all Canadians is a very important concept. To demonstrate our good will, we helped draft the bill and proposed a number of amendments in committee. The committee was impartial, which meant that we could present our amendments and they were agreed to. The Liberals, the Green Party and the Conservatives all presented amendments, but the NDP did not. I do not know where the NDP members were. For our part, we take this seriously and felt it was important to participate in the committee. That demonstrates

our good will. We are parliamentarians and we are here to help make the best laws possible. That is why we, as Conservatives, get involved.

The Liberals did not agree to all our amendments, but they did agree to two of them, and that improved the bill's procedural fairness. Because of our amendments, the Parole Board will have to include a review of this program in its annual report.

It is important to understand that the well-being of all Canadians is important to us, as is fairness.

• (1335)

We want to reassure Canadians that when we gain power in October 2019, we will make some changes to smartly and carefully meet Canadians' needs and guarantee their safety.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is yet another example of how this government has fulfilled campaign commitments, from the very beginning, when we brought in Bill C-2 to reduce tax rates for Canada's middle class, to this piece of legislation today, Bill C-93, which makes a commitment to pardon individuals for simple possession of cannabis. These are the types of progressive legislative commitments we made in the last federal election.

Would the member opposite not agree that Canadians have an expectation that all members of Parliament will actually work every day, all the way through? That means that for the next 12 to 14 days we should continue to sit and continue to debate important legislation that will have the same type of impact as Bill C-93 does for Canadians, and that is indeed a good thing.

Many of the members opposite seem to feel that maybe we should stop debating legislation. I think that would be bad public policy, given that we can still continue to work hard for Canadians and pass legislation. Would he not agree that we should continue to pass legislation wherever and whenever we can?

• (1340)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his comments. I would like to remind him of the fable of the ant and the grasshopper, which I mentioned in my speech. The Conservatives are not afraid of work. We are prepared to work to improve legislation, thereby improving Canadians' quality of life.

As for his question, I must say that we do not disagree. My only point was that the Liberals dragged their feet. When they see a problem, as has been the case with some important issues, like the SNC-Lavalin affair, they are always in reaction mode. They lose control and always act hastily. This seems irresponsible to me.

Government Orders

That said, we are happy to be here. Canadians chose us to represent them, and we on the Conservative side will always be there. The amendments we proposed to the bill are proof of that. I think they show our good faith.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I just want to ask him what he thinks of the Liberal government's pigheadedness. It agreed to provide pardons, but it refused to expunge records for simple possession of cannabis. We know all the problems this can cause for the affected individuals, who are often members of marginalized communities that face discrimination and injustice in various forms. This will affect them for the rest of their lives, especially when they look for a job and travel abroad.

Can my colleague tell us why he thinks the Liberals did not want to listen and refused to expunge records for simple possession of cannabis?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

It is now commonplace for the Liberals not to consider Canadians' needs. This is not the first time it has happened. I hope it will be one of the last, because there are just over three weeks left in this Parliament and the Liberals' term. There will be an election in October 2019, and I hope that after that, Canadians will be better served. I hope that they will choose us, the Conservatives, because we listen to all Canadians and care about their well-being.

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to speak to Bill C-93.

I played a fairly significant role in the debates on Bill C-45 in 2017, because at that time I was serving as my party's justice critic. I recognize that the issue of cannabis reform has occupied the public sphere for quite some time.

I listened to my Conservative colleagues during the debate on Bill C-45 and in today's debate, and I note they favour a strong criminal justice approach. They admit that the problem in question has to do with concerns over mental health and youth getting inappropriate access to large amounts of cannabis. As we know, too much consumption of cannabis can have consequences.

I have always believed that the criminal law approach to drug reform and drug policy is in a sense like using a sledgehammer to hit a nail. I believe that if we want to talk about social and health problems, we really need to focus our policy tools and levers on making sure that our health and social services have the tools to provide not only education regarding the possible harms of over-consumption of certain substances, but also support services to people who feel they have a problem. We should remove the stigma of criminality and of being an outcast among a group of friends or family and community, so that people have the ability to get the help they need. I believe policies like this have been shown to be very effective.

With respect to the harshness of other drugs, especially given the opioid crisis and the heroin crisis, we can look to countries like

Portugal, which have moved to a more social- and health-related policy for their drug problems. They saw significant results from that. Portugal went from being a country that used to have one of the highest rates of opioid deaths per capita in Europe to having one of the lowest.

When it comes to cannabis, I believe we had this debate, in large part, with respect to Bill C-45. Bill C-45 did not necessarily legalize cannabis, but rather made it less illegal, because in the provisions of Bill C-45, the consequences for stepping outside the boundaries of the law are in fact quite severe.

I come from a part of the country where attitudes toward cannabis possession and use are quite liberal. Many people on Vancouver Island, and indeed in British Columbia, have long regarded the crime of cannabis possession and use to be outdated and belonging in the previous century. Of course, we are very much looking forward not only to seeing the law reformed but also to seeing the injustice of the criminality addressed.

Unfortunately, when we look at the timeline, it is quite obvious that the Liberal government has not treated this particular issue of Bill C-93 with the seriousness it deserves. As my colleagues will remember, when Bill C-45 was introduced, it was already April 2017. I believe that particular bill received royal assent later that year. However, it was not until October 2018 that it had its provisions for coming into force. In other words, we were well into the third year of the government's mandate before Bill C-45 came into effect and cannabis use and possession were legalized.

Another problem is that police in different jurisdictions in Canada have different approaches. I have spoken to members of the police forces in Vancouver Island, whether in the RCMP or in municipal police forces, and they always tell me that with their limited resources, they have always had far bigger problems to go after than cannabis possession. By and large, when they have caught people with cannabis, they have usually just seized it and told them to please go on their way and not do that in public. However, we know that in other parts of Canada, the full force of the law has been brought to bear on people who possess even tiny quantities of cannabis.

Despite the record and the fact that the government has admitted this is a problem and has acknowledged the injustices, it is only now, in the dying days of the 42nd Parliament, that we are actually dealing with a bill that could have a substantive effect.

● (1345)

The government still has a very heavy legislative agenda before it. The House has just recently passed a motion to extend its sitting hours. We know that the other place, the Senate, is certainly showing true to its form as a new independent body. There is a lot of government legislation that is really up in the air right now, and I am not quite sure that Bill C-93 is going to have enough time to reach the finish line. Moreover, I think it does far too little.

Government Orders

The member for Victoria had a perfect blueprint for the government to follow in the version of Bill C-415. Rather than going through the pardon process, as Bill C-93 is doing, his bill would seek to expunge all previous crimes of personal possession from the record.

I like the word expungement, because it has an air of permanence about it. Expungement basically means that the crime never occurred. It is completely erased from the record. We have something that is now legal in Canada, and we have acknowledged the injustice of it, so it should be expunged from the record of any person who may have been charged with that crime back in the 1970s and 1980s. Such individuals could truthfully state to any official that they have never been charged with or convicted of such a crime.

The problem with a record suspension or a pardon, and we use those words interchangeably, is that the record is going to be set aside but would still exist. Moreover, when travellers go to other countries, such as the United States, which has very harsh drug laws, there is nothing in the bill that would actually tackle the problem of the United States still having those records on its systems. That, indeed, is a big problem.

The major criticism I have of the Liberal government is that instead of going all the way, it often resorts to half measures. We had a beautiful opportunity before us in this Parliament, through Bill C-415, to substantively tackle this issue.

My party, the NDP, has a long history of fighting for this issue. Just in this Parliament, if we go back to June 2016, we used one of our opposition day motions to fight for decriminalization. The Liberals have always argued that decriminalization is not an effective policy, but we always argued that it should be a policy that is employed as an interim measure as we went on to legalization. If we had had that in place for those three years, a lot of Canadians could have avoided those run-ins with the police and with the criminal justice system, which I think many in this place can agree has far bigger problems to deal with using its limited resources. We raised this, as I mentioned, in the debate on Bill C-45 and, of course, through Bill C-415.

I can recognize that there are parts of this proposed legislation that will certainly have a benefit for some people. However, that is precisely the problem: Not everyone is actually going to take advantage of the provisions. It is nice that the fee is going to be waived and that there is an expedited process, but still there is the problem of going through that, and the fact that some people have greater resources than others and will be able to benefit from this much more. I still think expungement would have been the better route, and I will remind my constituents that there was one party in the House of Commons that was fighting for expungement.

I cannot give my support to a half measure, not when we had a better option before us. Therefore, on principle, I will vote against this legislation. I will vote against it because there was a better way, and I am not going to let the Liberal government get away with another half measure without firmly standing in my place on behalf of my constituents and voicing my displeasure at the loss of what was a beautiful opportunity.

• (1350)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a very interesting day, watching both the Conservatives and the NDP fumble around this issue and try to determine where exactly they are going to land on it.

I find what the previous speaker said remarkable. He said that instead of going all the way, the Liberal government was resorting to half measures. That is exactly what the New Democrats did. In 2015 they refused to say they thought cannabis should be legalized. Instead, they resorted to a half measure and said we should decriminalize it, because that was probably going to be more palatable to the public.

They totally played that card wrong, and now they are forced into trying to justify and explain why their proposed system of decriminalization would still have led to thousands and thousands of fines being issued to people, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalized in our communities.

How can the member actually stand in the House and say that the government has resorted to half measures when in reality the Liberals have been consistent from day one? We said we would legalize and regulate cannabis, and that later we would bring in the proper measures to make sure those with simple possession records could be pardoned. How can he stand here today and say this?

• (1355)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member for Kingston and the Islands would spare the House his manufactured outrage. If he were to look at the voting records, he would see that my party did in fact vote on Bill C-45. The really bad thing about this whole thing is that the government, with all the trappings and power that comes with a majority, is only now moving on this issue. It had an entire term to get to it. Meanwhile, how many people had to go through our justice system while we waited for Bill C-93? How many people were confronted with police officers for a crime that was admitted by the government to be unjust?

I will take no lessons from the Liberals. They are a party of half measures. They know it is true. They know they could have taken substantive action. When Bill C-45 was introduced, what did they do? They waited three years to put those provisions into force. Meanwhile, 400,000 people had run-ins with the law. Liberals refuse to go all the way with expungement. I will take no lessons from them, and I will always cite the member for Victoria on the NDP's position on expungement. We have the right way. Liberals are just sad that they could not bring themselves to vote for it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members, as I mentioned earlier, that a disturbance is when somebody is speaking and someone else interrupts. That is not allowed.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Statements by Members

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct one thing the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford said. I have been on committee with him before and appreciate some of the work he does, but only some of it. He will know that I and several other members voted for expungement because we thought it was a cheaper route to go and was easier and faster to achieve. I do not think that hockey parents who made a mistake 25 years ago and were convicted should be stopped from volunteering for their children's hockey teams today when they fail their criminal background checks.

I just wanted to make sure I put that on the record. I do not have a question for the member, but I wanted to make that comment so he could at least understand that there were members on both sides of the aisle who voted in favour of expungement as a wiser and more fiscally responsible route.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Conservative colleague for reminding me of that. We would all do well to remember that Private Members' Business is more of a forum where individual members can consider the merits of the legislation before them. They are usually bills that are smaller in scope. I appreciate that some members of the Conservative caucus did support the member for Victoria and his very real efforts.

We call the member for Victoria our resident law professor in caucus, and all members in the House can recognize the work he has done in this Parliament, the contributions he has made and the very thoughtful analysis he has brought to the House. I think I can speak for all members in the House when I say that we are going to miss the member for Victoria and the work he has done for the House of Commons and Parliament. I really appreciate the member's comments in that regard.

We certainly look forward to bringing forward the issue of expungement as much as we can. It is still a worthwhile policy tool. I look forward to continuing that debate in the 43rd Parliament.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, the governing party in the Quebec National Assembly unveiled its plan for reducing Quebec's dependence on oil by 40% by 2030.

Hospitals, schools and public buildings will no longer be heated by oil. The Quebec government is going to have a fleet of electric vehicles. It is taking action. The only thing slowing down Quebec's shift to a green economy and preventing it from taking real climate action is, as always, Ottawa, which wants pipelines at all costs, prioritizes dirty oil and is willing to put wetlands at risk to move its gasoline.

Whether the government is Liberal or Conservative, it amounts to the same thing. It is always the same targets, the same obsession with the oil sands, the same handouts to big oil and the same cozy relationships with oil tycoons.

All the parties in Quebec know that serious action is needed right away. Quebeckers know this, too. Unfortunately, Ottawa still prefers negligence. Is it not time for Ottawa to wake up?

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[*English*]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I dedicate this statement to my grandfather on his 95th birthday. He has watched QP every single day since I was elected to catch a glimpse of me on TV.

His dedication to the women in his life has been devotional. Sardaar Kundan Singh was born in 1924, a time when women were not valued. He stood up for them to promote equal rights. When he sent his four daughters to university, people asked why he did not marry them off. His answer was he wanted them to stand on their own two feet and to never be at the mercy of any man.

My grandfather was a hardworking man his entire life. Along with my grandmother, he helped raise me when my parents were running their business. Papaji taught us the value of hard work and honesty, to never be greedy, to be forthright, to have integrity, to be honourable and to stand up in the face of injustice no matter how many years it may take. He inspired me to become a lawyer. The spirit he instilled in me is to be a fighter and never give up, even when the odds are against me.

[*Member spoke in Punjabi*]

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● (1400)

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a historic day in the fight against human trafficking in Canada. I am pleased to announce that the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking launched Canada's first-ever national human trafficking hotline. It is a confidential, multilingual service, operating 24-7, 365 days a year.

The national human trafficking hotline equips Canadians with the ability to report cases of human trafficking in their communities. Most importantly, victims and survivors of human trafficking seeking assistance can contact social services or law enforcement, regardless of where they are located in Canada.

On behalf of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, I want to thank the centre and all of its partners for their incredible work on this initiative. Congratulations.

If Canadians are being trafficked or suspect human trafficking in their community, they can call 1-833-900-1010. Once again, that is 1-833-900-1010. Let us end human trafficking in this country.

*Statements by Members***SENIORS**

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seniors across Canada make invaluable contributions to our country and deserve to have the care and supports they need. Today, I would like to thank the housing subcommittee of the Mississauga—Lakeshore Council for Seniors for taking the opportunity to present a report reflecting its thoughts on housing.

In its report, the council emphasized the importance of aging in one's place of choice, being able to age while living close to loved ones in a familiar environment, and being afforded the choice to stay in their neighbourhood. The value of that choice is not being overlooked.

Its report explores ways to increase the inventory of rental housing units, minimize the stress and responsibility of home ownership, address retirement income and provide seniors with improved access to services, while being supported by loved ones in their community.

I would like to thank Jon Grayson, Amarjit and Daljeet Banwatt, Doris Cooper, Don McVie and Faye Schepmyer for their hard work and dedication to the issues that matter to the seniors in Mississauga—Lakeshore.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the Harper Conservatives got less than 40% of the vote but formed a majority government with 100% of the power. In 2015, the Liberals got less than 40% of the vote but 100% of the power.

People across the country are worried about how life is becoming unaffordable. They are worried about climate change and access to health services. However, at election time, our broken voting system pushes people to vote against a future worse than the status quo, rather than voting for a future better than the status quo.

The Prime Minister promised Canadians he would change the system and end the strategic voting dilemma. Instead, he became an example of how false majorities breed entitlement, from ethics code violations to inappropriate interference in the justice system and everything in-between.

Canadians deserve better. They deserve a Parliament that reflects their true diversity and difference of opinion, a Parliament that forces political parties to co-operate to achieve common goals. The NDP invites Canadians to join us in creating elections that allow us to vote for what we want, rather than settling for less.

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INDIGENOUS READS

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, June is National Indigenous History Month, and I am happy to note that it is also the fourth year of the indigenous reads initiative.

Indigenous reads presents an exciting opportunity for all Canadians to expand their awareness of indigenous life, culture and history by reading works of talented first nation, Inuit and Métis writers. As UNESCO marks 2019 as Year of Indigenous Languages,

indigenous reads reminds us of the power of words and the importance of language.

This June, I encourage everyone to join me by reading indigenous authors. New books will be highlighted each week on the Government of Canada's indigenous social media channels. By using #IndigenousReads, all Canadians can read together by sharing their favourite indigenous books and authors.

* * *

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I recognize World MS Day. World MS Day is a day of global advocacy in the fight against multiple sclerosis. It brings together the global MS community to share stories, raise awareness and campaign for everyone affected by multiple sclerosis.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease that affects the lives of hundreds of thousands of Canadians. As many members know, my wife Kathy suffers from MS, and since her diagnosis, my family has been active in the fight against MS and other episodic disabilities.

That is why I put forward my private member's motion, M-192, to make life easier for people living with episodic disabilities.

Today, I would like to thank the MS Society of Canada and especially Julie Kelndorfer for all of their hard work on my motion and in the fight against episodic disabilities.

One day we will find a cure, but in the meantime, we need to band together and support all Canadians suffering from MS.

* * *

● (1405)

SENIORS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the vital impact the new horizons for seniors program is having on seniors in my riding of Don Valley East.

Our government recognizes that seniors face many challenges, including isolation, loneliness, poverty and dementia. As such, our government has created programs for seniors to enable them to live an active and dignified life.

In my riding, the new horizons program has been extremely successful. As I visit seniors buildings and organizations, I see the positive impact this program has had. The program includes art and dancing classes, fraud and elder abuse awareness, and cooking and financial literacy classes, among others.

We know that seniors are valued members of our community. By funding these programs, we ensure their social well-being, health and vitality.

*Statements by Members***TELUS DAYS OF GIVING**

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday members of the House, the other place and TELUS volunteers packed kits for kids' backpacks, filling them with school supplies as part of TELUS Days of Giving. Members will deliver these backpacks to schools in their ridings for children who may not have access to the supplies they need.

I will be giving these essential supplies to children in several schools in my riding of Edmonton Centre. The annual kits for kids event is part of TELUS' broader goal to be the most giving company in Canada. Over the past year, TELUS has contributed \$150 million and one million volunteer hours, more than any other organization in the country.

I would like to thank my parliamentary colleagues for their participation and all of the volunteers across Canada taking part in the TELUS Days of Giving campaign. Together we make our communities better.

* * *

ALS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year we mark June as ALS Awareness Month. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is a rapidly progressive, fatal motor neuron disease that leaves those affected in a state of progressive paralysis, but with full possession of their mental faculties.

This cruel disease took my father's life after a four-year fight, so it has affected me personally. All members know the courage of our late colleague, Mauril Bélanger, during his battle with this terrible disease.

Each year at this time, the Walk to End ALS takes place to help raise funds for critical research and support. On June 1, the Walk to End ALS will be taking place at the Island Lake Conservation Area in Orangeville at 10 a.m. I encourage everyone to come out and support those living with ALS and those caring for them.

I ask every member to wear a cornflower to demonstrate our support in the fight against ALS so that together we can support victims and families and promote research to find a cure.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the glorious National Arts Centre, Labatt Breweries and Equal Voice brought MPs from all recognized parties together to compete over two causes close to all of our hearts: the first, local craft beers, and the second, more women in politics. Now, it was no surprise to me when a crisp, citrusy Hefeweizen from Newfoundland carried the day. My brewmaster, Mill Street's Jacoba Mol, made sure of that.

The surprise was the makeup of the room. The cause of gender equality needs allies. Women already get it. A more diverse table makes better decisions, and we need more women in politics. Last night was my first Equal Voice event with more men than women, so much so that I felt the need to pass the mike when the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London was the only woman MP at the table.

I thank Equal Voice for this refreshing event and for my Labatt 50 draft tap trophy, which is fitting, because 50% is our goal.

● (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member needs to be reminded that props are not permitted in the House. I am sure members admire his trophy, but he must not do that in the House.

The hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington.

* * *

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World MS Day.

Approximately one in every 385 Canadians lives with MS. It can happen to anyone, without warning, as happened a few years ago to my friend Dave Millar.

I know the importance of research, because of people like Jennifer Molson, who was diagnosed with MS 23 years ago. Jennifer has seen the difference that research has made. The MS Society's bone marrow transplant program gave her new life. Because of this groundbreaking research, she can walk, ski and kayak. She is independent and working full-time, and she danced at her wedding.

Today, in honour of World MS Day, I ask all Canadians to stand in solidarity with the millions of people globally who live with and are affected by MS. Let us pledge to work together toward improving the lives of those living with MS.

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[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, life under the Liberal government is more expensive for everyone.

Statistics Canada tells us that farmers' net income dropped by nearly 50% in 2018. This shocking decline is the largest in 12 years. The Liberal government has done everything it can to make life more expensive for Canadian farmers, who have \$5 billion less in their pockets, which means they cannot pay off their debts, make investments or put money aside.

Statements by Members

Farmers are also dealing with the highest increase in expenses since 2012. The reality is that for the past four years, the Prime Minister has consistently abandoned farmers and the agriculture sector. He called them tax cheats, he capitulated on supply management, and farmers are still waiting for compensation. He went to India but did not manage to reopen the pulse market. He did nothing about the wheat market in Italy, he imposed a federal tax on carbon, and he did not stand up to China on the canola file.

Farmers are sick of being thrown to the wolves. Farmers deserve better, and that is what a Conservative government will offer them on October 21.

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[English]

MEMBER FOR SYDNEY—VICTORIA

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it may be the last time I speak in this House, and I want to recognize the communities I represent. From Bay St. Lawrence to Baddeck, Iona, Millville, Big Bras d'Or, and Frenchvale, and the rural communities in between, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with them on their vital fishing, farming and tourism industries and to enjoy their festivities every summer.

I thank the wonderful people of New Waterford, Florence and Sydney Mines, rich in coal mining history, for their unending support and hard work. On the north side, I loved attending Bartown days every summer in the gateway to Newfoundland. Sydney, formerly an industry leader in steel production, has not only maintained its vibrant immigrant culture but has created many new local businesses and has had many great projects.

I thank the three first nation communities I represent: Eskasoni, Membertou and Wagmatcook. It has not only been an honour to work on their many community projects but to also embrace their culture. I loved their powwows, and they taught me how to chicken dance.

I invite fellow members to come visit the beautiful communities I have had the honour to represent over the last 19 years.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Longueuil is two kilometres away from Montreal. If a person from Longueuil needs to take public transit to Montreal for a job interview or a doctor's appointment, for example, it will cost them \$13 to get there and back. It makes no sense to pay \$13 to travel two kilometres. If people have to make the trip regularly, they can buy a monthly pass for \$138. At these prices, it is not surprising that there is always so much traffic on the Jacques Cartier Bridge.

That is why the NDP opposed the Liberal government's decision to do away with the public transit tax credit. That is why the government should invest in extending the yellow line. Extending that line would attract 70,000 users a day. That is why RTL Longueuil needs a partner to extend the yellow line and money to renovate and expand the garages for its new electric fleet.

We need a government that will stand firm. In Quebec, 43% of greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation, with on-road vehicles accounting for 34%. We are in the midst of a climate crisis, and that is why we need governments to make major investments in efficient, reliable and affordable public transit so that we can build our cities while addressing the climate crisis.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians care about conservation and about protecting the air, land, water and wildlife. However, the Liberals have a tax plan, not an environmental plan. Their own data shows that they will miss reduction targets by 20%.

Most Canadians have no money left after paying their bills, but the Liberal carbon tax will make everything more expensive. The Prime Minister himself said that record high gas prices are exactly what he wants. That hurts rural Canadians, northerners, seniors and the working poor the most.

Canada is an environmental world leader. Now Canada is the only top-10 oil-producing country with a carbon tax, while five provinces, with two-thirds of Canada's population, oppose it.

Liberal tax hikes drive jobs, businesses and innovation out of Canada into countries with lower standards and punish responsible Canadian resource development, agriculture and manufacturing. That is bad for the environment.

However, Canadians can choose a Conservative plan that will lower global emissions, enable Canadian technology and create jobs without making Canadians pay more.

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● (1415)

ABORTION

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that our Prime Minister and our Liberal Party will always defend a woman's right to choose. In the 21st century, women, and women alone, should decide what happens to their bodies.

The Conservative leader has suggested that he would not stop his party from introducing anti-choice legislation. He also boasted about his voting record by saying, "I've always voted in favour of pro-life legislation." More recently, 12 Conservative parliamentarians appeared at anti-choice rallies, where participants pledged to restrict women's reproductive rights. However, now, on the eve of an election, the Conservative leader wants Canadians to believe that his long-standing position has changed. Where is the truth in advertising now?

Make no mistake, when it comes to restricting women's rights, the Conservatives are just as advertised.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the U.S. vice president is here to thank the Prime Minister for giving up concession after concession after concession in the renegotiation of NAFTA. He basically gave Trump absolutely everything he wanted. The Prime Minister made major concessions on dairy, on pharmaceuticals and on automobiles. He failed to stand up for Canada.

Why did the Liberals capitulate to the U.S. on every single one of its trade demands?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we could drop our demands and rush into a bad deal and capitulate. Canadians can be glad that we did not follow their lead and stood firm for a good deal. If we had followed their advice, we would not have a chapter 19. They would have completely dismantled supply management. We would have had devastating effects on our auto sector, and within five years, we would have had a sunset of the deal.

We stood up for Canadians. We got a great deal.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the House who does think it is a great deal, and that is Donald Trump. He is very happy.

The Prime Minister said he would not give in to steel or aluminum quotas, but guess what. He did. The so-called meaningful “surge” clause means that Trump gets to decide how much Canadian steel or aluminum is too much, and if Canadians suffer or if jobs are lost, oh well, too bad, because guess what: the Liberals signed away our ability to retaliate. This was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get this right, and they blew it.

Why will the Prime Minister not admit that he failed Canadians again?

• (1420)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, we know how important it is to stand up for Canadians. It was our government that defended the Canadian steel and aluminum industry. It is our government that put in place \$16.6 billion in countermeasures in the most drastic trade action since the Second World War. The Conservatives wanted us to stop arguing with the United States and not have any counter-tariffs. We stood up for Canadian steelworkers and the aluminum industry, and guess what. We won.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they won third place, I guess, and the Liberals think that is a win.

The Prime Minister did not stand up for Canadian jobs. He stood up for American jobs. The Prime Minister did not stand up for the steel and aluminum industries. He took away our right to retaliate.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister did not get one concession from Donald Trump. He gave the Americans absolutely everything they wanted.

This is serious. Does the Prime Minister realize that Canadian jobs and Canadian industries are going to suffer again because of his failure? Does he realize what he has done with this once-in-a-generation opportunity? He blew it.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, should I remind the Conservatives that in the last three and a half years, we have created one million jobs? We will compare our record of the last three and a half years to everything the Harper government did during its last 10 years.

The new NAFTA deal preserves our vital access to the U.S. market. Do my colleagues know how much that is? It is \$2 billion every single day.

This is the most important trade deal in the world, and we got it right.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abbotsford has helpfully reminded me that one member should be speaking at a time and not others joining in. Of course, that applies, as he knows, to all of us. One member should speak at a time and not be interrupted also.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, never in the history of Canada has it gone backwards on international relations or international trade. Never, that is, until the Liberal Prime Minister signed NAFTA 2.0, or rather NAFTA 0.5, as it should be called.

Never before has Canada gone backwards, yet that is what happened under the current government. It has taken a step backwards on auto manufacturing, on medication and on agriculture. The government touts this as a win for Canada, but it is no such thing.

How can the government celebrate? Mr. Pence is thrilled today, and it is easy to see why.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives told us many times to back down, sign a bad deal and basically just capitulate.

Canadians can be glad that we did not follow their example. If we had taken their advice, we would have an agreement with no chapter 19, the supply management system would have been completely dismantled, there would have been demands that would have decimated our auto sector, and a sunset clause would have made investing in Canada impossible. Thank God we did not listen to them.

*Oral Questions***CANADA REVENUE AGENCY**

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Canada Revenue Agency is making secret deals with big financial players, no matter what the agency says. According to CBC/Radio-Canada, KPMG has once again managed to make a secret deal with the Canada Revenue Agency.

How can the Minister of National Revenue allow such a situation?

I do not want to hear her say that the net is tightening because, on the contrary, the net is still wide open for friends of the Liberal Party.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is firmly committed to combatting tax evasion. The Canada Revenue Agency undertakes a fully independent process before reaching out-of-court settlements. This helps maintain the integrity of our tax system.

Although I understand that the regulations can be used appropriately in certain situations, I am concerned about the lack of transparency. That is why I have asked the Canada Revenue Agency to review this processes to ensure greater transparency surrounding the reasons for which a settlement is reached.

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● (1425)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, workers are critical of the Liberal government, which is in a rush to ratify NAFTA at any cost. This trade agreement is bad for our farmers, consumers, workers, and the environment. The consequences of this agreement could be disastrous.

Can the Liberals use some common sense and improve this agreement instead of giving in to Donald Trump?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP needs to understand that reopening this agreement would be like opening Pandora's box. We have an agreement that preserves \$2 billion worth of trade daily.

At best, the NDP is naive, at worst, it is playing political games by suggesting that Canadians would benefit from reopening this agreement.

If the NDP is so confident, why not admit that it is firmly opposed to NAFTA?

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. vice-president is here today to talk to the Prime Minister about the terms for ratifying the new NAFTA. The Prime Minister wants to ratify the agreement quickly, without debate.

That is almost as shameful as Mike Pence's position on a woman's right to choose. Unlike trade agreements, a woman's right to bodily autonomy is non-negotiable, but it is not enough to raise the issue with the vice-president.

Will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring that women across Canada have access to safe, accessible health care services?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government will always support a woman's right to choose. We all believe that Canadian women deserve safe access to abortion services. This is why we have consistently defended health and reproductive options in all regions in Canada, for instance, by expanding access to Mifegymiso and making it available without a prescription.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Vice-President Pence is in Ottawa today and U.S. congressional members are paying attention and asking why the Liberals are rushing the new NAFTA.

Congresswoman DeLauro said the Liberal government is acting prematurely and that quick approval of this deal is actually working against their efforts in protecting labour, the environment and ensuring people's access to affordable medication, the progressive things that Liberals pretend to care about.

A better deal is possible, but instead the government is working against it by ramming it through as is.

Why is the Prime Minister helping Donald Trump?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the NDP should realize is that reopening this deal would be like reopening Pandora's box.

This is the fruit of a whole year's effort by three countries to come up with a good deal. Either the NDP are naive in thinking that by reopening it, we are going to get a better deal, or they are playing political games. My guess is that the NDP should stand up and have the courage to say they are squarely against the NAFTA deal.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals should stop fearmongering about Pandora's box. This has happened in the U.S. twice, and it has been about all of these specific issues. The Liberals do not have the courage to fix the deal.

Canadians know that this NAFTA will hurt our dairy industry. No matter what the Liberals say, they did not protect them and the impacts will be felt by farmers, processors and workers in the whole dairy supply chain. The mystery compensation package that is yet to materialize will not include workers who drive trucks and work in processing plants.

Why do Liberals want working people to pay the price for their unwillingness to get a better deal?

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians saw how hard it was to negotiate this new agreement and achieve the lifting of tariffs. This was a task that all of our country was involved in. During that time, many Canadian families had real worries about whether they would lose their jobs.

Canada did its job. We have a new NAFTA deal that is a win-win-win outcome. We have a full lifting of the tariffs.

It is astonishingly irresponsible that the NDP seems prepared to plunge our country into a new negotiation and period of uncertainty.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the president of the United Steel Workers warned the Liberals not to bask in the glory of their agreement to end the American steel and aluminum tariffs, which leaves Canadian businesses and workers at risk, because the Liberals agreed with the Trump administration that tariffs can simply be slapped back on if the U.S.' imports begin to surge. The minister refuses to say exactly what would constitute a surge. With the livelihood of Canadian workers hanging in the balance, she had better know what it means.

Workers and businesses need to know. They need certainty. What constitutes a surge?

• (1430)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the United States government imposed tariffs, we stood up for the Canadian economy, we stood up for steel and aluminum workers and we stood up for their families. We immediately retaliated dollar for dollar with Canada's strongest trade action since World War II. Despite calls by Doug Ford and the the Conservative leader to back down, we stood firm.

We have the tariffs lifted. We have a good deal, and we are now able to ratify it and continue this process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister volunteered to renegotiate NAFTA by promising to get a better agreement. However, Canada accepted concession after concession without getting anything in return.

The Prime Minister even signed an agreement knowing that the steel and aluminum tariffs were still in place. Now, we have learned that the wording of the new agreement implies that Canada will be subject to a quota in disguise from now on.

Why did he sign an agreement that is so bad for our workers?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, we know how important it is to stand up for Canadian workers.

The American tariffs were lifted because we imposed significant counter-measures, despite calls from the Conservatives to lift them.

In November, the member for Durham said that our counter-measures were dumb and that they should be removed.

If we had listened to the Conservatives, there would still be tariffs on Canadian steel.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Canadians are in fact the Prime Minister's priority, I would like to know whether he asked the American vice-president for help with André Gauthier, a man from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord who is being held in the United Arab Emirates, a country known for its troubling human rights record.

Ms. Pamela Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are aware of that situation, and our government has been working on it for some time.

The minister has been in direct contact with the family. I have raised the issue with the Omani authorities. We are also in contact with the United Arab Emirates.

We are monitoring the situation very closely and will continue to do so.

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[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised a plan to help the workers at Oshawa's General Motors plant, and he failed to do so. The Prime Minister failed to come to Oshawa to meet with workers to justify this mistake, and it took over two weeks for the Prime Minister to even pick up the phone to call the mayor of Oshawa. Now, in the Prime Minister's new NAFTA agreement, automakers, including General Motors in Oshawa, are now limited in how many cars they can export to the United States.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he did not raise the issue of quotas on automobiles with the United States vice-president?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the key sectors to benefit from the new NAFTA was the automotive sector. We shielded this sector so we could continue to see production for years to come. With regard to GM and Oshawa, our government supported the workers every single day. We were there when the solution was proposed as well.

Over the last few years, we have seen \$6 billion invested in the automotive sector. If the member wants to compare our track record with theirs, 11,000 new jobs have been created in the automotive sector versus 20,000 jobs lost under the Conservatives before the recession even hit.

Oral Questions

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite ironic that the Liberals feel NAFTA 0.5 is a win when there were no gains and only losses sector by sector, but Canadians should be very troubled by the fact that the bill has a provision that allows the Prime Minister and cabinet to change the deal after we have voted on it. If this is such a good deal, why do they have a provision that says it will change?

Do they know that they will accept whatever Donald Trump gives them?

• (1435)

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we stood firm for a good deal and we got a good deal. The new NAFTA preserves our vital access to the U.S. market and safeguards \$2 billion a day in cross-border trade between our countries. The International Trade Commission reported that as a result of this deal, Canadian exports to the United States will increase by almost \$20 billion, as will U.S. exports to Canada. This is a good deal for Canadians. We will take every step we need to take very carefully, making sure that Canadians are protected, Canadian workers are protected and our economy continues to flourish.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his meeting with the U.S. vice-president, the Prime Minister did not raise Canada's Arctic sovereignty despite the fact that two weeks ago, Secretary of State Pompeo questioned our sovereignty in the Arctic. At a time when Russia and China are showing ambitions there, the Prime Minister is failing our north.

We know they signed away our sovereignty in the trade deal. Why are they not standing up for it in our Arctic?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Arctic sovereignty is long-standing and well established. As a person who has lived in the subarctic and experienced Arctic weather, Arctic concerns and expenses, let me tell you that this government stands with the people of the Arctic and will always stand for Canadian Arctic sovereignty. We will continue to work with international partners, we will declare our sovereignty and take every opportunity to ensure that Canada's interests and the interests of Canadians are maintained.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Grassy Narrows believed the Prime Minister when he made a solemn promise to build a mercury treatment centre. He even gave them a timeline, and then nothing happened. I guess we should have known that the punchline was coming when the Prime Minister made a joke about them to his rich donor friends. The punchline came yesterday: an empty agreement. No wonder Grassy Narrows refused to sign that bogus agreement. Politics is full of broken promises, but what about this one?

How does the Prime Minister justify such deplorable treatment of the people of Grassy Narrows?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, building a health facility in Grassy Narrows is an absolute priority. That is why the minister went yesterday to meet with the chief and council in the community. Progress is being made and we are committed to a comprehensive solution that meets the needs of all of the community. The people of Grassy Narrows have suffered for over 50 years. We will find a path forward on a plan that meets the needs of the community now and in the long term.

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PRIVACY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Oh, God, Mr. Speaker, that is their idea of a priority: no money for Grassy Narrows, but hey, lots of money for the billionaire Irvings. Speaking of which, when the media asked the government if it gave \$40 million to the Irvings to make French fries in Lethbridge as part of an Arctic shipbuilding contract, what did the Liberals do? They tipped off the Irvings, who then threatened The Globe and Mail with a lawsuit. Think about that: a government snitch line for billionaires to target journalists over the spending of taxpayers' money.

What is the Prime Minister trying to do: turn Canada into some kind of two-bit potato republic for his friends?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have clear obligations to verify information that is commercially sensitive. We must receive consent from the contractor, and my team and officials followed all of the appropriate steps respecting privacy.

With regard to the reporter, he received the information he requested.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Liberals polled Canadians about remediation agreements months before hiding the measure in the 2018 omnibus bill. Apparently Canadians across the country see these agreements as a get-out-of-jail-free card for corrupt and criminal corporate executives. The Liberals did not have public support for these agreements.

Is that why the Minister of Finance hid the measure in his bill at the last minute?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Oral Questions

I have three things to say about deferred prosecution agreements. [English]

First, it was announced to Canadians through a gazetting process. Second, consultations took place around the country. Third, it appeared and was vetted at the finance committee of the House of Commons and was also vetted by a Senate standing committee.

These agreements exist among five members of the G7: Japan, Britain, the United States, Canada and France. They are important measures that ensure accountability at the corporate level and ensure that employees are rendered harmless.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have learned. Opinion polls showed that Canadians did not agree with protecting corrupt criminals.

The former attorney general also understood that adding remediation agreements to the omnibus bill at the last minute was just a ploy to protect the government's friends at SNC-Lavalin. We are all aware of the Prime Minister's political interference and months-long pressure campaign against her.

Now we want to know why the Prime Minister is being so dishonest with Canadians.

The Speaker: I would encourage the hon. member to choose his words carefully.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the documents and the policy he referred to, it is extremely important to emphasize the truth for those Canadians watching us on television. There are three criteria for these agreements.

[English]

First, there must be an admission of responsibility. Second, a penalty must be paid. Third, they must pay victim restitution. Fourth, they must co-operate with ongoing investigations. These agreements are not about get out of jail free cards; they are about holding corporate directors responsible for corporate wrongdoing.

We agree with the member opposite that those people need to be held accountable, and they are.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually, based on those very criteria the member just listed, SNC-Lavalin does not qualify for a deferred prosecution agreement. This is not just my opinion; that is the opinion of the top prosecutor, the former attorney general and now, most recently, a Quebec judge.

We already know Canadians do not support special deals for accused corporate criminals. Will the government confirm that no politician will overturn the justice system and give a special deal to SNC-Lavalin?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of

the decision that was rendered yesterday in a matter that is currently before the court. That was a preliminary inquiry about an evidentiary threshold in an ongoing criminal matter.

It would be entirely inappropriate for me as parliamentary secretary, or indeed for any member of Parliament, to comment on an ongoing criminal matter. I will refrain from doing so.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is new. Now, all of a sudden, the Liberals do not think politicians should be involved in the justice system. What a strange turn of events.

The top prosecutor, the former attorney general, a Quebec judge and Canadians writ large all believe accused corporate criminals like SNC-Lavalin should face the music in a trial. Unfortunately, the matter is not closed. The government still gives itself the power to interfere.

Will the Liberals confirm that no politician on that side will interfere to cancel the trial into SNC-Lavalin?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member has been a member of the House longer than I have, but I also appreciate that he does not have significant experience in legal matters. Let me just educate him about this one point.

The reason why the *sub judice* convention exists is because we should not have elected officials who are involved in appointing judges potentially influencing a decision made by an appointed judge. That is called inappropriate influence over the judicial decision-making process. That is why all members of Parliament are covered by the *sub judice* rule, and why his former House leader invoked that convention 300 times in the last Parliament.

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[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned today that the Minister of National Revenue signed an agreement with KPMG clients to exonerate them of all charges in connection with its tax scheme. This is absolutely appalling and contradicts everything the minister has been saying for years.

This is yet more proof that there are two sets of rules, one for the privileged and another for everyone else. The minister just lost what little credibility she had left when she blamed public servants for this terrible agreement.

All she had to do was reel in the big fish, so why did the Minister of National Revenue cut the line and let it get away without facing any consequences?

Oral Questions

●(1445)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, our government is firmly committed to combatting tax evasion. The Canada Revenue Agency undertakes a fully independent process before reaching out-of-court settlements. This helps maintain the integrity of our tax system.

Although I understand that the regulations can be used appropriately in certain situations, I am concerned about the lack of transparency. I have asked the Canada Revenue Agency to review its processes to ensure greater transparency surrounding the reasons for which a settlement is reached.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the one thing that never changes is that the Liberals continue to sign secret deals with their millionaire buddies. We can always count on that.

Bicycles painted white have been placed on street corners and overpasses all over my riding. Why? To remind people that a cyclist was killed on that spot. These deaths are tragic and avoidable. I say they are avoidable because measures do exist that could make the streets safer for cyclists. They were actually proposed by departmental experts a few months ago. We have been waiting for several months now, but the Minister of Transport has not yet done anything.

How many people have to die before the Liberals will take action—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his commitment to the issue of the vulnerability of cyclists and pedestrians, which is a very serious subject.

We published a suite of measures that can be taken at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. At the federal level, we are currently conducting pilot projects aimed at improving sightlines for truck drivers and heavy vehicle operators. Once that is complete, we will make a decision.

I encourage municipalities and provinces to increase measures to make pedestrians and cyclists less vulnerable.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Kitchener Centre are deeply concerned about climate change. One young woman named Elizabeth Rose, age 15, wrote me a letter, expressing concern that inaction on climate change would keep her from celebrating her 75th birthday.

Our government believes that we are experiencing a national climate emergency. Unlike others in the House, we also know that a healthy economy and a healthy environment go hand in hand.

Could the Minister of Environment and Climate Change please highlight what our government is doing to transition to a clean economy so Elizabeth will celebrate her 75th birthday?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is for Elizabeth Rose. We are absolutely committed to tackling climate change. Right now we have seen flooding in the national capital region and in New Brunswick. We have forest fires that have started earlier out west. We need to take action and that is exactly what we are doing.

We are phasing out coal, ensuring a just transition for workers and communities, making historic investments in public transportation, in clean technologies and in energy efficiency. At the same time, we have created one million jobs. I know Canadians expect us to take action on the environment and grow the economy.

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JUSTICE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman served this country with dignity and honour and hopes to continue to do so. However, the Liberals sabotaged his career and have attempted to cover it up.

Yesterday, all Liberal MPs voted to continue the cover-up and refused to release the secret memo sent by disgraced former clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, regarding the Vice-Admiral Mark Norman affair.

What are the Liberals trying to hide?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, committees operate independently from the government and make their decisions based on their deliberations. I know that is hard for opposition members to understand, since they controlled the committees under Mr. Harper's government.

With respect to the trial of Vice-Admiral Norman, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada noted that no other factors were considered and that there was no political influence. Any accusation to the contrary by the opposition is absurd and unfounded.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals think that if they repeat their lines loud enough, Canadians will accept all their cover-ups. Yesterday, they resumed the Mark Norman cover-up. They voted against releasing the memo sent by disgraced former Privy Council clerk, Michael Wernick, on the Norman affair. They continue with the cover-up because obviously they have something to hide.

What are the Liberals hiding? When are they going to come clean with the truth?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I repeat that the committees operate independently from the government. It is the opposite of the way things were under the Harper government. Canadians can have confidence in our justice system.

This month, we supported a motion to recognize Vice-Admiral Norman for his service and to apologize to him and his family. We are also waiting to hear about next steps, because there have been discussions between General Vance and Vice-Admiral Norman.

The opposition's attempt to undermine the credibility of our country's justice system is totally absurd and unfounded.

● (1450)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the government.

The Prime Minister does not want Canadians to know the full truth about the Norman case. Yesterday, he forced the Minister of National Defence and the entire Liberal caucus to vote against releasing a memo.

In 2015, they promised that the government would be open and transparent. In 2019, this government is plagued by scandals and secrets.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, why is he imposing a code of silence on anyone who could reveal the truth about the Norman case?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, as the Public Prosecution Service of Canada confirmed this month, based on this month's decision on the charges against Vice-Admiral Norman, all decisions were made independently. No other factors were considered in the decision, nor was there any influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence.

My colleague should know that the PPSC and the RCMP operate independently from the government. If he does not know this, perhaps he would benefit from a law course. Once again, we will respect this country's judicial process and the deliberations of the committee.

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government still has a responsibility to Canadians. The Prime Minister promised that he would be transparent by default, and that sunshine is the best disinfectant.

The political interference in the Vice-Admiral Norman case has been disgustingly covered up and Canadians deserve to know the truth. Yesterday, the Liberals voted against releasing an unredacted version of the 60-page document that the disgraced former clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, sent to the Prime Minister.

What is the Prime Minister hiding? Why will he not tell Canadians the truth?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat it one more

time for my colleague. She knows that committees operate independently of the government. She used to be part of our government, so she knows how our committees operate, compared with how they used to operate under the Harper government.

Once again, with respect to the trial of Vice-Admiral Norman, no other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any outside influence, political or otherwise.

We followed the process. There have been discussions between General Vance and Vice-Admiral Norman regarding his return to work. We will continue to follow the process, and we will wait for the decisions that ensue.

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[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals announced funding to deal with the backlog at Veterans Affairs, it is clear that the system is still broken.

One veteran has been waiting over a year for a decision that VAC says takes 16 weeks. He is not the only one. VAC is currently processing claims from October 2017.

Could the minister explain to veterans and the House why, with this new investment that is meant to help the process happen faster, they are still waiting, in some cases years, for the help they so desperately need?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague that our government is committed to making sure we deliver for veterans. Yes, we did invest 10 billion new dollars, which included \$42 million to address the backlog. We hired 630 new front-line staff because there was a major reduction in front-line staff.

It is also important to realize the 66% increase in applications to Veterans Affairs because Veterans Affairs says yes more often. We take care of our veterans.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, climate change is having a detrimental impact on our rivers and watersheds.

Water levels in the Cowichan River are already low for this time of year. Startling new projections predict the river could run dry by July.

This past Saturday, I was on the river helping rescue salmon fry that were stranded in pools from the rapidly receding main river. The situation is dire and my community is calling for leadership.

When will the federal government commit to the funding necessary to raise the Cowichan weir to save this critical watershed and the salmon that depend on it?

Oral Questions

●(1455)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we continue to ensure the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems. We understand the importance of fishery resources in the Cowichan River to local indigenous groups and the local community. We are aware of the issues regarding the low summer flows and the threats to fish and fish habitat.

The department and the minister have attended meetings with local indigenous groups and provincial and local governments. We are actively engaged in ongoing discussions to find solutions and the possibilities of federal funding.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, veteran Medric Cousineau has exposed another blow to veterans in the pension for life scam. Veterans with the same injury applying before and after April 1 are not treated equally. Under the Liberals' new plan, veterans will receive less. Why do the Liberals think that veterans with the same injury should not be compensated equally?

Even Mr. Cousineau's Liberal member of Parliament agrees that this is unacceptable and reached out to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister reverse his cuts to veterans, or does he still believe they are simply asking too much?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always made sure that we take care of our veterans, and we always will. The well-being and financial security of our veterans are vitally important.

I want to be very clear. Injured veterans will be better off under the pension for life than they would have been under the previous government's policy.

Our veterans took care of our democracy and freedom, and we want to make sure that we treat them in a proper manner, and we will.

The Speaker: If the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George wishes to offer advice to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I would encourage him to do that either when he has the floor or perhaps at some other place and time.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister, surrounded by Liberal candidates, including the member for Orléans and the Minister of National Defence, who are both veterans themselves, made a solemn promise that under his leadership, veterans would never, ever have to go to court to get their due. He broke that promise.

He also promised to restore the pension for life option in the proper way. That was another broken promise. We are not the ones saying so. It is veterans themselves, the ones who are the most affected by this affair, who are saying that the money is just not there for the pension for life option.

Why?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's concern, but he is wrong. The Prime Minister indicated quite clearly that the pension for life will be much better and what is provided for veterans will be much better than it was under the previous government. That is what we promised, and I can assure the hon. member that it is what we will deliver.

We have made sure, and will continue to make sure, that our veterans are cared for properly.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister stood in the House and stated that he has instructed the Minister of Veterans Affairs to ensure that no veteran will receive less on a go-forward basis. Veterans themselves have proven that the new Liberal pension for life retirement income benefit is less than the previous benefits it replaces.

Can the minister confirm to the House, and to our veterans who are watching right now, that the new retirement income benefit will be paid out at the rate of the benefits it replaces as of April 1, 2019? When will that happen?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's question, but it comes from a party that slashed Veterans Affairs. It slashed 1,000 jobs at Veterans Affairs and slashed the number of caseworkers, so veterans could not even apply.

We have hired over 650 caseworkers. We have helped over 400 caseworkers to make sure that when veterans apply, they will be approved. In fact, Veterans Affairs is saying yes more often, not to mention the \$10 billion we invested to make sure veterans are served properly.

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[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is essential that we advance gender equality and invest in women to grow the middle class, strengthen our economy and build a healthy future in Canada and around the world.

[English]

However, governments cannot do this work alone. It requires multiple sectors, industries and communities to bring about change.

Could the Minister for Women and Gender Equality please inform the House of the work that is being done by our government to mobilize all stakeholders to achieve gender equality?

●(1500)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of International Development and Minister for Women and Gender Equality, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Châteauguay—Lacolle for her advocacy and effective leadership.

We have one million new jobs, one million families with a safe and affordable roof over their heads, the lowest unemployment on record for four decades and 825,000 Canadians no longer going to bed hungry at night, because our plan is working. It is a plan that sees equality as a driver for economic growth.

Women Deliver will offer us an opportunity to work with partners to seize the untold economic benefits that exist for all partners in the global community.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the evidence is overwhelming: The Liberals will not meet their Paris targets. Still, the minister continues to mislead Canadians by repeating that we are somehow going to meet those targets.

Is that why she said, last Friday, “if you repeat it, if you say it louder, if that is your talking point, people will totally believe it”? Did I get that right?

When will the minister come clean with Canadians and admit that her so-called climate plan is not as advertised?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' climate plan is exactly as advertised. We just had the Conservative Party announce its climate plan: It is the jam-through-pipelines plan.

What does it include? It includes making it free to pollute, in the face of energy companies saying there needs to be a price on pollution. It includes killing the new environmental assessment law that we put forward, which would not only rebuild trust but also ensure that good projects go ahead in a timely way.

The Conservative Party has no plan for the environment, no plan for climate change and no plan for the economy.

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FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's forestry sector is a fundamental part of many rural communities, like my riding. It provides high-quality, well-paying jobs that thousands of Canadians rely on to support their families.

In British Columbia, we are seeing temporary and permanent mill closures and shift reductions. The impact of the mountain pine beetle and increasing wildfires pose major threats to our forestry industry, as does the Liberal government's total failure to get a new deal on softwood lumber. U.S. duties are hurting our communities.

Will the Liberals make the removal of U.S. duties on softwood lumber a real priority and secure a fair deal for Canadians?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are taking action to ensure that our forestry sector remains a source of good, middle-class jobs across the country and is prepared to compete globally.

The programs, loans and loan guarantees made available through the \$867-million softwood lumber action plan are actively supporting workers and communities.

Oral Questions

This past fall, we also announced \$100 million for forestry through the strategic innovation fund. Building on our work to date, budget 2019 includes an additional investment of over \$250 million, which will help the sector to innovate, diversify and grow.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the construction industry is a critical part of the Canadian economy and a source of good, middle-class jobs for many Canadians. Contractors and subcontractors need prompt payments from clients in order to sustain their operations and support the significant costs involved in construction projects.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement please update the House on the work our government will be doing to ensure that contractors and subcontractors in the construction industry are paid in a timely manner on federal projects?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have very good news. Unlike the Harper Conservatives, we have listened to contractors on the need for federal prompt payment legislation. We know these businesses provide good, middle-class jobs to many Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and they deserve to be paid promptly.

As announced in budget 2019, we will put forward legislation that ensures payments reach construction suppliers and their employees quickly and efficiently.

We are standing up for workers, and we are standing up for contractors.

● (1505)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind members that when somebody has the floor, that person should have peace and quiet in the House so that everybody can hear what he is saying.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

*Oral Questions***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, Manitobans deserve the right to sell their resources abroad. Minnesota is willing to buy the clean hydroelectric power that Manitoba proudly produces. The National Energy Board has approved the transmission lines, but the Prime Minister is overruling the decision and is trying to stop the project. It is clear that the Prime Minister is holding a grudge against Manitoba because it will not go along with his carbon tax.

Why will the Prime Minister not let Manitoba sell its clean energy?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians understand that for good projects to move ahead and grow our economy, we must protect our environment and respect the rights of indigenous peoples. Our government has been hard at work consulting with indigenous communities on the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission project in order to fulfill our duty to meaningfully consult. Our focus remains on getting it right.

Our government has extended the timeline for a decision on this project until June 14, 2019. We have issued the short extension to ensure that the Crown has sufficient time to fulfill its legal duty to consult and come to the right decision.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, commercial shipping is causing bank erosion along the St. Lawrence River. Riverside residents between Montreal and Lake Saint-Pierre are losing up to two metres a year. Even worse, Ottawa abolished the riverbank protection program 20 years ago and will not let these residents do rehabilitation work. Marine shipping has economic benefits, but the government has completely abandoned these Canadians to deal with the consequences.

Will the government finally take responsibility, or will these residents have to take it to court?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, of course we empathize with those affected by this year's flooding. We know that water levels are very high. There has been a lot of rain and flooding this year in the Great Lakes area, and that water eventually makes its way to the St. Lawrence. The Government of Canada has imposed speed restrictions to avoid creating waves along the banks in the Lake Saint-Pierre region.

We are very aware that it is important to put these restrictions in place, and we will continue to monitor the situation.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, this is not about flooding. This is about erosion happening all year long.

My community is not the only victim of shoreline erosion. In addition to marine traffic, climate change is also wreaking havoc. The Magdalen Islands are losing half a metre of shoreline every year. Almost every year, the Gaspé Peninsula and the North Shore are cut

off from the rest of the world because erosion washes away parts of highways 132 and 138.

Rather than pour millions and billions of Quebecers' dollars into dirty oil, will the government step up and help Canadians?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that climate change and ocean warming are causing shoreline erosion on the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands.

I can assure the member that our government has ambitious plans to tackle ocean warming and climate change.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, we have been debating in this place a climate emergency. We know we are in a climate emergency. It is not in the abstract; it is real and happening in real time. In the community of Pikangikum First Nation in northern Ontario right now, 4,000 people are one to two kilometres from a raging fire. Recent reports are that the Hercules aircraft cannot land because of the smoke. It is terrifying for them, right now.

Can the hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness give us an update on what the government is doing to help?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the situation at Pikangikum was raised with the Government of Canada earlier this morning through a formal request for assistance from the Province of Ontario. The request was for Canadian Forces assets, namely aircraft, and rangers personnel, to help evacuate people from Pikangikum. The answer was, of course, yes. The assistance is being mobilized. Smoke and other local conditions are not helping with air operations, but we understand the deep angst in the community, and all levels of government will work strongly together to keep people in that community safe.

* * *

● (1510)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Professor Yoshua Bengio, co-recipient of the 2018 Alan M. Turing Award for conceptual and engineering breakthroughs that have made deep neural networks a critical component of computing.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Arthur Holder, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. government House leader if she could share with the House the business of the house for the remainder of this week and for next week.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this afternoon, we will resume debate at report stage of Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis. Tomorrow, we will start report stage of Bill C-97, budget implementation act, 2019, No. 1.

[*English*]

Currently, the intention is to have Monday, June 3 and Friday, June 7 as allotted days.

Next week, priority shall be given to Bill C-97, the budget implementation act; Bill C-93, concerning cannabis pardons; Bill C-92, an act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families; Bill C-88, concerning the Mackenzie Valley; and government business no. 29, the national climate emergency.

We will also give priority to bills coming back from the Senate.

Finally, I would like to mention that following Private Members' Business on Tuesday and Wednesday evening next week, we will have three hours set aside for speeches by members not seeking re-election in the next election.

These are our current intentions, but as we know, things can always change.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL RECORDS ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-93, An Act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-93, an act to provide no-cost, expedited record suspensions for simple possession of cannabis. I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton West.

I want to start by stating unequivocally that the Conservative Party and our Conservative leader have stated unequivocally that they have no intention of reopening or again making marijuana possession illegal. That train has left the station.

What we will be doing with respect to Bill C-45 is making corrections to the bill. Obviously, the legislation was enacted last year, and it has been several months since then. I remember saying at the time that although I did not support the bill for several reasons that I stated publicly, I had concerns with respect to issues at the border.

Government Orders

There were also issues that I thought were hypocritical within the bill, namely, with respect to possession of cannabis by young people in this country. I was also concerned that the police were not ready for the legislation to come out given the tools they needed for enforcement of the legislation's drug-impaired driving provisions. I have talked to a lot of young people in my riding, and I still have concerns about the broader issue of the effects of marijuana as gateway drug that could lead to other drugs.

Those concerns are still valid. They still exist. However, again, this is the law of the land now, and there is no changing that. It is certainly my intent to make sure that we do not roll back the clock on this piece of legislation and that it continues.

I will also say that in the year and a bit that I was critic for veterans affairs, I really came to understand the effects of marijuana on individuals and families, and how it has helped move people away from opioid use to marijuana use. I heard many times at the veterans affairs committee and as I crossed the country to speak to veterans and their families that opioids suppressed a lot of emotion and feelings among our veterans, but when they were able to switch to marijuana, it really helped open things up. There was less paranoia from marijuana than opioids. They were able to function socially. There were other functions that became a reality to these families, as well. I became a big proponent of medical marijuana for our veterans in my time as critic for veterans affairs.

I will also say that within my family, marijuana has become important for my cousin who suffers from epilepsy. There was a time when he was smoking medicinal marijuana, and it was helping him with respect to his seizures. He was seeing fewer of them.

Those experiences really caused me to rethink my position, particularly on the issue of medical marijuana. I am strong supporter and proponent of it. As I said earlier, it is not our intention to roll back this legislation. The toothpaste has left the tube, and we are not going to put it back in.

The legislation before us today is important, as well. Those who have been charged with simple possession are really being penalized. In my office, over the course of the last three-plus years I have been a member of Parliament, I have had members of the public come to talk to me about the impact that a simple possession charge has had on their life. They are unable to cross the border, for example, and there is the cost of having the charge suspended, and there is the impact of the charge on employment.

● (1515)

As the legislation stands, I am prepared to support it. However, I also understand there are flaws with it. Quite frankly, in many pieces of legislation introduced over the years by the Liberals, flaws have happened regularly. That is why the legislation went to committee.

Not only were there several amendments put forward by the Conservative side, some of which were rejected, some amendments were brought forward recently. At the end of the day, we are trying to ensure we get legislation in place that works for Canadians. There has been some concern with respect to this legislation.

Government Orders

By way of background, the bill proposes to make changes to the pardon process and waive the fee for Canadians with a past conviction for pot possession. For the people I dealt with, in several cases the fee was quite cumbersome. In many cases, they were low-income Canadians and members in my riding who simply could not afford to pay the fee. Therefore, that fee will be waived for a past conviction of pot possession.

The legislation was introduced in October 2018. The bill seeks to assist Canadians who were criminalized for something that is now legal, without that individual having to wait the usual time to pay the fee otherwise associated with a record suspension. The fact it is now legal is an important element of the legislation. Therefore, those who have a simple possession charge should be allowed to have an expedited record suspension.

Typically, offenders must wait five to 10 years, depending on the type of conviction, after they have served the sentence. The cost of applying is \$631. The legislation would amend the Criminal Records Act and references the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Narcotic Control Regulations and the National Defence Act.

As I said, as the bill went through committee, several concerns were highlighted. In particular, the Canadian Police Association was a witness. It suggested two amendments, calling for the Parole Board to retain limited flexibility and discretion to conduct investigations and to ensure the small number of applications from habitual offenders would be vetted. It would ensure that these individuals would not take advantage of a process that was clearly not intended for their case. That important amendment was put forward by the Canadian Police Association.

It also talked about restoring the Parole Board's power to make inquiries to determine the applicant's conduct since the date of conviction. That was an important aspect. Oftentimes, the behaviour and conduct of an individual can change quite rapidly and what was once simple possession, could manifest itself into other areas of criminal activity. The Parole Board, in the view of not just the police association but certainly the members on our side, needed to have that discretion and information available to it to determine further penalties or justification if required.

Of some of the notable amendments introduced to this bill, this one did pass. It allows for individuals to apply for a record suspension under the legislation, even with outstanding fines. This would add a financial burden due to loss of income. It also sets an unwanted precedent regarding the seriousness of the payment of the fines.

One amendment that was defeated was put forward by our colleagues on the Conservative side. It would have allowed for record suspension applications to be made through an online portal. With technology the way it is today, everything is moving to the digital age. We felt it was important to do that.

In wrapping up, we are going to support the bill at this stage, with some trepidation and concern, to ensure those Canadians with minor offences are able to get what they need out of the legislation.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

An issue was raised when we studied the bill at committee. I understand that the Conservatives are opposed to expungement. Although I do not necessarily agree with their reasons, I do understand them.

Having said that, we, at least the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, agree with them about one thing, namely that we heard a lot about an automatic mechanism. As things currently stand, in Bill C-93 and in the record suspension system itself, the burden rests with citizens.

Under normal circumstances, we can understand that it is up to citizens to obtain all the documents and pay other fees that are not necessarily in the federal government's control, but that must be paid to obtain certain documents. However, in a situation like this, which is meant to address an act that is now legal, it is rather unfair.

If I am not mistaken, his colleague from Yellowhead spoke at committee about the example of San Francisco, which is using artificial intelligence software to locate files.

Does my colleague agree that the government could have worked harder to implement an automatic process instead of making people run all over the place to obtain documents that are currently not well managed?

• (1525)

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

Yes, we can disagree on the legalization of marijuana, but we do agree on the fact that this will not be recriminalized.

I can tell the hon. member with some certainty and a great deal of respect for my colleague from Yellowhead, especially given his prior experience as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, that if he suggested it, it was a very good idea because of that experience. I did not sit in on those committee meetings and I am not able to speak specifically to the issue. However, if the member for Yellowhead did suggest that, then it would have been a good idea for an amendment to the legislation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we hear members on the opposition benches say that we have 17 or 18 days left to go. From day one, this government introduced Bill C-2 that gave a tax break to Canada's middle class and put an extra tax on the wealthiest 1%. Today, we are debating Bill C-93 that will have a profoundly positive impact on Canadians.

Would the member not agree that the number of sitting days left does not matter, that if we are afforded the opportunity to do good work for Canadians by passing legislation that will make a difference in their lives, we should all support and encourage that?

Government Orders

Mr. John Brassard: None of us is going to argue, Madam Speaker, that we should not be encouraging and supporting legislation to move forward. What is important in the House, this House of democracy, is that every member has an opportunity to speak to the legislation.

As I said during my speech, there is an interest in this in my riding. There is interest in my support of the legislation because of the fact that I have dealt with members of my community who have simple possession records that have disqualified them from certain things. I have, as their member of Parliament, helped them work through the system and get what they need to cross the border, for example, or not be handcuffed in employment opportunities where criminal background checks are required.

I, for one, am thankful, as the member of Parliament for Barrie—Innisfil, that I get to stand in this place and speak not just for my constituents and show my support for this issue, but that I am given the opportunity to do that. If members in the House want to speak to this issue, they should be given that opportunity.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be pleased to speak to Bill C-93. However, before I do, I want to congratulate all my fellow Albertans celebrating carbon tax freedom day. I also want to thank the new provincial government in Alberta for keeping its promise, which is something my friends across the way do not know. Maybe they can wait for the translation. It kept its campaign promise to repeal that bill. I also want to take this opportunity to wish our new premier, Premier Jason Kenney, a happy birthday.

Bill C-93 is a bill basically to provide no-cost expedited record suspensions for those who received a criminal record for pot possession. It proposes to make changes to the pardon process to waive the fees for past pot possession convictions. It will assist Canadians who were criminalized for possession of pot that is now legal, waive the usual wait time and also amend other acts.

We generally support the bill, but I have to agree with my colleague from the riding of Victoria, and it is a dad joke, when he called it half-baked. We will support the bill. It is not perfect, but it is a step forward. I am sure when the Conservatives are back in power, we will take the time to fix the weaknesses in the bill.

The Conservatives at committee put through several valid amendments, which I will discuss here.

First, we put forward an amendment to allow for record suspension applications to be made through an online portal to make it easier and most cost-effective for Canadians to apply. Unfortunately, that was voted down by the Liberals.

We put forward an amendment to allow for applicants whose records had been destroyed to sign an affidavit explaining their circumstances and swearing that they were eligible. This would bring procedural fairness, which was criticized by several witnesses. It was originally passed at committee and then unfortunately defeated by the Liberals at a later stage.

We put forward an amendment to reinstate the Parole Board's power to cause inquiries to be made to determine the applicant's conduct since the day of conduct. It was unfortunately defeated by the Liberals.

We also put forward an amendment with respect to the Parole Board's power to cause inquiries with respect to any factors that may be considered in determining whether ordering the record suspension would bring the administration of justice into disrepute. That was also defeated by the Liberals at committee.

Finally, we put forward an amendment to require that the Parole Board include in its annual report a review of the success rate of this legislation and the associated costs. This actually was approved.

The Canadian Police Association put forward an amendment, which we hope the Liberals will consider. This is the police asking that the Parole Board retain limited flexibility and discretion to conduct investigations and to ensure that the small number of applications from habitual offenders, not all, are vetted. This would ensure that these individuals would not take advantage of a process that was clearly not intended for their cases.

There are some fiscal implications of the bill.

The Department of Public Safety and the Minister of Public Safety think it is around \$2 million. They have not done any fulsome studies, but they guess it is around \$2 million. It is funny timing for the minister to say that, basically at the same time the Senate has forced through Bill C-81, the new backdoor gun registry bill.

I want people to think back to the Liberal government years ago and Allan Rock. The government said that the gun registration would only be \$2 million. It ended up well over a billion. It ended up costing Canadian taxpayers about \$1.3 billion. Of course, with this massive spending oversight, what did the Liberal government do? Much like it does today with all its other mistakes, errors and incompetence. It blames someone else. It blames the provinces and the gun owners themselves.

[Member spoke in Latin and provided the following translation:]

Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.

[Member spoke in Latin and provided the following translation:]

Beware of Liberals promising just \$2 million costs.

[English]

The government apparently has not done a proper study on the costs or timelines. The fee previously was \$631, which I understand had been moved up previously in 2012, on advice of bureaucrats who said that was the general cost of arranging the cost of the suspension. Now the government is saying it expects it to be \$250. Where did \$250 to the penny come from? We do not know because they have not done their homework on it.

Government Orders

It is currently five to 10 years to get the suspension, but the public safety minister said he could not offer a timeline as to when that would happen. He said that the critical point was not the cost or the actual timeline to help Canadians; it was getting the bill tabled. It was not the actual results helping Canadians, but it was the announcement of getting this bill tabled.

● (1530)

I have to ask, why now? The government has also said this is fundamental transformation. If it is critical and a fundamental transformation, I have to ask why the government waited until the final three weeks to put the bill through. Obviously it has been rushed through for political reasons.

I have looked at the departmental plans, and remember these are the plans that the minister signs and that are tabled in the House. This is not just nominal propaganda; these are actual documents tabled in the House, showing the government's plans for its departments.

These are the Liberals' targets for this year. The percentage of record suspensions that are processed within an established time frame is 95%, but the Minister of Public Safety says there is no time frame. Why would they commit to a target of 95%, table these numbers in the House and at the same time tell Canadians they do not know where they are going to help. I do not know if they do not have a clue, do not know what they are doing with their departmental plans or are just being disingenuous.

I also note that the departmental plans for 2018-19 for the Parole Board go out three years. When we factor in just 2% inflation, they are cutting 8.6% of the Parole Board's spending. This is in the Parole Board's departmental plans. These are actual plans, submitted in the House for long-range forecasts, which show they are cutting 8.6% of Parole Board funding.

When the member for Yellowhead submitted an amendment at committee, suggesting that people be able to apply online for this, members were told by the Parole Board that it could not offer it because of technical limitations. Apparently they do not have enough money to develop the technology, but at the same time we are going to allow this new process with up to 250,000 Canadians applying.

When we look at the Parole Board's departmental plans, which are also required to show labour going forward, they have not added a single body from the 2016-17 year. From last year to next year, they added five bodies. They are going to process perhaps up to 250,000 of these suspensions with no extra labour. Why do they think they can do all this extra work without providing extra bodies and while at the same time cutting 8.6% from the Parole Board budget going forward?

If getting it tabled is as critical as the minister says, and if it is so transformational, why has the government not provided for long-term funding in the departmental plans? It is not even mentioned in the public safety minister's own departmental plan. I remind members that all the pardons for the unjust criminalization of same-sex activities will be going through at the same time, yet with no extra bodies.

This is right from the Parole Board's departmental plan, signed off by the Minister of Public Safety. It says the volume of applications forecasted to be received this year or next year remains the same. We have all the applications from the unjust criminalization of those in same-sex activities all those years ago and potentially 250,000 Canadians who can receive a pardon for pot possession. The government has provided no extra resources and no extra staff, and has actually said there is not going to be any increase in applications over the previous year.

Again, I have to wonder how seriously the Liberal members are taking this. They say it is transformational and critical, but like so many other things, they leave it until the last second and rush it through. Are they pushing it through solely for their political agenda and for political reasons? The evidence shows they are. If they actually really cared about Canadians, they would have tabled this legislation at the same time they legalized pot. They would have taken the time to perhaps consider the other amendments put through by our party, the NDP or law enforcement members.

While we support the bill, it is another example of lazy legislation by the government.

● (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I disagree with the member across the way, which should come as no surprise. When we take a look at this legislation, much like many other pieces of legislation this government has been introducing virtually from day one, it is yet another piece of legislation that fulfills a campaign commitment that the Liberal Party made in the 2015 election.

However, I guess where we differ from the Conservative Party is that I believe, whether it is Bill C-2, which we brought in on day one of our mandate to give Canada's middle class a tax break while at the same time putting a special tax on Canada's wealthiest 1%, or Bill C-93, which we are debating today and which would allow for a pardon for individuals with convictions for simple possession of cannabis, these are all good, solid, sound pieces of legislation, and I am grateful.

The member is supporting this legislation, I understand. Would the member not agree that we should continue to look at ways in which we can pass legislation for every day that we sit. Would he agree that just because we are in the last 10 or 15 days, we do not have to stop passing legislation?

● (1540)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, everyone in the House supports legislation that is going to help Canadians, but the reality here is that this is another piece of legislation thrown together and pushed through at the last second without proper consultation. The Liberals' own minister did not mention it once in the Parole Board departmental plan; it is not mentioned in his own departmental plan that the minister signed off on; there is not one extra penny of resources for this, and there are no extra bodies to enable the Parole Board to deliver the services to Canadians. This all proves that the government, once again, is all about getting an A for announcement but a D for delivery.

Government Orders

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague is talking about the lack of planning that there seems to have been at the Parole Board. It is interesting, because we saw in committee, from both the minister and the officials, an acknowledgement that they did not want to do more because it would be too much work. Therefore, when the member talks about the numbers not anticipating an increase in requests for record suspensions, it is true.

If we look at Bill C-66, which had an application-based process for expungement for the historical injustice done to LGBTQ Canadians, that process has only been taken advantage of by seven people. Therefore, how are we to believe that the most marginalized Canadians, those whom the bill purports to help, are going to be able to acquire the documents they need and go through the other parts of the process?

At the end of the day, the government might be waiving the fee and saying that it is great and it is expedited, but ultimately these are individuals who get taken advantage of by bad actors who are out there offering bad advice for thousands of dollars, saying they are consultants and things of that nature.

The whole system is backwards and broken, not to mention the fact that we believe expungement would have been the best course of action, as did all the witnesses at committee. Does my colleague not agree that had the Liberals made it automatic, that would have gone at least some way in making this whole process work better, even if it required just a little more effort from these individuals at the Parole Board and the minister himself?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, the point about making it automatic was put forward by my colleague, the member for Yellowhead, who had a distinguished career in law enforcement, so I believe that is something the government should look at. However, this is the same government that so bungled the Phoenix pay system, so I worry about what system it would put forward.

However, it brings forward a good question about not being prepared, and I want to go back to the departmental plan. This is important. I mean, this is signed off by the Minister of Public Safety, and the very first item is the target for the Parole Board. We are talking about delivering suspensions to Canadians; the number one target is for the percentage of record suspensions or pardon decisions that are not revoked, and they have it at 95%. On the one hand, they are saying they want to help Canadians revoke suspensions, but in their own plan, their own marching orders to the department, the Liberals have put that they want 95% of suspensions not approved. It just shows again that the government has no clue what it is doing, and for Canadians, October cannot come soon enough.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise to speak to Bill C-93 this afternoon. Bill C-93 is the result of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry. I did not notice there was another name on the list, so this is my fault. If the member could hold onto his thoughts, I would like to recognize another member from a different party at this point.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am sorry for my colleague. I will try to quickly get through my speech so that he can also add to today's debate.

I am glad to speak on behalf of the people of Sherbrooke to Bill C-93, which is part of the larger issue of cannabis legalization. It is important to ensure that those who have been sentenced for simple possession can erase that from their criminal records. Now that cannabis is legal, I think everyone agrees that we must prevent all injustices committed against those who have criminal records because of this offence.

All of my colleagues have probably talked to constituents who have criminal records. They are well aware of the barriers these Canadians face. Although it is important for those who violate the Criminal Code to face consequences, it goes without saying that, when dealing with a product that was once illegal and has since been legalized, such an injustice should be acknowledged in an effort to remove the barriers these people face every day. I think everyone agrees on the principle of the matter. It is on the way to settle this injustice that we strongly disagree with the government.

Over the years, the Government of Canada has tried a number of times to address similar injustices in different ways. The NDP would have liked to see the government address the injustice related to the simple possession of cannabis by expunging the records of those affected. That is what was done in the case of other historic injustices where the Criminal Code contained unreasonable provisions that no longer made any sense.

Those who still have a criminal record for this offence deserve to have their record expunged, or permanently deleted, so that there is no trace of their conviction and it is as though the crime was never committed. We need to recognize this historic injustice related to an offence that is no longer an offence today. Simple possession of cannabis is now completely acceptable and legal in our society.

Obviously, the NDP's approach is completely different from the one the Liberal government took in Bill C-93. The Liberal government chose to suspend such records, but the word "suspend" means something completely different than the word "expunge" when it comes to the application and effect of this measure. The government decided to suspend the criminal records of those found guilty of simple possession of cannabis, and we do not think that is enough. Obviously, this approach will not work very well and will not do justice to those affected. This shows a lack of ambition on the part of the government.

As my colleague mentioned, the government decided to do the bare minimum. The minister himself said that automatic suspension was too complicated a procedure for him. Imagine how complicated it would be for him and his department to expunge a record.

Government Orders

Simply put, the Liberal government lacks ambition. It should have corrected this injustice well before the final sitting days of this Parliament. It could have included this in a bill or, at the very least, in a parallel process, because one cannot happen without the other. Legalization should have included a pardon and record suspension process, even if the records should ideally be expunged. All of this should have been done when we decided to legalize cannabis, given how important an issue it is.

● (1545)

Clearly, the government failed and it is trying to remedy the situation and do everything it can at the last minute to satisfy the many voters affected by this, who also happen to be our constituents. I have seen some of them in Sherbrooke. Just last month, I heard testimony from someone who was interested in the issue because it affected her personally. She was disappointed by the Liberal government's approach, which only implements a system for record suspensions, despite a very clear proposition in the form of a bill introduced by our colleague from Victoria. All the government had to do was pass it and everything would have been fine. Instead, it chose to stay the course and do the bare minimum. The government wants to do the bare minimum. Clearly, there is a lack of ambition.

I was reading a quote from a witness who said in committee that it was better than nothing. However, he also said that better than nothing was not a lot to ask from Parliament. We expect Parliament to do the best possible, to do everything in its power to make the situation the best possible, not to do the bare minimum and for it to be better than nothing. That is not what Canadians expect from us and our work. In light of the testimony heard at committee, the government's current approach is very disappointing. Despite all the evidence and witness testimony that it heard, it remains dead set on maintaining its approach and is unwilling to listen to anything or fix the situation. I am truly disappointed to have to say that I am opposing this bill since it is not the solution that should have been considered and brought forward by the Liberal government. The government got it wrong.

People who currently have a criminal record will continue to be marginalized. Even though this is free of charge, people may not have the capacity, the resources or the financial means to see the process through for getting their criminal record suspended. As I was saying before, the government decided that this would not be done automatically. The people involved will have to go through a process, file their application and maybe even submit biometric data to satisfy the many requirements related to getting a pardon or a record suspension. Marginalized people who may not even be aware of these changes are going to be left out. Some people do not read the news every morning and might not know that is available to them. If the government was truly ambitious and serious about marijuana legalization, it would have at least made this automatic, since it is not opting for expungement of criminal records, which was our preference.

I am really disappointed because I expected more. I expected a genuine desire on the government's part to correct this injustice. There is no reason why people who do not apply for a post-legalization suspension after Bill C-93 is adopted—if it is adopted—should continue to be saddled with a criminal record. The crime they committed is no longer a crime. Society accepts it now. This is a

gross injustice, an injustice that will persist because the government did not take the right approach.

Some of our constituents, like the one I met back home in Sherbrooke, are still vulnerable. These are people who need a helping hand from the government. They are still outsiders, still marginalized, and they are the ones we should be helping the most.

I felt it was important to add my voice to the debate and explain why I have to vote against this bill today. The government has clearly made a bad decision and is heading in the wrong direction with this. What a huge disappointment for me and for many of my Sherbrooke constituents.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, going back to 2015, we heard the debate on the cannabis issue. I was surprised when I heard the leader of the NDP campaigning, and I imagine the member was as well, on decriminalization. We would be in a much worse situation than we are now. We would not even be addressing these issues of pardons versus expungement and that sort of thing.

I am wondering if he could go back to 2015 and explain why he supported that but at the same time is criticizing the government's approach on this particular bill.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I do not know why my colleague is bringing up a debate from 2015, when this is 2019 and the situation has evolved. Today I am speaking about Bill C-93, which is before me. As a parliamentarian, my job is to speak to what is in front of me, and today Bill C-93 is in front of me, and it is, quite simply, a step in the wrong direction. The government has made a mistake. The debate has evolved since 2015. The government legalized marijuana, but it should have created a pardon process at the same time.

I do not know why my colleague wants to dredge up the past and talk about debates that are over. We debated the legalization of cannabis for hours in the House. I do not know why he is bringing that up during our debate on Bill C-93. All he has to do is read the House of Commons Debates. All of the members and all of the parties have already spoken about the legalization of cannabis, either during the last campaign or in the House. If he wants to go backwards and dredge up that debate again, he can do so online.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague always speaks so eloquently and pragmatically in this place. It is admirable.

I am told that indigenous people in Regina are nine times more likely to have a record for cannabis possession than non-indigenous people. In Vancouver, they are seven times more likely than non-indigenous people. My colleague, the member for Victoria, has called that constructive discrimination.

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When we in this place, as members of Parliament, seek an apartment, we have to sign on the dotted line as to whether we have a criminal conviction. Imagine what some of our interns must face. There are tens of thousands of Canadians who have criminal records for possession of small amounts of marijuana.

The government's argument is that it is against the Canadian Human Rights Act to discriminate against people who have a pardon. That is balderdash. It is bad enough that the government is requiring everyone to apply for a pardon. People will then have to hire a lawyer if they are denied being able to volunteer for the Boys and Girls Club, cross the border or even get an apartment, because they would have to honestly say, even though they had a record suspension, that they had a criminal conviction but had received a pardon.

I wonder if my colleague could speak to that. Here we are, late in the day, a year after this has become law, and the government is going to make people apply for a pardon, which is close to valueless.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, that is the crux of the problem. The government's fundamental mistake with Bill C-93 was choosing not to go with automatic suspension.

The vulnerable and marginalized people that my colleague mentioned are nine times more likely to be arrested for behaviour that would be completely ignored by law enforcement if it were committed by people in a non-marginalized group. Indigenous peoples, such as the Inuit and the Métis, are much more likely to be arrested for the same behaviour.

Marginalized people do not have the means or ability to undertake the record suspension process and meet all of the requirements. For example, in some cases biometric data must be provided. What is more, the services of a lawyer or consultant can cost a fortune. They cannot afford to pay for that. At the very least, they deserve an automatic pardon, but the government is still refusing to give it to them. That is shameful.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not often rise in the House to speak, but Bill C-93 is a very interesting piece of legislation. In all honesty, I think Bill C-93 came as a result of good intentions. The government saw a problem it had created because of some previous legislation and said that it had to fix it.

We should go back to the original issue. The original issue was that the Liberals rushed a piece of legislation. They tried desperately to meet self-imposed deadlines that they should not have made. The Liberals made promises that, in all honesty, they realized they could not keep. Then, to try to keep the promises, they crafted some very poor legislation. Of course, I am talking about the bill that legalized marijuana.

As some of my colleagues have said, the jury is still out. I do not feel that the jury is out, but some people say that the jury is still out on whether marijuana is a gateway drug. I have some personal experiences in my family, and I would argue that marijuana certainly

is a gateway drug. I do not think we are seeing the full ramifications of the legalization of marijuana.

We are discussing Bill C-93 this afternoon because the government is trying to come up with a quick fix for some flawed legislation to legalize marijuana. The end result would be a brand new category of record suspensions, which could not be easily revoked and could be granted automatically without any insight into an individual's history.

Let us imagine a person charged with possession of marijuana. For the poor innocent teenager who is caught smoking marijuana and charged, I am 100% in favour of striking that off his record. However, the people who are repeatedly charged, or the people who plead down maybe from a charge of selling marijuana to a charge of simple possession, I do not think should automatically be granted a pardon.

It is a good thing there is an election in October. Hopefully, what will happen in October is that there will be a change in government. The new government will be able to address some of the flaws we are seeing in Bill C-45 and Bill C-93. Hopefully, the Conservatives will form that new government, and we will bring some common sense and some pragmatic ideas on how to deal with this unfortunate happening.

In essence, we support expedited pardons. We think it is a good idea. There is a little good news in this legislation. I am not part of the committee, but I understand that while the Liberals did not accept all of our amendments, two were accepted that helped to improve the bill's procedural fairness. They would require the Parole Board to include a review of the program in its annual report. If the Conservatives are elected in October, and if there is any justice, we will be elected in October, we will be able to review this, because after a year, this would be subject to review.

Everyone makes mistakes. We realize that the government made a mistake when it legalized marijuana. However, we are supposed to learn from our mistakes. We try to teach our children to learn from their mistakes. We should learn from our own mistakes.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, in his rush to meet self-imposed political deadlines, failed to act to adequately address the many concerns of municipalities, law enforcement, employers, scientists and doctors about this cannabis legislation. I am here to say that in my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, we are feeling the ramifications of legalized marijuana.

• (1605)

In my riding, I have had police officers stop me and say that they do not know what to do with this. They are not sure about the equipment they were given to test whether folks are impaired, or whatever. It is the same with employers. Employers are shaking their heads and asking how they are going to deal with this terrible legalization of marijuana. They are telling me that people are going out during their breaks, smoking up and coming back to work. It is legal, so what is an employer to do about it? People are very confused about this.

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Now what do we do? We would add to the problem with Bill C-93. If the government had taken its time and not had its self-imposed deadline at all costs, and instead done Bill C-45 correctly, we would not have this problem. Police officers, employers and all the labour unions told telling us how to do Bill C-45 properly; there was a lot of input. The government had to get it done and now we have ended up trying to fix the problem with Bill C-93.

As I said, Bill C-93 is well-intentioned and has some good features. We agree that a person who just had one charge should not have it on his record, and we would like to facilitate its removal.

From what members of the committee tell me, the government would not listen to suggestions. I cannot understand why it would not listen to the suggestion made on behalf of the Canadian Police Association, which I believe is a reasonable one to improve the bill, namely, calling for the Parole Board to retain limited flexibility and discretion to conduct investigations and to ensure that the small number of applications by habitual offenders are vetted. This would have ensured that these individuals did not take advantage of a process that is clearly not intended for their cases.

The Canadian Police Association deals with this issue day in and day out. It has the experience and we should be listening to it. That was a wonderful amendment. I wish somebody from the government side would explain why it has no intention of including that amendment in the legislation. The amendment is so reasonable and would be so helpful, yet it was defeated at committee where the Liberals have the majority.

There were other amendments that I understand were also rejected. One of them was to restore the power to make inquiries to determine the applicant's conduct since the date of conviction. Let us say a young person made a mistake when they were 15 years old and have not had a problem since. I could understand our pardoning that person very easily. However, what if that person has had a terrible record of breaking and entering, selling marijuana and all of these other kinds of things? Would we still give that individual a pardon? Under this proposed legislation, we would not have any choice because the government did not agree to this amendment.

The bottom line is that I will be supporting this legislation, but it is not the way it should be. The truth of the matter is that the government should have taken its time. Why did we get this piece of legislation in the House at the last minute? It is because the government was too busy with other priorities and it did not seem to matter. All of a sudden, now it wants to ram this through at the last minute. I do not think that is the way this place should operate.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear the legalization of cannabis referred to as a mistake that we need to learn from. However, we have been assured by the Conservatives that they would never re-criminalize it. I am curious about his mention of cannabis as a gateway drug; that is interesting. We have heard it before.

The World Health Organization came out with a study that talked about the most dangerous drug in the world, which is alcohol.

What would the hon. member do to crack down on alcohol, this evil gateway drug, or tobacco, or anything else?

Prohibition of cannabis clearly did not work under the previous Stephen Harper government or any government before that. Will it work on anything else he wants to bring forward?

• (1610)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Madam Speaker, the member opposite says that I stated the legislation was a mistake. I want to clarify for the record that I did not say the legislation was a mistake. I said the way the government rolled it out was a horrible mistake. The government did it too quickly and did not listen to any advice from any organization across Canada. That is why we have this problem. The Liberals are trying to work on the margins to save this problem.

We all know about gateway drugs. The member only has to have one person in his family get involved with marijuana and then more serious drugs to realize how much of a gateway drug it is.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, the hon. member keeps coming back to this three-year process being rushed through. The hon. minister went through significant consultations as the parliamentary secretary at that time. The minister came to my Niagara region to meet municipal officials, public safety advocates and first responders. He also met with the senior leadership of the Niagara Regional Police Service. He met with everyone throughout the community, including school boards. This happened across the country and it took three years.

The Conservatives never wanted to see this happen. Does the member really consider the three years it took as rushing this through?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Madam Speaker, the member says there was all of this planning for three years. I have the budget for the Parole Board and there is not 5¢ in it to deal with this issue. If there were so much planning over the last three years, one would think there would at least be a nickel or so in the Parole Board's budget to deal with this problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I did a survey in a high-school class. Alcohol has been legal in Canada for years. I asked these 16-year-olds how many of them had consumed alcohol in the past year. All of them raised their hands. I asked the same question about cannabis before it was legalized and only four or five of them raised their hands.

Legalizing cannabis does not necessarily mean that fewer young people will use it. We saw that with alcohol. Now the Liberals are making the same mistake with marijuana.

Does my colleague agree with me?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague.

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[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to speak to the government's proposal to provide pardons for people who have criminal records for simple possession of marijuana accrued prior to the legalization of marijuana. We felt that the legislation that legalized marijuana was something that the government could probably have done a better job at overall, but we did support it ultimately because we thought it was time to move on from the approach to marijuana this country has had for a long time. We believed that making it a product that could be regulated and avoiding situations in which people's lives have been being ruined over simple pot possession was a good thing overall.

The question that comes up now is what do we do with the over 400,000 Canadians who have records for simple possession, some of whom got those just prior to marijuana's becoming legal, versus the people who now may have the same small amount of pot in their possession and who do not have criminal records? There is a question of fairness for those people who have extant records for something that is now completely legal and not a problem.

We know that criminal records present all sorts of barriers. They present barriers to people being able to access housing in some cases. They present barriers for people to be able to volunteer in their community and support local organizations that depend on volunteers. They present barriers to travel, which can be important for employment purposes, particularly if they present a barrier to travel to the United States. It is very clear that authorities may ask at the border whether people have smoked marijuana. If the answer is "yes", they may be turned away. Not only can that be a problem for people who have a job that requires them to cross the border, but it can also be a problem for people to get a job in the first place. We know that criminal records, even for something like simple pot possession have been and are barriers to people getting employment. When we talk about wanting people to be able to get a job and support themselves, it does not make sense that they would not be able to do that because they were caught with a gram or two of pot at some point in the eighties or nineties, or even a couple of years ago when it was still illegal.

Part of the idea behind the bill is to try to do away with that. The question is whether or not it uses all of the right tools at the government's disposal and whether or not it is going to succeed. This is where we think the government has seriously failed to adopt an approach that will get the job done, not just get it done in the right way for the people affected, but also in a way that is most efficient and cost effective overall. The government has proposed to try to reduce some of the burden of having that simple pot possession charge on people's records by expediting a pardon, sometimes referred to as a "record suspension".

There are a few problems with that. One is that we are talking about a lot of people and an offence that really is not very serious. This approach requires that people initiate this process themselves, which means that they have to know that it is available to them. Then they have to initiate it themselves. They may need legal advice along the way, which can be expensive and, frankly, out of reach for certain people, including some of the most marginalized.

When we talk about people being affected by simple pot possession charges, I think we have to acknowledge that in many cases we are talking about some of the most marginalized people in the country, particularly racialized people. We know that the statistics for convictions in the black and indigenous communities, for example, show that the rate of conviction is far higher for them than other communities and racial groups within Canada. We are talking about marginalized people, and yet this process will require Canadians who have those pot possession charges to have the resources to be able to seek legal advice, particularly if they do not get a favourable decision in the first place.

It does not make sense from that point of view. What would have made more sense is an automated and automatic process so that people do not have to apply. They would not then have to know this were available to them if they wanted it, but that the government would know that if somebody has one of these charges, they would no longer apply to them.

• (1615)

There is another problem with record suspensions besides the cumbersome process. However, on the point of the cumbersome process, I would add that the Standing Committee on Public Safety recently released a unanimous report, so all parties agreed, saying that the pardon process in Canada is needlessly convoluted, takes a long time and overall is not going well. Now we are talking about over 400,000 people in the country who have simple pot possession charges who may want to be accessing that system, adding a further burden. As the member for Edmonton West rightly pointed out, and he may ask me a question about this afterward, if we go through the departmental plan and the budget, there are no additional resources being allocated for this projected increase in the demand for pardons.

It is needlessly cumbersome. It is going to take time. It requires these people to know about the option and to take the initiative themselves. They may have to pay for legal advice. At the end of the day, if they are asked pointedly, whether it is at the border or by an employer or someone else, whether they have such a conviction, they still have to answer yes, because although a pardon removes the charge from the most commonly used database, that conviction, that record, remains in a number of other databases. That information may be shared with other countries. It may be shared in other ways between government agencies or police services. Therefore, there is still the possibility that the existing record will be shared in some way, shape or form that prevents people from travelling or gaining employment.

What my colleague from Victoria has rightly proposed as the alternative in his private member's bill is an expungement regime. If the government were to expunge the record, it would actually be gone. It means that if people were asked whether they had ever been convicted for simple pot possession, they could truthfully say no, because that is the power of expungement.

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In this place, certain things are sometimes stipulated. Even though it is just after 4 p.m., if the House deemed it 8 p.m., we could adjourn. The House can do that. In the same way, an expungement essentially deems the offence never to have occurred, which is not true of a pardon. If we truly want to make it the case that people who are guilty of simple pot possession do not ever have to worry again about what that charge, whether it is from the eighties, nineties or a couple of years ago, will mean for the rest of their lives, the way to do that is through expungement.

It is frustrating that the government did not choose that approach. It is still unclear to me why it did not choose to go down that road. Frankly, I have not heard a reason I find compelling. To be honest, I am not sure who gets the win in this either. I do not know who benefits from having an expedited pardon regime that will really only do half the job and present real administrative challenges for the Parole Board, versus expungement, which would not produce those same challenges or require extra resources and would do a job better for Canadians who are affected by a conviction for simple pot possession. If this option is cheaper, more efficient and would get the job done in a way that expedited pardons would not, I do not understand why the government is not interested in going down that road. That is why it is very difficult for me to support this. It would not do the job. It would cost more money. That sounds like bad policy when we say it out loud. Unless I hear a compelling reason why expedited pardons are better than expungement, I do not know why we would not do it that way.

It is not for lack of forewarning. Right from go, when the government first introduced its legislation to legalize marijuana, the NDP brought up the need to deal with all the people with existing convictions who will be in a position of fundamental unfairness. Someone who did the exact same thing after the law was passed does not have any problem. Canada has now said that it is legal and not a problem, yet there are people who did it just a couple of years ago who are in trouble. The government knew this was coming down the pike. We asked it to deal with it properly in the legalization package. It did not. I wonder why we need to do something that is going to cost more and be less effective for those who need it.

• (1620)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the discussion we had in previous debates in the House regarding expungement had to do with the complications that would affect people who have records in the United States if there was no match up of paperwork or a paper trail when they crossed the border. If expungement took their records out of the system, there would be a disconnect between the legal records in Canada and the legal records in the United States.

Could the hon. member comment on expungement for travellers going to the United States and how that might be a risk for them, as they would have to get additional pardons to get across the border?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, first of all, if we want to make a case for people not getting in trouble at the border, then their not having a criminal record in Canada would be the right start. The proper approach would be to advocate to our counterparts in the United States to also delete the records, letting them know that as cannabis is now legal in Canada, and as these people have not, in the

eyes of Canadian law, committed any crime, they should not be in any U.S. database for having committed a crime in Canada.

That was part of our frustration in regard to not only USMCA negotiations but other international negotiations between Canada and the United States. This issue was not being brought up, and the Liberal government did not get any guarantee or any reassurance from the United States government that it would not unfairly penalize Canadians who either have a record or have simply smoked pot.

We think the United States policy on this is completely unreasonable, and the answer is not to try to cohere better with the unreasonable policy of the Americans. The answer is to have a clear, consistent policy that makes sense here and then advocate for our American counterparts to reflect that.

The current plan is a sign of the attitude of contrition we so often get from the Liberals when it comes to the United States.

• (1625)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague is probably the only person other than me who actually reads departmental plans. I am pretty sure that the Minister of Public Safety does not read them.

The member commented on the lack of resources put forward for this. The minister figures that about \$2.5 million will be spent. That works out to about 2% of eligible Canadians who can actually ask for a suspension.

Does the member believe that perhaps the Liberals are just not taking this seriously? Perhaps they will make this process incredibly difficult for average Canadians. Why does the member think they have only put aside enough resources to help just 2% of Canadians affected by pot convictions?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, it is somewhat perplexing, and it is something we have seen with respect to other issues, such as pay equity. The Liberals have said that they will move ahead with pay equity in the federal civil service, finally, after being told many times that it is something they are required to do, but then there is no money for it in the budget. If they really mean it that they are going to do something, they have to resource it. It does not make sense to not put the money in the budget.

This raises the concern that we will see a backlog. People who are entitled to this will not be able to access it. That is just as much an issue of justice as not being able to access it under the law. It is great if the law changes, but if we do not resource things, then the rights and possibilities we have under the law are not meaningful and real. Of course, in cases where resources are required, what is an ordinary Canadian going to do?

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The Liberals could have proceeded with a mass expungement of records, in a more efficient way that needed less money, and not subjected people to a process that required them to apply and go to the Parole Board, which we know is already overburdened. This could have been done automatically. Doing it automatically would have been a way to do this a lot more cheaply. Not only would that be okay from the point of view of allocating fewer resources now, it would mean that overall, the process would be cheaper for Canadians. That makes sense. Where we can save money, we should save money. This is a way I believe they could have, and they are not.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am joining the debate on Bill C-93 today, and the clock has been pushed out. I was originally supposed to speak some time ago, but as happens often in the House, we were delayed. Therefore, I am delayed in my phone call with my friend Wolf Solkin, a 96-year-old veteran at Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue in Quebec. If Wolf is watching, I will be calling him after these remarks.

Wolf would inspire all Canadians. He is 96. He helped liberate the Netherlands. Now he is an advocate for veterans and his comrades at Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, which is a hospital I helped transfer to the Quebec government as minister. However, the service is not living up to the standards we expected. We are trying to work on Wolf's concern and solve that, so I will be with Wolf in a moment.

The only time I dealt with cannabis as veterans minister was as a form of treatment for veterans. With Bill C-93, we are looking at the expedited record suspension route for simple possession of cannabis, but this is actually an example of another fumbled element of the cannabis legalization from the government. As the Liberals approach the election in the fall, that is literally the only issue I think the Prime Minister can look to and say that he kept his promise.

However, we have actually had to deal with the aftermath of rushed and often ill-conceived timelines and consequential public policy moves with respect to the Prime Minister's election promise. This is an example. That is not to say that we are going to turn back the clock when the Conservatives form government in the fall. Marijuana will remain legal, but we will try to address some of the public safety concerns, such as some of the concerns that pediatricians, the Canadian Medical Association and others have had.

It may have come as some surprise to some of the Liberal MPs who were not here in the last Parliament that I, and many MPs in the Conservative ranks, including my colleague from Kootenay, David Wilks, a former RCMP officer, supported the legalization step of decriminalization. It was not a full legalization rushed in this fashion. It was a ticketing approach by law enforcement, which the Liberals suggested would be a big problem, but it actually would not. In many ways, it was an unofficial way law enforcement could deal with it while still keeping the substance a controlled drug and illegal and keeping our international treaties and things like that in line. That was the approach many of us were advocating, because it was time to look at a new approach with respect to cannabis. Many of us recognized that. We did not want to see serious criminal sanctions for young people, but how could we also still talk about the public health risks associated with this drug? It is a minor drug with fewer complications and harms than many others, but let us also not kid

ourselves. There are public policy and public health challenges with it. Therefore, I want to thank my former colleague, David Wilks, and other people for a serious discussion on this.

We are not going to turn back the clock. The leader of the Conservative Party has said that clearly, but we will try to address some of the concerns that have been raised on border issues by the CBSA, on public health and particularly on youth and the impact of cannabis on the developing brain. I was a little disappointed, personally, as a father and someone who has delved into this issue for many years in Parliament, that there was not any guidance with respect to the age of 18 or perhaps a higher age. These are the debates we should probably have rather than the rushed, often misguided public policy we have seen with the government.

I am going to raise a few concerns I have with the bill. Nothing shows the poor planning of the government more than how many pieces of substantive legislation it has on the docket with literally fewer than 20 days of Parliament left. The Liberals now have us sitting literally until midnight every day to try to rush through things that they say are priorities, such as Bill C-93, such as child welfare for indigenous Canadians and a whole range of other bills. That shows that they are not a priority, when after four years, they are in the final weeks of Parliament.

The main public policy concern I have is that the bill would actually create a new category of record suspension. Where there is a normal sort of pardon record suspension process, this would accelerate it and have no cost for a certain provision.

• (1630)

I do not think Liberals have raised a public policy rationale for why that is done, particularly when they defeated the bill from my colleague and friend in the NDP, the member for Victoria, on expungement. There were a lot of Conservatives who voted for the NDP bill and wanted more of a discussion of expungement within the context of record suspension. Why? It is because one of the major problems with the Liberals' rush on marijuana has been the border issue.

Canadians may not realize, and this is acute in places like Windsor and British Columbia, that if they are asked by an ICE agent, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent in the United States, whether they smoke marijuana, they can be barred from entry to the United States. If they need to go to the United States for work, that hurts their economic liberty and job prospects. Even with President Obama, the Prime Minister's bromance friend, as he has described it, the government could not get an assurance that ICE would take that one screening question off its list. That would have been a modest proposal.

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In light of that, expungement is actually a superior route, because a record suspension is not recognized by the United States. If we are talking about creating a special category, we should have a wider discussion of expungement because of the risk that the U.S. would not agree. Maybe the Prime Minister brought it up with the vice-president today. He certainly did not bring up a whole range of issues, but that is still a big miss, because people's liberty could be impacted. The member for Victoria put forward some very thoughtful proposals. He is a member who will be missed for the public policy input he has.

A concern the Canadian Police Association has raised, which is very on point, is the fact that there is no ability to distinguish simple possession cases that were initially more serious cases that had been pleaded down to simple possession. In criminal cases where the Crown pleaded down a charge to simple possession, at the time the Crown did that because there would still be a criminal charge and a criminal record associated with this, so the Crown was satisfied with pleading down the charge, saving the judicial system money and that sort of thing. We should probably try to pull those cases out of a one-size-fits-all approach to record suspension.

A lot of us want expungement or some sort of ability to recognize that since marijuana is legal now, people's job prospects and other things should not be encumbered by a criminal record. However, we should also say that if the Crown could really only guarantee a conviction on simple possession, but the person was culpable or guilty of many other things and there was a plea deal, those cases are very different from the typical case of a young person or someone not causing any harm, not dealing, not doing any associated criminal acts and being caught for simple possession. This rushed one-size-fits-all approach does not allow that to be distinguished, and that is what the Canadian Police Association has raised as a serious concern.

As we are in the final days of Parliament, the Liberals crushed the expungement bill of my colleague from Victoria getting to committee. We really have not had a serious discussion of the issues underlying expungement versus record suspension and why the government seems to suggest that expungement is open for other former crimes from the past. We are really glad to see some of the past violations for sexuality and things like that removed and expunged. That is good, but we should also have a debate on why that route was not chosen in this case, because of the impacts on people's ability to travel to the United States. Until the government deals with that issue bilaterally with the United States, that will remain something Canadians should be very concerned about.

I have a final few words about the rush here. The Canadian Medical Association, physicians, pediatricians, the provinces themselves and law enforcement have all asked at various times in the government's marijuana agenda for input and slowing down the process. After 100 years of one way, we should make sure we get the balance right. I can assure Canadians of one thing: We will try to get the balance right when the Conservatives are on that side of the floor in the fall.

• (1635)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have heard a few Conservative members talking about the rush on Bill C-45. It was three years from the time of the election and

commitment. There were consultations across the country, including in my own community in Niagara, which is four ridings. We heard from mayors, fire chiefs, the police chief and senior officials at the police station in Niagara Falls. We had a meeting there. We met with the District School Board of Niagara. We met with Public Health. That was just one consultation in Niagara. I know the hon. minister did that across the country.

How can the hon. member stand there and call Bill C-45 a rush after three years? It sounds like, after 100 years of prohibition, Conservatives would like to wait another 100 years for this change to happen. If the member could explain how three years is a rush, I would like to hear it.

• (1640)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comment from the member for St. Catharines, because it allows us to remember what his leader said when he was running for office.

Let us remember that most of the Liberal promises have since been broken or stepped away from. A critical one is that the Prime Minister said he was going to respect provincial autonomy and respect the provinces. In this area, several provinces asked the Prime Minister to slow down.

Collaborative federalism, which the Prime Minister promised in opposition, was not respected, whether it came to the carbon tax or whether it came to marijuana. I believe both the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario asked him to slow down. The premiers asked because they were putting the retail structure in place. We now have huge shortages, not enough supply and demand. No one was ready. We had communities, probably including his, saying that they did not want retail stores. Municipalities and provinces said to slow down.

However, there was no collaborative federalism as promised. "Sunny ways" has turned to "My way or the highway". The member knows that. He has probably thought at times about joining the Liberal ethical caucus, over in that corner, who have not liked the way the Prime Minister has conducted himself in terms of all issues.

If a province, one of our partners in Confederation, asks the government to slow down a bit on a critical piece of public health and public safety, the Prime Minister should respect that. This one did not.

Government Orders

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member across the way and also the member for St. Catharines for pointing out the consultations that happened on Bill C-45, which is not exactly the legislation we are debating. However, I can echo that we had consultations in Guelph, Wellington and Kitchener-Waterloo. The Waterloo Regional Police Service was there. There was a lot of work that went into the legislation.

Now we are talking about how to make it fair for people who were convicted under a previous crime, and the idea of expungement. I asked the hon. member from the NDP a question on expungement. When people are going to the States, where there is an existing criminal record on file, if we remove the file in Canada, there would be a disconnect between the two countries. The member's answer was that we should go to an expungement regime in the United States, as if we could enforce that from Canada.

Would the hon. member across the way comment on the idea of expungement and the negative effects it would have on Canadians travelling to the United States, where the regime not only does not have expungement but also considers this a crime in that country?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, the member for Guelph is highlighting why we need a proper debate instead of the Liberal whip saying no to the MP for Victoria.

Actually, expungement is the superior process. It is the record suspension that is not recognized in the United States, particularly because the government provided information sharing at an unparalleled level with the United States, including entry and exit information and the ability for U.S. customs officials to search Canadians on Canadian soil, unprecedented powers given to the United States by Canada.

What did we get in return? Nothing. It has been a one-way relationship between the United States and the Prime Minister, whether with President Obama or President Trump.

We should be looking at the simplest route. The member for Guelph should tell the public safety minister that the simplest route is to get immigration and customs in the United States to take the marijuana screening questions out of the border questions. The Liberals could not even get that assurance.

Do we think they will get the U.S. to respect modernizing the safe third country agreement? We cannot get anything done under the Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Today, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-93, which aims to provide record suspensions for simple possession of marijuana.

I would like us to focus on the word “suspension” and the effect said suspension could have when people try to cross the border. During border controls, if American customs officers do background checks on Canadians and find record suspensions for simple possession of marijuana, I wonder what value they would have when compared to expungement, which would certainly be more effective.

As everyone knows, many Canadians have this type of criminal record and so cannot travel to the United States. That may be the reason why a major lobby was pushing the Liberal government to provide record suspensions, which it did in a clear attempt to win votes, seeing as there are only three weeks left in the 42nd Parliament. I am not really sure that this will result in more services or freedoms for Canadians abroad.

I would like to come back to Bill C-45, which is what led us to Bill C-93.

The 42nd Parliament will no doubt go down in history as the one that made legalizing marijuana the top priority. It was done under a Liberal government. I am still wondering why it was considered more important than the economy, the environment and our children's future.

When I made the decision to run as a Conservative candidate in the 2006 election, I was hoping to leave the world a better place for future generations through public policy. This hope is what really motivated me, because I felt that, in my riding, which was a Bloc Québécois riding, there was not enough collaboration with the federal government, and there were not enough federal programs and services. I also thought that the Liberal government of the day was undermining the Canadian economy through its interventions in other countries. These interventions were sometimes hard to understand, and they were impeding international trade. I owned a small business at the time, and I exported hay. Some of the decisions made by the Canadian government were having practically immediate repercussions on my American customers.

That said, I do wonder why such a powerful lobby had such a strong influence on the Liberal Party. When I say lobby, I mean market. The market for marijuana, for drugs, is worth billions. I never understood why the Liberal members did not brush off this powerful lobby.

Political parties often make policy decisions at biennial conventions. They make decisions for the future based on the votes of delegates from each riding and province. Some 2,000 to 3,000 delegates present policies to be voted on.

I do not understand how a party with 2,000 delegates managed to adopt policies to legalize marijuana. Nevertheless, that is what happened. The Liberal Party's hands were tied by its own policies. The Liberals voted, and they kept their promise.

At the last Liberal convention, they also promised to legalize all drugs, which I find quite concerning. They kept their promise to legalize marijuana, and now they must keep their promise to legalize all drugs. It makes me worry about our country's future.

Government Orders

•(1645)

I have always believed that we enter federal politics to make things better for future generations. In my humble opinion, things have taken a disastrous turn. When we regain power and return to the other side of the House, we will have an unprecedented mess to clean up. The Liberal Party has been running amok for four years, and the bills will start to come in. The credit card is maxed out. The government has not started paying it off, and it is going to saddle future generations with this debt, keeping society from moving forward.

We deal with very important matters, and Canadians will have to choose a vision for the future of their country. The Liberal Party tried to impose a vision on Canadians with its promises, but Canadians will remember that, of all the promises made by the Liberals in 2015, the only one they kept was legalizing marijuana. That is the only promise that led to major change in our country, but not for the better.

Today, we are beginning to feel the effects of that change. I recently spoke with the chief of police in my riding. He talked to me about the problems and adverse effects of cannabis legalization in our high schools, including an increase in consumption. We do not yet have the data to prove this, but it is being compiled. It is not legal cannabis consumption that is on the rise in our high schools.

A study published this week in the media reported that a teen's first use of marijuana unfortunately leaves permanent cognitive damage. A father's greatest hope for his children is that they will grow up in a healthy environment so they have more choice and opportunities, which must lead to a better life.

I am 55 years old and I still have some years left. Throughout my life, I have seen people from my generation grow up. Those who used marijuana did not necessarily get the opportunity to achieve their full potential. It can be the difference between earning \$14, \$28 or \$50 an hour. We are practically all equal at the start, but on life's journey, some people stand out, others stay where they are and there are those whose lives fall apart. All too often, what they share is an addiction to illicit substances such as marijuana and possibly hard drugs.

This week, one of my constituents called me in a panic, once again because of marijuana and other drugs. She was looking for her daughter, whom she had not seen in a month. She is well aware that her daughter uses drugs—she admitted it. She is desperately looking for her daughter, who is in a city somewhere. When people disappear like this, it has a lasting impact on all their family members and friends. Unfortunately, this is happening more and more, because of the decisions this government made under the influence of a powerful lobby seeking only to legalize its market.

•(1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier today I indicated that we look at the legislation and do a comparison. From day one, I have made numerous references to Bill C-2, which has given the middle-class of Canada a substantial tax break while at the same time increasing the

tax level on Canada's 1% wealthiest. Today we are debating Bill C-93, which is in essence going to provide a pardon for simple possession of cannabis. Whether it was day one or today, this is a government that believes we should work hard every day.

Would the member agree, as we look at the next 14 or 15 days of the House's sitting, that we have a responsibility to do what we can to support legislation and see it come to a vote, believing that Canadians will benefit from members of Parliament who are prepared to work all the way to the very last day?

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I will simply respond by saying that we are in a rush to work on solving a problem that the Liberals created during this Parliament. That is pretty rich. The way they went about legalizing marijuana led to all these consequences. Now we have to rush through other things to fix a problem that the Liberals created. October 21 cannot come soon enough.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know that when people are charged and convicted of simple possession of marijuana, it creates barriers for them to access housing, employment, and even to volunteer in the community. The goal here is to try to create a pathway for them to be able to move forward. The pathway being proposed by the Liberal government would simply give people a break, but not give them a break permanently. It would not expunge the records, which is what we need for these people to be treated fairly.

Today people can legally access marijuana, so why would people living with a criminal record get their record suspended and have to live in fear that another government could come in and reverse that decision, which would make their record available to the public and again become a problem in their lives? It simply makes sense for the government to expunge all the records. It has made marijuana possession legal.

We clearly hear that my colleague does not agree with the Liberal decision to legalize possession of small amounts of marijuana. The government decided that Canadians should be allowed to access and consume marijuana. Now that they are allowed to do that, would it not make sense for the government to expunge the records and move Canadians forward? If they were in government, would they work to completely erase the records that have been suspended and reinstate those records?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Government Orders

The key word here is “suspension”. Does suspension mean anything in today's world? Canadians convicted of simple possession of marijuana will now have the word “suspension” stamped on their record. When they try to cross the border, the customs officer could still refuse them entry, since they got a criminal record suspension for possession of marijuana, which implies that they consumed marijuana.

Furthermore, if a person wants to work in another country, if they want to do business there or something, being able to prove that their criminal record was suspended is meaningless. It is not a pardon, and it is not an expungement.

Unfortunately, this is just an election gimmick to try to get an extra 300,000 or 400,000 votes.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Saskatoon West, Transport; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Justice.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-93. The bill has come forth as a result of the government's lack of foresight in its hurried quest to legalize marijuana. The bill was so rushed to meet the Prime Minister's self-imposed political deadline that it fails to address a host of concerns raised by municipalities, law enforcement officials, health care professionals and stakeholders who testified at committee and reached out to the government.

As issues arise with recreational marijuana going forward, there has to be due diligence and proper steps taken to protect Canadians, and because of that, I will be supporting this legislation very cautiously.

The Liberals have left consequential legislation to the final weeks of our Parliament. They have failed to consult and to listen to those key stakeholders, including law enforcement.

This has been a theme of the Liberals. They make great promises and then drag their feet and wait until the eleventh hour to implement them. In a lot of ways it shows disregard for the stakeholders to whom they made those promises originally. We have seen this time and time again.

I have heard questions by government members to my colleagues on why we are concerned that they are raising this issue at the eleventh hour of this session of Parliament. I would like to explain it to them in a context that I have used to explain things to my young children, as I do at storytime. I will reference the story of *The Tortoise and the Hare*.

The Liberals were hare-like when they began. They got off to a loud start with their promises. They promised balanced budgets and sunny ways. They were going to do government differently and were ridiculing their opponents and arrogantly spending Canadians' money on vacations and impressing American celebrities on Twitter. Like the hare, the Liberals figured they were well ahead and decided to take a nap before the race was over.

The Liberals have been in nap mode for several years and their consecutive deficits and their dropping of the ball on important legislation are proof of this.

In the story, the hare eventually wakes up from his nap to find that his opponent had already crossed the finish line while he was sleeping. That is exactly what we have seen here.

It took the explosion of the SNC-Lavalin and Vice-Admiral Mark Norman scandals during the Liberal government's spring of scandal to finally wake them up. Now that the Liberals have finally woken up, it is a mad scramble to the finish, moving legislation that should have happened years ago in some cases.

Certainly, having waited this long, they should have been listening to those stakeholders along the way. However, here we are without having proper debate and proper consultation with stakeholders and we are moving toward the House sitting late for many weeks before the end of session, which has been the custom in this place.

It is a shame that the Liberals did not take that lesson from the tortoise and the hare. They might have been more successful over the years if they had worked slowly and steadily, instead of carelessly leaving Canada with massive debt to pay off.

In the wake of legalization, many questions remain. It is clear that the government was hasty in its roll out because of its rush to roll up. Many groups, including law enforcement, were concerned about the increase in drug-impaired driving after legalization. The Liberals assured the public there would not be an increase in drug-impaired driving, but if there were, they would equip our police forces to deal with it and properly enforce the law and protect the public. That is not the case.

The roadside marijuana testing devices that the Liberals hastily approved in time for last year's legalization roll out is giving out regular false positives. It is a failure right out of Seinfeld.

During testing, this device was giving false positives for subjects who had eaten a poppy seed bagel. People can have their favourite poppy seed bagel at the diner with friends, or a poppy seed lemon loaf at the iconic Canadian brand Tim Hortons, but all of a sudden for that indulgence a person can test positive for opiates in the saliva test and then again when the confirmatory urine test is done.

● (1700)

If people indulge in their breakfast treats or their afternoon snacks and they get pulled over by police, they will be arrested and taken to the station. Then they will be charged with driving impaired, all for having a bagel or a slice of lemon loaf with their Tim's coffee.

Government Orders

Canada's Conservatives understand that Canadians should not be unfairly burdened by a criminal record for something that is no longer illegal. I understand the government wanting to create a process for pardons. What I do not understand is the attitude when the situation is inverse. That being said, that was carried out while it was perfectly legal and being deemed illegal was the consequences of that.

In its recent firearms legislation, the government has moved to reclassify certain rifles as prohibited, which means over 10,000 legally bought and owned rifles will be reclassified for no reason in particular. That has the potential to criminalize the owners of these rifles if they do not comply with the new ownership requirements of a prohibited firearm. This law would be applied retroactively, which means someone could be jailed for up to 10 years for something that would be perfectly legal and perfectly legitimate, as licenced and law-abiding firearms owners in Canada know.

Imagine a government that is giving pardons for actions that were crimes when they were committed, but are now legal. It is criminalizing something that was legal when it was done; a classic Liberal strategy.

We proposed several amendments to the legislation at committee in an effort to strengthen the legislation and empower law enforcement and the Parole Board, but the Liberals stood opposed to those common sense suggestions and amendments.

We put forward an amendment that would have given the Parole Board the power to make the necessary inquiries to determine the applicant's conduct since the date of conviction. In my meetings with representative of Canadian police unions, their concern with the legislation was that it was an introductory or gateway offence and not an isolated incident of someone being arrested for simple possession and a one-time mistake. However, this amendment was to empower the Parole Board, which is the expert in the field, to provide it with as much information as possible. Evidence-based decision making is what we are advocating for and the Liberals are steadfastly against that.

In addition to that, we put forth an amendment that would restore the Parole Board's power to take a look at ordering the record suspension to see if that would bring the administration of justice into disrepute. The Canadian Police Association, as I said, had suggested these amendments and wanted the Parole Board to have that flexibility, that discretion, the ability to conduct investigations and ensure that the small number of applications seen from habitual offenders were being properly vetted. This would prevent individuals taking advantage of a process in a way it was not intended to be.

We have grave concerns that the amendments were not given serious consideration. We have concerns that the time was not taken to review it, and now it is being hastily imposed. The government's failure to recognize these amendments is an affirmation about the haste with which it has gone about this legislation and, frankly, with which it has carried out its mandate.

I will be cautiously supporting this interest. However, Canadians can count on a Conservative government this October to correct this Liberal failure along with many others.

● (1705)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I was in opposition and Stephen Harper was the prime minister, fairly strong words came down from the PMO. If an opposition member were to propose an amendment, to not allow it to see the light of day. That has changed from the time of Stephen Harper to the current Prime Minister. We have a prime minister who encourages members of Parliament of all political stripes to look at ways in which legislation can be improved. Whether it is this legislation, or Bill C-45 or many other pieces of legislation, we have seen ministers respond to the presentations being made and listen to members on all sides of the standing committees.

Would the member not agree that this is a much better attitude toward standing committees than Stephen Harper ever had?

● (1710)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, a concept has been put forward by the member opposite, but certainly not the practice that is currently in place. We have seen time and again the heavy hand of the PMO and the Liberal members pressing down on committees. We need look no further than the interference by the PMO in the SNC-Lavalin scandal. We need look no further than the government's efforts on all things when it comes to due process.

While the concept that the member opposite proposes is an interesting one, we are certainly not seeing anything of that from the Prime Minister.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know the Conservatives did not support the legalization of marijuana. However, the NDP is in support of looking for ways to ensure the records of people who were arrested for simple possession of marijuana in the past, when it was illegal to consume, get expunged so they can move forward, like everybody else in society, and there is fairness.

Regardless of the position of the Conservative Party, not supporting the legalization of marijuana, at this point in time, the majority of Canadians would like records expunged, not just suspended.

My colleague said a couple of things in his speech, on which I would like to find out more. Now that it is legal in society, if one neighbour consumes legally today and another neighbour was charged in the past and carries a criminal record that could affect him or her getting employment, or housing or is even an obstacle to volunteering in the community, does he support expungement at this point?

The member also said something that I would like him to clarify. He said that if the Conservatives were to get into power, they would be fixing things. What fixing is he talking about? Is he talking about completely erasing the suspension of records that they have proposed, which the New Democrats think is far from what is necessary, which is to support expungement?

Government Orders

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, this is one of many messes left behind by the Liberal government that the Conservatives will be required and prepared to clean up. We heard great testimony from experts at committee and we have received recommendations. We would like the opportunity to look at them to see if we cannot improve this flawed legislation that will advance through the House.

It has been said, and I will repeat, that a Conservative government will not recriminalize marijuana, but we certainly want to ensure there are no undue obstacles or burdens on folks as a result of this change in the law.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-93, an act that would provide for the possibility of a record suspension for a conviction in relation to the minor possession of cannabis.

I support the legislation. However, while I support it, I do so reluctantly. I support it because in the absence of other legislation, it is the best we have at this present time. However, it need not have been that way.

A bill was put forward by the hon. member for Victoria, Bill C-415, that would have provided for the expungement of records for minor possession. I would submit that Bill C-415 was a much better approach than Bill C-93 introduced by the government. I was very proud to stand in support of Bill C-415 when it came to a vote at second reading. It is very unfortunate that the Liberals across the way, almost uniformly one by one, voted that legislation down.

Why is Bill C-415 better than Bill C-93?

One of the distinctions between the bills is the difference between an expungement and a record suspension. Oftentimes there is confusion of whether they are one and the same or more or less substantively the same, but they are substantively different. An expungement is the deletion, it is the removal of a record. If people are asked if they had ever been convicted of the offence of minor possession, they can honestly answer, no, that they have not because that record is expunged; it is removed. It is as though that offence and that conviction never occurred. Bill C-415 would have provided that.

By contrast, Bill C-93 provides something quite different. In order to obtain a record suspension, one must apply to the National Parole Board. While the Liberals pat themselves on the back for waiving the \$631 fee, the fact is that there are significant costs associated with applying to the National Parole Board for a record suspension. Those costs can include such things as finger printing and other searches of records that may be required. So complicated is an application for many individuals, that there are individuals who provide services on a for-profit basis and charge anywhere from \$1,800 to \$2,000 to apply for a record suspension. It is nice that the Liberals waived the fee, but again it does not address the other costs, time and effort that will be required in order to apply.

Second, under Bill C-93, the burden falls on the applicant to obtain a record suspension. If people happen to be convicted in relation to another offence, they need not apply because they do not qualify. More than half a million Canadians have been convicted of minor possession. By the way, almost half of Canadians have said that they have consumed a minor amount of cannabis.

• (1715)

Half a million Canadians have been convicted. According to departmental officials who appeared before the public safety committee, the estimated number of individuals who would be eligible to apply was around 250,000 Canadians. Right off the bat, half of Canadians who have been convicted of minor possession are disqualified. Why should they be disqualified?

Why should they be disqualified from having their record suspended, and frankly it should be expunged, for committing an offence that today is perfectly legal? It is an activity that the Prime Minister bragged about engaging in before it was legal, when in fact the Prime Minister was a sitting member of Parliament. He was never charged. He was not convicted. He very proudly sloughed it off.

However, a lot of Canadians who were not so lucky as the Prime Minister are burdened with a conviction. Then, if they happen to go through the application, establish that they qualify and obtain a record suspension, it is not over. Why is it not over then? The record is not deleted. It just goes from one national database to another. At some point in the future, perhaps the individual who has obtained a record suspension will have a traffic ticket violation, and the Parole Board might try to reimpose that conviction on the basis that the individual is no longer of good conduct. There are examples of that and there was testimony to that effect at the public safety committee.

That is not to mention the fact that the minister has broad discretion to share those records where the minister deems it to be in the interests of public safety or where there is some other security purpose. Again, even after one has gone through the cumbersome process, the record continues to hang over one's head.

The consequences of having a conviction are serious. It is an impediment to employment. It can be an impediment to housing. It can be an impediment to being able to volunteer in one's community. All this is for committing an offence that is perfectly legal today.

I did not support marijuana legalization, but it seems to me that if the government is going to go down that road, and it has chosen to go down that road, expungement should be part and parcel of that legalization. It is why, of the 23 U.S. states that have either legalized or decriminalized minor possession, seven states have provided for an amnesty, and six of those states have provided for expungement.

Again, that is something the government has opted not to do. Instead, it has established a costly, burdensome process that in the end is going to exclude nearly half of the Canadians who have been convicted of minor possession. It is a half measure that is totally inadequate.

While I support this legislation as being better than nothing, the government could do a lot better than Bill C-93.

• (1720)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague and commend him for his intelligence. Always, when he rises in this House, he has done his homework.

Government Orders

I also want to thank him for taking the leap and supporting the bill of the member for Victoria because it made sense. I did hear him that the Conservatives did not support the legalization of marijuana. However, it is nice to see that the member has put that aside and decided to look beyond that and ask what the right thing is for Canadians. Now that Canadians are able to consume marijuana legally, how could they carry a criminal record or a suspended record, which is something that would always hang over their head in society, when it could be expunged?

The member talked about the costs. The government calls it a “no-cost record suspension”, but there is a real cost to that. There is the cost of administration, which is significant, whereas an expungement eliminates that cost. Maybe he could speak a bit about the economic costs of not moving forward with expungement.

• (1725)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni is absolutely right. There are a lot of costs associated with this bill. The cost-effective solution would be to go into CPIC and delete the records. That is all that would be needed. The government has said there are different databases and records stored in courthouse basements. Guess what. When employers ask for a background check and people go to the RCMP, where does the RCMP get the record? It gets the record out of CPIC. When the Government of Canada shares information with the U.S., what database does it share? It shares the CPIC database.

Therefore, from the standpoint of addressing the stigma associated with a conviction that impedes employment, housing, volunteering and crossing the border, expunging the records from CPIC would go a long way. The current government did not do that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting debate. In the last federal election, the NDP favoured decriminalization, and the Conservatives were passing out all sorts of false information, saying how bad it would be if the Liberals were to legalize cannabis. Today, we have a government that not only has moved forward and legalized cannabis, but it is now seeking to provide a pardon through this legislation. Now the two opposition parties are uniting and saying that it should be an expungement. One could easily see the hypocrisy there.

We have heard that the Conservatives want to amend Bill C-93. Would it be the intention of a future Conservative government to change it to expungement? Is that one of the amendments we can anticipate if the Conservatives come to office?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, in response to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, what a Conservative government would do is clean up the mess left by the current government on a whole host of fronts. There is going to be a lot of work ahead, but I know the hon. leader of the official opposition is more than ready for the task.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. The vote on this motion also applies to Motion No. 2. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on Motion No. 1 stands deferred. The recorded division will also apply to Motion No. 2.

[*Translation*]

The question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

• (1730)

[*English*]

Normally at this time, the House would proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at report stage of the bill. However, pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, May 28, 2019, the divisions stand deferred until Monday, June 3, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***NATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH VICTIMS OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY AND VIOLENCE****Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC)**
moved:

That the House recognize that acts of violence and bigotry directed against religious believers, such as the June 23, 1985, bombing of Air India Flights 182 and 301, the September 15, 2001, firebombing of the Hindu Samaj Temple and the Hamilton Mountain Mosque, the April 5, 2004, firebombing of Montreal's United Talmud Torah Jewish school, and the January 29, 2017, murder of Muslims at the Quebec City Islamic Cultural Centre, are inimical to a free, peaceful, and plural society and declare January 29 of every year as National Day of Solidarity with Victims of Anti-religious Bigotry and Violence.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the first of my remarks, which will take about 10 of the 15 minutes allocated to me, deal with why I believe Canada needs a national day of solidarity with the victims of anti-religious bigotry and violence, which I intend to be understood as bigotry and violence in both their international and their domestic manifestations.

The remainder of my remarks will present the case for demarcating January 29 as the date on which to annually express this solidarity. January 29, 2017 was, of course, the date of the attack on the Centre Culturel Islamique de Québec. This was the worst act of Islamophobic violence in this country's history, and it was the worst act of anti-religious violence against members of any religious group in over a generation, claiming the lives of six men and leaving 19 others wounded, some severely.

Let me turn now to the first of the two parts into which I have divided my remarks. It is my belief that the greatest human rights challenge of our century is the persecution around the world of religious minorities. The issue of state-sponsored anti-religious bigotry, sometimes rising to the level of ethnic cleansing or genocide, is as great a challenge in our times as were the issue of slavery in the 19th century and the challenge of avoiding global war in the 20th century.

There is also a non-state version of the same problem. It comes in the form of acts of bigotry and violence against persons who have been targeted solely because of their religious identity by organized groups which, when they are tolerated or semi-tolerated by state authorities, can be described as death squads, and when they operate without any such state approval, we call terrorist groups. Finally, there are isolated individuals operating outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group, who are sometimes characterized as lone wolves. The acts undertaken by these groups and individuals can, in the worst cases, amount to mass murder.

[Translation]

Intolerance and oppression against religious groups take many forms around the world. Here are seven concrete examples with deadly consequences. First, the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar. Second, the ruthless treatment of Christians in North Korea. Third, the murder of thousands of Christians in African countries. Fourth, the rise of anti-Semitism in places where I never thought such a thing would be possible,

including the United Kingdom and the United States. Fifth, the egregious and sometimes murderous treatment of small groups like the Yazidi in Syria and the Baha'i in Iran. Sixth, the long-standing oppression of Tibetan Buddhists in China, and now the mass internment and widespread surveillance of Uighur Muslims in northwestern China. Seventh, the ongoing oppression of Falun Gong practitioners in China.

The worst form of intolerance is, of course, murder, and in the past two months alone, we have witnessed terrifying examples of mass murders of peaceful worshippers at prayer in the world beyond our borders, such as the mosque shootings in Christchurch on March 21, the church bombings in Sri Lanka on April 21, and the synagogue shooting in San Diego County on April 27.

These three incidents alone left over 300 Muslims, Christians and Jews dead and over 500 injured.

● (1735)

[English]

Please note that I have not broken down the foregoing death toll by the religion of the victims. It should be an article of faith to all Canadians that the adherents of all religions are brothers and sisters, and I think it is our instinct as a nation to feel that an attack that targets the members of any identifiable part of civilian population is, in practice, an attack on society itself.

If we take a closer look at the seven-item list that I have just read aloud, an important fact becomes apparent. The state oppressors and terrorist murderers of course identify and abuse their victims based upon their religious affiliation. However, more often than not, these victims are targeted because, in the eye of the perpetrators, their religion is important primarily as a symbol of something else, something entirely non-religious, such as advocacy of regional autonomy or independence, being unwanted foreigners, being a demographic threat, being manipulators of the law or the financial system and so on.

The victims of the Christchurch shootings, for example, were targeted because their faith was seen as being symbolic of their otherness, of the status of many of the worshippers as immigrants and of being part of a group imagined to be inherently resistant to assimilation.

The shooter at the California synagogue likewise claimed to be motivated by what is being described as white replacement theory or white genocide theory, in which race, religion and place of birth are conflated in such a fashion that being an adherent to any religious tradition other than that of the European-derived majority is seen as marking a person as a perpetual outsider, an outgroup member with no right to be here. In consequence, that person also has no right even to be alive, if killing that person can serve the greater purpose of sending the supposedly important message that others have no place here.

There was another claim made by the California gunman that ought to attract our attention. He asserts that a month prior to the synagogue shooting, he attempted to set fire to a mosque.

Private Members' Business

In the ideology of white nationalism, being Muslim or Jewish makes a person a perpetual outsider. As Mustafa Farooq observed a few weeks ago in *The Guardian*, in 2019 it is now true that “Anti-semitism and Islamophobia are two sides of the same coin”.

There was a time not so long ago when this thesis would have seemed preposterous. Today, as the testimony of the California gunman reveals, it is an established protocol in a living, if alarming, ideology.

Now let us take a look at the victims of the Sri Lanka bombings. One of the motivations of the killers seems to have been retaliation for the Christchurch shootings, even though it would have been obvious to even the most deluded individual that none of the Sri Lankan victims were involved in that crime in any way. How could they have been? Another motivation, according to the Sri Lankan government, was to strike back against the western countries that had crushed ISIL in Syria and Iraq, although, again, not even the most delusional person could have imagined that any of the victims bore even the most peripheral responsibility.

The reduction of human life to being merely symbolic of some half-baked group association and the conflation of religious identity with national identity, or with the foreign policy of this or that nation, or with simple otherness, are features of these terrorist acts.

About 10 years ago, I was the co-chair, along with Liberal MP Mario Silva, of a parliamentary coalition to combat domestic and international anti-Semitism. At that time, I thought this kind of fantastical group association was a burden borne uniquely by Jews, who were, and unfortunately still are, held collectively responsible for the transgressions, real and imaginary, of the State of Israel. This collective responsibility extended all the way up to the point that, in the eyes of some extremists, every Jew could be regarded as a legitimate target for deadly retaliation against a state of which, in most cases, they were not even citizens.

However, now I realize that this phenomenon is true for other victim groups as well, and that, unfortunately, it is true in Canada as much as in the rest of the world. For example, this country's worst act of domestic terrorism took place in 1985, when Air India flight 182 exploded in mid-air on its way from Canada to London. We would later learn that the goal of the conspirators had been to kill as many Hindus as possible, because the perpetrators had, simplistically and unfairly, conflated Hindus as a whole with the Indian state. One of the militants said, “The Indian Government is our enemy, the same the Hindu society is our enemy” and, “Until we kill 50,000 Hindus, we will not rest”.

In the event, the Air India bombers killed 329 people. This included 200 Hindus, but also over 30 Sikhs and a number of people of other faiths.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Then there was the attack at the Centre culturel islamique de Québec. People who interacted with the shooter reported that he was both aggressively anti-immigrant and aggressively anti-Muslim. His attitude and his apparent desire to make immigrants feel unwelcome are strikingly similar to the ideology of the New Zealand shooter who came along two years later.

I would urge the House to keep that in mind while I change direction and draw a comparison between January 29 and November 11, which, as we all know, is Remembrance Day.

Exactly a century ago, in 1919, His Majesty King George V instituted a number of measures to express his gratitude to the millions of brave young volunteers from Great Britain, Canada and the whole world who lost their lives in the Great War. Of all the commemorative actions the king initiated, the longest lasting was his decision to designate one symbolic day of the year when we, as a society, take the time to reflect on the sacrifices of our courageous dead.

Accordingly, even though our soldiers perished in battle every day of the year, November 11 was selected because November 11, 1918, was the day the killing ended. Thus was born Remembrance Day, which, over the decades, has become a day for paying tribute not only to those who died during the Great War, but also to those who lost their lives during all the wars that followed, as well as during peacekeeping missions.

[*English*]

While the Great War did not turn out to be, as the leaders at the time had hoped, the “war to end all wars”, the sense of unity that is renewed each year on November 11 in our country is an enduring source of strength and unity for all of us.

The same logic ought to apply to choosing a day on which to express our solidarity as a nation with the victims of anti-religious bigotry and violence. January 29, 2017, was not, of course, the only day on which Canadians faced acts of outrageous bigotry.

The text of the motion cites three other dates: April 5, June 23 and September 15. However, to me, January 29 is an important symbolic date. In part, I see its symbolism as lying in the fact that it happened in Canada. Every MP, regardless of party affiliation, shares the aspiration that our country, of all countries, should be the safe haven, where every person of every religion can feel free to worship in safety and security. In part, January 29 seems to me to have a special symbolism, because the events of 2017 represent such a fresh wound, just as the Great War was still so fresh a wound when King George led the first November 11 commemoration in 1919.

I also see the symbolism of January 29 as lying in the fact that it was an attack on people at prayer, the most essential, foundational act of any religion whatsoever. If we want to express our solidarity with the victims of anti-religious bigotry and violence, whether that be in the form of Islamophobic bigotry, anti-Semitic bigotry or any form of anti-religious bigotry and violence whatsoever, then I feel it is best to do so by showing that we stand by our fellow citizens when they are most clearly and completely expressing their religious faith.

Finally, I see the significance of January 29 in the fact that it is possible to hope, to hope at least, that the shootings of January 29, 2017, will turn out to be what November 11, 1918, failed to be, the tipping point toward peace and the event that ends all such tragedies in this country so we can return to the role that ought to be ours in the world: the safest, most welcoming home for every Muslim, every Jew, every Christian, every Hindu, every Buddhist, every Yazidi, every Bahá'í, every atheist and every believer in any other religion or philosophy of life whatever, full stop.

Private Members' Business

• (1745)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, actions matter; words matter also. I know the member opposite was very seized with the study at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage with respect to systemic racism and religious discrimination. The report posed a lot of wonderful, very concrete recommendations.

The heritage committee heard from many organizations and individual Canadians. Why does the member's website quote known right-wing extremists as he moves forward on this motion?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, forgive me, but I am not familiar with what the hon. member is referring to. I am genuinely unfamiliar with it. I wish she had made her reference more specific than that, but perhaps we will get the chance afterwards for her to do so.

I would be astonished to discover that anything on my website, in any way, or that was said by anyone, that I would have anything up there that is—

I just do not know what to say to that.

Some hon. member: It was evil Scott Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: There is no way.

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am impressed by the work done by my colleague on this important day. January 29, as we now know, has been touched by a major tragedy.

Motion No. 103 brought about a study that took into account taking action against racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia. They also made suggestions for wording in their report, not that there is anything wrong with the wording. I preferred the wording there.

I wanted to ask the member why he chose not to use that wording. There was wording specifically for that day.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is referring to the focus on Islamophobia, which is a reasonable question. This was, of course, the date of the worst act of Islamophobia, by a wide margin, in our country's history. It is something we all hope will never happen again but that we all fear could happen again.

I would say two things. First, the problem of Islamophobia is linked to other forms of hatred. That was part of why I emphasized at such length the very dangerous ideology of white nationalism. Another consideration is that this can serve, as I said, simply as a symbol for all of us and for all anti-religious discrimination and violence. To me, a crime against one of this sort is a crime against all.

I will say this as well. Many people have chosen to honour January 29 on their own, taking up actions to symbolize their solidarity with Canada's Muslim community. Some have done so by putting candles in their windows on January 29. When I learned of this last January, I put one in my own window to honour the victims of January 29, 2017. It was in my office here. It was an electric candle.

It is something I meant to mention. If I had had more time in my speech, I would have said that I hope all of us will be able, in the

future, to pick that up. If some people choose to say that they want to focus on those victims and on the Muslim community and its rightful concerns about the terrible thing that happened in January 2017 and everything that implies, and all the fears they rightly have, that is entirely appropriate. It is very meritorious. If they choose to say that they see this as something that ought to reflect their fears for practitioners of all religions here and abroad, I think that is also meritorious.

• (1750)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the motion.

In listening to the member raise this issue in such a manner, one of the things that came to mind is that this issue, unfortunately, is not new. I was first elected back in 1988, and one of the first reports I recall reviewing was presented by the Manitoba Intercultural Council. At that time, it was an important report for me personally. I have always represented the north end of Winnipeg where there is a great diverse community, and that report was all about the issue of racism, and there were a number of recommendations that came out of the report. The one that was most compelling for me personally was that if we are going to fight racism, we need to incorporate cross-cultural discussions and educational programs that would enlighten people about the benefits of diversity. That may not be the exact wording of the recommendation; it was 30 years ago. However, I think it demonstrates two things very clearly. One is that this is the type of issue that has been with us very for many years. A second is that there are some potential things that government can do to try to minimize the amount of racism, bigotry and violence out there.

I suspect that all 330-plus members who make up the House of Commons would recognize where we, as a society, can take action, and that we should take action to combat this violence, bigotry and racism. However, I would suggest that it is not just Ottawa that should act, and I will provide some thoughts about what Ottawa has done in a very tangible way, but also that we should get different levels of government and society as a whole more engaged on this particular file.

If we want to be effective in fighting bigotry and racism, we need to look at our classrooms and school divisions and the role that provincial and national governments can play. From my perspective, the national government can demonstrate very sound, solid leadership on this file. Provincial and other levels of government can look to Ottawa and see that it is in fact taking action, and they need to do likewise. However, it goes beyond just government institutions. I would suggest that it also includes non-profit organizations, business communities, the private sector, unions, all of which have recognized in the past that they do have a role to play. Indeed, we need to have that strong, more united approach. This is one of the reasons we have, for example, an international day against racism. It goes beyond Canadian borders. We will find many schools, parliamentarians at different levels and private sector companies who recognize that day.

Private Members' Business

I believe that the vast, overwhelming majority of the people we represent understand and appreciate the value of what makes Canada as great as it, namely our diversity, and we need to treasure and protect it. When we see things that take place here in Canadian society or abroad that go against the value of diversity, we need to speak out, as we have all seen inside and outside the House. Some of us have have experienced it firsthand.

• (1755)

I think of the hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills and the fine work she did. When the issue came before us, dealing with racism in the worst way, she stood in her place and took a strong stand. By taking that stand, she subjected herself to a considerable amount of hatred, directed to her personally. I am so proud of my colleague who stood firm. Other caucus members and members from other sides of the House joined her to provide support.

Since I was elected in 1998, I have visited gurdwaras all over Canada and in other places of the world. I visited gurdwaras, synagogues, churches and mosques. I understand, appreciate and value the places where we practise our faith, the value they add to our society as a whole.

I wish others were given the same opportunities I have had as an elected official to go into these communities and experience firsthand the love and caring attitude toward not only individuals such as me, but facilities, churches, mosques, synagogues or temples all across our land.

I admire the Sikh society gurdwara. I am proud to say that a female is now running the gurdwara in her role of president. One of the teachings of Sikhism, which I really appreciate, is that when people enter a gurdwara, they take off their shoes and squat to listen to the service. Everyone is an equal and that has stuck with me over the years. Whether it is in Winnipeg, Abbotsford, Toronto or the Punjab, where I visited many gurdwaras, including the golden temple, everyone is treated as an equal.

I believe that same principle will be found in all our religious communities where that sort of respect is offered. That is why I will go back to the Manitoba Intercultural Council. It came up with a report many decades ago. It said that if we wanted to combat bigotry and racism, we needed to ensure a better sense of cross-cultural awareness. I believe it recommended that MLAs take a course on cross-cultural awareness. The report was right on. Members of Parliament could become more sensitive to cross-cultural awareness.

The Prime Minister is one of the strongest advocates in our country in talking about the benefits and strength of Canada being our diversity. The Prime Minister is right in his assertion. If we want to get a sense of it, we need to look at the different regions of our country. Will get a far better appreciation of what is meant when say our diversity is our greatest strength.

• (1800)

I would encourage not only members here, but all parliamentarians to take the challenge recommended not only by the Manitoba Intercultural Council, but by many other organizations.

Let us appreciate what we have. Let us become more educated.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise to speak to Motion No. 153. After all, we are discussing violence against people of faith, religious communities and the discrimination they face.

In Canada, there is an important tradition of religious freedom and also of religious diversity. These rights are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Despite the claims we hear from time to time, we are unfortunately not immune to the forces that exist here and around the world and that, all too often, target these people because of their faith or for all sorts of other reasons that we will examine today.

Some of these acts of discrimination may seem to belong to the past, but several have occurred recently. For example, there are frequent attacks on Muslim women wearing a hijab or niqab. They are victims of violence in our public spaces. We also know that these incidents occur in big cities with diverse populations, places like Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, where the population's diversity is rightfully celebrated. However, these people are targeted all too often.

[*English*]

I want to point to a variety of incidents, but one in particular I read about in the media. People we know personally have lived these experiences.

I want to mention the experience of Ms. Merriman, who has roots in Canada. She was born in Winnipeg. She was physically attacked in Toronto because she was wearing a niqab. That type of incident makes one's blood run cold. In a city that rightly celebrates its diversity, a woman was attacked for something she had chosen to do. Her life could potentially be in danger.

I would invite colleagues to read that media coverage and the many other stories. It is a sobering reminder that we are not hidden away from these forces, the discrimination, the hatred that can be committed on religious communities, and too often on Muslim women.

It is not only individuals who get attacked both physically and otherwise for their faith. It is also places of worship. As the NDP's public safety critic, I know a lot of work needs to be done, and that is unfortunate. It is unfortunate that the government needs to provide protection for these places of worship.

We can think of things ranging from vandalism to firebombings and other forms of heinous damage that is caused, sometimes with the risk to people in those areas.

I think of February 1981, in Merritt, BC. Around 3 a.m., an explosion occurred at an East Indian church. Firefighters speculated that someone had thrown dynamite through the window. Obviously, given the time, no one was in the building. One can only imagine what that represents to the community and its people, seeing their place of worship attacked.

In 1985, the Temple Shalom in Vancouver was firebombed. The damage was significant, \$400,000. It also threatened a Jewish funeral chapel.

Private Members' Business

Communities too often feel under attack by individuals who put forward bigotry and hatred. That fear is certainly exacerbated by these types of attacks.

There have been firebombings in Mosques in Calgary and Hamilton and in synagogues in Edmonton. A Hindu temple in Hamilton suffered an arson attack. That attack was mentioned earlier in debate today. There were attacks on a synagogue in Saskatoon and a Mosque in Edson. A Sikh temple in Vancouver suffered an arson attack. Someone who douses gasoline on temples creates a climate of fear and hatred.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

These acts obviously create a climate of fear and hatred and cause physical harm. They can lead to the kind of physical attacks we have seen committed against people.

This brings me to the next example, the attack at the Centre culturel islamique de Québec on January 29, 2017, which we are unfortunately all too familiar with. Six people were killed, and nearly two dozen were seriously injured. As we know all too well, it was an important and tragic reminder that such acts can be committed here in Canada.

An individual had been radicalized by far-right values and white supremacy. He was anti-Muslim and had been radicalized by politics that are more common among our neighbours to the south and by certain ideas that have been put forward by President Trump. These ideas can fuel a fear of the other, which is too often behind these acts.

Since then, people within the Muslim community, along with many Canadians, have shown their support for and solidarity with their grieving neighbours. This solidarity in the face of all the hatred and violence is an important reminder that we have the power to make a positive change when it comes to these kinds of acts. When we list all these heinous acts, all the attacks against places of worship and people of faith, the list is unfortunately far from exhaustive. However, these examples show that there has been an increase in religiously motivated hate crimes in Canada.

[*English*]

According to Statistics Canada, police reported that hate crimes increased by 47% from 2016 to 2017. In 2017, just two years ago, there were 2,073 incidents, 664 more than in the previous year.

Jewish Canadians, as we unfortunately know, continue to be the most targeted community for religiously motivated hate crimes, and incidents increased from 221 in 2016 to 360 the following year.

Muslim Canadians see a growing trend of hate crimes committed against them, with incidents increasing by over 150% in that same span from 2016 to 2017, for a total of 349 police reported hate crimes. That is an important distinction. We can only imagine the unreported crimes that are also committed. Additionally, there were also 142 racially or ethnically motivated hate crimes against Arab or West Asian Canadians. Given the overlap between these groups, we would definitely see the statistics as being interrelated.

The New Democrats understand the role we also need to play as politicians when we see outlets like Rebel Media and associations between party leaders that take the same platforms as individuals like Faith Goldy, for example. Even though social media has been a laggard in dealing with this type of hate, even they know this hate has no place on their platforms.

We have a responsibility. The New Democrats are proud to work with anyone who believes, as I think all Canadians do, that this type of bigotry and hatred toward religious communities and, quite frankly, any Canadian who is part of any part of any minority group who can be discriminated against for any reason whatsoever deserves our full and unequivocal support.

Before I propose an amendment to the motion, we should look to New Zealand and its Prime Minister and the example she showed. It was so important for her to remind her constituents, and particularly the Muslim members of her community, that it was not an us and them thing that too often fuelled this hate.

We are all one together in this fight against this form of bigotry and hatred. That is our core responsibility as parliamentarians.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to move an amendment seconded by my colleague from Drummond. Considering all the groups targeted by hate, I think this amendment gives the motion a broader scope.

[*English*]

I move that the motion be amended by replacing the words “January 29 of every year as National Day” with the words “the entire last week of January of every year as National Week”.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I must inform the hon. members that, pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), amendments to private members' motions and to the motion for the second reading of a private member's bill may only be moved with the consent of the sponsor of the item.

[*English*]

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston if he consents to the amendment being moved.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, for the same reason I think remembrance week would be much less effective than Remembrance Day is, I think expanding to a week at the end of January would be less effective than a single day. I do want to say that I know that this is offered in a most open spirit, and I very much appreciate the thoughtfulness of the member, but I think it would actually lead to a less effective commemoration than sticking with the original motion.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: There is no consent.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Edmonton Manning.

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[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak in support of my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston's motion on such an important topic. For seven months in 2017, I had the pleasure of being the seatmate of my esteemed colleague, and I was privileged to benefit from his unique insights and wisdom on a wide variety of topics.

Motion No. 153 deals with a very important issue that I know all members of this House take very seriously. The plight of religious bigotry has no place in Canadian society. It is especially important to my constituents in Edmonton Manning. I am very proud to represent such an incredibly diverse riding.

When travelling the short distance across my riding, one can experience the culture and religion of dozens and dozens of different countries. In Edmonton Manning we have churches of all different denominations, mosques, gurdwaras and temples. We have several community leagues, where people come together and interact with their neighbours, regardless of their faith, ethnicity or cultural background. We have hard-working cultural associations to help newcomers, to celebrate the cultures and histories of the wide array of people in Edmonton and to teach others from the community that despite coming from different places and having different cultures or religions, we are, in fact, not so very different after all. That is one of the beautiful things about Edmonton Manning and, in many ways, about all of Canada: our unity throughout our diversity.

I am incredibly proud of my constituency, its diversity and the peaceful co-existence of mutual respect and co-operation. Together we lift each other up to heights that we otherwise would not be able to achieve. This is a beautiful thing, but sadly, these are not universal values. Bigotry, racism, extremism and hate are all real. These traits are not owned by any one culture, faith, identity or group, and that is why I believe this motion is so important.

We must recognize that there are problems in the world and in Canada that we must tackle head on, and religious bigotry is one of them. Around the world, we have seen a backslide in accountable government and human rights. The space for human rights champions to operate is shrinking in the areas where they are needed most. Governments and regimes around the world have had great success in “othering” groups of people, usually ethnic and religious minority groups, to try to legitimize their systematic dehumanization of these people. We have seen it all over the world and against a whole range of different faith communities.

In my capacity as the official opposition shadow minister of international development, I have had the opportunity to travel and speak with people who have been subjected to these campaigns of discrimination. Almost without exception, these draconian government policies turn into horrible human rights abuses, such as the genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar. This is perhaps one of the most pronounced examples of where the denial of recognition and citizenship for the Rohingya turned into incitement, assaults on villages, the systematic use of rape of women and girls, torture, genocide, the razing of settlements and forcing the Rohingya out of the country.

I have met with Christians in Africa who have been targeted for their faith, whose children have been taken by Boko Haram, and

with people who are routinely harassed, terrorized and subjected to horrors largely because of their religious beliefs.

While there are major protracted crises around the world that are driven by bigotry based on faith, there are also horrendous attacks with the same motivating factors, some of the most severe of which are named in Motion No. 153. We have seen attacks on religious institutions and the faithful who were attending them here in Canada and around the world. People should never have to fear persecution or attack while they attend their places of worship.

● (1815)

We all have a duty to speak out and condemn religious bigotry in all of its forms, regardless of which religious group is being targeted. I often say, when it comes to helping those in need, that Canadians all have the same DNA. It is a part of who we are as people. Whether here at home or around the world, Canadians have always answered the call to help those in need, to stand up for those who are unable to stand up for themselves and to call out bigotry and discrimination wherever it is found. Whether it is discrimination against Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, any other religious group, or those who do not have a religious belief, as Motion No. 153 makes clear, faith-based violence and bigotry is not compatible with our shared vision of a free, peaceful and pluralistic Canada.

I believe it is important that we recognize this by naming January 29 of each year the national day of solidarity with victims of anti-religious bigotry and violence. When it comes to such an important issue, creating a day of solidarity seems like a small gesture, but I would suggest that it is an important one. It is important because of the word “solidarity”. Violence, hate and persecution toward a religious group is not only a problem for the community that is targeted, but also a problem for all of us, because these deplorable acts run counter to Canadian values and the vision that all of us in the House are fighting to achieve. Together we are stronger than when we are divided. Those who seek to spread violence and hate will virtually always seek to do one thing to the other group they are targeting. They do not want people to see their would-be victims as they see themselves and their loved ones. They try to spread their hatred like a cancer to trick people into taking their side. They try to convince people to buy into their heinous ideology.

While it may seem unimaginable for it to happen in a place like Canada, it does happen around the world. I very much doubt that any society believes it can happen to it, until it starts to take hold. That is why I believe we must respond with solidarity to those who would persecute people for their faith by making it clear that we are one people. When challenges arise, we must look at them through the lens of equality, disregard the differences, stand shoulder to shoulder against those who would seek to tear us apart and say no. This person is my sister, this person is my brother and what they believe is important, but when it comes to standing up for them, it does not matter, because it is simply the right thing to do. In a free, peaceful and multicultural society like Canada, I would argue that it is the only thing to do.

One of the reasons Canada works so well, even though it is so diverse, is that we are inclusive. Therefore, despite the efforts of those who seek to target other people in our own society, we as Canadians will not let them succeed, because we stand together in solidarity, regardless of our different faiths or any other factor.

Several months ago, there was an article in the news about the possibility of terrorists coming to Canada from Syria. Members of ISIS were using the confusion of the humanitarian crisis to try to mix in with legitimate refugees to escape accountability for the horrendous acts they had committed.

I had a couple come into my office for a meeting. We sat down over coffee and discussed this issue. One of the things they said to me is one of the most impactful things I have heard as the member of Parliament for Edmonton Manning. They said something along the lines of, “You folks have to get this right. I know they are only a few people and don't represent their whole community, but I am afraid. I am afraid of an attack. Mostly I am afraid that, because of this handful of bad people, society will start to fear and hate everyone from their community.”

● (1820)

I know these people. They do not harbour bigotry and racism in their hearts, but they see what those who seek to divide us are trying to do and are rightfully concerned about it. That is why I believe it is important to establish a national day of solidarity with victims of anti-religious bigotry and violence. It is as much about a single day as about declaring to those who do not share our values that we are united, that we reject their hate and violence and that we will not be divided despite their efforts.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard. I will let him know that there are just shy of 10 minutes available to him. If he does need the full 10 minutes, the remaining time will be available to him the next time this bill comes up for debate in the House.

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the fact that words matter. We stand here today to talk about recognizing January 29, and there is a reason we are doing this, as was mentioned by my previous colleagues: the atrocity of the massacre. Words matter.

I was sitting around having a coffee with members of the Muslim community in my riding in early January 2016 and they were worried about the rise in the amount of Islamophobia, the words they were hearing in the press and certain leadership around the world

Private Members' Business

attacking Muslims. They asked me what I could do about it and said that since I am now in government, I should do something. We came up with the idea of asking for a debate on Islamophobia. I thought it sounded like a good idea, keeping in mind that I was and still am a new member of Parliament, so I did not exactly know the rules. I spoke to the House leaders, who said there would not be an entire day's debate on Islamophobia since it is a no-brainer, that of course everybody is against Islamophobia. They said thanks, but no thanks, that the government had only so many days and that it had to use them to move its agenda forward.

That all made sense to me, so I went back to my riding and talked further with the same people. They said that if that could not happen, could something else be done. At that point, I spoke to other members of Parliament, in particular, a friend of mine who knows the rules very well, and he said there is something called unanimous consent. He said I could move a motion for unanimous consent with no debate to condemn Islamophobia. I thought it was a really good idea.

I went to the House leadership and was told that while these rules do exist, there was an agreement among the parties not to use that provision, so I could not do it. I went back to my riding again for a third time, had another coffee and talked about what to do. It is at that point I learned that an ex-member of the House had brought to Parliament something called e-petitions, so we decided to make a petition condemning Islamophobia that I could present in Parliament. It sounded like a good idea and we went about doing it. The House leadership also said it was a fine idea and that we should knock ourselves out, so we did. We did not knock ourselves out here; we knocked ourselves out working to get signatures. It is an expression.

I am very happy to say that the petition got the most signatures of any electronic petition to that date. We set a record. People across the country signed up. We started slowly because we did not know how to get it going. Petitions can only go for so long, but had it been allowed to go longer, we could have had even more people signing it. It was accelerating and exploding, nonetheless. I was very proud to present that petition in the House.

At that point, the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills came to see me with an idea. She said she had a motion for Private Members' Business coming up and it would be good to put it out there that we should do a study on racism and discrimination, including Islamophobia. I said that would be fantastic. I could not think of anything better to do: it led right into the petition, so the member put it forward.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have to say that I was shocked. I was just not ready for the vitriol and attacks that the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills was subject to. I was really taken aback. At one point, I started to feel bad because I thought I was partially responsible for getting her into this. I did not know the member that well at that point, since we were new members. We sat down in her office and I told her that I would understand if she wanted to pull out because it was not worth it. This young lady really impressed me when she put her fist down and said that we would knock ourselves out again and do this, and she did it. She took a tremendous amount of personal attacks, up to and including death threats, and I never saw her flinch. I take my hat off to her for doing that and bringing it forward.

• (1825)

Sadly, while all this work was starting and going on, the attack of January 29 happened. The massacre happened when words infected some young man's mind and he went in and killed and maimed a bunch of people.

I know Imam Hassan Guillet, who gave a moving eulogy that was played around the world. In that speech he said everyone was a victim, and he included even the shooter. He said the shooter was a victim of people who put hatred and ignorance in his head that led him to this. His life was destroyed. His friend's life was destroyed. Everyone was a loser in this situation.

That brought us to the report that came out. I thought the report was an excellent document. It covered a lot of things, and one of the important things it said was that we should take the time to commemorate January 29 as a day of remembrance and action on Islamophobia and other forms of religious discrimination.

The member has put forward that exact idea. Let us commemorate January 29. He has not used the words from the report, but he has used similar words. There is a bit of a debate as to whether the words should include Islamophobia or not, and that is something to be debated. I like the words in the report, with or without the word Islamophobia. I actually prefer them to the words that are proposed now. In general, the concept and the idea of recognizing this day is a very good one.

In that vein, I want to congratulate the member for putting forth the idea. I want to congratulate the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for doing the hard work. I want all of us as legislators and politicians to learn a bigger lesson. This did not start a day before or a week before. It built up. The words of politicians and the words of political leaders led to this. I am not saying any particular person is to blame, but we should all keep in mind that when we start to hear this, we stand up faster, stronger and more together, so that this does not happen again.

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: If he wishes and should he have the opportunity, the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard will have an additional two and a half minutes remaining in his time should the House take up debate on this question at some point in the future.

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent at this time to call it 12 midnight so that the House will adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during today's adjournment debate, I will be talking about a human case that transcends partisanship. I am obviously talking about the case of André Gauthier, a Canadian citizen from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord who is currently being detained in the United Arab Emirates, a country with a poor human rights record.

We have been working with Mr. Gauthier's family for over two months now. The family has been working on this case for more than four agonizing years. Over the past four years, the family has knocked on many doors. It has spoken to various stakeholders and consular authorities. In four years, very little progress has been made. Does that mean that the usual non-political channels are not proactive enough? It seems clear now that unless a case gets media attention, the government is not really interested.

I will recap the events of the past few days. The media broke the news of Mr. Gauthier's detention on May 25, last Saturday. The office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not inform us until the evening of Tuesday, May 28, that it was trying to intervene with the Omani government before Mr. Gauthier was deported to the United Arab Emirates. However, we had known since Saturday about the urgent need to intervene before Mr. Gauthier was deported to the UAE. Why did this take so long?

Yesterday, Wednesday, we learned that the office no longer had any idea where Mr. Gauthier was, and yet it is Canada's right to know where its citizens are. We have an ambassador in the region. It is his duty to do the necessary research in a timely manner so as not to leave the family anxious and in the dark.

In my opinion, the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not take the situation seriously and Canada has been negligent. Nothing has changed since we began working with the family. However, once the media got wind of what was going on, suddenly there was more of an interest. Some progress has now been made, but not much. The government keeps telling us, in the media and during question period, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is aware of the situation and that she is monitoring it closely to see if there are any developments. Is the government really trying to bring Mr. Gauthier home to Canada or it is simply trying to ensure that he has a telephone and access to the care he needs while he is in prison? There is a big difference between the two.

Adjournment Proceedings

I am familiar with international law as it relates to these issues. I understand that the United Arab Emirates is not required to send André Gauthier back to Canada. This is where diplomacy and negotiation come in. The United Arab Emirates is the largest importer of Canadian goods in the Middle East. We have emerging trade relations with this country, which is trying to get closer to the west. The United Arab Emirates wants to attract foreign investors as well as tourists. Now is a good time for Canada to bring our citizen back.

The family are in complete bewilderment over the level of support they have received so far. Nevertheless, we are not here to put anyone on trial. At this stage, we would all be very happy for André Gauthier to come home.

I have some questions for my colleagues in the government this evening. Why has it taken so long to move this case forward? What kind of support will be offered to the family? Where do things stand right now? What concrete action will the government take to bring Mr. Gauthier back home? Has the government set a timeline for bringing Mr. Gauthier back to Canada?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the delivery of consular services to Canadians abroad. When Canadians are arrested or detained abroad, one of the core principles of Canada's consular services is to ensure that they are treated fairly, in accordance with the rights and standards of the host country.

Protecting consular clients' privacy is paramount. Consular officers are required to comply with the parameters established under the Privacy Act. That is why the government can often only share very limited information with the public in consular cases.

[*English*]

As the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have very clearly stated, the Government of Canada is not only following but is very engaged in the case of Andre Gauthier, who was extradited from Oman to the United Arab Emirates.

The parliamentary secretary for consular affairs has already advised the House that consular services have been provided to Mr. Gauthier and to his family throughout this case. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and her parliamentary secretary are personally engaged on this case. They have both spoken directly with the family to reassure them of our continued support and our vigilance on this case.

Further, the parliamentary secretary has spoken directly with senior-level foreign officials. She continues to receive frequent updates on Mr. Gauthier's case. In addition, the Consulate General of Canada in Dubai has been engaged on Mr. Gauthier's case from the very outset and is actively working on it. Our officials in the UAE are in close contact with local Emirati authorities.

As the member indicated, Canada has a strong and positive relationship with the United Arab Emirates. We respect, as well, the sovereignty of its legal system. In this context, Canada will continue to convey our humanitarian and compassionate concerns regarding Mr. Gauthier's situation to the Government of the UAE.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that the safety and security of every Canadian is of the utmost importance to the Government of Canada, as is ensuring that the rights afforded by foreign jurisdictions are fully respected in cases that involve our citizens, including Mr. Gauthier.

The Government of Canada's efforts and our diplomatic engagement on this case will continue to focus on these issues as we hold his family, his friends and the people who love him in our hearts and our minds, as we engage in this important case.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Mr. Speaker, I respect what my colleague opposite said. We know one thing for sure though: during Mr. Gauthier's extradition from Oman to Dubai, there was a 24-hour period during which there was no news. Nobody knew where he was.

Now his family is desperate. Let me reiterate that this has been going on for some time. We must support his family. That is extremely important.

Can the government promise me that it will take the necessary measures as soon as possible and implement an action plan to bring André Gauthier back home?

I would also like to know if the government is in a position to initiate good negotiations with the United Arab Emirates.

● (1840)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by recognizing the work that the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord is doing on this case. It is tough work for a member of Parliament to represent his constituents well, and I believe he is doing a very fine job at that. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the parliamentary secretary have been impressed with his care and concern. We thank him for that.

We will continue to follow this case extremely closely. It is important that we use our good relationship with the UAE to discuss Mr. Gauthier's situation in a frank and open manner, and to advocate for his rights to due process under their law, under local law. Government of Canada officials endeavour to work in collaboration with the Emirati government in Mr. Gauthier's best interests.

Finally, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the parliamentary secretary responsible for consular affairs will continue to raise and bring attention to this case with their counterparts until he is safe.

TRANSPORT

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am again asking the federal government to help provide safe, accessible and affordable transportation to the people of Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Transportation Company is an important issue for the people in my home province. Many people, particularly from rural and indigenous communities, are unable to travel to see loved ones, to go to work, to go to school, to do business or to access medical care following the closure of STC and the pullout of Greyhound service in Saskatchewan.

Adjournment Proceedings

This is one of my last opportunities to press the government in the House before the end of Parliament, so I am doing what I have been sent here to do: share the experiences of my constituents, give a voice in Parliament to their concerns and advocate on their behalf to get something done.

Abigail Murphy, a woman living with a disability who cannot drive, stated that “the demise of STC has meant the demise of my independence and severely affected my self esteem and the freedom to visit my family.”

Valeria Middleton said, “So now I’m almost a senior and there is no public transportation to get me to those increasingly frequent doctor appointments, I don’t see family much anymore and if I was able to financially, I would seriously consider moving to Saskatoon—but who can afford the rents there?”

Michele Kiss says that the end of STC has hurt her environmental business that relied on STC to ship it parts. She said they now are “making a 3-4 hour round trip to the city and back, costing paid employee hours and fuel,” or “keeping our equipment idle and jobs incomplete. It’s inconvenient both ways.”

Many indigenous women are forced to hitchhike and are facing violence or discrimination as a result. One driver said two women she helped were “both recovering addicts who have, since December, been hitchhiking daily from a reserve” to seek medical treatment. When they tried to access a medical taxi, they were refused because they were addicts.

Marlene Bear picked up an indigenous hitchhiker who was inappropriately touched by the driver, who later became aggressive when she refused his sexual advances.

A stranded hitchhiker told CTV Regina, “I’m stuck on the highway at Grenfell, trying to get to my family for Christmas. I have minor hypothermia and almost died last night. Me and my dog are going to die out here and it’s only getting colder.”

These are the experiences on the ground. People from Saskatchewan are isolated from family, cannot access medical treatment, are losing business, and face discrimination, harassment and potentially death while trying to travel between communities.

Many people hoped the Liberal government would be different. For that matter, where are my Conservative colleagues from Saskatchewan on this issue? There has not been one peep from these MPs on behalf of their constituents. Neither the current Liberal government nor Saskatchewan Conservative MPs are standing up for indigenous women, seniors and people who cannot travel independently.

The half-hearted measures, rhetoric and proverbial passing the buck the people of Saskatchewan get from this Liberal government, and the silence from elected Saskatchewan conservative MPs, is exactly the lack of leadership that led to the crisis on B.C. highways we have come to know as the Highway of Tears. Is that what it is going to take for governments and elected officials to take this seriously, a Saskatchewan highway of tears?

Why is the Liberal government failing to stand up and work hard to provide safe and affordable transportation to the people of Saskatchewan, as it has for people living in other provinces?

● (1845)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize the seriousness of the issue of reduced intercity bus service in western Canada that has resulted from Greyhound’s exit, and we have offered funding to help address this problem. I appreciate greatly the constituents’ specific concerns just raised by the member opposite. I encourage her and hope that she will share those stories with the premier of Saskatchewan as well as with the elected Conservative members in her province.

Our government would like to reiterate that it is the responsibility of provincial governments to economically regulate and support intercity bus services as they see fit. In fact, federal money is on the table and the member opposite’s provincial Conservative government is refusing to use it to help the people of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan need only look to my province, British Columbia, which has already stepped forward and shown its willingness to partner with us to support intercity bus services within the province of British Columbia. Should the Saskatchewan government move to offer funding for a bus service to fill in the gaps left by Greyhound, the federal government will be there to support it.

In terms of the transportation needs of indigenous communities, as part of our October 31 announcement, we announced that we would offer direct support to indigenous communities that would want to launch a new service to meet their community’s needs.

It is important to re-emphasize that private sector operators have taken substantial steps to expand their operations in light of Greyhound’s exit, including in Saskatchewan. While these companies may not be able to match Greyhound’s service capacity overnight, we want to avoid crowding out private sector entrepreneurs who are working hard to expand their businesses and provide services to Canadians.

Finally, we can assure the member that we remain committed to addressing this issue over the long term. We believe that the immediate funding will address the urgency of this issue. However, it is essential to come up with a sustainable, innovative and stable solution that works for an industry that has seen considerable long-term decline.

We look forward to developing a long-term solution. I appreciate the member’s willingness and ability to bring the reality and seriousness of this situation to the House.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague and I have had this conversation in the House before. I want to reiterate that I really feel that what the federal government has offered is too little, too late. It has been a short-term, half measure for what is an issue of equity and safety for the people of Saskatchewan. The private sector has not stepped up and will not step up.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Liberal government is doing what many previous governments, Liberal and Conservative, have done before: When the going gets tough and people need their help, governments throw up their hands, say they have tried to act, blame things on everyone else and walk away.

I want to thank the people who shared their stories. I thank my constituent Stephanie Sydiaha and University of Regina professors Cindy Hanson and Joanne Jaffe, as well as all of those who have shared their struggles and stories about the loss of transportation by STC and Greyhound. I want them to keep up this work and keep the pressure on the government. I am on their side.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Speaker, no relationship is more important than the one between the Government of Canada and indigenous peoples. Like our government, the provinces and territories have a lead role in this area.

That being said, we recognize the impact these reductions have had on indigenous communities, and we prioritize the safety of indigenous peoples. That is why we announced that we would provide support to indigenous communities affected by Greyhound's reductions. This support would be provided directly to indigenous communities and thus would not require a cost-sharing partnership with the provinces. It is something that can be acted on now.

We will continue to work with provinces and territories over the next year to develop longer term solutions to the intercity bus reductions. We hope this long-term approach, combined with the short-term funding, will respond effectively to Greyhound's reductions and demonstrate our commitment to ensuring that all Canadians have the access they need to transportation.

• (1850)

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Admiral Norman is owed an apology by the Liberal Party leader. It is an absolute disgrace to the women and men who have served our country in uniform that the Liberal leader continues to refuse to apologize for trying to destroy the military career of an honourable gentleman. The fact the Liberal leader chose to run out of the House of Commons moments before the vote was taken on the motion by my hon. colleague from Milton speaks volumes to the character of the leader of the Liberal Party and those individuals in his party who still refuse to admit to the horrible wrong done to Admiral Norman. They are apology deniers.

I assure members of the Liberal Party that their shameful treatment of an honourable soldier has not gone unnoticed by soldiers and veterans. I was moved to tears, as was Admiral Norman, when he shared the story of a World War II veteran sending him \$5, as that was what the veteran could afford, for the admiral's legal defence fund. It was necessary for members of the public to come to the aid of Admiral Mark Norman. The Liberal government was trying to bankrupt the admiral into submission by refusing to pay his legal bills, despite payment of the latter being the usual action taken when a Crown employee is party to legal action as a consequence of his duties as a public servant.

We live in a fearful time when someone of the stature of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman can be subjected to the type of political witch

hunt he has been subject to by the Liberal Party. Given how hard the government is struggling to withhold evidence, the way it withheld evidence from Admiral Mark Norman's lawyers so that he could not properly defend himself, there must be something very terrible to be uncovered by the Senate investigation.

Political interference in an RCMP investigation and a court case is a slippery slope that no government in Canada should be sliding down. Canadians agree with Conservatives on this point. This is what some Canadians had to say in the May 22, 2019, edition of the *Ottawa Citizen* in response to its story on the Admiral Mark Norman Liberal scandal:

Your in-depth article on the two-year ordeal of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman, his wife and daughter was incisive and clearly showed how politics drove this outrage.

More telling, though, is that our prime minister is always ready with an apology, a tear and a hanky for any pedestrian issue that provides an opportunity for a media photo-op —except when he is directly responsible for the debacle that affected the reputation of an officer with integrity.

Not only is Norman due an apology and compensation, he should be at National Defence Headquarters as Chief of Defence Staff, replacing Jon Vance, who should join Michael Wernick (formerly of the Privy Council Office) in obscurity and retirement.

Those were the comments of Adele White of Ottawa.

Then there were the following comments by Bill Russell of Ottawa:

A frightening attempt to hide records. Thank you for the most recent instalment in the Vice-Admiral Mark Norman story. There are many disturbing aspects to the tale of his defence. The senior echelons of the Canadian military have clearly not covered themselves in glory.

One of the most offensive and frightening revelations—reported in December 2018 and mentioned again in David Pugliese's most recent contribution—relates to the actions undertaken within the Department of National Defence to stymie attempts by the vice-admiral's legal team to obtain information deemed relevant to his defence from departmental files. The conscious effort to hide references to Norman in the records is a great concern for anyone who believes that the proceedings were about "justice." The tone of arrogance and self-satisfaction in the words of the senior officer who is quoted in a Dec. 18 *Ottawa Citizen* story —"Don't worry, this isn't our first rodeo. We made sure we never used his name. Send back the nil return."—is chilling.

Thankfully, the moral compass of a more junior staff member, whose name is protected by a publication ban because of fears of professional reprisal for coming forward, was not skewed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question during tonight's adjournment debate. This is not the first time this topic has come up during the adjournment debate.

It is important to reiterate that the charges against Vice-Admiral Norman have been stayed. As the Public Prosecution Service of Canada confirmed, every decision was made independently and no other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence in either the initial decision to prosecute Mr. Norman or in the decision to stay the charges. We have said this a number of times in the House. Despite the opposition's efforts to raise this matter repeatedly, there was no political influence or any other kind of influence. We hope the opposition will respect the judicial process.

Adjournment Proceedings

My colleague is well aware that the House unanimously adopted a motion to recognize Vice-Admiral Norman's service and to apologize to Mr. Norman and his family. The chief of the defence staff and Vice-Admiral Norman met last week and had a very cordial discussion.

With respect to legal fees, the deputy minister was very clear. She examined the current policy governing Vice-Admiral Norman's application for reimbursement of legal expenses. She shared her analysis with us, we agree with her and we are proceeding. Further information will be made available in due course as discussions are ongoing.

As we already addressed this matter in a previous adjournment debate, I would like to take this opportunity to speak about the investments and support our government is providing our men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, unlike the previous government, which repeatedly cut the defence budget and veterans' services.

Our government has made real progress on the single most important element of our defence policy: taking care of our people. We established the Canadian Armed Forces transition group to improve military members' experiences as they transition to life after military service. We also rolled out the seamless Canada initiative to improve the coordination of services across provinces and ease the burden of moving for military members and their families.

We have also enhanced services and expanded access to military family resource centres, and I had the opportunity to learn more about them when I visited the centre in Gagetown, New Brunswick. Their staff is doing amazing work in providing all the necessary services to the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces during their transition, particularly by helping them find housing and a family physician when they are posted to another military base.

We also expanded relocation benefits available for military members by updating the Canadian Armed Forces relocation policies. Furthermore, we enacted a retroactive pay increase for military members to ensure world-class compensation for our women and men in uniform.

Canadians can therefore be proud of the work accomplished by the members of the Canadian Armed Forces, whether it be

responding to natural disasters, during overseas missions, providing search and rescue or defending our sovereignty. That is why taking care of our men and women in uniform has been of the utmost importance. The government and indeed all Canadians have a duty to recognize the incredible work and contributions of the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are very grateful for their work. We will invest as much as possible to ensure that our men and women in uniform have the tools and equipment necessary to do their jobs.

• (1855)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, finally, this is a letter from Joe Spence, from Ottawa:

I am a non-partisan person. I have voted for all three major parties in one election or another.

In October, I will be forced to vote against the Liberals because I want answers in the cases of Mark Norman and [the member from Vancouver—Granville]. The Liberals refuse to give me the answers, so I will have to vote for a party that I hope will.

I suspect that many people will be voting to get answers.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, as we have said many times in the House, General Vance and Vice-Admiral Norman recently had a cordial discussion. We will have more information in the coming weeks.

With regard to the legal fees, the deputy minister reviewed the policy in place and found that Vice-Admiral Norman's legal fees could be reimbursed, and that is what we will do.

What is clear is that we respect the judicial process. We do not have the right to interfere in that process. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada was very clear: there was no influence, including political influence, in the case of Vice-Admiral Norman.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, May 28, 2019, and Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)

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