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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 28, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from April 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has 17 minutes and 39 seconds remaining in the debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to continue my discussion on this piece of legislation. You were actually sitting in the chair when you gave me the first two minutes and 21 seconds of debate on this, so I am glad to see that we are coming full circle to complete this.

It is important to point out, as many people have, not just within the House, but also outside of the House, that this piece of legislation is not what unfortunately the Conservatives are trying to label it as, an attack on legal gun owners. As a matter of fact, the bill is only going to affect about 3% to 5% of gun owners as it attempts to only ban military-style assault rifles, in other words, guns that are designed to kill the maximum number of people possible.

I come from a family both on my side and on my wife's side of proud hunters who have hunted for many generations going back whether they were in Canada or immigrated from another country. A close uncle of mine on my mother's side owns a lodge near Westport, Ontario with acres and acres of land, where he hunts regularly and uses the guns that he has to hunt. He is not concerned about this bill because he does not have military-style assault rifles. He does not see the need to have semi-automatic or automatic weapons that are designed to kill people in combat to be used for the purpose of hunting.

My late father-in-law grew up on a hunting and fishing lodge in Plevna, Ontario, where he, his father and his grandfather routinely hosted visitors, a lot from the United States, who would come to the lodge where they would be taken out fishing and hunting and shown the great outdoors of Canada.

If people in these situations had listened to the narrative coming from the Conservative Party, they would have great concern over what they were hearing. That is because the Conservatives like to leave out some of the very important points as to what the bill is attempting to do. I will get to why I think that is later in my speech.

It is important to address the fact that the bill is meeting the concerns of not just parliamentarians, but of many citizens and stakeholders throughout this country.

Let us go to chiefs of police for starters. Over the years, there have been a number of chiefs of police who have warned about the risks associated with weapons of this style. The Saskatoon Police Chief, Troy Cooper said in an interview, "People who use firearms in committing crimes in Saskatchewan obtain them primarily by theft". The Regina Police Chief, Evan Bray, said that crime guns are "not being brought in by the United States....[but are] coming from break and enters".

Therefore, people have to ask themselves if they should believe the Conservative narrative that all these guns that are being used for this purpose are coming through illegal means through the border, because that is the narrative that the Conservative Party has trumpeted for years in the House as I have heard it myself, or do we believe the chief of police from Regina? With all due respect to my Conservative colleagues, I tend to side with those who seem to have the facts and evidence and the real-life experience, notwithstanding the fact that of course there would be members from the House who would have real-life experience in law enforcement as well.

Recently, Edmonton Police Chief, Dale McFee, "said roughly five to 10 per cent of Edmonton's crime guns are coming across the U.S. border." That is 5% to 10%. The quote goes on to say, "The remainder have either been acquired legally, obtained through 'straw purchasers' or stolen".

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• (1005)

There was a quote recently in Ontario from Inspector Chris Renwick, who told a Crime Prevention Ottawa board meeting that half the crime guns recovered within Canada are usually legally registered, but stolen. However, we hear the narrative from the other side of the aisle that all the guns that are used in committing crimes are coming from across the border, and that we have to strengthen those border measures and get tough on crime. Although I am sure that it does give a fraction of the picture, it indeed misses a vast majority of what the police chiefs are identifying as concerns.

Since I am on the topic of talking about making sure that the proper tools are there for crime prevention, I should remind the House that, when the Conservatives were in power, billions of dollars were removed from the CBSA's ability to do this work. However, over the last number of years, money has been returned to ramp up those efforts: in the last Parliament, \$327 million to combat gun and gang violence, \$86 million to prevent cross-border smuggling of illegal firearms. The Conservative Party voted against that. The Conservatives are going to have to explain that one to me, even though they claim that is how all of these guns are coming into Canada. This year alone, there is \$30.8 million allocated to support the CBSA's efforts to reduce border-related gang activity and prevent firearms from being smuggled into Canada.

Therefore, are we interested in working on that smuggling problem; are we interested in working at combatting the crime that is related? We are absolutely interested. We are doing that and working on that, but it is not the only solution. We do not attack a large problem like this by thinking that working on one thing, which, as I already said, the Conservatives scaled back on, is going to be the only solution.

I want to turn briefly to an issue that came up in the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security because it is extremely germane to the discussion and, indeed, the position that is being taken by Conservatives.

Before I do that, let me just jump to something else here. The Canadian National Firearms Association has been quoted saying that the Leader of the Opposition met numerous times with the National Firearms Association in Canada when he was running for leadership. One might ask the question of why that is relevant to the Conservative Party's position on this bill. It is quite relevant because when we take the main firearms policy goals of the CCFR and compare those to what is in the platform of the leader of the Conservative Party, they are almost identical. They could have been written by the CCFR.

The CCFR asked for a simple classification system. In the document released by the Leader of the Opposition, he specifically talks about introducing a simplified classification system.

The CCFR asked that people be able to discharge any firearm they own on their own property. That is the Leader of the Opposition's platform commitment.

A definition of a converted fully automatic and variant is requested to be clearly described in legislation. Guess what? The Conservative Party leader commits in his platform to remove the arbitrary classification of firearms.

The CCFR requests to re-establish the service standard for issuing new FRT numbers; and, guess what, the Conservative Party leader committed to that in his platform.

There is a request by the organization to change the limits to 10 rounds for all magazines. Guess what the leader said in a town hall meeting: "I don't like the restrictions" that are inherently there as they relate to the number of rounds in all magazines. He said that on May 15, 2020, only one year ago.

• (1010)

We can see that it is hard, when we compare these documents, to not come to the conclusion that the Conservative Party is beholden to the National Firearms Association in Canada, considering that its own document on this, as it relates to what they are running on in the election, is almost a carbon copy of what the association is asking for.

This brings me to what I had mentioned a few moments ago, and that is an issue that happened in the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. I really wish I could share a prop in here, but I will not, because that is against the rules, but I draw the attention of members to two particular cartoons. I am looking at them, so I will try to describe them to the best of my ability. There are two cartoons that were issued by the National Firearms Association of Canada, that are quite demeaning in their approach to the representation of the member for Oakville and our Deputy Prime Minister. There is another one that has the Prime Minister in it and what appears to be his wife. These are demeaning in the fact that they try to associate fearful women and guns, and there are other individuals standing in the picture holding guns saying, "I think we'll be fine..." By any measure, nobody in this House should accept those as being a proper way to engage in our democratic society.

In any event, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security brought forward a motion to their committee meeting in February that said something I want to read into the record of the House. It said:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security condemn the National Firearms Association and statements made by Sheldon Clare, President, on February 16, 2021 in a video posted online with regards to the introduction of the Bill C-21 which states: "...revisit their old woodworking and metal working skills and construct guillotines again (laughter). That would really be the best kind of Committee of Public Safety to get this reestablished. If they want to make it about public safety that was the way. The sound of this person's voice is not one that is joking. He was not joking. I don't think they understand that this is not New Zealand, this is not the United Kingdom, this is not Australia. This is a country made up of people who been here for thousands of years, our aboriginal people, immigrants from Europe who fled tyranny, who fought against tyranny and ... know tyranny when they see it. And this my friends is tyranny"

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The House of Commons standing committee introduced this motion asking the committee to condemn a comment made by the National Firearms Association president that specifically referred to their committee as a committee that should go back to studying woodworking and metalworking skills and “construct guillotines”. That is what the National Firearms Association president said, and all the committee asked was that the comments be condemned.

I will fast-forward to the vote on that. Do members know how the vote went on that? Everybody voted in favour, except for four members: the member for Lakeland, the member for Battle River—Crowfoot, the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner and the member for Langley—Aldergrove. They did not vote against it; they abstained. I went back and watched the video of that. I watched the rationale that the member for Lakeland used in trying to put that into an in camera meeting. She basically said this is an issue that if somebody's life feels threatened, they should be contacting the police, and therefore they really should not be talking about this in public, because, if they did, then it is an ongoing investigation. What a load of crock that is, with all due respect. This is a public statement that had been made in the public about not somebody being attacked individually, but specifically about what the committee should focus its work on.

● (1015)

“Perhaps the committee should focus its work on revisiting their old woodworking and metal skills to construct guillotines.” The members for Lakeland, Battle River—Crowfoot, Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner and Langley—Aldergrove could not not even bring themselves to vote in favour of the motion condemning those words. We have to wonder why that would be. How tightly does one have to be intertwined with the National Firearms Association to not vote in favour of that? I believe I have already demonstrated that by telling members how intertwined the leader of the opposition's policy and platform commitments on firearms are with the requests of the National Firearms Association.

As I conclude, I will leave members with the thought that perhaps the opposition to this bill is less about people coming here and genuinely trying to look for solutions as much as it is being directed by an organization that has a stranglehold on a party. I hear members from the other side saying “wow”, but maybe they can explain to me why the four members I pointed out would somehow not be willing to vote in favour. What makes it even worse is that somehow they thought they were skating the issue by abstaining. If they were against it and truly believed what the member for Lakeland said, why did they not vote against it? It is because they knew that by voting in favour they would be sending a message back to the organization their party is so intertwined with, which would not be beneficial to their future campaigns. That is the only conclusion that I can come to.

This legislation is necessary. We need to move forward with it and we need to protect Canadians' lives. We need to listen to the chiefs of police, whom I quoted earlier, so that we can save lives in Canada. We need to stop playing games for the benefit of some people in this country who are trying to promote, rightfully so, their position on the matter but unfortunately are completely intertwined with the Conservative Party.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish I could take more than just a few minutes to refute all the misinformation the member put over. However, I will start with his comment about the four members abstaining.

Maybe the member could tell us how many members of the Liberal cabinet abstained on voting to declare as genocide what the Chinese government is doing to a million Uighurs. He does not have to answer, because the answer is zero. Not one of them had the courage to stand up and say that.

I will go on to some of the other falsehoods. I wonder if perhaps the member has read something called the Public Accounts. People may lie and present misinformation, but the Public Accounts do not. If the member looked, he would see that when the Liberal government took over, it slashed \$400 million from CBSA. It slashed hundreds of FTEs, and its departmental plans going forward show that, based on inflation, it is cutting \$200 million more from CBSA. The truth hurts. Perhaps the member should acknowledge that.

● (1020)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, what a distraction that was. The member should know that I voted in favour of that motion. However, he is trying to compare two completely different issues.

As the member said that he had a lot more to say to me on this issue, he should email me. I would love to get into a discussion about this with him. We could go back and forth all day on it, and I will continue to prove my point to him as best I can, but whether he will believe me is a different issue.

I voted in favour of the motion that the member brought up. I thought it was an important issue. If he wants to wait to ask a question of a minister during question period, which he has the ability to do, he should do that so that he could get the answers to those questions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The Conservatives are obviously not happy about Bill C-21. I think that was to be expected, even though the bill only sets out half-measures, particularly the fact that the buyback program is optional.

Does my colleague agree that, since the government was introducing a bill in this regard anyway, it could have gone with one that was much clearer and that did not alienate people who support the cause, such as those affected by the events at the École Polytechnique?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, here is the difference between an opposition that is trying to work with a government on a bill and an opposition that is outright against it no matter what.

There are some good arguments for what the Bloc has been advocating for, which is making the purchase program a requirement rather than it being voluntary. Personally, I am undecided on that issue, but I think there could be more compromise given to that.

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I hope to be able to work on this side of the House with the member and the Bloc Québécois to make this the best legislation for Canadians. Personally, I have not ruled out what the member is proposing as an option.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP wants legislation that is going to make Canadians safe. We have also been hearing from groups saying there has been very little consultation. In fact, there has been no consultation when it comes to airsoft and replica guns. We have received letters and calls from hundreds of concerned airsoft owners and businesses who do not understand why airsoft guns are going to become illegal under this legislation. We have seen states in the United States create regulations around brightly-coloured plastic tips, trigger guards and age restrictions. The industry is open to a regulatory regime if necessary, but there has not been appropriate consultation.

Could the member speak about whom the government consulted from the airsoft industry when it was preparing the bill? The industry is directly impacted by this bill.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I think the member knows that I cannot comment directly on whom the government consulted. The information I would receive would be the same information he would receive regarding that. I will say the intent of this was not to affect the paintball industry. The minister has said that is not the intent, and if more work needs to be done to further clarify that I would certainly support it.

The paintball industry has a number of operations in my region, if not specifically in my riding, as it is primarily rural. That is a legitimate concern that has been brought forward, but we should not allow that legitimate concern and our work to fix that to somehow throw us off course, as the Conservatives are trying to do with this issue.

I appreciate the way the member brought it up. I think there is an opportunity to work together to ensure clarity around this, but let us not allow this to derail us from the work that we need to do.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the member seem exercised today. I am a passionate advocate myself, so I do not judge that, but I thank him for a lot of the details he gave about his family, his family background and his rant about the public safety committee. Maybe I will ask a question about the details of the legislation, as it seems to me that is what we are supposed to actually be doing today.

I am curious about the member's comments about the hunters he knows who believe they will not be impacted, and that no firearms used for hunting would be impacted by Bill C-21 or by the May 2020 OIC, because the government has built in an exemption for indigenous hunters. Of course, they use firearms for sustenance hunting that are banned under the Liberals' bill, as do thousands and millions of sport shooters and hunters across the country.

One of the other problems, though, is that the government has made it so that indigenous hunters cannot take their firearms to licensed gunsmiths because they are not covered by the exemption. Obviously, that causes a safety concern. It prevents indigenous hunters from being able to use their firearms, and it is a contravention of their section 35 rights.

Will the member fight to fix this?

● (1025)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I would agree with the member that we are equally as passionate on our opposing sides of the issue. I appreciate that. She asked about the people I know.

I have an uncle who is a big part of the Italian community and a big hunter. Not only is he a hunter, but he also helped to build a shooting facility as part of the Italo-Canadian Club in Kingston. Once they are aware of the legislation and have gone beyond the talking points of what we are hearing from the Conservatives, the concern genuinely starts to dissipate. I had a very good conversation with him about that specifically and his concerns when he first started hearing about this. Once I was able to reference actual legislation, not highly charged comments or lobbying organizations, and show exactly what was going on, by and large his concerns dissipated.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for the open-mindedness he demonstrated earlier.

I have another suggestion for him. Will the members of his government also be open to sitting down and defining which firearms should be prohibited, as a first step?

As the bill currently stands, we see that some assault weapons are banned while others are not, and there is no real reason for that.

The first thing to do would be to define the characteristics of weapons that should be prohibited so that they can be put on the list. This is not just a matter of picking out of a hat the models of firearms we have heard most about.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about that.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, first of all, I cannot commit to anything on behalf of the government, as requested by the member, but I can say that the government has always been there, in my opinion, and wanted to work with stakeholders. The member would know that the Minister of Public Safety banned roughly 1,500 weapons through an order in council about a year ago. As to how the classifications work and how things are specifically addressed, I personally am a little leery of members of Parliament, politicians, weighing in on discussions of one consideration or another. I would prefer that experts define what those are. I would prefer that chiefs of police are consulted on this.

If the member is asking my personal opinion of whether it is important to consult and have discussions to get some kind of classification system, I would agree with that. I cannot comment specifically on the amount of consultation that went on with respect to that or on anything more that will happen.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

For this debate, I am adding my thoughts to those of my colleagues from Lakeland and Provencher, who have already pointed out what is wrong with Bill C-21's wrong-headed idea of firearms policy.

The member for Lakeland, who serves as the shadow minister of public safety, has done an incredible job in exposing many of the fallacies and misconceptions in how the Liberal government deals with firearms. After doing so in this House, she received a shockingly bad and partisan response from the Minister of Public Safety. That says it all about how Liberals are handling this important issue.

Simply put, the Liberal government proposes to take firearms from co-operative, law-abiding citizens while doing nothing to stop the flow of illegal guns to dangerous criminals and gangs, which is where the crisis is coming from in the first place. Of course, violent crime with illegal firearms is happening in Canada and has especially been a growing concern for certain cities.

There is a lot more to say about the alarming rise of rural crime as well, which has to do with a completely different set of circumstances for citizens and law enforcement, but today I will focus on a basic principle the Liberal government is totally missing.

Instead of targeting law-abiding Canadians and firearm retailers, the government should be investing in police anti-gang and gun units, and in the CBSA, to provide law enforcement with all the resources it needs to stop illegal smuggling operations and get dangerous criminals and gangs off our streets. This is a common sense approach that would proactively save lives and prevent crime.

In his speech, the member for Kingston and the Islands indicated that rather than deal with high rates of crime, we should just ban guns instead and all crime would magically stop. This is the dangerous mentality the government has when dealing with crime. Rather than deal with the actual problem, it chooses to make a splashy announcement that sounds like it is doing something, but in reality, it continually harasses law-abiding gun owners, who are the most highly vetted citizens in Canada.

This is exactly the problem with what the Liberals have presented in Bill C-21. They are not directing the necessary effort to where expert advice and data indicate it should be going. If we are not keeping illegal guns out of the hands of dangerous criminals, then nothing will change.

If there is any real hope of better protecting the public from these threats, we must focus on stronger enforcement and on deterrence of criminal activity, gangs and illegal gun trafficking. That is what it will take for any new firearms policy to be effective. This is what the experts and professionals are telling us. It is what police depart-

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ments across Canada are saying when discussing this legislation. I will quote a few prominent members of those respective forces.

Toronto Police Association president, Mike McCormack, said, "There's no way in my world or any world I know that this would have an impact on somebody who's going to go out and buy an illegal gun and use it to kill another person or shoot another person."

Retired Toronto staff inspector Mike Earl noted, "A handgun ban is ridiculous and doesn't address the actual problem of criminals shooting up the city. If those people aren't obeying the laws that are already in place, why would they obey a ban?"

Winnipeg police inspector Max Waddell said that, while a ban on all guns might seem like a common sense approach, banning guns wouldn't necessarily stop gun violence. He explains:

I'll draw a parallel. Illicit drugs are also banned. Yet we see dramatic increases and challenges around methamphetamine...because it's that supply and demand force that causes individuals to obtain these firearms whether it's to protect their drug trade, prevent harm, to use it for extortion. Whatever the criminal element is needing these guns for.

There are many more quotes from professionals, people the government clearly failed to consult while drafting this legislation, or else it would have reconsidered a full-scale ban on handguns. If we think about it for a moment, it is a bizarre move for how it wants to set up such a ban and really shows the major flaw with its entire program.

The government would be creating conditions on federal firearms licences to restrict handgun storage of transport within municipalities that have passed such bylaws. These bylaws would effectively be conditions on licences, which means it would only target lawful Canadians who already have the paperwork and are complying with the rules. This provision would only add more red tape and regulations for law-abiding Canadians, and these would be subject to change from community to community depending on whether a particular municipality has passed a bylaw. This is nothing but redundancy and ineffectiveness, and there are mayors who have already spoken out against this bizarre legislation.

Don Iveson, the mayor of Edmonton said, "it's not the direction we would go in...to pursue a city-specific ban when the issue of the flow of these weapons and their ties to, particularly, drugs and organized crime is much more than a municipality-by-municipality issue".

He makes a good point. I am all for the division of powers and decentralized government, but when it comes to tackling gun crime and illegal guns, there needs to be a consistent and national approach.

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• (1030)

The mayor of Halifax, Mike Savage, points out what we think would be obvious, but clearly it is not. He questioned whether a handgun ban would successfully counter gun violence in a city because, as he says, “A lot of them are not registered weapons”. These are the same handguns used by criminals. Further to his point, these are firearms and they are not obtained legally.

We need to focus on a cost-effective gun control program that is designed to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, while at the same time respecting the rights of law-abiding Canadians to own and use firearms responsibly. The reality is that at least 80% of guns used in Canadian gun crimes are illegally smuggled in from the United States, meaning that municipal regulations on law-abiding firearms owners will not change much.

Why is the government not focusing on the main supply for gun crime in this country? If it would have consulted those who are dealing with gun crime on the front lines, this bill would be significantly different. Some of the measures that we all support in this House are going to be mandatory minimum sentences for the criminal use of firearms, although the government is moving to remove some of those.

We already have strict processes for people who go in to buy firearms. I referenced earlier in my speech that they are among the most highly vetted citizens in Canada because of the process it takes to acquire the certification to be able to acquire and possess a firearm. One of the most important elements this bill fails to address is putting more law enforcement officers on our streets to deal with the illegal guns and the gangs that plague our cities.

A strange part of the legislation has caught many of my constituents off guard with the prohibition of the importation, exportation and sale of all non-regulated air guns that look like modern firearms. In case members in other parties, especially the governing Liberal Party, were not aware, airsoft guns are not real firearms. We do not have to be afraid of them. They are intentionally designed for games or simply for practice in a controlled environment.

Under Bill C-21, virtually all airsoft guns in Canada will be banned based on their muzzle velocity, as well as their similar look to real firearms. Basically, the government want to ban a hobby enjoyed by thousands of Canadians, including many of their own constituents. In all seriousness, this is more than the Liberals being killjoys. This will affect the real jobs and livelihoods of our fellow Canadians.

According to Airsoft in Canada, the Canadian airsoft market is worth \$100 million, and more than 260 Canadian businesses are linked to the paintball or airsoft community. Distributors and retailers are left unsure as to what to do with both their current stock and their stock on order because all of it would be rendered worthless immediately if the government goes through with its ridiculous ban.

There is also a lack of clarity on how this would be enforced. Will they be confiscated, or is the government planning a costly buyback plan for these airsoft guns as well? With this example, it cannot get any clearer that Bill C-21 is not serious about tackling gun crime at all. Sadly, this is the superficial response they are of-

fering to Canadians. They are full of distractions and empty rhetoric.

Canadian lives are at stake here. The government had an opportunity to actually listen to the experts, who have all come to agree that any legislation tackling gun crime must be directed at criminals and gangs, but they have chosen to ignore data-driven policies so they can try to score cheap political points. This is something my Conservative colleagues and I cannot play along with. We will continue to demand real action on gun crime so all Canadians can live in peace and security. This can and should be done while fully respecting the rights and freedoms under the law.

There is one other point I want to address. I addressed this when I spoke to the budget earlier this week. One of the biggest discrepancies we face here in Canada continues to be the difference between urban and rural Canadians. This gun ban particularly hits at the lives of rural Canadians because a lot of the firearms that were banned by the order in council are tools that are used by ranchers and farmers. They are actually necessary for their day-to-day operations in that they help to deal with pests. They help them to protect their herds and their livestock.

There is actually a real need for some of the firearms that were banned by the order in council. To arbitrarily use the bore diameter and the muzzle velocity chosen by the government really does not make any sense because it directly impacts the people who are using them for common sense purposes and reasons.

• (1035)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the National Firearms Association has close ties to the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition has made promises to the National Firearms Association about what he will do. Back in February, this organization called for guillotines to be constructed because, as they said, they “know tyranny when they see it, and this, my friends, is tyranny.” The public safety committee condemned this kind of language. At the time, the Conservative Party abstained from voting.

Will the member here today stand in the House and condemn this kind of language and these kinds of attacks on our democracy and on our politicians here in Canada?

• (1040)

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, the first thing I want to say is that the leader of the Conservative Party does not have any ties to the NFA, so I will just clear that up.

Second, let us focus on the legislation at hand. We are talking about a bill that is banning firearms and harassing law-abiding Canadians. As I referenced in my speech, they are the most highly vetted Canadians in Canada. The process and training that is required to even acquire a simple possession and acquisition licence, a PAL, is very extensive.

The process I had to go through as a teenager with my hunter safety and safe handling courses, and all the different things I had to go through, are very important aspects as well. We need to highlight the fact that these are law-abiding Canadians who the government is choosing to go after.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I understand his opposition to Bill C-21. I would like to know if he is open to working on a technical and scientific definition of the type of firearms that should be prohibited rather than including firearms such as the air-soft guns that are in there now but should not be. There are a lot of options there.

Would the Conservatives be interested in sitting down with experts to take a scientific approach to deciding which firearms should be banned, or are they completely opposed to any control over automatic weapons, which most civilians do not need?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, I think the point the member is making, which I fully agree with, is that the government is not really focused on anything with this bill other than trying to ban as much as it possibly can.

Yes, I think sitting down and having the conversation about practical approaches to what this legislation should have done should have been the process all along. Automatic weapons have been illegal in Canada for a number of years, so I think we need to make that distinction as well.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we keep hearing from the Conservatives that we need to tighten our borders to stop the flow of illegal guns, but, when the the Conservative Party had a majority in the House of Commons, it cut 7% of the Canada Border Services Agency positions, more than 1,000 jobs. It got rid of the very people who stop the flow of illegal guns into Canada.

Does the member agree that was a mistake? Does he recognize that in order to stop gun smuggling and the smuggling of fentanyl, which is killing people through the opioid crisis, we need to increase resources at the CBSA, not decrease them?

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, obviously I was not part of that Conservative majority government. I was only elected in 2019, so I cannot comment as to what the backroom discussions were or what the reasoning and motives were for what it was doing.

However, right now, based on the evidence that we are seeing and the information we are receiving from experts, we need to stop the illegal flow of firearms into Canada from the United States, and these illegal drugs the member mentioned as well, because it is a huge and growing problem. It seems just about every day in the news police forces are continuing to make busts on illegal firearms

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and drugs, but it is barely making a dent into the supply. It continues to come in, so, yes, practically, I think bolstering the enforcement of our CBSA forces would be a good thing.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak today to Bill C-21, hoping that I can bring a calm and reasoned approach to this discussion. All parties in the House are united in their desire to get rid of gun crime in Canada. The question is, what is the best way to go about doing that?

We know that we need to be fact- and evidence-based. In fact, the Liberal government is always talking about how it is fact- and evidence-based, but in this particular discussion, it has missed the mark.

We know that 95% of gun crime in Canada is illegal guns and guns used illegally. What does Bill C-21 do to address illegal guns coming into Canada? The answer is, nothing. What does Bill C-21 do, then, about guns used illegally? The answer, again, is nothing. In terms of trying to address gun crime in Canada, this bill misses the mark.

If we look at the 261 gun-related crimes that happened last year, 60% of those were committed with handguns that are already prohibited or restricted. One in four homicides was related to gang activity. If we look at the people who were arrested for illegal firearms offences in 2019, the Toronto chief of police said that the 326 people charged with firearms offences are free on bail. Even when people commit a crime, we are not enforcing the law, and the penalties are reduced.

If we look at an approach of what we ought to be doing to reduce gun crime in Canada, the first thing is to address the illegal guns coming into the country. I am sad to note that the Liberal members voted against a private member's bill from the member for Markham—Unionville that would have introduced measures against illegal guns coming into the country.

Certainly the point has already been made today that we need to step up the effort at the border, because we know from the statistics that most of the guns coming in are coming in from the U.S.A. There is a role to play there. I know that the National Police Federation has called on the Government of Canada to increase the funding to the RCMP border integrity program to enable dedicated and proactive RCMP investigative weapons enforcement activity in order to address gun crime at the border.

Another issue that Bill C-21 does not address is organized crime and gangs. We have heard the statistics about one in four homicides being related to gang activities. This is something that has not yet been addressed.

Government Orders

What does Bill C-21 actually do? There are a number of things in the bill, but basically, for firearms that have already been banned for lawful gun owners, they are allowed to keep them but there is no defined compensation yet. Again, this is a measure that comes against people who are abiding by the law, and now the government is punishing them. They are not allowed to use these guns, and they are not going to be compensated. Nothing has been put forward on that.

At the same time, the Liberals are trying to remove the provincial authority for the chief firearms officer to “approve, refuse, renew and revoke authorizations to carry” and to give that power to a federal commissioner of firearms, another “Ottawa knows best” kind of strategy coming from the government.

In terms of importing ammunition, the government wants to add additional requirements for a licence to import ammunition. Again, it is always focused on people who will obey the law, and what it is missing is the main point that criminals do not obey the law. They do not obey the existing gun laws, and they would not obey these new guns laws. They would not obey a requirement to have a licence to import ammunition. The naïveté needs to stop, and we need to start with reasoned approaches to actually address the issue.

The municipal ban that is proposed by Bill C-21 has actually been opposed by many of the mayors across the country. The government ought to listen to mayors who are saying that this is not municipal jurisdiction. The RCMP has the expertise in this area, and that is where the power should rest.

• (1045)

At the same time that the government is implementing things that will not do anything about gun crime in Canada, we also see that it is introducing other bills, like Bill C-22, that will reduce the penalties for crimes committed with guns. I cannot even imagine why Liberals would think about doing that.

Bill C-22 repeals several minimum penalties. Let me read the list: unauthorized possession, possession of a prohibited firearm, possession of a weapon obtained by crime, weapons trafficking, possession for the purpose of trafficking, reckless discharge, discharge with the intent to wound or endanger, and robbery with a firearm. Why would we ever reduce the penalties for those very things that are part of the problem of gun crime in Canada, which is the thing we are trying to solve?

At the same time, Bill C-22 would also eliminate a number of offences that would be ineligible for conditional sentencing, such as sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking in persons for material benefit, abduction of people under 14, motor vehicle theft, and arson for fraudulent purposes.

Again, we are trying to solve the problem of gun crime in Canada: illegal guns, guns used illegally, and the kind of organized crime and gang crime activity that is related to all these illegal activities. We have a huge issue of drugs in the country, so we should definitely be putting our money there.

I see that my time is drawing short, and yes, I am going to get to my points. There has also been an allegation that suicide is a reason for the banning of weapons for lawful gun owners, that it would re-

ally do something about suicide in the country. I would offer that people who are going to kill themselves, sadly, are going to find other ways: hanging themselves, slicing their wrists, taking pills.

We see a huge increase in suicide in this country. In fact, because this pandemic has gone on so long and the Liberal government has failed to get a plan to exit, we have seen a quadrupling of suicides. Instead of the 4,000 people a year who typically commit suicide, if that is quadrupled, the number of people dying from suicide is approaching the number of people dying from COVID-19. This is why it is important for the government to focus its efforts there and, if it really wants to eliminate suicide, get us a plan to exit this pandemic, absolutely.

The undefined buyback program needs to be clarified so that we can actually comment on it. Right now it just looks like weapons will be banned and there is no defined plan, but the plan is likely to be very expensive and it looks to me like the initial estimates have underestimated what that cost will be.

All in all, Bill C-21 misses the mark on eliminating gun crime in Canada. I want to summarize by saying that the problem is illegal guns and guns used illegally. Bill C-21 does nothing about illegal guns. It does nothing about guns used illegally.

What do we need to do? Let us step up the efforts to keep illegal guns from coming into the country and the penalties associated with being involved in gun smuggling, and once those people are convicted, let us keep them in jail and not let them back out on the street with their weapons again.

Let us make sure that we focus on organized crime and gang activity. I think there are resources that would be better applied there. In fact, the National Police Federation said that we should divert from the monitoring activities on lawful gun owners that we spend on and put some of those resources into crime prevention. That is a very good thing to do as well.

At the end of the day, all of us want the same thing. We all want to eliminate gun crime in Canada, but Bill C-21 does not do it.

• (1050)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to quote something the member said in her speech. She said that we need to step up protection as it relates to the borders and gun smuggling.

This government introduced spending of \$327 million to combat gun and gang violence, with \$86 million to prevent cross-border smuggling of illegal firearms. The member voted against it. Why did she vote against measures that she is now claiming are so important?

Statements by Members

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, the Liberal government put forward an omnibus budget bill that is 720 pages long with a plethora of things in it. Although this specific action I do agree with, the amount of debt that the government has racked up without providing for a growth budget has created \$250 a month of payments, for the next 10 years, from every Canadian to the government in order to pay off its existing debt. There is no plan to exit that, no plan to restart the economy or grow the economy in the budget, and that is the reason I did not vote for it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will ask the member questions in two areas.

The first is about smuggling and ensuring that CBSA has the resources to do that job, yet when the Conservatives were in government, they actually cut CBSA resources to the tune of 1,000 staff, which would have helped prevent smuggling at the borders. I wonder what the member's response is to that.

Second, the member mentioned that municipalities are opposed to it. In Vancouver and Surrey, the mayors actually do support it. Do their voices not count?

• (1055)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I was not involved in the previous Conservative government's decisions. My mother always told me that we cannot change the past; we can only change the future. In the go-forward, to really solve this crime, we are going to need additional efforts at the border because most of the guns are coming in from the U.S., as I said.

With respect to the second question, I think the municipalities in some cases are misinformed about what is happening. If we look at the gun crime statistics, they will say they are happening with weapons that are already prohibited. If a handgun ban is put in place, criminals are not going to obey. If we say tomorrow that no more handguns are allowed in Vancouver, the criminals and people involved in organized crime are still going to have them, so it is not addressing the root of the issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that well-laid-out speech.

We agree that nobody is satisfied with this bill. People who are against all forms of gun control are not happy, and neither are those who want gun control, because the bill is full of half-measures. For one thing, it does not contain an adequate definition of an assault weapon.

Would my colleague be open to the idea of having discussions and trusting the experts to define what an assault weapon is and which ones should be banned? If and when we came to a final agreement on banned weapons, would my colleague support a mandatory buyback program?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We must absolutely consult with people who have a lot of experience to develop a plan for eliminating gun crimes in Canada and to bring in a program to compensate people who have to give up their firearms.

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly found interesting the amount of charged rhetoric coming from the Liberal side and the refusal to answer any questions of substance about the bill, but I do agree with the member for Kingston and the Islands when he said that politicians should not be making the calls around the specific actions about which weapons should and should not be prohibited. I do agree with him on that front.

I wonder if the member for Sarnia—Lambton would also agree that it should be experts who are informing these decisions, not politicians, in agreement with the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, absolutely, the experts should be making those decisions, but in fact it is not clear that this is what happened in the order in council, which made no sense, about hundreds of guns and people with a lot of experience in firearms and their use. That is worthy of note.

The other thing that is worthy of note is that a lot of the handguns being discussed are already prohibited or restricted and the government keeps pretending that they are not. That is simply not the case.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on everyone. While families across the country have struggled with the COVID-19 illness itself—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. There is something wrong with the member's screen. I will ask the member to restart.

To ensure that we do not waste any time and that no time is taken from other members, I would ask members to ensure their headphones and screens are on; otherwise, I will have to go to someone else.

The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

• (1100)

Mr. James Maloney: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on everyone. While families across the country have struggled with the COVID-19 illness itself, that is not the only fallout from the pandemic.

Statements by Members

Forty per cent of Canadians have experienced having their mental health deteriorate over the last year. For those with pre-existing mental health conditions, the number rose to 61%.

Young people have seen the greatest decline in good mental health compared to pre-pandemic levels. Seven in 10 health workers reported worsening mental health and 64% of indigenous people said their mental health had deteriorated. We are all feeling the pressures.

On May 13, I had my annual mental health forum but this year we were virtual, and I recorded it for people to consult after the event. It was an incredible discussion with Dr. Katy Kamkar from Toronto's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and Deborah Quiggin from LAMP Community Health Centre, located in my constituency of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. They were both very helpful with respect to COVID mental health survival tips.

People need not suffer alone. There is help. Please reach out.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, businesses in Mégantic—L'Érable need a real plan. The wait times for hiring temporary foreign workers are unacceptable.

We are talking about wait times of up to two years, which has consequences not only for businesses, but also for regional development as a whole. Expansion projects are being cancelled and contracts are being refused. In Mégantic—L'Érable alone, we are talking about millions of dollars every week.

In a joint letter to the Minister of Immigration we asked that he resolve the situation and respond to the request for a meeting made by Princecraft, Brisson Paysagiste, CBR Laser, Galvanisation Québec, Lemoltech Foundry, Manoir du Lac William, Palettes CMP, Convertex, Attraction, Fromagerie La Chaudière, Lapierre Equipment, Gosselin Express, TechnoPaint, Série-Act Peinture, CIF Metal, Optimoule, Plantations Robert, the Castech Plessitech Group, Plantations Nicholas and the three chambers of commerce.

The minister must implement a system that works and puts an end to the current wait times. It is high time Ottawa showed businesses the respect they deserve.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL TOURISM WEEK

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week is National Tourism Week. In my riding of Markham—Stouffville, I know that many of my constituents have made excellent use of the beautiful Rouge National Urban Park, in keeping with public health guidelines to exercise, get fresh air and maintain their mental health during this challenging time.

Our national parks are extraordinary areas where we can enjoy and appreciate Canada's natural beauty. At the same time, these parks protect our environment and conserve vital ecosystems. As

we recover from the pandemic, our national parks present Canadians with opportunities to explore our country's natural heritage.

There is still much work to be done in continuing to restore and develop the Rouge National Urban Park, and therefore there is great opportunity for jobs, economic development and tourism.

During this National Tourism Week, let us celebrate Canada's national parks and continue our work to preserve them and see them grow.

* * *

SINGLE SENIORS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, in addition to the two-tier OAS proposal, there is yet another example in this budget of the government's discrimination against groups of seniors, and that is single seniors.

The government has chosen not to address the tax unfairness introduced by the Harper government. Single seniors are without an equivalent to income splitting whereby married or common-law partners may transfer pension income to the lower earner and thus pay less tax.

What does that mean? By not introducing measures for those without a partner, the Liberal government would allow a single senior to pay substantially more taxes than a senior in a couple with the exact same income.

By the same token, singles will continually be blatantly disadvantaged on any tax credits and benefits that are calculated using a taxpayer's net income, such as the age amount on the old age security benefits. This is totally unfair.

Governments need to put an end to this tiered seniors approach and stop discriminating against single seniors.

* * *

ETHIOPIA

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of the House the escalating violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers are reportedly committing widespread human rights abuses, including targeted killing of civilians and brutal sexual violence.

The conflict, which began in November, has killed thousands and displaced as many as two million people. It has now led to a humanitarian crisis, which is putting five million people at risk of famine. According to the UN, 91% of the people of Tigray are in immediate need of assistance.

I ask all members of the House to join me in calling on the Ethiopian authorities to ensure an immediate ceasefire; to hold accountable those responsible for extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention and human rights violations; and to immediately ensure safe access to humanitarian aid such as medicine and food supplies to the Tigray region.

* * *

• (1105)

AZERBAIJAN

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, today is the Republic Day of Azerbaijan, a day to honour the formation of the first parliamentary republic and first democratic, legal and secular state in the Turkish and Islamic world.

The republic, among other things, vowed to guarantee all its citizens within its borders free and full political and civil rights regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, class, profession or gender. Unfortunately, the republic only survived 23 months in its first iteration, as it was taken over by Bolshevik Russia and it remained part of the Soviet Union for 70 years.

Since its restoration, however, Azerbaijan has remained an ally to Canada through the partnership for peace programme through NATO.

Today, as chair of the Canada-Azerbaijan Friendship Group, I am joining the people of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani Canadians and people around the world in celebrating Azerbaijan Republic Day.

Happy Republic Day.

* * *

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I am honoured to recognize Asian Heritage Month. With a rich and vibrant history, Canadians of Asian descent have made significant contributions to building this great country.

My riding of Scarborough North is home to a diverse Asian population that has grown businesses and enhanced the cultural landscape of our community. This week, I was pleased to announce a federal investment of \$2.8 million for the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. The funds will help increase accessibility and build a new Asian garden, an important cultural legacy for generations to come.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCC has provided meals to seniors, distributed PPE and donated to food banks, while addressing the rise of anti-Asian racism.

This month, let us be reminded of what connects us as Canadians, respect, freedom and inclusion, and continue building an even better Canada.

Statements by Members

CROATIA

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my father came from Croatia to Canada as a seven year old in 1929. The characteristics he gained from his upbringing ensured his success in Canada: hard work, self reliance and love of family.

Croatia is an ancient nation, but Sunday marks the 30th anniversary of statehood, celebrating the day its first multi-party parliament passed the constitutional recognition of Croatian sovereignty and independence.

In 2019, I had the honour of attending the official state visit of the Croatian President to Canada and the Prime Minister's reception for her in Hamilton. Before that, I had welcomed the Speaker of its parliament and other members to the House.

On Saturday, I will be joining His Excellency, Ambassador Vice Skračić to see the colours of the Croatian flag projected onto Niagara Falls. We all anxiously await the end of the pandemic so Canadians can discover one of the most beautiful vacation destinations in the world, our beautiful homeland, *Lijepa naša domovino*.

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, people in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove like to celebrate Canadian Environment Week by planting trees. They are just mere seedlings for now, but as they mature, they will add real beauty to our neighbourhoods and contribute to the greening of the planet and, in a very modest way, the fight against global climate change.

Next week, on Saturday, June 5, in front of the Home Depot, I will be there with my friends at the Langley Environmental Partners Society and we will hand out 500 native tree seedlings. Admittedly, that is not as impressive as the two billion trees the Liberals keep promising again and again, but our trees are real trees that are going to absorb real greenhouse gases.

I want to invite everybody to be there on Saturday, June 5, in front of the Home Depot, to get their own beautiful native tree seedling.

* * *

[Translation]

PAUL MERCIER

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise this morning to acknowledge a remarkable man from Gatineau, Paul Mercier. Paul is a bit of an icon in my community, not because he seeks recognition for his many contributions to civic life, but precisely because he works tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to ensure that everyone has a shot at a decent life.

Statements by Members

Born in Ottawa in 1945, Paul quickly made a name for himself in the business world in Montreal, Quebec City and, since the 1990s, in Hull and Aylmer. He is now a full-time volunteer, donating his time here, there and everywhere. He is involved with the Royal Canadian Legion and the Knights of Columbus, but above all, he answers his neighbours' calls any time they are in need. I should definitely add that Paul considers every human being his neighbour, no matter where they live.

I want to thank him for everything he does for our community. We truly appreciate him, and I wish him every success in all his endeavours.

* * *

• (1110)

[English]

WHITE ROCK PIER

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the 1914 White Rock Pier landmark, the longest pier in Canada, brings locals and tourists to our coastal beauty, to small businesses like Cosmos and Uli's restaurants, and to delicious ice cream sold alongside the beach promenade. In non-pandemic times, the pier and Marine Drive host events like Picnic on the Pier, the summer concert series, the Sea Festival, Semiahmoo Days and Canada Day by the Bay, with awesome fireworks.

In 2018, our pier was broken in half by 90-kilometre winter winds. I watched the daring helicopter rescue of a visitor stuck at the wrong end of the damage. After a silent spring and summer, the pier reopened with a \$4.3 million repair funded by the city, the province and the community, but it remains structurally fragile. Urgent reinforcement is necessary. It is a shovel-ready infrastructure project. Sincerely, the federal government needs to step up. It must act now to save this west coast icon.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Liberal-NDP coalition rammed through the House the Prime Minister's billion-dollar-deficit budget. This budget is a massive letdown to all Canadians who were looking to the federal government to deliver us out of the worst economic times this country has faced in a century. Instead, Canadians got costly spending piled upon costly spending. Under this Liberal-NDP coalition, the Prime Minister has now racked up more debt than all previous Canadian governments combined.

In my riding of Saskatoon West, constituents want to know why the NDP has supported this reckless racking up of the national credit card and has mortgaged our children's future. It is in contrast with the Conservative plan to secure jobs and secure our economy. Our leader has put forward a real plan that would get our economy growing again and create good paying jobs that would get Canadians back to work across the country. The people of Saskatoon West do not want a reckless Liberal-NDP coalition. They want a solid Conservative plan to secure jobs and secure our future.

NATIONAL URBAN PARK

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, Ojibway Shores is a vital 33-acre green space and the last remaining undeveloped natural shoreline in Windsor-Detroit. Hundreds of endangered species rely upon migration through surrounding local parks for survival. These include Ojibway Shores, Spring Garden, Black Oak and Tallgrass Prairie Park, to name a few.

If connected, this area, including the Detroit River, could become one of North America's best treasures. It serves not only as a home for endangered species, but also provides flood mitigation for climate change and provides natural areas for our community to enjoy for healthy tourism and living.

Over the past several years, a consensus has developed among residents and local, national and international organizations to put all of these lands together into a national urban park. Tens of thousands of people have attended public meetings, signed petitions and written letters and emails. Even the Prime Minister says he is in favour.

The federal government should seize the opportunity and move on its goal to create more urban parks, as indicated in its fall economic statement. It is time now for Ojibway national urban park.

* * *

[Translation]

DEATH OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise today in the House with a broken heart and feeling devastated. The discovery of the remains of 215 indigenous children buried behind a residential school in Kamloops is terrible. I cannot understand it; it is so terribly sad.

As a white person, I am ashamed. As a mother, I feel sick, physically sick. There are periods of history that are so dark, so ugly and so dirty that we have a sacred responsibility to remember. Never again. The children had the right to live, the right to love and the right to grow up. We, the white society, gave them nothing but neglect and mistreatment. It is appalling.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois and, most certainly, on behalf of all Quebecers, I wish to extend my deepest and most sincere condolences to the Tk'emlups community and all first nations that suffered such treatment. My heart goes out to them.

Oral Questions

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday, Kúkpi7 Rosanne Casimir of the Tk'emlúps First Nation revealed that the remains of 215 children had been found buried on the site of the former residential school in Kamloops, B.C. Today, our community mourns along with those who suffered this terrible loss and alongside all survivors of the horrific residential school system, who are undoubtedly forced to remember their trauma upon hearing the news. There is nothing more painful in life than losing a child.

My heart breaks today, thinking of all the loving parents who never saw their children return home and who were never granted the dignity of knowing what happened. This tragedy is yet another reminder of the important work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and how much more work true reconciliation requires. Chief Casimir and the leadership of the Tk'emlúps community have taken on the heavy burden of caring for these lost children.

Finally, to those who love these children, know that I, the Kamloops community and the whole of Canada mourn with them. Their loss will never be forgotten.

* * *

● (1115)

[Translation]

END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the students in Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

This year many of them started a new chapter in their online schooling. They did their best to stay motivated. Many of our students are finishing up their high school, college or university studies alone in front of a computer screen.

I want to recognize their perseverance and strength in dealing with being isolated and unable to enjoy the moments in life that they should have.

[English]

As such, I want to share this message with all of our students. Congratulations on making it through. It may not have been perfect, but nothing has been during this pandemic. Whether you have just finished another year or term, or are graduating, I hope you know just how strong you are for getting here. Whatever your next steps and plans are, we are behind you. Your teachers and parents are behind you, and we all look forward to seeing you reach new heights and achieve all that you hope to achieve and experience in the years ahead.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday evening I asked the Minister of Finance if she knew what the inflation rate in Canada was and I got no answer.

I asked her if she knew what the Bank of Canada's target inflation rate was and I got no answer.

By feigning ignorance, she is showing that she has no idea what is going on in Canada right now. Everything costs more, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed yesterday that interest on this government's astronomical debt will cost \$3.4 billion more a year.

Why did the minister fail to present a credible economic plan to Canadians?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take this question. The hon. member does not tell us that his solution to the supposed inflation problem is to stop spending on supports that are helping businesses stay open and helping workers keep their jobs and put food on the table.

The reality is that the inflation target of between 1% and 3% is run independently by the Bank of Canada. The Government of Canada is in charge of fiscal policy. We used our fiscal firepower during the greatest economic emergency we have seen to help those families and workers keep their jobs and put food on the table, and I will not apologize for it.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us do a little math. More inflation equals a higher cost of living for Canadians. Higher prices equal less money for Canadians. More inflation equals higher interest rates. Higher interest equals higher prices for all Canadians. Higher prices equal less money for all Canadian families.

Why is the minister standing around doing nothing?

The math is simple, and the minister is ignoring the Parliamentary Budget Officer's warnings.

Why has she failed to present a credible plan for Canada's entire economy?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is selective in his choice of sources. A number of credible experts, including former governors of the Bank of Canada, have described the fiscal framework outlined in the recent budget as being sustainable.

Oral Questions

If the member is concerned about inflation, I would point him to the fact that we have been able to lock in long-term interest rates. If he looks at the costs of servicing our debt outlined in budget 2021, he will see that in raw dollar terms, despite the fact that we have had to incur debt to support Canadians, the cost of servicing that debt is actually less than what was predicted in the fall economic statement before this pandemic. We will move—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the cost of everything is rising. That is the reality.

Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report that confirms what we have been saying all along about this Liberal budget: There are more risks and more debt for Canadians. Revenues have been overestimated, deficits and debts have been underestimated, and there are no plans for the Liberals to ever balance a budget again after one two years in the making.

Why has the government failed to produce credible plans for the future?

• (1120)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member sees the cost of the measures we have put in place, but he does not see the value in them. I would point out to the hon. member that today is actually the day that families with kids under the age of six are going to receive an enhanced Canada child benefit after months of delay by the Conservatives. They pretend to support our measures when they opposed CERB, voted against measures to extend the wage subsidy and held a press conference at the beginning of the pandemic to say they would not support big, fat government programs.

Canadians should know that in their time of need it was our government that was there for them to ensure they could keep their jobs and put food on the table. That was the right approach then and it is the right approach—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the facts are that inflation is on the rise and with it interest rates will go up sooner than expected. A rise in interest rates will cause debt-servicing costs to also skyrocket.

The PBO confirmed yesterday that interest rate increases will add, on average, \$3.4 billion in debt interest costs annually. That is \$3 billion less for health care, infrastructure or helping make small businesses more competitive.

Therefore, I ask again: Why has the government failed to put a credible economic plan in place?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will take no lessons from a member of a party that had the worst economic record since the Great Depres-

sion before this pandemic. If he wants to see a credible fiscal plan, I would direct him to budget 2021. The plan is to continue to support households and businesses through this pandemic. The plan is to defeat COVID-19. The plan is to ensure that all Canadians, not just wealthy Canadians, get to benefit from the growth that is being projected not just by our government but by private sector economists wherever we look.

The reality is our plan maintains an AAA credit rating, it maintains the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7 and it supports Canadian workers. This is—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was indeed a big budget, but not for the right reasons. It is the biggest spending, biggest deficit and biggest debt in the history of our country. The PBO even said that inflation and rising interest rates will blunt the effectiveness of the so-called stimulus spending in the massive budget.

With no fiscal anchor, no debt management strategy and a never-ending deficit, why is the government setting up the country for massive failure?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is clear that the hon. member has not taken the time to read the budget.

He claims there is no fiscal anchor. The fiscal anchor is actually described in those terms as a declining debt-to-GDP ratio. He says there is no debt management strategy when the phrase “debt management strategy” is actually included in the portion of the budget that seeks to explain how we plan to manage our debt.

The reality is that we have launched spending measures to keep businesses open and to support Canadian families. We have done so in a way that is sustainable, that has preserved the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio of any G7 country, and maintained a AAA credit rating. That is more than could be said for any plan the Conservatives have offered.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois and all Quebecers want Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses. When we ask the minister about this, she tells us that she will protect the right to work in French, but that is not what Bill 101 is for.

This bill does not protect the right to work in French; it makes French the language of work across all of Quebec. Does the minister want to protect the right to work in French in Quebec, or does she want to protect French as the official language of work in Quebec?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. We recognize that French is in decline and that we need to protect and promote the French language not only outside Quebec, but also within Quebec.

We will step up and ensure that businesses under our jurisdiction contribute to the effort to protect French that has been initiated by the Government of Quebec and francophone communities. We are proposing to provide protection for French as the language of work and service in Quebec and in other communities across the country with a strong francophone presence.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am asking the question because, in the white paper announcing its language reform, the government does not say that it wants French to be the language of work in Quebec. Rather, it says that it will extend the application of the Official Languages Act to all federally regulated businesses.

The government does not want to defend French in the workplace. It wants to defend bilingualism, even though bilingualism is doing great in Quebec. It is French that is in decline. Will the government let Quebec apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses to protect the French language?

• (1125)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said, we recognize that there has been a decline in the use of French. We will promote and protect the French language both outside and within Quebec. As we stated in our February reform document, protecting and promoting French is a priority for our government.

For the first time, the federal government recognized that the use of French is at a turning point in this country and that it is the government's responsibility to protect and promote the language both outside and within Quebec.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, Facebook just made a deal with 14 media outlets to pay for online journalistic content. We can all agree that is a good thing and a step in the right direction. However, we do not want piecemeal solutions that depend on the wishes of web giants.

The real question here is why the heritage minister is dragging his feet and has not yet introduced a bill to protect our news media. What is he waiting for? For all of our newsrooms to shut down? When will the Liberals stop kowtowing to the web giants and stand up to them for a change?

[English]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadian news publishers deliver essential information for the health and safety of

our communities, and they should be fairly compensated for their work.

It is important. We are continuing to work, and we are committed to ensuring a fair and well-remunerated system for our news publishers here in Canada.

[Translation]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, Campus Saint-Jean, the only francophone campus in western Canada, is ailing. The Liberal government promised \$121 million for post-secondary minority-language education across Canada.

It already promised Ontario \$60 million. Now, it is asking Albertans to wait. Will the minister commit to supporting Campus Saint-Jean before it is too late?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and also for her exceptional work in making sure Campus Saint-Jean receives the funding it needs.

Our government believes without a doubt that any post-secondary institution in Canada with a strong francophone majority should be supported. The Minister of Official Languages has been in contact with her provincial counterpart in Alberta. We are truly working on solutions and we want to continue to be involved.

That is why, since we came to power in 2015—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord

HEALTH

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives raised concerns about Switch Health in mid-April. The Prime Minister said he had asked his team to carefully look into what was happening with the contract and with that company. However, the government had already extended the contract, which is worth up to \$180 million, before the Standing Committee on Health had a chance to look into the situation.

Did the Prime Minister call for a thorough review, or did he simply let Canadians down once again?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we expect this company to fulfill its contract requirements. Officials have been working with Switch Health to address any problems and concerns. We will not sacrifice the safe and reliable testing at our borders for Canadians. The minister has also directed officials to look at alternatives for providing this service. We have added an additional provider. We will stop at nothing to ensure that the contract and the testing are both fulfilled.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he is committed to transparency, but he keeps covering up his mistakes.

Nearly 5,000 tests were not processed because the samples were improperly labelled. Now the Liberal government will not even show us the contract, once again citing national security as the excuse.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to accept responsibility for his mistakes?

- (1130)

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is the contrary. As I said, we expect Switch Health to fulfill its contract requirements. Officials have worked with this company every step of the way to address any areas of concern. In addition to that, we have added additional providers. The Minister of Health is very seized with this file. We will ensure that our testing is safe and reliable, so we can ensure all Canadians can count on it.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, Switch Health is an English-only company. This has caused numerous problems for francophones, especially for farmers and business owners who have hired temporary foreign workers.

None of the company's partner laboratories are located in Quebec, and tests performed in Quebec are generally sent to Ottawa to be analyzed.

How can the government ignore the needs of francophones for such an essential service?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have said in this House before that we expect the testing to be done in both official languages. We have worked with Switch Health on this file. It has doubled its French capabilities. However, even before that, we ensured to add an additional service provider to make sure there is safe, reliable testing in both official languages. We continue to work with officials and Switch Health, as well as look for additional service providers. We will stop at nothing to keep Canadians safe.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister likes to use the word “expect” a whole lot in her answers, but what I have noticed is that the government refuses to hold them accountable. Let us move onto a different topic.

The principle of net neutrality is that everyone's content online is treated the same way. It means no favouritism. The government used to respect this principle, but that is not true anymore. With Bill C-10, the government will boost some content and suppress other content all based on arbitrary criteria. It is completely discriminatory.

Will the minister stop trying to pick winners and losers, and leave Canadians' online content alone?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Bill C-10 is about having web giants, like Netflix, contribute to the creation of Canadian productions. It is about Canadian jobs and Canadian artists. Bill C-10 does not deal with Internet service providers in any way. There is nothing in Bill C-10 that would allow or support in any way that Internet service providers could block people from accessing a service like Skype, or slow down a service like Netflix or YouTube in order to encourage someone to buy a different streaming service.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister once again tries to mislead the House and the Canadian public. The bill would result in discrimination against some Canadians. It is clear the Liberals no longer advocate for net neutrality; they think discrimination is okay so long as the government is the one doing it.

Here is the thing. We cannot lift one group of artists up by tearing another group of artists down, which is exactly what Bill C-10 is trying to do. The heritage minister is attempting to pick winners and losers. Will he change course, do the right thing and scrap Bill C-10?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the only obligations in Bill C-10 for social media companies are for the companies themselves, not individuals. The proposed obligations for the companies are restricted to having them advise the Canada Revenue Agency, contribute a portion of those revenues to Canadian production and make those creators discoverable.

Nothing in the bill asks social media companies to hide content. It is about requiring web giants that make money in our country to contribute to our Canadian shows, movies and music. Why would we let web giants make money from Canadians and not contribute back?

Oral Questions

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, a well-read answer. I really wish the individual who just answered would stop trying to mislead Canadians.

The Internet is an amazing tool that allows Canadian artists to explode in popularity around the world. With Bill C-10, the Liberals are attempting to build a wall around Canadian creators. The problem is, on average, 90% of their audience is from outside of Canada. By creating a so-called protective wall around them, the Liberals are actually imprisoning them, thereby quashing their ability to succeed.

When will the minister stand up for all Canadian artists and scrap Bill C-10?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Bill C-10 is about modernizing the Broadcasting Act, which has not been updated in 30 years. That is before streaming services became a part of the way that Canadians found their shows, movies and music and it needed an update. However, from the very beginning, before the bill even went to committee, the Conservatives vowed to block this law from going ahead. The Conservatives have been against web giants contributing to the creation of Canadian stories from the beginning. Why?

* * *

• (1135)

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the COVID-19 testing and screening expert advisory panel recommended that the government stop hotel quarantines, not for health reasons, but because the quarantines are ineffective owing to the government's disastrous management. That is not a recommendation; it is a statement of failure.

The experts are right when they say that it makes no sense that people who cross land borders do not have to quarantine. They are right when they say that it makes no sense that people can avoid hotel quarantines by paying a fine. Rather than end the program, will the government finally start managing it properly?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we welcome the report from the COVID-19 testing and screening expert advisory panel. These recommendations are going to be incredibly helpful as we move forward in adjusting measures. One of the fastest ways to adjust restrictions is for Canadians to continue to get vaccinated.

Every step of the way our process at the borders has been about adding layers of protection. Every single layer of that protection is an additional measure that is going to stop the spread and protect Canadian lives. We will stop at nothing to do so.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, public health authorities must be the ones driving the process. The hotel quarantine program is not the

problem. The problem is the federal government's incompetent management of the border. Until travel is safe again, returning travellers must be monitored.

People have been making sacrifices for 15 months. As we near the end of the pandemic, the federal government cannot tell them that it is abandoning border security because of an administrative foul-up. Will it get its act together instead of shirking its responsibilities?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, absolutely not. As I just said, our approach has been about adding layers of protection to ensure that all Canadians are safe. That is why we have some of the strictest border measures anywhere around the world.

In fact, we know these requirements are working because air travel has reduced by 96%, compared to pre-pandemic travel levels. As the situation evolves, we will absolutely take into account any science and evidence, but we are going to ensure that the hard work done by Canadians is not sacrificed and we will keep them safe.

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CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, many Canadians will remember the issue that sent 30,000 self-employed individuals into a panic last Christmas as they were told they were ineligible for benefits and had to reimburse the government. The CRA's failure to define income in the context of small business caused anxiety for millions. In fact, many Canadians repaid benefits they were rightfully entitled to.

Can the minister please tell these hard-working Canadians when they will get their benefits back?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the pandemic hit, we quickly introduced the CERB, helping more than eight million Canadians put food on the table and keep a roof over their head.

We know that this continues to be a difficult time for many. That is why we are allowing self-employed workers who applied for the CERB based on their gross income to keep their payments as long as they meet all other eligibility requirements. For people who may still need to make a repayment, no one is required to do so at this time.

As the Prime Minister said, we will work with Canadians who need to make repayments in a way that is flexible and understanding of their circumstances. There will not be penalties or interest for anyone who erred in good faith.

*Oral Questions***HOUSING**

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Bank of Canada has been warning us about housing prices being up over 30% during this pandemic, and we have massive job losses throughout the country. These increases cannot continue. We know that some families represented by that side of the chamber will be just fine, but what about average-day Canadians?

Families need to know how they can secure affordable housing and how this government will ensure that families do not lose with massive interest rate increases on the rise and many mortgages across Canada coming up for renewal.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I take great exception to the hon. member's assertion that the families who may live in my community because of my partisan affiliation are somehow less deserving than the families he represents. The reality is that when it came to this pandemic response, we were there for families no matter where they lived, no matter who their representatives were.

The issue of housing affordability is a very real one that we are watching very closely. We have worked with the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to monitor the situation and are looking at changes to the mortgage stress test to ensure that things do not run amok. In addition, I would direct the member to the national housing strategy, which is looking at reducing homelessness and making sure that all Canadians can live in a home they can afford.

* * *

• (1140)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, Ben Mansoura, a permanent resident who is a senior IT manager from Toronto, had to file an access to information request about himself just to find out if he passed an online citizenship test back in December, and he is not the only one. This is a prime example of a system that is ineffective and inefficient. Frankly, it is harming the mental health of immigrants and Canadians, and also our nation's economy.

Why does the minister continue delaying addressing this inefficient system, causing applicants more hardships?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, openness and transparency in government are essential, and our government takes the protection of Canadians' privacy very seriously.

We have made progress in support of access to information and have backed that with investments that are strengthening our system. Our officials have proactively reached out to the Information Commissioner in order to address any questions they may have.

We are going to continue to ensure access and transparency, and ensure that all of the integrity and privacy that is part of our immigration system stays in place.

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, recently, California and New York passed bills that target Canadian forest products. The bills these states passed are fundamentally flawed, will hurt trade, and condemn our forest industry, comparing us to other, much less sustainable forest industry product exporters, when in fact Canada has the most sustainable forest industry in the world.

Will the minister stand up for our forest industry, or will he let these states push us around, as he does with our energy sector?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just want to reiterate that I agree that Canada's forestry sector is important to our economy. It supports hundreds of thousands of good, well-paying jobs here in Canada. We will always vigorously defend their interests, and we look forward to continuing to work with the United States on this matter and ensure that the industry continues to stay vibrant.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, this week, the Auditor General made clear what is obvious to first nations in our region and the country: The government consistently fails them. First nations began the pandemic with nowhere near enough personal protective equipment and struggled to catch up. When communities cried out repeatedly for more nurses, more than half of their requests were rejected. Whether it is on water, housing or this pandemic, we are getting monthly condemnations from the Auditor General and monthly commitments from the government to do better.

Where is the political will from the Liberals to act on the repeated neglect and deliver for first nations?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we would like to thank the Auditor General for her report.

Our government shares the priority of ensuring that indigenous peoples have the resources and support they need to combat and prevent the spread of COVID-19. As part of our ongoing work, Indigenous Services Canada is continuing reviewing our practices to improve the efficiency and flexibility of providing surge crisis support.

We are working hand in hand with indigenous organizations and communities to receive real-time feedback, and we will seek to better our processes now and beyond COVID-19.

*Oral Questions***TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, with limited international and domestic travellers, summer 2021 is going to be another devastating loss for tourism and hospitality businesses right across the country. The Liberals are cutting the wage subsidy and rent supports for these businesses just when they need them the most. Once again, the government is leaving workers in the tourism and hospitality sector behind.

Will the minister commit today to extend the wage subsidy and rent support until at least spring 2022 to help these small businesses and their workers?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his legitimate concern for the small business operators in the tourism sector, which we know has been hit disproportionately by COVID-19.

The first thing these businesses want back is their customers, and we are working hard to deploy vaccines to ensure that we can have a sense of normalcy return as soon as possible.

With respect to the wage subsidy, I would point the hon. member to the fact that we have extended in the recent budget the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy, with the flexibility to do more if necessary, and we have implemented new funds to support Destination Canada and \$500 million directly toward support for the tourism sector.

We will be there for operators, because our recovery depends on their participation in the economy.

* * *

• (1145)

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has impacted many Canadians, including young families. My constituents in Scarborough—Agincourt have had to balance work with child care alternatives and many higher expenses along the way. Can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to support families with young children during this difficult time?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, families have faced financial challenges during this pandemic. That is why we announced a Canada child benefit top-up payment of up to \$1,200 per child under the age of six. Today, the first payment is being made, going directly into the pockets of parents, and will benefit 1.6 million families. The Canada child benefit helps nine out of 10 families and has helped lift 435,000 children out of poverty. My message to families is clear: We will always be there to support them.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are disturbed that two scientists at the National

Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg may have been passing top-secret information to the communist regime in China.

Both scientists were fired in January, but the Prime Minister will not tell us why. The scientists were given top-level security clearance by the Liberal government, and we know they shipped deadly viruses like Ebola from Winnipeg to the virology lab in Wuhan, China. It was Canada's security agency, CSIS, that expressed concern, which initiated the scientists being fired.

Will the Prime Minister protect our national security and stop providing top-level security clearance to scientists who report to the Chinese military?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the scientists and researchers at the National Microbiology Lab play a vital role in Canada's response to COVID-19. We take threats to research security and intellectual property seriously. The NML is a secure facility. Everyone working at or visiting the NML must undergo security screening and adhere to strict security protocols, procedures and policies.

We will never put the health and safety of Canadians at risk, and the employees in question are no longer with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, heritage department memos reveal that Bill C-10 has the potential to grant the CRTC regulatory powers to affect online services, including sports streaming, news sites, podcasts and apps. The Liberals are still pressing for the bill to be passed, which would cause tech giants to pass down the tax increase costs to my Bow River constituents by 50%, approximately.

Why did the minister ignore his department officials and proceed to present this destructive bill that will pick winners and losers based on unknown criteria?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again, the Broadcasting Act has not been modernized in over 30 years. Bill C-10 is about bringing us that update, and it is an important update that will support Canadian jobs and Canadian creators.

If the member would like to, he can continue to follow the debate and work with us to help our creators, but the Conservatives have been vowing to block this law from going ahead since before it even went to committee. This is about web giants contributing to our creators. Why will the Conservatives not help us to make that happen?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians were shocked to learn that two scientists at the National Microbiology Laboratory may have shared confidential information with the Chinese Communist regime. This is a serious attack on our national security, but the Prime Minister refuses to be transparent with Canadians and is failing to protect them.

Will the Prime Minister commit to terminating any co-operation between the Chinese Communist regime and our Canadian laboratories and universities?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said before, everyone at the NML must undergo security screening and adhere to strict security protocols, procedures and policies. We take threats to research security and intellectual property incredibly seriously. That is why we have protocols in place. These people are no longer with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, three weeks ago, I asked the heritage minister why he removed the clause in Bill C-10 that exempted what Canadians post online from government regulation. The minister's answer was that I should read the bill. Patronizing remark aside, that same minister has since admitted that Canadians posting online with enough views will, in fact, be regulated.

Which is it? Will Canadians be regulated online or not?

● (1150)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is clearly stated in the bill that users are excluded from the Broadcasting Act. That is a specific exclusion within the bill. The Broadcasting Act modernization will apply to social media companies only and require them to report the revenues that they make in Canada, to contribute a portion of those to the creation of Canadian stories and music, and to make our creators more discoverable. That is important for Canadian jobs and Canadian creators. I hope that the Conservatives will choose to support us in that.

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*[Translation]***SENIORS**

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, seniors are not happy that the federal government is dividing them into two classes by increasing the old age security pension only for those 75 and up.

This week, FADOQ, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons and the National Association of Federal Retirees all condemned this move.

They note that financial insecurity can affect all seniors. Misfortune does not discriminate based on age. The only one trying to do that is the federal government.

Will the government stop discriminating and increase the pension for all seniors?

[English]

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government has delivered on its commitment to increase old age security by 10% for all seniors age 75 and up. We are helping address the pressures that are faced by more than 3.3 million seniors as they age, by giving them more financial security later in life. Older seniors face increased care expenses and are at greater risk of running out of their savings.

As seniors age, their health and home care costs rise. All the while, they are more likely to be unable to work, have disabilities or be widowed. The OAS hike—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Manicouagan.

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*[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the House voted in favour of increasing employment insurance sickness benefits to 50 weeks. For that to happen, however, the government needs to give a royal recommendation, and it refuses to do so.

People suffering from unforeseen illnesses, such as cancer, need 50 weeks to heal. The government's proposal of 26 weeks is just half of what the most seriously ill people need.

Does the government realize that people need support when they are at their most vulnerable and that it is abandoning people who are fighting for their lives?

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians expect and deserve an EI system that is flexible and responsive to their needs. EI sickness benefits are an important support for Canadians who need to leave work because of illness or injury. Workers receiving important treatments or requiring a longer period to recover from an illness or injury sometimes face a stressful income gap before they are healthy enough to return to work. That is why budget 2021 extends EI sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks, providing approximately 169,000 Canadians every year with additional time and flexibility to recover and return to work.

There is more work to do, and we will continue working so that EI is there for Canadians when they need it most.

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SENIORS

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, seniors have been coming to my office quite upset. The issue is that they have received a link for the census, but they have no ability to go online.

They are very capable of using computers, but they have no home Internet because they simply cannot afford it. They cannot make video calls to see their grandchildren, and they have been unable to visit during COVID. They cannot access free Wi-Fi because most of the places that offer it have been locked down.

This is not a luxury. It is basic connectivity, yet the Liberal government has done nothing to spur competition and make Internet rates more affordable.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the best of times, living without high-speed Internet is difficult. During COVID, particularly for our elders, it has been incredibly difficult.

Our government continues to work to connect Canadians to this essential service, and it has been working on this since taking office back in 2015. I would say that tens of thousands of Canadians are already on their way to getting connected to this high-speed Internet service because of the investments we have made. We have made 10 times more investments in broadband than all other governments combined. We will not stop until—

• (1155)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Prince Albert.

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STATISTICS CANADA

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, many seniors in my riding have called to ask why they have not received their census forms.

They are concerned that they will not be counted. The City of Prince Albert is concerned because our municipal financing depends on an accurate count. Seniors who have called the census hotline have been unable to receive any help.

Could the minister explain to those in my riding why the forms are missing, and what will be done to ensure they are counted?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Innovation and Industry), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we understand that the census is incredibly important. Canadians have come to appreciate how important it is as well.

It is important for my friend to recognize that we are there to assist individual Canadians. The census provides valuable information, and Canadians can also use the telephone to complete the census.

Oral Questions

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government's decision to designate all plastic manufactured items as toxic is absurd. It is inconsistent with the government's own science assessment, and it threatens thousands of jobs.

Can the minister, with a straight face, tell the more than 100 employees at Pro-Western Plastics in St. Albert that the health and food plastic products that they manufacture are akin to lead, mercury and asbestos?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, perhaps the hon. member, like me, enjoys a soft drink or a beer, which contains carbon dioxide. That is also listed in the toxic substances. Canadians understand that, under the Environmental Protection Act, the term “toxic substances” has a specific meaning, and they can be used safely.

Canadians also know that plastics pose a significant danger to the environment and our health when they not used properly. That is why Canadians want us to regulate it, and that is what we are going to do.

It is unfortunate the Conservatives stand in favour of the plastics industry and what—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we continue to hear from hundreds of women about the need for child care. The lack of child care services is a huge contributor to the gender pay gap.

We know that women are the ones who stay home to take care of their children, which limits their participation in the labour market. This also limits their access to education and skills training, on top of access to present and future financial resources.

Could the Minister for Women and Gender Equality tell the House how budget 2021 will help these women and help make the Canadian economy more inclusive?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for tenaciously defending women's rights.

This Liberal government is the only one to have a credible plan to help women return to work. We will do so by fighting the COVID-19 pandemic by administering vaccines. We will be providing affordable and universal day care services. We support women entrepreneurs and we provide support to victims of gender-based violence.

Our government will continue to work with all feminists—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, released documents outline how the Liberal government is funding the PMPRB to combat a so-called disinformation campaign by opposition MPs and cystic fibrosis advocacy groups. These families are fighting for their sick children to have access to drugs that are readily available in most developed nations.

Why is the Liberal government shamefully attacking the families of sick Canadian children, instead of working to get them the life-saving drugs they need?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that could not be further from the truth. Our government has committed to a national pharmacare program with the precise objective of ensuring that Canadians no longer have to choose about putting food on their tables or affording the prescription drugs they need.

I find the Conservatives' questioning on this interesting, and I wonder if they will support a national pharmacare program so that we can ensure all Canadians have access to the critical medicines they need at an affordable price.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the upper amount of cannabis individuals are authorized to possess for medical purposes is almost impossible for an individual to consume personally, and the sourcing of this production is being given over to designated growers. According to law enforcement officials, these production licences are often abused, with the excess production being illegally sold into the black market, traded into the U.S. for fentanyl or, even worse, traded for handguns, fuelling our gang violence.

When will the Minister of Health address the loopholes in these regulations? These loopholes are large enough to drive a U-Haul truck through, delivering illegal, black market—

• (1200)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. minister.

I see the Minister of Health is not available to answer, so we will go to the next member.

The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, for years, companies such as MindGeek have published videos of sex trafficking, child exploitation and sexual assault. Removing these videos after 24 hours, as the government is proposing, is not good enough. Within that time, a video could be viewed and downloaded millions of times, creating an endless nightmare for victims.

Yesterday, I introduced the SISE act, which would require pornographic platforms to verify the age and consent of every individual in a video before it is published. Does the government support this approach of putting the burden of responsibility on companies, instead of on victims?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we take the issue of exploitation and trafficking extremely seriously, and we have worked diligently to address this through provisions that currently exist in the Criminal Code and through funding investments included in our most recent budget.

That funding would assist in the prosecution of those who exploit people, including through trafficking. We are dedicated to promoting that funding so we can ensure people are kept safe, particularly children who are being sexually exploited.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 50 years ago today, on a tragic night in my riding, the life of Sandy Seale, a young Black man, was taken, and a young Mi'kmaw named Donald Marshall Jr. spent 11 years in jail for a murder he did not commit. The inquiry into these events later found that the criminal justice system failed Donald Marshall Jr. at virtually every turn.

Can the Minister of Justice inform the House what steps have been taken by the government to address systemic racism in our justice system?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sydney—Victoria for his advocacy on this important issue.

While we will never be able to fully right the wrongs since the wrongful arrest and imprisonment of Donald Marshall Jr., I am proud to say that a lot has changed since then. We have taken significant action, including crucial steps toward the creation of an independent criminal case review commission to review potential wrongful convictions. We have also brought forth legislation to address the overrepresentation of indigenous persons and Black Canadians in the justice system.

There is more to do, and our government is committed to doing the work that will lead to a justice system and a country that is more just and more fair for all.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board invested \$900 million in a private water scheme in Brazil, driving up the cost of the water utility for residents in Rio de Janeiro's most impoverished communities. Labour and human rights groups are fighting this move, calling it a violation of Brazil's national laws. Liberals and Conservatives, two months ago, defeated my bill to bring more accountability to the Canada pension plan investment policies.

Clean water and sanitation are human rights. Why are the Liberals encouraging this unethical investment of our public money?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his sincere concern for our relationship abroad and the importance of protecting the environment and working with international partners to do so.

However, I do want to point out that when it comes to the investment decisions of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, which are designed to protect the retirement security of Canadians, those decisions are made entirely independently of the Government of Canada. It is important to maintain that space between the government and the Pension Plan Investment Board to ensure that there are not political decisions taken that could compromise the retirement security of Canadians.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister speaks from both sides of his mouth when defending our rights and freedoms. Last year, he attended a public protest in Ottawa, a violation of Ontario's emergency measures, yet he also claims lockdown protesters spread COVID, as if COVID spreads only at rallies he does not like.

He has affirmed the right of thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters who were not ticketed by police, yet I, as a sitting MP, received two court summons for attending other peaceful outdoor protests.

Points of Order

Can the government confirm the Prime Minister is in favour of all Canadians' right to peacefully protest, or just the causes he personally endorses?

• (1205)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that the hon. member does not understand how to follow local public health rules, but they are in place to keep Canadians safe and to stop the spread of COVID-19. I recommend that if he continues to get summons, there is a problem with his interpretation of these public health measures.

They are serious. They are put in place to keep Canadians safe, but a person's ability to peacefully protest has not changed. The measures are in place to keep Canadians safe by stopping the spread of COVID-19, and I recommend he take them seriously.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand that there is an agreement to observe a—

The hon. parliamentary secretary on a point of order.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, the hon. member opposite asked a question earlier about CERB repayment. With your permission and the permission of the House, I would like to correct the record and my response regarding the CERB repayment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I did call on the parliamentary secretary twice for a response. I would ask those who are participating virtually to ensure they are ready to respond. Unless there is a technical issue, that is a different story.

I will allow the hon. parliamentary secretary to respond, but I would also indicate that members should be ready to respond immediately, so it does not take away from other orders of the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, for the sake of clarity, I would like to know whether the parliamentary secretary wants to answer a question or correct a previous answer. What he is asking is not exactly clear, and I think you should clarify that with him before ruling.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary want to clarify an answer or respond to a question that was asked?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, I would like to clarify a response that I gave to a question regarding the repayment of CERB. I would like to correct the record and provide an improved answer.

Points of Order

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is no consent to do that at this point, but the member can clarify that during debate in the House.

[*Translation*]

Is the hon. government House leader also rising on a point of order?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Things have been clarified.

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There was a question directed to me and unfortunately the mute button would not come off. It was a technical issue. I was prepared and ready to answer. I can do so now.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is there unanimous consent to allow the parliamentary secretary to respond to the question that was asked in the House?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not believe unanimous consent would be required in this situation. Precedent has been set by the Chair that if there is a technical issue raised by a member, he or she is allowed to respond or re-ask the question. I think we need to be careful about asking for unanimous consent because the precedent has already been set that it is not required.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. House leader of the official opposition on a point of order.

• (1210)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, we understand very well that sometimes there are technical problems. We respect that but would remind members that there are never any technical problems in the House.

The government was free to choose another person to answer the question and had the time to do so. Sometimes, a member asks a question directly to a minister and someone else answers. We may not like that, but the government always answers because whoever responds does so on behalf of the government.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was therefore free to choose another colleague. He decided not to do that. That is his choice and his right. Everyone has the opportunity to speak when they have permission.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the members for their remarks. Given that this has happened several times now in the House, I will allow the parliamentary secretary to respond.

I encourage everyone who wants to ask or answer a question to be ready, especially if they are participating remotely. Any technical problem can be raised immediately afterward.

This is my decision: I will allow an answer to the question. I thank the members.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that individuals who require cannabis for medical purposes have reasonable access to it.

That being said, individuals who are authorized to produce cannabis for their own medical purposes must follow the law and operate within the local authorization as well. It is illegal for these individuals to provide or sell cannabis to anyone else.

We are continuing to move forward on this file. Consultation just ended and we look forward to the results of that to make additional improvements to the cannabis file.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand that there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence.

[*English*]

I would now invite members to rise and observe a moment of silence following the tragic discovery of the remains of 215 children at a former residential school in British Columbia.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I hope you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practices of the House, Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Day for Truth and Reconciliation), be disposed of as follows:

(a) the bill be deemed concurred in at the report stage; and

(b) when Government Orders is called later today, the bill shall be considered at third reading, that a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party be recognized to speak for not more than 10 minutes each following by 5 minutes for questions and comments and, at the conclusion of the time provided for debate or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the bill be deemed read a third time and passed.

• (1215)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed to the parliamentary secretary moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Hearing none, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 13 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, entitled "Main Estimates 2021-22: Vote 1 under Canadian Dairy Commission, Vote 1 under Canadian Grain Commission and Votes 1, 5 and 10 under Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food".

[Translation]

The committee has considered the estimates referred by the House and reports the same without amendment.

[English]

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates on the main estimates, 2021-22.

The committee has considered the estimates referred by the House and reports the same back without amendment.

* * *

NATIONAL HEALTH DATA STRATEGY ACT

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-303, An Act to establish a national strategy for health data collection.

She said: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce my private member's bill, an act to establish a national strategy for health data collection. This enactment would require the Minister of Health to develop a national strategy in consultation with representatives of provincial and territorial governments, indigenous governing bodies as well as with health researchers and public health experts for the collection of health data to ensure that such data is available in a consistent manner across Canada for research and policy development.

As a physician and former chief medical officer of health for York Region, my goal in introducing the bill is for the development

Routine Proceedings

of a national strategy for health data collection that supports the work of health care providers and researchers to lead to improved health outcomes for all Canadians.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-304, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (grooming).

He said: Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to introduce an act to amend the Criminal Code. I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Lakeland, for seconding this proposed legislation and for her great advocacy in protecting children and the vulnerable from predators.

This Conservative bill would make grooming an aggravating factor that the courts would take into account when handing down a sentence for individuals convicted of sexual offences toward young persons. If a court decides not to give effect to the presence of this aggravating factor in any case, it must give a reason for its decision.

For the purpose of the bill, grooming would include communication with victims or conduct in relation to them by a predator such that it makes the victims more susceptible to sexual abuse by the predator.

Grooming is an evil practice that has enabled and continues to enable the victimization of many children. Although the Supreme Court of Canada recognized grooming as an aggravating factor in *R. v. Friesen*, there are still cases in which the courts have not recognized grooming.

The bill would codify grooming as an aggravating factor, and it is an important step toward tougher punishments for those who choose to use this disgusting practice.

I call on all parliamentarians to work toward tougher punishments for grooming and to increase the protection of children by supporting this bill.

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

* * *

● (1220)

[Translation]

MAIN ESTIMATES, 2021-22—NATIONAL DEFENCE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The following motion in the name of the hon. Leader of the Opposition was put on the Order Paper:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(b), consideration by the Standing Committee on National Defence of all votes under Department of National Defence in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, be extended beyond May 31, 2021.

(Motion agreed to)

Routine Proceedings

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, during the debate on the business of supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) on Monday, May 31, 2021, the time provided for consideration of the main estimates in committee of the whole be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 16 periods of 15 minutes each.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

OPIOIDS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am here today to table two petitions, both of them relating to the opioid crisis, which really indicates what a serious concern this is for my constituents.

The first petition had over 40 signators. They call on the Government of Canada to, one, declare the current opioid overdose and fentanyl poisoning crisis a national public health emergency under the Emergencies Act in order to manage and resource it, with an aim to reduce and eliminate preventable deaths; two, reform current drug policy to decriminalize personal possession; and, three, create with urgency and immediacy a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so that people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose due to the contaminant source.

The second group of petitioners, again on the opioid crisis, call upon the government to declare the overdose crisis a national public health emergency so that it is taken seriously and funded appropriately; and to immediately work with provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian action plan that includes full consideration of reforms that other countries have used to significantly reduce drug-related fatalities and stigma, such as legal regulation and decriminalization for simple possession of illicit drugs. This petition was signed by 88 constituents. I want to thank Darlana for her hard work on this file.

- (1225)

SEX SELECTION

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition is from individuals in our country who are calling on the House of Commons to pass a Criminal Code prohibition of sex-selective abortion. The petitioners' argument is that it is legal in Canada because we have no laws; it is antithetical to our commitment to human rights, to equality between men and women; and

84% of Canadians believe it should be illegal to have an abortion if the sole purpose is due to the family's not wanting a specific sex. As well, Canada's health care professionals have indicated that sex selection is a growing problem in Canada.

ETHIOPIA

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is in regard to the Tigray people and specifically brought to me by members of the Ethiopian community in Canada. They are very concerned about the current conflict that is going on in that region, and are calling on Canada to become involved in ending this violence. They call for humanitarian access to the region; for independent monitoring to be allowed; and for investigation into credible reports that are out there on war crimes and gross violations of human rights laws. They ask Canada to engage directly and consistently with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments on this conflict, and to promote short-, medium- and long-term elections monitoring in Ethiopia. They are calling on our government to take action.

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to table this petition today. It is initiated by Adrian Hough in Nanaimo—Ladysmith and has had more than 15,000 signatures with the e-petition and the paper petitions combined.

The petitioners are deeply concerned about the ongoing logging of endangered old-growth ecosystems, an ecosystem that has less than 3% of it remaining in British Columbia. Threatened screech owls have been found in the areas that are being logged. More than 130 people have been arrested, including first nations youth from the Pacheedaht First Nation, whose territory this lies within, and seniors who are lining up to be arrested as well.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and the first nations to immediately halt logging of endangered old-growth ecosystems; fund the long-term protection of old-growth ecosystems as a priority for Canada's climate action plan and reconciliation with indigenous people; support value-added forestry initiatives in partnership with first nations to ensure Canada's forestry industry is sustainable and based on the harvesting of second- and third-growth forests; ban the export of raw logs and maximize resource use for local jobs; and ban the use of whole trees for wood pellet biofuel production, which is another thing that is happening in British Columbia and is not climate friendly at all.

Routine Proceedings

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have three petitions to present to the House today.

The first petition highlights the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners by the Government of China. Petitioners note that this persecution has been going on for some two decades, in spite of the fact that Falun Gong practitioners are only seeking to stay true to their spiritual beliefs and their commitment to truthfulness, compassion and tolerance.

The petitioners ask the government to take a stronger response to these and other human rights abuses in the People's Republic of China. In particular, they want to see the use of Magnitsky sanctions against those involved in human rights abuses in the PRC.

• (1230)

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition highlights the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The petitioners are very concerned about human rights abuses that have been taking place there, the ongoing violence and the horrific impact that violence has had on civilians. The petitioners want to see an end to violence, humanitarian access to the region, and independent, credible international investigations of war crimes and gross violations of human rights. They want to see the Government of Canada engage directly and consistently with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments on this conflict and also support short-, medium- and long-term election monitoring in Ethiopia in light of upcoming elections.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third and final petition is on Bill C-6, the government's bill that purports to seek to ban conversion therapy. The petitioners are supportive of efforts to ban conversion therapy. However, they are very concerned about the definition in the bill, a definition which, in substance, would ban many things that are not and have nothing to do with conversion therapy, including private conversations in which views on sexuality and gender expression might be expressed.

The petitioners call on the government to ban coercive, degrading practices that are designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, to amend Bill C-6 to fix the definition of "conversion therapy", thus banning conversion therapy without banning voluntary counselling or criminalizing conversations. The petitioners want to see the government allow parents to speak with own children about sexuality and gender and to set house rules about sex and relationships.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 598, 600, 601, 604 and 606.

[Text]

Question No. 598—**Mr. Jamie Schmale:**

With regard to the ban on the importation of goods made with coerced labour since January 1, 2020: (a) how many times have such goods been seized by the Canada Border Services Agency; and (b) what are the details of each seizure, including the (i) date, (ii) description of goods, including the quantity, (iii) estimated value, if known, (iv) location where suspected coerced labour occurred?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to upholding human rights and international labour standards. Forced labour in any form, anywhere in the world, is completely unacceptable. The CBSA actively collaborates with Employment and Social Development Canada to monitor and research evidence related to problematic supply chains. Shipments containing products suspected of being produced by forced labour will be detained at the border for inspection and will be prohibited when it has sufficient evidence to do so. All goods entering Canada may be subject to a more in-depth secondary examination. The government has made amendments to prohibit products that are mined, manufactured, or produced wholly or in part by forced labour from entering Canada. Additionally, the government has prohibited the import of goods suspected of being made using forced labor in China's Xinjiang region.

Question No. 600—**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:**

With regard to the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020: (a) respecting the Privy Council Office being informed that it was the Prime Minister's intention to recommend to the Governor General that the Parliament be prorogued, (i) who participated in the communication, (ii) on what date and time, (iii) by what medium (e.g. in-person meeting, videoconference meeting, telephone call, email); (b) did the Prime Minister informally advise the Governor General, ahead of presenting a formal Instrument of Advice, of his intention to recommend that Parliament be prorogued, and, if so, (i) on what date and time, (ii) by what medium (e.g. in-person meeting, videoconference meeting, telephone call, email) did this occur; (c) did the Privy Council Office informally advise the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General that the Prime Minister would be recommending to the Governor General that Parliament be prorogued, and, if so, (i) who participated in the communication, (ii) on what date and time, (iii) by what medium (e.g. in-person meeting, videoconference meeting, telephone call, email) did this occur; (d) on what date and time was the Instrument of Advice recommending the prorogation of Parliament, (i) provided by the Privy Council Office to the Prime Minister or his office with a draft, (ii) signed by the Prime Minister, (iii) tendered by the Prime Minister to the Governor General, (iv) accepted by the Governor General; and (e) when the Prime Minister tendered the Instrument of Advice to the Governor General, (i) who was present, (ii) by what medium (e.g. in-person meeting, videoconference meeting, telephone call, email, fax, courier)?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020, on February 16, 2021, the deputy secretary to the cabinet (governance) and the Canadian secretary to The Queen and director of policy, machinery of government from the Privy Council Office, PCO, appeared at the procedure and House affairs committee, PROC, and provided information responsive to these questions.

Routine Proceedings

On October 28, 2020, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tabled a report to Parliament outlining the reasons for the prorogation of the first session of the 43rd Parliament. On August 18, 2020, the two instruments of advice, one to prorogue the Parliament of Canada and the other to summon Parliament to meet for the dispatch of business, were signed. Furthermore, the Governor General signed the corresponding proclamations aided by the assistant clerk of the Privy Council. Once approved, the proclamations are published in the Canada Gazette, and are available at: www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2020/2020-08-19/html/si-tr58-eng.html and www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2020/2020-08-19/html/si-tr59-eng.html

Leading up to the prorogation, the Privy Council Office supported the government by providing procedural information and advice.

Question No. 601—Ms. Marilyn Gladu:

With regard to four corners meetings convened by the Privy Council Office or the Office of the Prime Minister since January 1, 2019: (a) what was the date of each meeting; (b) what was the subject-matter of each meeting; (c) which departments, agencies or Crown corporations participated in each meeting; and (d) which ministers or ministers' offices participated in each meeting?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, to the President of the Treasury Board and to the Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office undertook an extensive preliminary search in order to determine the amount of information that would fall within the scope of the question and the amount of time that would be required to prepare a comprehensive response. It was concluded that producing and validating a comprehensive response to this question would require a manual collection, and careful analysis that is not possible in the time allotted and could lead to the disclosure of incomplete and misleading information.

Question No. 604—Mr. Marty Morantz:

With regard to the statement on January 22, 2021, by the Minister of International Development regarding classroom materials provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) that she has instructed Canadian officials to investigate the presence in school materials in the West Bank and Gaza of references that violated UN values of human rights, tolerance, neutrality and non-discrimination: (a) which Canadian officials were assigned to conduct the investigation; (b) what is the current status of this investigation; (c) what is the timeline for when the investigation will be concluded; and (d) when will the unredacted reports related to the investigation be published and how will the public have access to them?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following reflects a consolidated response approved on behalf of Global Affairs Canada ministers.

The following is in response to parts (a) to (d). Canada is committed to focusing its international assistance on the most vulnerable communities, including those served by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA. Canada's support helps over 500,000 Palestinian children who rely on UNRWA for their education.

Canada and other donor governments expect UNRWA to uphold UN values and humanitarian principles, including neutrality, in all its activities. Canadian funding reinforces UNRWA's ongoing efforts in this regard, including work by UNRWA staff to identify, monitor, and follow up on violations of these principles.

As with all Canadian development and humanitarian assistance for Palestinians, Canada exercises enhanced due diligence on fund-

ing for UNRWA. This includes ongoing oversight, regular site visits, a systematic screening process, and strong anti-terrorism provisions in funding agreements. Canadian officials on the ground also play a key role in ensuring ongoing oversight on programming, maintaining dialogue with the agency, and engaging with representatives of like-minded donor governments that support UNRWA. Canada actively participates on UNRWA's advisory commission, which allows for oversight, influence, and engagement on key issues.

It is deeply concerning that problematic educational materials were circulated. UNRWA recognized its error and is taking corrective actions. Notably, on April 19, 2021, UNRWA launched its digital learning platform, which is described as a centralized digital platform for online learning material for over 540,000 students in 711 schools across the Middle East, in accordance with host country curriculum.

Following the January 2021 statement by the Minister of International Development on this topic, the minister and Canadian officials based in Ottawa and in Ramallah are working closely with partners and with UNRWA's senior management to address the issue of problematic educational materials. This extensive engagement positions Canada to insist on UNRWA's accountability and transparency, including through taking further corrective actions, as needed.

Question No. 606—Mr. Tim Uppal:

With regard to Global Affairs Canada and its anti-racism training documents which state that wearing blackface is an overt act of white supremacy, as reported in the Toronto Sun on April 8, 2021: (a) who approved this training; (b) how much did this training cost; (c) was this contract sole-sourced, and, if so, what was the rationale for sole sourcing this contract; (d) who participated in this training; (e) what was the rationale for the department offering this training; (f) is it the official view of the government that wearing blackface is an overt act of white supremacy; (g) are officials who provide anti-racism training permitted to discuss the Prime Minister's history of wearing blackface and its impact on racism in their training, and, if not, why are there restrictions against discussing the Prime Minister's history; (h) how often did this training occur and on what dates; and (i) who provided this training?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following reflects a consolidated response approved on behalf of Global Affairs Canada ministers.

With regard to part (a), the course was designed in-house with the input of internal and external subject matter experts, including self-identified Black, indigenous and other racialized employees.

With regard to part (b), as of March 31, 2021, the department invested \$148,365 to develop and deliver 32 virtually facilitated sessions to 397 executives. This amount includes work for the design of the course and for the development of the supporting material, as well as the facilitation of the sessions. In future offerings, only facilitation costs will be incurred.

With regard to part (c), this was not a sole-sourced contract.

With regard to part (d), 397 employees in the executive cadre at Global Affairs Canada participated.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to part (e), the training was designed to strengthen the competencies of Global Affairs Canada's management cadre with a view to develop an understanding of what racism is, to recognize the negative impacts of racial discrimination and how it can manifest itself in the workplace, and to develop a shared understanding of the role and actions managers can take to combat racism and promote an equitable and inclusive workplace.

With regard to part (f), participants in the training were presented with research, studies and opinions from various sources in order to elicit self-reflection and discussion among themselves. These were not presented as an expression of the view of the government.

With regard to part (g), trainers and participants were free to raise and discuss subjects that were of interest to them and relevant to the objectives of the training.

With regard to part (h), the half-day training was offered in February and March 2021, as follows: February 1-4, February 8-11, February 15-18, February 22-25, March 1, March 3-4, March 8-11, March 15-18, March 23-25 and March 29-30.

With regard to part (i), the training was provided by the learning and development division of Global Affairs Canada.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 596, 597, 599, 602, 603 and 605 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

[Text]

Question No. 596—**Mr. Denis Trudel:**

With regard to the initiative to dispose of surplus federal properties to create affordable housing, since it was established in 2018: for each project, which organizations or corporations benefited from the initiative, broken down by (i) the name of the recipient organization, (ii) the city where the organization operates, (iii) a short description of the project and how many housing units will be built or renovated, (iv) the properties disposed of and the address, (v) the date the renovation work began, (vi) whether the housing is currently occupied or, if not, the anticipated date when prospective tenants may move in?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 597—**Mr. Richard Bragdon:**

With regard to illegal fishing in Canadian waters by foreign commercial vessels, broken down by year since 2015: (a) how many instances or suspected incidents of illegal fishing activity in Canadian waters is the government aware of; and (b) what are the details of each such incident, including the (i) date, (ii) description of illegal fishing activity, (iii) specific enforcement action taken, including what type of charges or fines were levied, if applicable, (iv) origin country of the vessel, (v) country the vessel was registered in?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 599—**Mr. Jamie Schmale:**

With regard to cheques or payments made to individuals with addresses outside of Canada and to a CTV news report of April 2021 on a Canadian family who has been living in New Zealand for the past 18 years and received a COVID-19 benefit cheque addressed to their disabled daughter who died in 2009, despite never applying for any financial aid: (a) how many cheques or payments were made to individ-

uals with addresses outside of Canada, broken down by program; (b) how many cheques or payments were made to people who never applied for financial aid, broken down by program; (c) what measures, if any, were taken to ensure that the payments made in (a) and (b) were not made to individuals who were deceased prior to 2020; and (d) how many COVID-19 relief payments has the government made to people who died prior to the pandemic, and what is the total value of those payments, broken down by program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 602—**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:**

With regard to the Privy Council Office's (PCO) 2021-22 Departmental Plans: (a) how and when was the figure established that 61 per cent of PCO employees described their workplace as psychologically healthy; (b) how did the remaining 39 per cent of PCO employees surveyed describe their workplace, broken down by responses; (c) were there any write-in answers to the question which generated the figure referred to in (a), and, if so, what were they; (d) what sources or causes are attributed to the responses of the 39 per cent of PCO employees who did not describe their workplace as psychologically healthy; and (e) what measures are in place to increase the proportion of PCO employees who describe their workplace as psychologically healthy?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 603—**Ms. Jenny Kwan:**

With regard to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA): (a) broken down by month, gender, location of processing office, and country of origin, what is the total number of Humanitarian and Compassionate applications since 2016 that were (i) submitted, (ii) accepted (iii) rejected; (b) how many applications in (a) included gender-based violence considerations; (c) how many people are in CBSA's detention and alternatives to detention programs, broken down by (i) year since 2012, (ii) month since 2020, (iii) associated immigration applications streams, (iv) province, (v) region, (vi) facility, (vii) age group (e.g. minor, adult, potential minor without ID to confirm) and type of detention (e.g. detained in a provincial or federal facility, voice reporting, community case management, supervision and electronic monitoring, etc.); (d) broken down by application stream, which IRCC processing center is still facing long backlogs of transferring files from mail into digital systems; (e) since 2019, broken down by month, how many Temporary Resident Visa Applications have been (i) submitted, (ii) accepted, (iii) rejected, (iv) rejected under paragraph 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations; (f) how many of the applications in (e) indicated dual intent; (g) since 2020, broken down by month and stream for all immigration streams, what is the average processing time for (i) the issuance of an acknowledgement of receipt (AOR), (ii) the issuance of a modified AOR, (iii) finishing the completeness check after a modified AOR, (iv) a final positive decision, (v) a final positive decision on applications once security, criminality and eligibility have all been passed; (h) broken down by month, how many medicals have expired since March 15, 2020; (i) since 2019, broken down by month and stream, what is the number of family reunification applications under asylum seeker streams that have (i) been received, (ii) been accepted, (iii) been refused, (iv) landed; (j) since 2018, broken down by month, stream, processing office, country of origin, province, gender, and whether it is inland or outland, what is the total number of applications under the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers program that were (i) submitted, (ii) accepted, (iii) rejected; (k) since 2019, broken down by month, processing office, country of origin, province and census metropolitan area, what is the total number of Interim Pathway for Caregiver, Home Child Care Provider and Home Support Worker applications that were (i) submitted, (ii) accepted, (iii) rejected; (l) since 2016, broken down by month, stream, processing office, country of origin, gender, province, length of permit and census metropolitan area, what is the total number applications for Post Graduate Work Permits and Work Permit for Spouses of Students and Post Graduate Work Permit holders that were (i) submitted, (ii) accepted, (iii) rejected; and (m) broken down by year since 2010, by month since 2020, and by country of origin, gender, province, age group (ie. minor, adult, potential minor without ID to confirm) and associated immigration stream, what is the total number of deportation orders that were (i) issued, (ii) revoked, (iii) resulting in the deportation of an individual?

(Return tabled)

*Privilege*Question No. 605—**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:**

With regard to federal spending, since January 1, 2006: what is the total amount of federal investments to control golden nematode, broken down by (i) year, (ii) department, (iii) city, (iv) project?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Finally, Madam Speaker, I would ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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PRIVILEGE

CONDUCT OF THE MEMBER FOR PONTIAC

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I recognize that Canadians have big problems and issues and many challenges right now, so it is regretful that I rise today on a question of privilege concerning the admissions published late last night by my colleague, the member for Pontiac, concerning his conduct while attending the House on Wednesday.

In a statement released on Twitter at 10:34 p.m. last night, the member—

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The interpretation is not working.

I know there are lots of technical difficulties in this part of the House.

[*English*]

The interpretation is now working.

I would ask the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London to restart her speech.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, I recognize that Canadians are being challenged right now. There are many issues and problems that we must face, but it is my regretful duty to rise today on a question of privilege concerning the admissions published late last night by my colleague, the member for Pontiac, concerning his conduct while attending the House on Wednesday.

In a statement released on Twitter at 10:34 p.m. last night, the member admitted, “Last night while attending the House of Commons proceedings virtually, in a non-public setting, I urinated without realizing I was on camera”.

This shocking event is, in my respectful view, a contempt of the House. On page 81 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, it explains that :

There are, however, other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege.... or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House

To do what he did within the House is quite frankly an offence to the dignity of Parliament. Though a very quick scan of our precedents does not reveal any past cases of contempt of this specific nature, I would suggest two things: First, such shocking and reckless conduct is likely unprecedented, and second, no specific precedent is required for the House to act.

On page 81 of Bosc and Gagnon, it explains:

The House of Commons enjoys very wide latitude in maintaining its dignity and authority through the exercise of its contempt power. In other words, the House may consider any misconduct to be contempt and may deal with it accordingly. This area of parliamentary law is therefore extremely fluid and most valuable for the Commons to be able to meet novel situations. Throughout the Commonwealth most procedural authorities hold that contempts, as opposed to privileges, cannot be enumerated or categorized.

On page 83, it continues:

Just as it is not possible to categorize or to delineate every incident which may fall under the definition of contempt, it is also difficult to categorize the severity of contempt. Contempts may vary greatly in their gravity; matters ranging from minor breaches of decorum to grave attacks against the authority of Parliament may be considered as contempts.

Even though it is impossible to complete an exhaustive list of what might constitute a contempt of Parliament, the United Kingdom's Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege included in a 1999 report a collection of various categories of contempt. At the top of the list was: “interrupting or disturbing the proceedings of, or engaging in other misconduct in the presence of, the House or a committee”

That list, including the item I quote, is favourably cited by Bosc and Gagnon at pages 82 and 83. The actions of the member for Pontiac without a doubt represent the engagement in misconduct in the presence of the House.

I know that some could be quick to stress the part of the member's statement that he was “in a non-public setting”, but frankly, there is no part of the House of Commons that is non-public. While I am speaking right now, the cameras are on me and more than 95% of the rest of the chamber is not in the camera shot. That does not mean that what is happening outside of the camera shot is non-public or what not happening inside the chamber. It certainly does not stop us from properly calling to order those who are disorderly, wherever they may be.

I would also refer the Chair to paragraph (c) of the special order adopted on January 25, 2021, which authorizes our current hybrid proceedings, as follows:

any reference in the Standing Orders to the need for members to rise or to be in their place, as well as any reference to the chair, the table or the chamber shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the virtual nature of the proceedings

Consistent with the decision of the House and by all logic, to turn on our camera and to log onto the House Zoom feed is the same as opening one of those doors behind me and walking down to any of the 338 seats in this majestic room. The use of our webcams in our proceedings is less than an year old and, if I have anything to say about it, only temporary.

Government Orders

The television cameras filming us have been here since 1977. The House of Commons is, on the other hand, an ancient institution and its rules and its rights long predate cameras and broadcasting equipment. To claim that what happens in the House is only what is broadcast on the outgoing television feed is nonsense and it cheapens what is the institution and what it represents.

Whether something happens right here on the floor of this chamber, either in or out of the camera shot, or in the extension of the chamber through the video conferencing, we must apply equal treatment to members' conduct. It falls to us to respond to offensive behaviour in the same manner too.

• (1235)

The member's behaviour, whether committed right here or via Zoom, cannot be condoned.

Finally, let me address one further technical matter. On Wednesday evening, the House was sitting in committee of the whole, though it is not clear whether the misconduct of the member for Pontiac occurred before or after the House resolved itself into the committee of the whole. In normal practice, questions of privilege arising in committee shall first be reported to the House from the committee itself. However, given the practical realities surrounding how committees of the whole conduct their business, you ruled on July 22, 2020, at page 2,701 of the Debates:

I accept that the particular circumstances of this situation, notably the challenge surrounding the committee of the whole format, do make it appropriate to bring the matter to the Speaker.

In closing, this is not the first time the member for Pontiac has exposed himself while virtually attending a sitting in the House. It is not even the first time this spring. I recognize that he has apologized, and acknowledged that he requires some form of assistance or intervention, but it does not absolve him of the responsibility for his conduct and his choices while attending a sitting in the House.

Even if the member's conduct was unintentional or lacking in malice, we must also recognize that it still puts his colleagues, plus all of the hardworking staff of the House of Commons administration, in a very uncomfortable position. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that the House of Commons is, and remains, a safe and respectful workplace.

Canadians send us to Parliament to represent them because they believe we possess the good judgment necessary to make these important decisions on their behalf. The reckless conduct the member for Pontiac admitted completely undermines that for himself, for each of us and for the institution of Parliament as a whole.

What is more, it is becoming clearer by the day that we must draw a bold, bright line that confirms that logging into the virtual House is the same as entering into this room, and that standards of behaviour in both places must be the same. Perhaps the procedure and House affairs committee would be able to make this point should the matter eventually be referred to it.

Madam Speaker, should you agree with me that there is prima facie contempt, I will be prepared to move an appropriate motion, even if I wish these circumstances had never happened.

• (1240)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I wish to thank the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London for the detailed information she has provided. I will review the information and will return to the House with a response.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BILLS OF EXCHANGE ACT

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.) moved that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Day for Truth and Reconciliation), be read the third time and passed.

He said: Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are all, whether physically or virtually, present today on the ancestral lands of first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

This is not just something we say. The land acknowledgement speaks to the context we are living today, and to the new relationship that we are trying to build through our everyday actions. Like many, I am still in shock about the horrors that have been uncovered at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in B.C. Having the remains of 215 children be at the residential school is horrifying.

The residential school system caused harm to generations of indigenous children and communities. For that, the government has apologized, first in 2008 to former students of residential schools, and in 2017 to former students of Newfoundland and Labrador residential schools, for example. As we are all acutely aware, Canadians continue to witness tragedies perpetuated against indigenous peoples. Racism in Canada is an undeniable reality and reconciliation must be more than apologies.

Reconciliation must be about big legislative actions and smaller gestures. It must be about both everyday actions and bold moves. Reconciliation is a long-term commitment that requires the engagement of all. It is made up of many actions, apologies, commissions, family conversations, school assemblies, community collaborations, conversations with colleagues, friendships, distinction-based policy changes, infrastructure support and commemorations.

There are many opportunities that could be seized for real change. We must act now.

[*Translation*]

In budget 2019, our government invested \$7 million over two years to help non-governmental and community organizations recognize and commemorate the history and legacy of residential schools.

Government Orders

Thanks to this investment, over 200 communities and organizations across the country are receiving funds this year for projects to raise awareness and educate Canadians about this dark chapter of Canada's history.

[*English*]

Budget 2021 also proposes to provide \$13.4 million over five years, with \$2.4 million ongoing, to Canadian Heritage for events to commemorate the history and legacy of residential schools and to honour survivors, their families and communities, as well as to support celebrations and commemoration events during the proposed national day for truth and reconciliation.

These numbers show that despite the pandemic, the need and interest of communities to be able to honour and commemorate as they see fit are high. People want to tell their stories and they want to stand witness so new stories can be told. They want to honour the survivors. They need to heal and they want to learn so they can act for change.

This kind of groundswell of interest shows that indigenous and non-indigenous people alike recognize the importance of commemorating this history.

[*Translation*]

This commemoration funding and the creation of a national day for truth and reconciliation reflect the recognition that all histories and cultures are important. These actions speak to our capacity to expose the wrongs of the past so we can face this history and commit to do better.

I think we can all agree that it is important to recognize the profound impact residential schools had on first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

[*English*]

In fact, the Indian Act legislated government control over almost every aspect of indigenous peoples' lives, including mandatory attendance at residential schools. Governments throughout Canada's history continued to uphold legislation and follow policies that perpetuated systemic racism in our society.

With the social upheaval occurring globally, we must harness the generational potential to reduce racism in our world. Residential schools targeted the children. We can turn that on its head and aim to educate the next generation to uphold inclusive values and to prioritize respect above all in communities, in schools, in families and in digital spaces.

The words from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report bear repeating:

All Canadian children and youth deserve to know Canada's honest history, including what happened in the residential schools, and to appreciate the rich history and knowledge of Indigenous nations who continue to make such a strong contribution to Canada, including our very name and collective identity as a country. For Canadians from all walks of life, reconciliation offers a new way of living together.

● (1245)

This statutory holiday helps to build that new way of living together, particularly in the global context of calls for social justice. This day is part of how we build back stronger together. People might ask how one day will make a difference. How will one day

that establishes a statutory holiday for a limited number of people make a difference? It is telling that people do not ask these questions about Remembrance Day. Recognizing the selfless sacrifices that veterans made to a global effort against oppression is appropriate and right. Shining a light on a dark history of oppression of our own making is also right. It is uncomfortable, but perhaps it is because it is uncomfortable that we should commit to it.

Dr. Marie Wilson, one of the three commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, spoke to the importance of a national statutory holiday. She said that reconciliation is "very tied to issues of law and public policy". That signals the importance of reconciliation to those who work on these issues, and that it is valuable.

As we have said before, a national day reveals our priorities. It says that this issue is important and we should be paying attention to it not just on this day, but throughout the year. Just as Remembrance Day is not only for veterans, a national day for truth and reconciliation is not only for first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Just as we honour veterans and highlight our values as a nation on Remembrance Day, we would honour survivors and those lost on the national day for truth and reconciliation, but also reflect on our path as a nation, on our values, on how our values have shifted and on how we can chart a new path for Canada: one that includes everyone who calls these lands home.

In so many ways, our lives and our world have witnessed loss and our realities have been forever changed. There is no doubt that these are complex, difficult times right now, but Canadians do not shy away from the tough issues. Reconciliation is tough, but we can make progress on a just journey together with first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The establishment of a national day for truth and reconciliation fulfills call to action 80 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report. It is an important action to take, and we must act immediately so that this day becomes part of our reality this year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have to say that the NDP absolutely supports fast-tracking Bill C-5. This should have actually become law in the last Parliament, as it mimics the bill that former MP Georgina Jolibois brought forward. With that being said, I hope that this will in fact pass through the Senate this time.

What assurances can the member provide the House that this will become law this time around?

Government Orders

• (1250)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Speaker, as I said the first time that Bill C-5 was introduced to the House, I recognize all of the work done by Madame Jolibois on all of this. In fact, the bill does reflect what had been tabled during the last Parliament.

As the member well knows, the Senate is an independent body of Parliament. That being said, the government has been hard at work for many months, talking to a number of senators to try to ensure that the bill makes it through the Senate in the fastest possible way.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is a very significant day. Once again, we are taking a step forward on what is a very important issue for all Canadians, no matter what their background might be. When we talk about reconciliation and moving forward, legislation of this nature plays a very important role in doing just that.

Could the minister provide his general thoughts on how important it is that we continue to move toward a healthier relationship with first nations and toward reconciliation?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Speaker, in my view, and I think in the view of most member, reconciliation is a path and journey that we are taking with first nations, Inuit and Métis people.

There are a number of things that we as government, as the Crown, need to do on that path to reconciliation. This includes things like the adoption of the bill on UNDRIP and the implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act, for which I have the honour and privilege of being responsible.

Speaking of indigenous languages in our country, I would like to remind the House that when our government came into power in 2015, the federal government invested \$5 million for indigenous languages across the country. This year, it will be more than \$100 million, and I do not think that is enough. We need to do more. We are working with our indigenous partners to see what the adequate and long-term level of funding would be for indigenous languages.

There are many things we must do on this path to reconciliation, but moving forward with Bill C-5—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am going to allow one more question.

The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, speaking of reconciliation, the Canadian government continues to fight first nations children at the Human Rights Tribunal. Dr. Cindy Blackstock has done tremendous work in challenging the government and advocating on behalf of indigenous children and their rights.

Why does the government persist in taking indigenous children to court?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Speaker, this is obviously a very complex issue, one with which our government is seized. We are doing everything we can to find a quick resolution to many of these issues.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code, a the national day for truth and reconciliation.

Before I begin, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to speak to the very horrible discovery made yesterday afternoon in Kamloops. The news yesterday of the remains of 215 children found buried at a former residential school in Kamloops is tragic beyond words. We, on all sides of the House, wish to express our deepest sympathies to the residents of that first nation and surrounding indigenous communities who are sharing in this trauma.

We also want to acknowledge the deep sorrow and mourning that all indigenous peoples and survivors of residential schools are experiencing at this time. While communities and families grapple with this unthinkable revelation, we must come together in support and provide whatever assistance is necessary to aid in the healing process and to provide whatever resources are needed to protect, honour and identify those children.

Residential schools are a national shame that has had a profoundly lasting and damaging impact on indigenous culture, heritage and language. In the words of former prime minister Stephen Harper:

The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities. First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

We have been reminded that more work needs to be done to address the devastating and hurtful effects that residential schools had and still have on many survivors today. I want to echo the words heard earlier this morning in the House, that those who love those children should know the whole of Canada mourns with them and that their loss will never be forgotten.

With that in mind, I would like to turn our attention to the matter at hand, Bill C-5.

This legislation would establish a national day for truth and reconciliation for federally regulated private sector and federal public sector workers that would be observed as a statutory holiday on September 30. Call to action 80 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls upon the federal government, in collaboration with indigenous peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a national day for truth and reconciliation.

The choice of September 30 builds on the grassroots momentum of Orange Shirt Day, which is already known as a day to remember the legacy of residential schools and move forward with reconciliation. The Conservatives proudly observe National Indigenous Peoples Day every year and encourage Canadians to participate in local gatherings.

Government Orders

Canada is one of only a few countries in the world where indigenous and treaty rights are entrenched in our constitution. Educating Canadians about their rights is an important part of the path to reconciliation. Unfortunately, at times, the Liberals seem to have no plan to develop a reconciliation education strategy to provide Canadians with learning opportunities about indigenous Canadians and the horrific dark chapter in Canada's history of residential schools. We hope that will be quickly remedied.

Other federal holidays, like Remembrance Day, commemorate through educational campaigns. While this bill does not include such a plan, we hope that one will be forthcoming very soon, and I offer my sincere assistance to the minister in helping get that done.

While the Conservative Party supports and has promoted National Indigenous Peoples Day, we believe more needs to be done to advance the rights of first nations, Métis and Inuit people. Encouraging indigenous businesses, building strong economies in indigenous communities, developing indigenous supply chains and giving indigenous kids hope for a brighter future are essential to the future of Canada.

The Conservative Party supports treaty rights and the process of reconciliation with indigenous peoples living in Canada. As mentioned earlier, in 2008, then prime minister Stephen Harper delivered a historic apology to former residential school students, their families and communities for Canada's role in the operation of the schools.

• (1255)

Our former Conservative government also created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as part of the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which recognized that the Indian residential school system had a profoundly lasting and damaging impact on indigenous culture, language and heritage.

The commission's report reflected the hard work and dedication to building public awareness about residential schools and fostering reconciliation, understanding and respect. The final report of the TRC helped to explain this dark chapter in Canadian history and the calls to action addressed the legacy of the residential schools and advanced the process of reconciliation.

As mentioned, more needs to be done to address the outstanding recommendations in that report. They need to be addressed and addressed quickly so we can get on to doing the hard work of tackling issues that will actually improve the lives of indigenous peoples right across Canada.

There is a lot of support for the bill.

Carlton Big Snake and his wife Lisa, descendants and survivors of the residential school system from Siksika Nation and former member of its chief in council, spoke in support, stating:

We were raised with negative impacts of history... adopting the bill would show the government's sincerity and commitment of the federal governments to address truth and reconciliation for Indigenous people. "Together we can begin to heal the past and look forward to a united, prosperous future."

Stacy Allison-Cassin, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto and chair at the Canadian Federation of Library Associa-

tions, Indigenous Matters Committee, also spoke in favour of the bill, stating:

Creating a national day of truth and reconciliation will create further weight and impetus for a day of remembering and learning for all Canadians.

My colleague, the member for Cariboo—Prince George, reminded us in his speech at second reading that:

While we say every child matters, we need to remember that all children matter even if they are now adults. We have so many people who are still locked in that time when they were in that program.

On a tragic day when we are reminded of the horrific, shameful history of the residential school system, on a day when we must honour and do what we can to make amends to those children whose lives were tragically cut short, we must also remember that there are many survivors of that system who are now still with us today. We must honour their memories and ensure that the racist, colonial practices of the past are never, ever repeated again.

• (1300)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to not see the clock at 1:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Philip Lawrence): Is there unanimous consent to not see the clock at 1:30 p.m.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Philip Lawrence): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like thank the member for his work at INAN.

I am glad the member brought up the need for education to be part of reconciliation moving forward. We all know that provincial governments are in control of their own curriculum.

However, could the member speak to the important education and awareness that we need to create around the indigenous residential schools and how the government can help, working with the provinces, to reflect the changes and the need for more awareness around residential schools?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, as a reminder, I am the member's next-door neighbour in the riding. I thank my friend from Nova Scotia for his comments. He does great work on the committee, and it is always a pleasure listening to his experiences and knowledge. I really appreciate the education that all members on the committee continue to receive from him and others.

Government Orders

I agree with the member that we all need to work together. The government needs to work with the provinces to continue to ensure that people of all ages do recognize and acknowledge what happened with the residential school system and what a stain it is in Canadian history. I do not think that is something any Canadian is proud of, and we all need to work harder to ensure that these tragedies are remembered—

• (1305)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Philip Lawrence): The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for clearly articulating the horrific and shameful history of the Indian residential schools. Clearly, today is a really difficult day for all the survivors and their families who attended Indian residential school.

That is no different for Nuu-chah-nulth people. I am going to share a tweet from Mariah Charleson, vice-president of the tribal council of the Nuu-chah-nulth people, who were impacted and had members sent there. She said, “My father aunts & uncles went to residential school, some to Kamloops Indian Residential School. The truth continues to be revealed. The truth so many of our survivors have lived with. My heart aches. The genocide inflicted by Canada has lasting effects.”

My question to the member is this. In honour of the survivors, we saw the previous bill in the last Parliament tabled by Georgina Jolibois for this very important day, this national day for truth and reconciliation we are talking about today, to be made a statutory holiday to ensure that we reflect on the colonial history and its past and current impacts on indigenous people and indigenous women and girls. What is my colleague going to do to help get this through the Senate, given that the Conservatives in the Senate held the bill up in the last Parliament?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from British Columbia and offer my sympathies to the people of his riding, British Columbia and all across Canada as we learn the details regarding the news from Kamloops, which is so tragic and horrific that words cannot explain.

With respect to his question, as he will see very shortly, Conservatives will be continuing to support Bill C-5. We obviously had a few questions during the committee process that we were able to discuss, including concerns about when the government will be ending some of these boil water advisories, when a lot of these paths to reconciliation will be implemented and what the agenda is on how to get there. Those questions need to be answered through the committee phase. Some questions are still there, but overall I think we are ready to support the bill and move it through the process.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am a bit shaken today as I rise to speak to Bill C-5. It obviously has to do with the events of the past week, when the remains of 215 indigenous children were uncovered behind a residential school.

Earlier, when I was thinking about this, I realized that as gruesome as this image is, it shows us that the gesture we are debating today, humble as it may be, is necessary for commemoration and remembrance in a spirit of reconciliation, but also in a spirit of truth as we deal with the bombshell of these appalling new revelations.

The thought of this image is definitely making me emotional as I speak to Bill C-5. This bill is something tangible that proves that we have started a process that is not finished, so we have to keep moving forward.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with this bill and will support it for all of the reasons it has previously mentioned, which I would like to reiterate. I think that the idea of painting a picture and telling stories would be good for everyone. As I said before, the purpose of this day is to actively remember. Memories are not a passing thing that we let slip by. They are something that we hold close and reflect on so that we can heal and act.

This is a human issue, and there are certainly many other human beings in the House. We sometimes try to keep a level head when giving certain speeches and in certain situations, but the issue of residential schools is something that strikes to the very core of who we are.

I am going to share a story I was told by one of my constituents, a story that is all too common. I listened to this story from every possible perspective, as a human being, a mother, a woman, a daughter, a sister and an elected official. This constituent is a man who was born in the Innu community of Nutashkuan, which has no road access. He told me that when he was two years old, some people showed up, took him away from his family and brought him to a residential school.

I have a three-year-old son, and I cannot even imagine my little guy being taken hundreds of kilometres away from home, far from everything he knows and loves.

This man went to a residential school for one year and was sent home the following summer. He found that first summer difficult, since he was starting to lose touch with the community. It was starting to feel foreign to him. A second summer passed, then a third. Eventually, he ended up losing the language he had learned at home. He forgot the smells, tastes and people from back home and ended up feeling like a different person from the little Innu boy he used to be. He started asking not to go home anymore, since he had lost any connection to that home.

The man ended up returning home. He did great things for his nation, but the person, the human being, the Innu man who returned home was not the same. He had been stripped of his language, his culture, his family, his people and love.

• (1310)

What does one do upon returning home when one is no longer oneself, when one has lost all sense of connection to the people one loved, to one's culture, to one's nation?

Government Orders

The man recovered his language and culture over the years, but there was always a divide. He himself became a father and even a grandfather. He now has several grandchildren, so he thinks a lot about passing on his knowledge because he himself nearly lost everything. He was taken far away and even lost contact with his parents.

Earlier, I used the word “process”, but I wanted to focus on the concept of continuity, of our living connections to both the past and the future because the ability to convey one's culture and language, to be oneself, is all one and the same.

His story is the story of so many other people, but his story shows us that we need a day like September 30 to focus on truth and reconciliation for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples with a colonial past. I said “colonial past”, but I would add that we still have a colonial present. We need vigorous, rapid action on many fronts, and this day is one of those actions.

I talked about one particular case, but considering all the goodwill we are witnessing in the House today by virtue of symbolic gestures including ideas, values and principles, I hope this will translate into quicker action on several issues.

We are talking about first nations today, but we all know that the Indian Act still exists. It is the clearest example of systemic racism. If we had to pick one, that would be it. Someone talked about the issue of water earlier. Human beings have basic needs, and not all indigenous children have access to water at this time. Education also comes to mind. We talk about the acculturation that resulted from the assimilation process at residential schools. Meanwhile, when we know that indigenous children have less money for their education than non-indigenous children, we have to look carefully at whether indigenous languages and cultures are being protected.

There is of course just such a day, and the Bloc Québécois would like to see September 30 officially designated. Meanwhile, there are many things we can do right now. As we did with Bill C-15, I hope we can pass this legislation quickly, so that it can be implemented as soon as possible. Symbolism is essential, but we also need concrete actions on the ground, and means and resources must be given to these communities.

This bill talks about truth and reconciliation, but I would like it to go even further and talk about the vitality of first nations and first nations children, because children are really at the heart of this.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the courage of my constituents. I am thinking about the parents who lost their children some sixty years ago, parents whose children were flown out one day and never came back or were found again, like the children in Kamloops.

My wish for them, and for all indigenous peoples, is that, one day, as they see their children leave, they can be confident, and that they will no longer think about what happened in the past. I want them to know that their children are safe and can live their lives with dignity, respect and love, as all children in this world deserve.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I really want to thank my colleague for the important, thoughtful and compassionate speech she has delivered today addressing the news of the finding of the young children who were lost at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The losses that took place there are horrific.

We know this is not the only residential school. My heart aches for those children who were never given the opportunity to live the life they so deeply deserved. I share my condolences with all of the families of those impacted and those impacted across our country.

This bill is critical in showing support for indigenous people during this important national day of reconciliation. Could my colleague speak to the importance of Parliament moving this bill quickly, given that there may be an election this year, the importance of the Senate fast-tracking this bill to demonstrate its support for the truth and reconciliation calls to action, and the importance of this bill to demonstrate to indigenous people that we are together and behind them?

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and question. As he well knows, we are both on the same page on this issue. He talked about how important this is. I would say that it is necessary. Every gesture we make is just as necessary. I hope this will be done quickly.

We are talking about reconciliation, and “conciliation” means “bringing together”. We want to make these ties strong again. Every gesture we make is another step toward rebuilding trust. Trust takes time and we have no time to lose to earn it back.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. It is wonderful to talk with her.

[*English*]

Could the member talk more about the importance of what we, as citizens, can do every day, especially those of us who are non-indigenous, to help along the path of reconciliation? I look forward to her comments.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments. Of course, any legislative measure is important, as are all these gestures that my colleague and my other colleagues and I make, such as stating in the House that we want to participate in this reconciliation process. Every gesture is important, even those we make every day as individuals.

Government Orders

I am talking about gestures, but I would also like to talk about listening because we are not done listening. We must continue to listen to the first nations, who still have a lot to say. It is a process and I want us to listen with our minds, but also with our hearts.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Manicouagan for her emotional speech. I know how connected she is to the indigenous communities in her riding.

Today's debate is about reconciliation and a day of commemoration. How might this day help us understand that there are still far too many women who are victims of violent crime in indigenous communities? Indigenous women have a higher than average chance of going missing, being murdered or being trafficked. How can we be mindful of this very real situation for indigenous women and girls?

Mrs. Maril ne Gill: Madam Speaker, once again, this day of commemoration is one step, and many more steps will be required to make sure everyone is aware. The purpose of this day is to give indigenous and non-indigenous people a chance to reflect, remember, converse and share their stories. I believe this is the right approach. There needs to be interaction, communication, understanding and empathy. This day, like many other actions, could make all of this possible.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am speaking today from the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

Today is a dark, dark day and the dark clouds that hang in the air as we learn of the news in B.C. at the Kamloops residential school just shake us to the core. I cannot imagine what the families and friends of the children must be going through.

We can say we mourn with them, and we send our strength and support as they are confronted with this horrific news and forced to relive the trauma of colonization and the egregious impact of residential schools. These are, of course, words and they are not our family members who have lost loved ones.

However, I do want to say with all my heart, I know that I and all my colleagues, the New Democrats, the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Bloc members and the Greens, stand with them. We share their mourning and we take in deeply what this means.

The finding is a reminder that the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation has estimated that more than 150,000 indigenous children attended residential school. The centre also estimates that 4,100 children died at the schools. They are identified in death records, some by name and some not. Let us just imagine, for one minute, if that were our child. The exact number of children who died is not known, as many were taken to residential schools and many never returned.

We must remember this and never forget the generational impact of Canada's shameful history. For us to say these words, we must then redouble our efforts in every single action we do to address this shameful history. Reconciliation cannot just be words. It must be action.

We must also never forget that this is not an indigenous people's problem. It is a Canadian problem. I ask members to remember these words each and every day. That is what I ask for all members of the House. I also ask all Canadians to remember those words and act on those words.

Today, we are speaking to Bill C-5, a bill that would honour indigenous people and set the national day for truth and reconciliation as a statutory holiday. It is a recognition of the call to action 80 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report states, "Reconciliation is not an [indigenous] problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered."

We, as non-indigenous peoples, must carry these profound words with us each and every day in everything that we do, and, as mentioned, this is particularly significant with the news of what has happened at the Kamloops residential school.

What does it mean for us? There is no question that we need to get this bill passed. I want to honour former MP Georgina Jolibois, who brought forward her own private member's bill in the last Parliament. It went through all three stages in the House, and then, when it went to the Senate, the Senate blocked it. The unelected Senate blocked it and it never became law.

I hope that this does not happen again. I call on the government, the Conservatives and all members of the House to do everything they can to ensure that Bill C-5 becomes law. The NDP is in full support of seeing this expedited through the House of Commons so we can honour indigenous peoples, their history and their culture, and remember the trauma and generational impact of colonization.

● (1325)

However, it is equally important that we truly honour and celebrate them, make a statutory holiday not as a day off, but as a day to learn about indigenous peoples, their culture and their history, and take to heart what it means to show the respect they deserve and that was robbed of them so many years ago.

The call for collective action across Canada in recognition of first nations, M tis and Inuit peoples and the history of their rights, cultures and languages must be at the heart of our work. They are the first peoples of this land and we must never forget that, whether we are talking about the conflicts going on now, Land Back or issues around rights. We must remember this not only in the face of news about the Kamloops residential school, but as a guide in the work that we do. When we talk about the voices of indigenous peoples, we cannot just say that we consult with them. It must be in the context of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and honouring their inherited rights, acknowledging these and acting on them.

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This bill does not address socio-economic challenges faced by indigenous communities, but it is a reflection on colonial history and its current effects on the rights of first nations, Métis and Inuit communities across the country, and that is an important step. Equally important, though, is the question I asked the minister: Why on earth is the Canadian government taking indigenous children to court? His answer was that this was a complex issue. I say that it is not that complex. The government should step up, own up and stop taking indigenous children to court, period. This is something the Canadian government can and must do. That is how to show reconciliation in action and not just in words.

We talk about water safety. Water is sacred. Our lives depend on it, so why are we still dealing with water advisories? The government will say we are making progress. How about that? We are making progress. How is it acceptable that people do not have access to clean, safe drinking water? How is it acceptable that this is happening to indigenous people? How is it acceptable that we are taking this incremental approach to get there?

• (1330)

Mr. Gord Johns: It's 1:30 p.m. You have about one minute, literally.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni to make sure his microphone is off.

The hon. member for Vancouver East has one minute to finish her speech.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, I will wrap up by simply saying this. We should not just talk the talk, but walk the walk and put it in action. That is true reconciliation. Let us get this bill passed. Let us honour the work of former MP Georgina Jolibois and all indigenous peoples, their history and their culture, and get this bill passed. The House should not rise until it passes through the Senate and becomes law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I sincerely thank the member for Vancouver East for her heartfelt speech in which she really emphasized the need for action.

Everyone's thoughts are with the families of the 215 children today, as well as all the other victims, whose names are often unknown.

Aside from this day becoming symbolic and being an annual reminder, I wonder if the member could identify possible solutions for moving forward in a way that is not paternalistic.

I say this because sometimes, even in the House, people with good intentions talk about the need for economic development and so on.

The solution, however, is not to impose our way of doing things on others, but to give people the autonomy to develop in their own way and make their own decisions, whether in education or other areas, so that we can achieve a true partnership. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, absolutely, we must honour indigenous peoples and recognize their right to self-govern, and that in fact they did exactly that before settlers came to this land.

When we talk about action that needs to be taken by the government, and when we talk about resources, for example, we need to honour indigenous peoples and their rights, and recognize their inherent rights. Informed prior consent must also be at the heart of all of those decisions.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will just pick up on the last question, around self-determination and development.

One of the most challenging issues that we deal with in the development space is when there are differences of opinion between different indigenous communities or there are different representative bodies, whether it is a hereditary authority structure or an elected authority structure, coming to different conclusions. My view would be that respecting the autonomy of indigenous communities, respecting self-governance, means deferring to the wishes of elected community leaders and allowing those decisions to stand.

I wonder if the member has any guidance in terms of respecting indigenous rights. From her perspective, how would we resolve these cases where there is disagreement among different representative bodies or different communities?

• (1335)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, part of respecting indigenous peoples would be respecting both hereditary chiefs' points of view and those of the elected bodies.

What we should do, in fact, is give them the time, space and resources to resolve these issues. All too often, as we just heard from the member, we hear people say, "This is my perspective." Well, good on them, that is their perspective, but what we need to do is respect indigenous peoples and their voice, and their perspective.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Vancouver East for her intervention and her compassion.

I find it very disappointing that I have to stand here today and debate an issue that was already passed in the 42nd Parliament, at all stages, by our former colleague, Georgina Jolibois, and yet was blocked at the Senate. This is an important issue, and yet here we are back again, debating the same issue.

What I am hearing today is that all the parties agree this is going to pass. Does the hon. member agree that the government has to work swiftly on this to make sure this gets quick passage, and that all parties should encourage the Senate to deal with this issue ASAP to make sure this never happens again and history does not repeat itself?

Government Orders

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, there is no question. Absolutely, every single member in this House should do everything they can to ensure that this becomes law. It was shameful that Georgina's bill did not pass the Senate in the last Parliament. Likewise, UNDRIP did not pass because of the Senate in the last Parliament. We are back in this Parliament, debating UNDRIP as well. That should never happen because of the work of the unelected Senate.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Madam Speaker, I wish to acknowledge the unceded Wolastoqiyik territory from which I speak today and the immense privilege I carry as a settler in this land.

I would like to begin by extending my deepest condolences, and to send strength, to all who will be retraumatized by this new and devastating information regarding the realities of Indian residential schools in Canada. The remains of 215 children have been found buried on the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, B.C., using ground-penetrating radar, confirming what families and communities have known but could not substantiate until now. This new knowledge is truth. We need to confront our past and our present with truth before we can build reconciliation.

I remember when I was first introduced to the concept of residential schools. It was during my post-secondary studies, largely on my own and in conversations with family and friends. It was not taught to me in school. We only learned that Canada was a land of peacekeepers and apologetic people whose brave pioneer ancestors defied the odds in a barren land to build the country we have today.

We have worked very hard to erase the history and culture of indigenous peoples. We have also worked very hard to erase the people themselves, as well as the evidence of these crimes.

Prime Minister Harper's historic apology was largely in response to mounting potential litigation as rumours and horror stories became all too real, with well-documented acts of genocide bubbling to the surface. Yes, genocide: not simply cultural genocide, preventing language and tradition from flourishing, but the United Nations' definition of genocide.

From the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, article II, of the United Nations:

...genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

"(a) Killing members of the group," like throwing a child down a flight of stairs or out a third-storey window, as outlined in Isabelle Knockwood's incredible novel *Out of the Depths*.

"(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group," like separating children from their parents and communities, like threatening those who witnessed abuse with the same fate, like force-feeding expired food, shaving sacred hair and stripping children of their given names and mother tongue, as so many experiences across the country have documented.

"(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," like deliberately exposing children to fatal diseases and being proud enough, or brazen enough, to take photos and share them in textbooks for years to come in celebration of the efforts undertaken to

address the Indian problem. The problem of course in Canada was their existence.

"(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group," like forced sterilizations, forced abortions and infanticide targeting specific family bloodlines, like those of hereditary chiefs or strong leaders.

"(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." Sadly, we are seeing this continue, with more indigenous children in care today than were enrolled in residential schools at the height of their operation in Canada.

There were schools in almost every province and territory in Canada. New Brunswick likes to gloss over this fact, but we too had institutions where children were treated like animals or worse, and parents were stripped of their rights right here in our backyard. It was simply before Confederation, so Canada washed its hands of accountability.

In doing my own research, I studied survivor testimonials, historic news articles and official records. It took me two years to pore through the information. I wept. I was angry, and ridden with guilt and frustration.

I particularly remember watching the film *We Were Children* with my high school students, as their cultural teacher. I was six months pregnant with my second child: an indigenous child who would be born with the same beautiful brown skin his father has. I could not contain my emotion, as I cannot right now. My baby seemed more and more like a miracle, the descendant of survivors.

My sons have never met their great-grandparents. They died too young. We call them survivors because they came from Shubenacadie alive when so many did not. However, the nightmare of their experiences would follow them. It would continue to eat away at their souls. It would be present in their parenting styles, in their substance abuse, in their domestic violence, in their internalized racism and in their pain.

The discovery of the remains of 215 innocent children is beyond devastating. For Canada, apologies, payouts and even days of recognition will never be enough. There are 215 families who were given no answers about their babies, some as young as three years old, which is the same age as my youngest child.

When senators, leaders of political parties and everyday Canadians suggest these schools had good intentions, were not all bad or were a product of the times, I say how dare they.

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• (1340)

Systemic murder, often in front of other children, followed with threats and intimidation and a disgusting cover-up of the use of mass graves, forged records and death certificates, this is not an isolated incident for the school. One child's death and erasure are criminal, despicable. There are 215. With the potential of more gravesites across Canada to be found now more likely than ever is genocide.

We are so quick to step on our pedestal and wave our fingers at other countries for their transgressions when our stool may well sit on the graves of indigenous children killed by church and state right here in Canada, shame, shame. There is no apology in the world that will take this pain away.

There has been a lot of talk of reconciliation with indigenous peoples in Canada, but truth must come first, and the truth is that most Canadians have no idea of the full impact of residential schools, the residual effects and the intergenerational trauma.

Bill C-5 is a necessary step to fulfill the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to bring much-needed awareness to the horrors of the past as well as those that continue.

Make no mistake: Missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and two-spirit peoples is part of this legacy. Joyce Echaquan's death is part of this legacy. Chantel Moore's death is part of this legacy. A national day of reconciliation is only as good as the space it creates for truth, truth about what has been and truth about what is.

I fully support Bill C-5 and I stand with my colleagues in the House today to see that it becomes law. It is long overdue. It is reactive rather than proactive, however. For those children and their families, please, we must do better.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really thank our Green Party colleague for her moving and poignant speech. I do not know if this can comfort her, but we share and feel some of her emotions today.

I will go back to the question I asked a little earlier.

I would like her to talk about the way forward. There is unanimous support in the House for passing the bill to introduce this day. However, we cannot continue to be paternalistic towards indigenous communities if we are to improve this partnership and ensure that the much-talked-about reconciliation takes place. Indigenous people must be given the means to govern themselves and to make their own decisions, and we must be able to have a true partnership.

I would like to hear what she has to say about the next steps.

[*English*]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Speaker, absolutely the legacy of paternalism continues. I very boldly voted against Bill C-15. I know it came as a shock for a lot of people, but it was a protest. It was because we still have the Indian Act in Canada.

The parents of those children were unable to seek legal counsel because it was illegal in our country to do so. We have not done the work of reconciliation, and to pass a bill to say that it may happen with the stroke of a pen is irresponsible and it continues that paternalistic approach.

Indigenous communities have the capacity and the leadership to determine their own fate. They must be given the resources they need to do that, and that is the way forward.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I worked for the Government of Saskatchewan when it dedicated the Indian industrial school's cemetery to be a provincial historic site. I remember how powerful that ceremony was and the memory of those lost lives in unmarked graves there. It is a tragic part of our history.

I thank the member for bringing this forward and I am glad to see that we can see this is passed. This is more of a comment than a question.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Speaker, I very much thank my colleague for those kind words. I mentioned my role as a teacher. I worked in a middle school in the city of Fredericton. Outside it is a very famous large cemetery. It is for members of the community from days gone by, but the children often make comments about looking outside and how sad it is to see a cemetery rather than, say, a playground or something more uplifting.

The truth is that for so many children in residential schools that was the reality. Every school had a graveyard. That reality alone should shock us all into action. The action is the key. We can be as upset as we want, we can be as moved as we want, but unless those actions follow, we are still failing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, to the member's point on action, what we know is that there has been such a delay in implementing the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls calls for justice. The government promised that it would, in fact, deliver on those last year, and we are still nowhere near.

I wonder if the member could comment on that. Should the pandemic be an excuse for the delay, or is it the opposite? Because of the pandemic, do we not actually need to step up the action?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is right. There is no justification for inaction on the missing and murdered indigenous women file. If anything, the pandemic has exacerbated issues specifically for women already from vulnerable communities. To see we are potentially using that as an excuse is beyond upsetting.

We also failed to follow through with the recommendations from the royal commission. We failed to follow through with the recommendations from the TRC. We have ticked off a couple boxes, but we are nowhere near what we need to achieve, so I am so frustrated.

Again, I have to mention Bill C-15, and I hope people can understand what I was trying to do with that, which was to educate. We are not there yet. We have to continue these really difficult conversations.

• (1350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my dear friend and colleague from Fredericton gave a very important speech. I noticed her reference to Chantel Moore, the beautiful young woman from Vancouver Island and Nuu-Chah-Nulth territory who was killed in the area where the hon. member for Fredericton lives and works.

I would like to ask the hon. member if there is any update. Has her family been given any information about how she was murdered during the course of a wellness check?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Speaker, I have to say her name as many times as I can. Chantel Moore's family deserves answers and justice, and our province can no longer sit on that report.

The report has been completed for some time now, and the family needs to see every crossed t and dotted i about what what happened that night. We also need to look across Canada at what wellness checks bring on and what kinds of threats they bring to people of colour and indigenous people across the country. We continue to fail.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 1:50 p.m., the motion is deemed to have been adopted and Bill C-5, an act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code with regard to a national day for truth and reconciliation, is deemed read a third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 1:51 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTION ACT

The House resumed from April 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-233, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sex-selective abortion), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would really like to say that I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-233, which was introduced by the member for Yorkton—Melville, but that would be a lie.

Unlike what some would have us believe, Bill C-233 does not seek to restore the balance between the situation of young girls and young boys. It is not a bill to combat sexism. It is anti-abortion legislation, period. It is a pretext, a roundabout way for the member to achieve her purpose, an attempt to reopen a debate that we hoped had been closed for several decades now. The member is shameful-

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ly using and hijacking the discourse on human rights to hide other intentions. I am not trying to freely impute motives, unlike what some of my colleagues might try to accuse me of following my speech.

This is a fairly well documented situation, which was the subject of at least two CBC reports just before the last election in which the journalists talked about new pro-life lobbying methods. As an aside, I want to mention that, in my opinion, the term "pro-life" is a term that has been overused so that people do not have to say anti-abortion, even though that is what it means.

The groups featured in these reports have abandoned certain strategies in recent years and have adopted new ones. Their stated purpose is to get dozens of anti-abortion members elected. Alissa Golob, one of the cofounders of the group RightNow, explained on camera that if, instead of spending two hours holding a sign on the sidewalk, they were to spend that time knocking on doors for a candidate, it would probably be a much more effective use of their time.

In the report that was recorded in June 2019, RightNow explained that it was employing several tactics. First, the group encourages pro-life activists to run for office. Then, during the nomination races in various ridings, it suggests to its supporters that they become members of a party that is running a pro-life candidate and that they vote for that candidate, obviously. Finally, RightNow's volunteers go door to door to find voters who would be willing to support anti-abortion politicians. The day of the election, the group encourages voters to go vote. Without specifically naming them, the lobby admitted to targeting some fifty-odd ridings during the 2019 election.

Scott Hayward, another co-founder of RightNow, explained in the same report that the group's objective was to get into the corridors of power to pass legislation that will reduce the number of abortions in Canada as much as possible. He conceded that the strategy to have a total ban on abortion was doomed to failure. This group's new strategy is to take incremental steps.

Another news report from September 2019 revealed the communications strategy of lobby groups. Their strategy is to attack the consensus that the issue of women's right to control their own bodies is a debate that should be considered to have been closed for decades.

Although the leader of the Conservative Party at the time, the current member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, who has openly stated that he is pro-life, said in the last election campaign that the debate would not be reopened, the same story reported otherwise. The report reminded readers that backbenchers would nevertheless have the right to introduce private members' bills seeking to restrict the right to abortion.

The group We Need a Law is another anti-abortion group. The same news report explained that its approach is to lobby the public and politicians to convince them that Canada needs an abortion law.

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It is important to remember that the general situation in Canada is that we trust women to make their own decision, and we trust doctors, who receive guidelines from their associations that cover the stage of pregnancy starting at which specific criteria must be taken into consideration before they can sign off on termination. According to *We Need a Law*, in order to change the law, we must first change the way people think. For both *We Need a Law* and *Right Now*, that means the discourse must be refreshed, but also softened.

• (1355)

These days, anti-abortion groups are deliberately softening their approach. They are moving away from the all-or-nothing route and focusing more on a middle-of-the-road approach, and guess what? One of their strategies involves creating a precedent with abortion-related legislation, particularly by trying to get laws passed that seek to criminalize sex-selective abortion or to ban abortions after a certain point in the pregnancy.

Bill C-233, the bill before us today, fits that pattern exactly. It seeks to chip away at abortion rights with the stated long-term goal of making it harder and harder to access abortion. That is the frame of mind we need to put ourselves in as we examine this bill.

After all that, I have not even talked about the many other problems with Bill C-233, such as the potential interference in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction.

The member for Yorkton—Melville is clearly trying to use the Criminal Code to regulate medical practice, which is not something that falls under federal jurisdiction. However, we have become accustomed to this tactic. It is something that we debated in the House just yesterday during the study of Bill C-268, which seeks to criminalize certain aspects of medical assistance in dying as a way to indirectly sabotage something for which there is a consensus, particularly in Quebec.

I am not even talking about the difficulties associated with implementing Bill C-233, which would involve a major violation of doctor-patient confidentiality for charges to be laid under the Criminal Code provisions Bill C-233 proposes.

Nor am I talking about the possible consequences of this bill for racialized people. If Bill C-233 passes, doctors could engage in profiling by only asking pregnant women of Asian or Indian origin, communities in which sex-selective abortion seems statistically more prevalent.

No, I am going to talk about what is behind Bill C-233.

I am talking about the red herring and the tactic that some members use when they say they do not want to reopen the abortion debate but then turn around and introduce bills like Bill C-233 to do just that. I urge the bill's sponsor and her leader to at least have the decency and transparency to acknowledge the real purpose of the legislation they put forward.

I was born in 1984, only four years before the Supreme Court ruled in the Morgentaler case. From that moment on, logically, my adult life should not have been punctuated by attempts to ensure that others could decide in my stead what is good for me or dictate what I should be doing with my own body. What is being proposed

is a step backwards and a disservice to the progress that women's rights have supposedly made since then. That is why I believe it is still relevant to quote Simone de Beauvoir, who said, "Never forget that it only takes one political, economic or religious crisis for women's rights to be put in jeopardy. Those rights can never be taken for granted. You will have to remain vigilant your whole life".

Let us not be fooled. Let us stay vigilant, as she said. This bill is nothing more than the umpteenth iteration of a form of antiquated bigotry temporarily clad in the guise of feminism, which is suddenly so timely. No matter how sugar-coated the pill is or how polished Bill C-233 looks, we must not lose sight of the fact that, deep down, it is motivated by values that have no place in a democratic institution.

Because I am a woman, because I am a feminist and because I am progressive, I simply cannot support Bill C-233.

• (1400)

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak against Bill C-233, which is nothing more than a backdoor attempt to criminalize abortion and attack our reproductive rights. I want to acknowledge the critical work of so many advocates of Abortion Rights Coalition, who have made clear that Bill C-233 is not actually about protecting girls and women, or supporting vulnerable women, but rather, a veiled attempt to criminalize abortion in our country.

It is a bill that opens the door to racism, misogyny and abuse. Today, I acknowledge that, as I stand again in this House, in support of a woman's fundamental right to choose, that we stand on the shoulders of giants, giants like the women of the abortion caravan, trailblazers like Henry Morgentaler; feminist leaders like Judy Rebick, Carolyn Eagen, Joyce Arthur; the women of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and many more.

I think of the women and two-spirited activists who created the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and the fierce feminist activists of the Radical Handmaids.

I think of the women in my own community and in our own region who fight to make sure that women and transgender people have access to reproductive rights.

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Let us get to the core of the issue. This bill is also a key part of the Conservative Party of Canada's not-so-hidden agenda. Its members tell us they have rebranded. They tell us they are pro-choice. They tell us they are pro-LGBTQ rights. They slap an emoji on it, a hashtag on it, and they are good to go. Then its members put forward bills like this one. It is not by accident and it is also not the first time.

Almost 10 years ago, in 2012, and feminist activists will remember, Motions Nos. 312 and 408 were put forward by Conservative members at that time that again, were backdoor attempts to criminalize abortion in Canada. I spoke to those motions as a member of Parliament almost 10 years ago. These motions, yes, were overwhelmingly opposed, but they were not meant to pass. They were meant to send a signal at that time, like they are today, that the Conservative Party also holds the belief that women and some transgender people should not have the choice to do what they want with their bodies. These motions were meant to send a signal that the state ought to have the final say and criminalize those who choose abortion. These motions stoke the fire of possibility of a reactionary, patriarchal view of our world where women are subservient.

If the Conservatives truly cared about gender equality and the rights of girls and women so much, what else could they do to spend their time fighting for us? My answer is: so much more. First of all, they could start by recognizing that indigenous women in this country have been and continue to be subjected to genocide. They could support the findings of the historic National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, an inquiry that they opposed and pour their energy into action on its recommendations, but instead, the Conservatives are not doing that.

It is May 2021. We are a year and some into a global pandemic. Women have borne the brunt of care work in this pandemic, in our care homes, hospitals, homes and schools as essential workers. The Conservatives could fight for them for paid sick days; for desperately needed protection; for targeted shutdowns of dangerous workplaces; for immigration status for women migrant workers and all migrant workers, but the Conservatives are not doing that. They could speak up for the thousands of Canadian women who have lost their jobs, had to leave their work, had to scale back their employment because of a lack of child care, a lack of elder care; a lack of supports. They could speak up of the she-session and the clear recognition that women in Canada have lost significant ground during this crisis. They could fight for them, for universal child care, for cancelling student debt, for free education, for affordable housing; for publicly owned compassionate models of care that value the women who need that care and the women who provide it, but the Conservatives are not doing that either. Instead, we have Bill C-233 that will set the clock back on our reproductive rights.

I am here to say that Canadian women and transgender people are not having it. Many, including in my own province, have been on the front lines of fighting for greater access to abortion, particularly the availability of Mifegymiso. Thanks to the immense public pressure from advocates of the grassroots, Mifegymiso became universally covered by the provincial government here in Manitoba.

• (1405)

However, the struggle continues. Many women and some transgender people still do not have access to medical or surgical abortions in real terms when they need them. Here I also want to highlight the hypocrisy of the Liberals, who aim to score points on being pro-choice but do next to nothing to make abortion services available to women across our country, particularly in northern and rural areas.

Many are fighting back. I want to acknowledge the leadership of Emily Pruder, an abortion doula and advocate for reproductive justice here in our north, who said, "Northern and rural people already face incredible barriers just to access abortion. People are often forced to travel long distances, pay for travel out of pocket and wait weeks before they can have an abortion. We don't need more barriers. This paternalistic bill is an attack on reproductive justice."

The struggle is ongoing: for access to abortion, for control over our own bodies, for reproductive justice, for gender justice, for liberation. The struggle is not over. Women in the United States are taking on struggles in defence of reproductive rights in their home states and across their country. Women around the world, from Ireland to Argentina, have made it clear: our bodies, our choice.

Bills like Bill C-233 are not fooling women across Canada. The not-so-veiled agenda of the Conservative Party of Canada is on full display.

It is 2021. Women deserve leadership, leadership that will fight to make our lives better. Bill C-233 not only would not do that, but it would make our lives worse. That leadership starts with the fundamental respect of our right to control our own bodies, to allow us to make the choices that we know are best for who we are: when we want to get pregnant, whether we want to have kids and when we want an abortion.

Today I stand, along with so many women and so many people across our country, including my colleagues in the NDP, to state our clear and unequivocal opposition to Bill C-233, which is nothing but a not-so-veiled attack on a woman's fundamental right to choose.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with utter sadness that I rise today in the House of Commons to speak on the current issue of femicide in our country.

Unfortunately, the treatment of women as non-human and therefore not worthy of protection is not new. In ancient Athens, it was very common for couples to take newborn baby girls out to the wilderness and leave them to die: an act they called exposing the baby. "Everybody raises a son even if he is poor", one Greek writer wrote, "but exposes a daughter even if he is rich".

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In ancient Rome, this was just as common, especially in poor families. There are records of a lower-class Roman writing to his wife about her pregnancy: “A daughter is too burdensome and we just don't have the money; if you should bear a girl we will have to kill her.”

Even in ancient Egypt, which gave women comparatively equal rights, the poor often left kids to die. “If you have a baby before I return”, one letter shows an Egyptian man writing to his wife, “if it's a boy, let it live; if it's a girl, expose it”.

For centuries, daughters were considered lesser. Sons were given more food when food was scarce, better medical care and a better education. Boys were assets while girls were liabilities. We think, of course, that we no longer suffer from this in modern times, but medical advancements have made the problem even more complex and helped it persevere into the 21st century. Families no longer need to wait nine months to know a baby's sex. Through ultrasound imaging, families now have the ability to choose early to abort their daughters.

I know there will be some in the House who take offence at the suggestion that this even happens in Canada. Some say there is no need for any sort of legislation in our country because we do not do this here, but investigative reporting has shown that this actually is happening in Canada.

Years ago when I was having my babies, I was not even allowed to be told the sex of my child following the ultrasound because it was common knowledge that girl babies were at risk. However, here we are in a country that prides itself on statistics, data and evidence-based decision-making, and it is nothing less than outrageous to see that we do not track abortions by sex.

Let me repeat that: We do not track abortions by sex. Every Canadian woman should be absolutely shocked by this intentional exclusion, yet despite this lack of transparency, the Canadian Medical Association Journal managed to publish two research papers in 2016 studying imbalanced sex ratios at birth. These studies linked the gender imbalance to induced abortions, so I ask you this: Are we keeping these statistics hidden so we can claim ignorance, and so that the practice can continue while we turn a blind eye? Do we seriously think that we are immune because we are a progressive western society?

International organizations, including the World Health Organization, United Nations Women and United Nations Children's Fund have identified unequal sex ratios at birth as a growing problem internationally. In response, many countries have laws or policies on sex selection, including China, which has an extremely lenient framework around abortion. I do not believe we can ignore these uncomfortable facts.

The Minister of Justice recently released a statement in response to a petition submitted by my hon. colleague for Yorkton—Melville stating the government's position on the issue of sex-selective abortion. He stated unequivocally that the Government of Canada “condemns all practices that are motivated by discriminatory views of women and girls, including sex-selective practices”. Let me highlight that official statement once more: The Government of Canada condemns sex-selective practices.

With that statement on the record, and knowing that 82% of Canadians polled in 2019 did not support sex selection as a reason to terminate a pregnancy, no one could be faulted for thinking this private member's bill would sail through the House uncontested, yet when we stand up to speak out and call for an end to gender-based violence in the form of sex-selective abortion, suddenly this is twisted to claim that we are anti-women. Nothing could be further from the truth.

• (1410)

The bill we are debating today is about equality. It is about women in our country who have been forced into terminating a pregnancy simply because her child is a girl.

How many times has this happened? We will likely never know, because the system is designed to hide that information. Without a law against it, without actual legislation from the leaders of our country that says “no more”, this practice will continue to happen, despite all the speeches about violence against women that we have heard from this supposedly feminist government.

Recently, at a take note debate on violence against women, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality said the following:

These conversations are important and our government will continue to create spaces for them. However, this cannot just be about words, but has to be followed by action...We lost more than 160 women to femicide last year, and one life lost is too many.

I would like to put for the minister that her numbers are off. In fact, we lost many more than 160 women to femicide last year, and yet we will never know how many. Their numbers are shrouded in darkness because discrimination continues unabated. If we do not take action and create legislation to stop the practice of sex-selective abortion, it will continue undeterred.

Many of us participated recently in what was described as a historic and momentous debate in the House concerning violence against women. I know that I and my colleagues meant what we said, and that this is truly a problem that we need to fight against. I would ask all my colleagues to consider their vote on the bill in light of their position in that debate.

It is interesting that Canada does have legislation on the books that acknowledges discrimination against a female fetus. In Canada, if in vitro fertilization is used, the Assisted Human Reproduction Act makes it illegal to choose which embryo is selected based on its sex. It demonstrates how we know in our heart that to deny a girl a basic right to life simply because she is a female is utterly wrong. How can we not insist that this applies to our naturally conceived girls as well?

I recently read an article on the occasion of International Women's Day. It was from the Sikh Research Institute, which said the following:

The Sikh culture, as envisioned in the Guru Granth Sahib and created by the Ten Nanaks, insists on the dignity and respect of all human beings. In today's parlance, this is complete equality and equity in society. There is no stratification spectrum of inferior or superior status...be it gender or other social divisions.... In the Sikhi lifestyle, *IkOankar* is enshrined in every heart. The same divine light is present in all human beings. Every man and woman is an image of *IkOankar*.

The same basic tenet is also found in the Christian tradition. It is this kind of countercultural thinking that changed the ancient world and their practice of leaving unwanted girl babies to be exposed and unprotected, simply because they were girls.

In 180 AD, Tertullian wrote that Christians in Rome rescued the tiny bodies of newborn babies from the garbage and dung heaps, and raised them as their own. Their belief that each individual person had worth because they were created in the image of God was foreign to the society at the time, where the state, the tribe and the collective were the only values they knew.

The right of a woman to live life as an equal, safe from violence and discrimination must apply to all stages of her being. As a fetus, an infant, a toddler, a teenager, a mother and a grandmother, every stage must be protected by society. When we take action by enshrining those protections in law, we move forward as a country, demonstrating that we understand the intrinsic value of every individual who calls this place home.

I urge all my colleagues in the House to consider their vote carefully and support the women this bill would protect.

• (1415)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am here today to speak to private member's bill, Bill C-233, an act to amend the Criminal Code, sex-selective abortion, at second reading.

I really wish I did not have to do this. I am, quite frankly, disappointed that I have to spend time in the year 2021 on the abortion debate in Canada, when a woman's right to choose has been law for over 30 years. It really is unfortunate that members of Parliament are still seeking to restrict that right.

The sponsor claims that this bill is to address sex-based discrimination. To achieve that goal, this bill would create a new Criminal Code offence prohibiting doctors from performing an abortion when they know it is being sought solely on the grounds of the genetic sex of the fetus.

While I note that the offence is ostensibly aimed at doctors, I must point out that it would also criminalize women as parties to the offence. Make no mistake, Bill C-233 will limit a woman's right to choose by doing this. Criminalizing a woman for seeking an abortion is a violation of the fundamental rights of women in Canada, and it is just plain wrong.

I would like to speak to what we know about the impact of using criminal law to regulate abortion. We need not look further than Canada's own legal history of abortion regulation and its impact on Canadian women. That history reflects what the international evidence tells us. Criminal restrictions on abortion result in women

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having less access to them, and having less access negatively impacts women's equality rights.

Let us take a look at how we got to where we are today. Currently, no criminal offences apply to abortion, and the provinces and territories are responsible for providing safe abortion services to Canadian women. However, we must not forget that, until 1969, abortion was absolutely prohibited in Canada. That meant that very few, if any, safe options were available to women. Women were forced to either bring an unwanted pregnancy to term or access unsafe and unregulated methods such as back alley abortions, which often led to infection and death.

Women who sought abortions also risked criminal sanctions, and doctors who provided safe abortions risked punishment. Many of us will remember Dr. Morgentaler. He was incarcerated for saving women's lives. He risked his own safety to champion women's rights and for that he was awarded the Order of Canada in 2008.

I cannot emphasize enough how much we do not want to return to that era. I am proud to live in a country where women have safe access to abortion and do not need to worry about criminal reprisals. Again, I am very disappointed to be here today having to fight against an attempt to limit these hard-earned and important rights.

The evidence before the court in the Morgentaler case highlighted the medical risks and psychological trauma restricting access to abortion caused women seeking abortion services in Canada, and the importance of affording women autonomy to make decisions about their own bodies. The provisions were found to violate women's security of the person rights.

This is because, and I quote Justice Bertha Wilson, the first woman justice of the Supreme Court, who said that those provisions asserted that, "the woman's capacity to reproduce is to be subject, not to her own control, but to that of the state."

The court found the violation of women's rights by limiting access to abortion to be completely unacceptable, and so do I. The court has been very clear on this front, and I think that a court could also find this legislation unconstitutional for the same reasons, should it pass.

The 1969 provisions remained in the Criminal Code, but were unenforceable until they were repealed in 2019 by our government in the former Bill C-75. Other related abortion offences were repealed by our government in 2018 in former Bill C-51. Even though they were inoperable, I am proud that our government took the important step to remove these discriminatory provisions.

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● (1420)

It took more than 100 years to remove abortion-related criminal offences from our Criminal Code, which is, frankly, a shameful mark. However, again, I am quite proud to be part of the government that finally removed them from the books, and I have no intention of supporting any attempt to add them back.

Consistent with the Canadian experience, international research has shown that using the criminal law to regulate any aspect of abortion results in barriers to accessing abortion services, which contributes to gender inequality. For example, international research indicates that laws restricting the use of technology for sex selection purposes, as well as sex-selective abortions, are likely to have harmful impacts on women. These impacts include women seeking unsafe procedures that fall outside regulations, protocols and monitoring.

I fail to see how criminalizing women who choose sex-selection abortion, perhaps because of familial pressure to do so, protects them, or other women for that matter, from discrimination. Rather, a criminal law response is more likely to detract from women's equality rights by creating barriers to accessing abortion.

The United Nations recommends combatting this form of discrimination by addressing the root causes of gender inequality. This includes focusing on advancing access to education, health services and economic resources for women and girls. I am pleased to note that our government has made significant investments to advance gender equality, guided by women and the framework for assessing gender equality results, introduced in budget 2018.

Criminalizing women seeking abortion is not the solution to this problem and would be a massive step backwards for this country. I cannot emphasize enough how disappointed I am to see that there is yet another attempt in this bill to limit a woman's right to choose.

In Canada, I am proud to say that abortion is treated like the medical service that it is and falls within the responsibility of the provincial and territorial health sector. All medical procedures are subject to medical professional standards.

Ultimately, what could happen if we were to enact an offence such as this? Perhaps doctors would refuse to provide abortion services out of fear of criminalization, because they believe their patient may be choosing abortion for the wrong reasons. Perhaps a woman who needs access to an abortion would be afraid to seek it out in case she is reported and charged for having done so. Perhaps women from certain communities would be denied access to abortion based on discriminatory views about their reason for seeking it. In short, I fear that this bill could undo decades of arduous work to ensure that women never face these barriers again.

I was really disappointed to see the Leader of the Opposition indicate that his caucus will be allowed a free vote on such a fundamental issue as protecting women's right to choose.

I hope that members of the Conservative Party who are currently heckling me will recognize, as all other members of this House do, how important it is to protect equality rights for women in Canada and join me and the government in voting against this proposed legislation.

● (1425)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do want to remind all members that while someone has the floor they are not to heckle them. It is disrespectful, and the rules of the House dictate that it should not be allowed.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, today we are debating an extremely sensitive topic that should not even be up for debate, in my view.

I cannot believe that the Conservatives want to reopen the abortion debate. It boggles the mind. Let us just say what this bill really is. Bill C-233 is an anti-abortion bill. My colleagues will say that opinion is divided within the Conservative Party, but each Conservative member chose to join a party with common values.

When I went into politics, I joined a party that shared my values. I can say without hesitation that the Bloc Québécois and I unequivocally defend women's right to control their own bodies, women's right to choose, and the right to free, accessible abortion services.

I have a serious problem with the fact that these rights are being called into question. I have a serious problem with the fact that a woman is trying to tell other women what to do with their bodies. That is what the member for Yorkton—Melville is doing with her bill. She is reopening a debate that was thought to be closed for good, on an issue that women have already fought too long to settle.

I want to remind the House that women did not obtain the legal right to seek an abortion until 1988. In Quebec, the consensus is that the abortion debate must not be reopened. That consensus has been in place ever since the 1988 Supreme Court ruling that struck down the provisions criminalizing abortion.

The decision to have an abortion is one of the most delicate decisions a woman can face. Such a serious decision must be left up to women, and only women. A woman's body belongs to her alone. No one can make that decision but her. "My body, my choice", as the slogan goes.

As we can see, this is a fragile right that continues to be threatened by opponents who are using backdoor tactics to reopen this debate and limit women's right to make free choices about abortion.

I was worried about the rise of Donald Trump in the United States, as well as the appointment of certain conservatives to the U.S. Supreme Court and their interest in reopening this debate. I never thought it would happen here, in a free and democratic society that generally promotes women's rights.

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As a woman, I am disappointed to once again be fighting for rights that should already be a given. It is disappointing to hear the Conservatives say that they do not want to reopen the abortion debate, even though they keep bringing it up. This time, they are going about it in a roundabout way by raising the issue of sex-selective abortion. This issue adds all kinds of nuance to the debate, and the Conservatives are using it as a flimsy pretext to find new legal grounds to criminalize abortion.

I must say that it is hard for the feminist in me to avoid qualifying my comments in this debate. As a woman and as a feminist, I do not approve of sex-selective abortion. However, I am firmly opposed to allowing the government to interfere in women's bodily autonomy. That is not the role of the government or elected officials. Women are free to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy. They are the only ones who can make that decision.

Although sex-selective abortion is based on misogynistic and sexist ideas, we cannot fight it by imposing more social control on women. We cannot fight sexism with sexism. The solution is not more control, but more equality.

I do not agree with this bill, and I will go even further by saying that rhetorical manipulation and the hijacking of the discourse on human rights and the fight against discrimination are outdated, worn-out stratagems that do not show the manipulators in a good light and that undermine public confidence in democratic institutions.

Hijacking the discourse on human rights undermines the fight for human rights. Parliamentarians have a moral responsibility to state their real intentions when they open a dialogue on behalf of the citizens they represent. That is what determines the quality of the democratic conversation.

Obfuscating the debate on abortion rights reduces the quality of the democratic conversation. These tactics must be recognized, called out and stopped. I sincerely hope that the leader of the Conservative Party will publicly acknowledge that Bill C-233 is just a strategy to attack the right to abortion and that he will call on his members to oppose it out of respect for all women.

● (1430)

The Conservative member's initiative is part of a series of tactics used by anti-abortionists to challenge the status quo in Canada. Sex selection is one avenue that pro-lifers and Canadian and U.S. evangelical groups enthusiastically pursue to make things tricky for the pro-choice side at every turn.

For those who might not be familiar with the concept, sex-selective abortion is selective abortion based solely on the sex of the fetus. Unfortunately, the practice is typically carried out on female fetuses in countries where cultural norms place a higher value on boys than on girls.

For cultural reasons, there is apparently a certain segment of the population in Canada that uses abortion to favour the birth of boys, which is absolutely deplorable. The idea that it is legitimate to selectively terminate female fetuses on the grounds that girls are inferior human beings is absolutely unacceptable. I feel sick just thinking about it.

I do not want my comments to be taken out of context. There is a huge difference between opposing a practice and supporting its statutory prohibition. It should be noted that this is an extremely marginal phenomenon in the country and the numbers show that it has no impact on the ratio of male to female births. It would be wrong to believe that this is common practice within cultural communities in Quebec and Canada, because the vast majority of communities do not practice sex-selective abortion.

Fortunately this practice is fading away and will hopefully soon disappear entirely. This change happens precisely because of the influence of culture and the value placed on gender equality, and not because of any prohibition. It reminds us that we must counter instances of discrimination by emphasizing the importance of valuing equality and promoting human rights, not by relying on coercion and control.

As a young woman and a parliamentarian, I want to promote the values of equality and the advancement of rights. Women do not need to justify their decision to terminate a pregnancy. The only concern of health care professionals should be the health and safety of their patients, who have the right to a safe abortion.

The provisions of Bill C-233 compromise patient safety by introducing fear and mistrust into the patient-doctor relationship. Clause 2 of the bill would make it an offence, liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than five years, for a medical practitioner to perform an abortion knowing that the abortion is sought on the grounds of the fetus's genetic sex.

I think it is extremely problematic for the state to interfere in the patient-doctor relationship. That is why I am vigorously opposed to this bill. I am opposed to this bill because I do not want to reopen the abortion debate in any way. I am opposed to this bill because women and only women can decide whether to have an abortion. I am opposed to this bill because I want to protect the health and safety of women.

Today it is sex-selective abortion, but what will it be tomorrow? We do not want to reopen the debate. The selective abortion of female fetuses is merely a symptom; it is not the problem. The root of the problem is misogyny and the undervaluing of girls and women.

A law banning sex-selective abortion would simply sweep the problem under the rug. We must work to raise the status of girls and women over the long term by actively preventing discrimination and by promoting equity and equality.

The symptom of selective abortion of female fetuses will end when families feel that their daughters have equal opportunities and are valued just as much as a son would be. We have much work to do to continue to advance women's rights. Now is not the time to roll back those rights. We owe it to our mothers, our daughters, our wives, our friends and our sisters. We owe it to ourselves.

Private Members' Business

• (1435)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before we go to resuming debate, I want to advise the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek that she will have seven minutes for her speech, as her hon. colleague has a right of reply for five minutes.

The hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to my hon. colleague's private member's bill, Bill C-233, the sex-selective abortion act.

Canada is a nation that has long been firmly committed to and defended human rights, both at home and abroad. We have often been proactive in our efforts to protect those who cannot protect themselves and to stomp out discrimination.

Now we are being confronted with the issue of sex-selective abortion. It is an issue that will test our commitment to protecting human rights. The bill seeks to amend the Criminal Code to make it an offence for a medical practitioner to perform an abortion knowing that the abortion is sought solely on the grounds of the child's genetic sex. It also requires the Minister of Health, after consultation with representatives of the provincial governments responsible for health, to establish guidelines respecting information provided by medical practitioners in relation to a request for an abortion.

It must be noted that in Canada, sex selection in the case of embryos is already illegal under the Assisted Human Reproduction Act, 2004, section 5(1)(e). I believe that a criminal prohibition should be added to the Criminal Code in order to extend this same protection to pre-born girls.

Research from the Canadian Medical Association Journal, as well as several provincial colleges of physicians and surgeons, has indicated that sex-selective abortion is an issue in Canada. This is intolerable. In fact, Canada's health care profession has shown concern with sex-selective abortion and discourages the practice.

Sex-selective abortion is wrong and this practice is happening in Canada today because there is no law against it. It is also well documented that sex-selective abortion disproportionately targets girls. There is this idea, and it is perpetuated from the beginning of life, that for some reason the life of a male is more valuable than the life of a female. How can we proclaim ourselves a country of equality when we continue to allow the practice of terminating a pregnancy on the grounds of the genetic sex of a child, perpetuating the belief that one sex is more valuable than the other?

In a society such as ours, one that strongly advocates for and seeks to protect equal rights between the sexes, sex-selective abortion has no place. If as a society we are truly serious about fighting sexism, we must start at the very beginning with the practice of sex-selective abortion. It is an inherently discriminatory practice that targets females and promotes sexism, and it must be stamped out.

Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that every person should be treated with the same dignity, respect and consideration regardless of sex. However, the practice of sex-selective abortion

starts females off on an uneven footing. They are being treated differently from the very beginning. This practice cannot be allowed to continue in a society that claims to support equality of the sexes.

It is also important to note that while a majority of Canadians support access to abortion, a majority of Canadians oppose sex-selective abortion. The purpose of the bill is very clear. It is not intended to limit access to abortion; rather, it is being put forward to address the inequality that exists between the sexes in their earliest forms.

To summarize, the bill would prohibit medical practitioners from knowingly performing sex-selective abortions and includes indictable and summary offences should they do so. It includes a directive for guidelines to be established on how medical practitioners would provide information on the prohibition to pregnant persons. Finally, the penalties outlined in the bill are consistent with those found in section 241.3 of the Criminal Code for failing to allow the medical assistance in dying safeguards.

I implore every member of the House to give their support to this bill. This is not a question of access to abortion, but a question of the use of abortion for a specific purpose that targets females.

• (1440)

For a society that has come so far in combatting sexism, we must continue in our fight to stop sexist practices. This is a time when we can all come together and send a message that the targeting of pre-born girls is unacceptable and we will not allow it to continue in Canada.

By adopting appropriate legislation to end discrimination against any person based on sex, we are reconfirming Canada's commitment to advancing human rights.

I would ask all members in this place to vote in favour of this bill to send the message that discrimination is not acceptable in Canada and will not be tolerated. This protection is long overdue.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we close second reading on the sex-selective abortion act, I have some thoughts to share.

I would like to thank my colleagues on both sides of this House for contributing to the debate. Regardless of our political stances, parliamentarians have begun to have the important discussion that Canadians have been asking for on this universally condemned practice.

Eighty-four percent of our constituents have been clear that an evaluation of sex-selective abortion and its place in our country is overdue. I am glad this House and this minority Parliament, have begun to honour their wishes.

We should not be afraid to have this conversation. Despite claims to the contrary, sex-selective abortion does not fit within a rigid understanding of abortion in Canada. Let us remember that a majority of Canadians would like to continue to have access to abortion. That is what makes this debate so unique.

It is clear that Canadians identify and treat sex selection as a stand-alone human rights issue. The medical community, cultural groups and those with divergent views on the matter of abortion believe that this procedure, performed solely on the basis of sex, is fundamentally wrong. As I have said many times during the course of this discussion, the vast majority of those who would like sex selection to be made illegal are in fact pro-choice. They are not pro-abortion for any reason, but pro-choice. These facts should send a strong message to everyone in this House. We have a mandate from Canadians to act.

As Dr. Kiely Williams, MD, said, “We are finally in a position to stop [sex-selective abortion]. It is very rare in politics when we’re presented with a bill that all parties can support. There are no Canadian political parties that do not support a woman’s right to life.”

Indeed, I was encouraged to hear from my colleagues throughout this debate that they believe sex-selective abortion is wrong, so why are some members against passing this bill into law?

We should be gripped by this discussion and treating it with the seriousness it deserves. As direct representatives of the people of Canada, we were elected to defend the equality of all Canadians before and under the law, regardless of race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. We have an obligation to address gaps in our laws that fail to meet this standard.

The continued practice of sex-selective abortion is a glaring hole in our laws that denies equal rights to Canadians on the grounds of age and sex at a minimum. It needs to stop and we have the power to do so.

Furthermore, we were each sent to this place to enact the reforms that Canadians want. That is a key reason why I introduced this bill and I am so proud of it.

Poll after poll tells us that the tolerance of Canadians for sex selection has run out. Rather than resorting to tired accusations that do not speak to the heart of this bill, we have the opportunity to judge it for what it is, which is a reasonable limit on abortion that forms just one part of a response to the prevalence of sex-selective practices. On this issue, parliamentarians should abandon absolutist narratives on the abortion debate and accept that Canadians have identified a key problem that is in need of a legislative solution.

I truly believe this House has taken the first step on behalf of women and girls in addressing a persistent human rights failure. Indeed, as the only democratic country internationally that lacks a sex-selection law, the world is looking at Canada to fill this void.

Private Members' Business

The debate that we have had on this bill will not soon be forgotten by Canadians and the human rights community. It is one thing to permit a debate to take place. It is an entirely different thing to take the necessary action to rectify the tragedy of sex-selective abortion. This Parliament has the power to make a bold statement in defence of equality between the sexes in the next generation. Canadians are counting on us to make that important decision now so that future generations can benefit from it later.

Today I am asking members to continue to honour the wishes of Canadians by taking the next step forward and voting in favour of Bill C-233. To me the choice could not be clearer. On the one hand, we can allow divisive politics to continue to obscure this debate and permit the deliberate termination of baby girls to continue solely because of their sex. On the other hand, we can take a bold stand for women in this country, see this bill for what it is and pass a prohibition on sex-selective laws. We can send a clear message, both here and around the world, about the values our country stands for and what it does not permit.

● (1445)

I know our nation is behind this bill, and wants it to be sent to committee so it can receive the debate and constructive scrutiny it deserves. Finally, I rest my case for today. I know I have represented the concerns and desires of the majority of those who have been called here to serve to see the sex-selective abortion act become law in Canada.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 2:50, the time provided for debate has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

● (1450)

[*English*]

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I would request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 2 at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 2:51, the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:51 p.m.)

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