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Tuesday, June 14, 2022

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 14, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to section 11 of the Lobbying Act, to lay upon the table the report of the Commissioner of Lobbying for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2022.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions. These will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-26, An Act respecting cyber security, amending the Telecommunications Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

• (1005)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth and 10th reports of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in relation to Bill C-242, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act regarding temporary resident visas for parents and grandparents.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-283, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (addiction treatment in penitentiaries).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very excited today and pleased to rise to introduce my private member's bill, the “end the revolving door” act, to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act regarding addiction treatment in penitentiaries. I would like to thank the member for Kootenay—Columbia for doing a lot of the preliminary work on this legislation and for seconding my bill.

This bill proposes to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to expand the sentencing options available in our justice system and to assist those whose lives have been ravaged by addiction.

In my home province of British Columbia and my community of Kelowna—Lake Country, we are all too familiar with the revolving door of our criminal justice system, with prolific offenders and seeing addiction on our streets with increasing crime rates. High recidivism rates in Canada among those suffering from mental health issues and drug addictions are putting extreme pressure on law enforcement resources, straining our justice system, harming and costing our communities, burdening our municipalities and breaking Canadian families.

Routine Proceedings

A 2015 study by the Correctional Service of Canada showed that, at admission to federal custody, 70% of men and 77% of women offenders have a substance use issue. This legislation would allow the commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada to designate all or part of a facility as an addiction treatment facility. It would allow a court the ability to make a recommendation that people serve their sentence, or part of it, in custody in a designated facility as defined and under certain terms as laid out in the bill.

There needs to be evidence establishing a pattern of repetitive behaviour by the offender that indicates that problematic substance use has contributed to the offender's involvement in the criminal justice system. The purpose of an addiction treatment facility is to provide inmates with access to a program for a curative treatment in relation to the problematic substance use, as well as access to other related services that respond to their specific needs. In sentencing, offenders would still receive meaningful consequences, while also receiving care leading to a path of reducing the risk of reoffending.

We have a complex addictions crisis in Canada, and this would be an important tool to help communities and families, protect the public, and maintain public confidence in the judicial system. I trust that all members of this House will support my private member's bill.

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

The Speaker: I would remind all members in the House to be as concise as possible. The time for debate comes once we debate the bill and not now, but I appreciate the details.

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NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EYE CARE ACT

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-284, An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy today to have the opportunity to introduce this bill calling for a national strategy on eye care, something that, for many years, Canadians have been calling for, and something that the government has promised many times before that.

I want to acknowledge that I am introducing this bill in memory of my grandmother, Annie Steeves, and I continue to see my aunt Ruby Gentile and my long-time friend and mentor Paul Valenti, who suffer from blindness.

There are over eight million Canadians living with a blinding eye disease that could be prevented. Research has shown that if it is diagnosed early and people have access to treatment, blindness can be prevented. I ask all of my colleagues to just imagine how their lives would change if they lost their eyesight. We take it for granted, and we do not stop to think enough. Over eight million people currently live with a blinding eye disease that puts them at risk, and these numbers are expected to grow to almost 14 million people.

Many of us currently in the House may also develop macular degeneration, and I would like to see February designated as macular degeneration awareness month.

The Canadian Council of the Blind, Fighting Blindness Canada, CNIB and countless other organizations have been calling for an eye strategy for Canada, to move forward with the commitment made previously to develop a national eye strategy that will protect the eye health of all Canadians.

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

* * *

● (1010)

PETITIONS

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present petitions signed by hundreds of citizens across Canada who continue to call on Parliament to protect the conscience rights of medical professionals from coercion or intimidation to provide or refer patients for assisted suicide or euthanasia.

Freedom of conscience is a fundamental right, clearly articulated in section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I want to thank these petitioners for their engagement on this important issue.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present two petitions today.

The first deals with the critical issues of ground transportation in this country. Ground transportation is actually in a crisis, in terms of travelling between communities. With the withdrawal of services from companies like Greyhound, the need for Via Rail has never been greater.

These petitioners point out that Via Rail is an essential service owned by the Canadian public, that it is a public asset that must remain public, and that it should be seen as an important part of our transportation system, requiring more investment to ensure that we have a green, economical, efficient alternative to travel within Canada that is accessible to all.

These residents call on the Minister of Transport to stop any move toward the privatization of Via Rail in the Windsor-Quebec corridor and to improve service across Canada.

HEALTH

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition relates to the number of physicians in Canada and the lack of family doctors. There is an acute shortage. The citizens and petitioners in this petition call on us as a House of Commons to work with all provinces and territories to come to a fair and holistic solution for the current doctor shortage.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first petition that I want to table comes from a group of citizens who are concerned about our social safety net. We saw how those most in need were made extremely vulnerable by the pandemic.

These citizens are calling for a universal basic income funded with a wealth tax on Canada's wealthiest corporations and billionaires.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition that I want to table is the initiative of three organizations, namely the Collectif Échec à la guerre, the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace and the Hiroshima Nagasaki Day Coalition. Hundreds of people are concerned about the threat of nuclear weapons, and they are calling on the federal government to finally sign the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

I want to acknowledge the work of my colleagues from Edmonton Strathcona, Lac-Saint-Jean and Beaches—East York on this file.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a petition signed by 593 Canadians, who note that in Canada many medications available on the market are not adapted for children's use, as manufacturers produce primarily adult formulations, which do not take into consideration the differences in size for children.

• (1015)

[Translation]

When no pediatric formulations are available on the market, adult formulations must be adapted for children's use.

[English]

The citizens of Canada who signed the petition call upon the Minister of Health to waive Health Canada submission fees for pediatric formulations to encourage the research and development of medicines for children.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of several dozen residents of my communities of New Westminster—Burnaby.

Given the extent of the opioid crisis that we have seen and the fact that we have a death occurring in Canada about every two hours, on average, and that we have had a death toll of over 15,000 in the past four years alone, these constituents are calling upon the Government of Canada to declare the overdose crisis a national public health emergency and take important steps to end overdose deaths, to collaborate with provinces and territories to develop that comprehensive pan-Canadian overdose action plan that is so important, including looking at reforms such as legal regulation of drugs

to ensure safe supply and decriminalization for personal use, and to ensure that this emergency is taken seriously, with adequately funded programming and supports.

These constituents ask the Government of Canada to act on the opioid crisis.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions to present this morning.

I am presenting the first petition on behalf of Canadians who are concerned about certain charities that are being targeted based on their views. The petitioners call on MPs to ensure that charities that hold views different from the government's do not lose their charitable status.

• (1020)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition comes from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about the increase in trafficking in human organs. They are calling on the government to pass legislation that would prevent Canadians from going abroad to purchase organs and to ensure that no financial transactions happen in the pursuit of gaining organs.

NORTHERN RESIDENTS TAX DEDUCTION

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is from folks living in Fox Creek and Swan Hills. These are two towns located in northern Alberta. The petitioners say that the rising costs of heating and fuel make life more expensive, particularly for those living in the north. They also have to travel great distances to get groceries and go to shopping centres.

They are calling on the government to move the arbitrary line that runs across Alberta and prevents Fox Creek and Swan Hills residents from accessing the northern living allowance. They call on the government to include Fox Creek and Swan Hills as communities within the prescribed intermediate zone, allowing these people to receive the northern residents deduction for living in northern Alberta.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about the changes to the law around conversion therapy. They are calling on the government to define the definition in a way that does not ban talk therapy. They are calling on the government to ensure that parents and clergy are able to have discussions with children around their sexuality. They call on the government to ban coercive integrating practices that are intended to change a person's sexual orientation or identity, but to amend the current law so that conversion therapy does not ban discussions that happen between parents and their children.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is from Canadians from across the country who are concerned with what is going on in Azerbaijan with the detention of Armenian prisoners of war. They are calling for the immediate release of those prisoners of war, for the government to use all diplomatic tools to advocate that those being held be released, for the condemnation of the ongoing state sponsor of anti-Armenian hatred in Azerbaijan and they denounce all aggressive rhetoric from Turkey and Azerbaijan against Armenian and other minorities. They call on Canada to provide all necessary humanitarian assistance to ensure the safety and viability of the Armenian population there.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the final petition is from Canadians from across the country who draw the attention of the House to the ongoing campaign against the Uighur population by the Chinese Communist Party. They particularly note the birth suppression that is happening there through forced sterilization and abortion. They also want to call to our attention some of the photos that we have seen of folks lined up at bus stations and being taken to detention centres. They are calling for the government to recognize this as a genocide.

They are calling on Canada to do more for the plight of the Uighurs and their treatment by the Communist Party of China. They are also calling for the use of Magnitsky sanctions to go after particular officials in the Chinese Communist Party to ensure that they are held responsible for these heinous crimes against the Uighur population.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour to stand in this place to present a petition signed by more than 100 Canadians who are very concerned about the possible application of a values test or a values-test-like rule when it comes to charitable status in Canada. Therefore, the citizens and residents of Canada call upon the House of Commons to, one, protect and preserve the application of charitable status rules on a politically and ideologically neutral basis without discrimination on the basis of political or religious values and without the imposition of another “values test” and, two, to affirm the right of Canadians to freedom of expression.

It is an honour to stand and present this petition in the House of Commons today.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (for the Minister of Justice) moved that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see you back in your seat.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill C-5, An act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which proposes to consider alternatives to incarceration in appropriate cases while reducing recidivism and keeping society safe.

I want to acknowledge that I am speaking on the traditional unceded lands of the Algonquin people.

Bill C-5 is an important step forward in addressing systemic racism and discrimination. It puts forth an approach that promotes fairer sentencing outcomes for everyone, notably indigenous peoples, Black persons and members of marginalized communities who are disproportionately and negatively impacted by inflexible sentencing laws. These changes would continue to denounce and hold offenders accountable.

The bill advances three broad categories of reforms. I will speak on the specifics later on. I want to speak today about what it means to be incarcerated. I know that the Conservative approach to crime is about locking people up and throwing away the key. The reality is that many jurisdictions where this was tried have realized its innate failures. I want to note that Newt Gingrich, one of the early proponents of mandatory minimum penalties, has now recanted and suggested that mandatory minimum penalties do not work. All across the United States, this realization is coming into the public discourse.

Incarceration is not the answer to all people. There is a need for us to use incarceration only for crimes that are of a serious nature and that pose risks to individuals. We need to provide off-ramps. Systemic racism in the criminal justice system is real. While we may think that our justice system is blind, the outcomes tells us a different story. Indigenous and Black Canadians who go to prison are treated differently; that is, they are mistreated. Their lives are devalued. I would invite anyone who still doubts that to look at the latest Auditor General's report on our correctional system.

I want to give members some snippets of her findings. For example, indigenous and Black offenders faced greater barriers to safe and gradual reintegration into society than other incarcerated groups.

The process of assigning security classifications, including the use of the Custody Rating Scale, and frequent overrides of the scale by corrections staff, result in disproportionately higher numbers of indigenous and Black offenders being placed in maximum security institutions. I quote:

We noted Indigenous representation gaps among correctional officers across institutions, Black representation gaps among program and parole officers at institutions with a high number of Black offenders, and gender representation gaps among correctional officers at women's institutions.

Indigenous and Black offenders, for example, were placed at a higher security level on admission into custody at twice the average rate of other offenders. Indigenous and Black men were placed at maximum security institutions at twice the rate of other offenders and made up 51% of maximum security placements.

The report added:

We also found that Indigenous women were placed at maximum security at more than 3 times the rate of non-Indigenous women and made up almost 70% of maximum-security placements.

Corrections staff can override classifications, which means that once a classification is completed, corrections staff have the discretion, at times, to override them. In this case, corrections staff overrode up to 53% of minimum security placements, compared with 27% for non-indigenous women. Indigenous women were classified upwards by 53%, while the average was 27% for non-indigenous women.

For indigenous men, correctional staff overrode up to 46% of minimum security placements to higher levels compared with 33% for non-indigenous offenders. The report said:

...more Indigenous offenders remained in custody until their statutory release and were released directly into the community from higher levels of security.

This essentially means that once somebody is classified, the higher the security classification, the harder it is for them to get the programs of support necessary for them to reintegrate into society.

It also means that they serve a longer period of their sentence in custody, while those who were maybe classified at the lower levels are able to spend less time in custody and more time in bridging programs that will allow them to integrate within the community. This essentially leads to higher levels of recidivism.

• (1025)

For me the most profound thing about the Auditor General's report is that, for the first time, it has quantified systemic racism within our criminal justice system. As we look at reducing mandatory minimum penalties, a very important takeaway is for us to reflect on what that means. We know the offences that are the subject of Bill C-5, for which we are repealing many of the mandatory minimum penalties, directly have an impact on indigenous and Black offenders. It is so critical that we keep that in mind as we look at this bill.

I do want to talk about my personal experience working with young people in the criminal justice system. I used to run an organization called the Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre back in the late 1990s, early 2000s, before going to law school. I dealt with a number of young people who were involved in the criminal justice system as young offenders and even young adult

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offenders. I was able to work with them for many years. I still continue to call many of those people my friends because of the relationships we built during that time.

Some of these young people were involved in violence. Some of them were involved in petty theft or other mishaps within the community. What I realized during that time was that they needed support. It is very easy for us, as a society, to incarcerate someone. It is the easiest thing we can do. The harder thing for us to do is to support young people as they redeem themselves as they come out and reintegrate into society.

One of the things I realized is that the more support that we were able to give young people, the more off-ramps we provide to those who may engage, for the first time or second time, in the criminal justice system, the better off society is in the long term. I have consistently seen, in a number of cases, these young people who have come out of the system, and they are now very active and contributing members of our society. That is not always the case, but based on the vast majority of the people I have worked with, that continues to be what I have seen.

During the deliberations at committee, we heard from a number of important stakeholders. I want to highlight the testimony of Raphael Tachie, who is the president of the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers and who obviously supports the repeal of many of the mandatory minimum penalties that are here.

He spoke about what his lived experience was as a young Black man growing up in British Columbia. He talked about the first time he was at a theatre and there was some commotion going on outside of the movie theatre. He was there on a date. He found himself, with many other young Black men, surrounded by police and essentially questioned. Luckily for him, he had a great support system that allowed him to really defend himself because he did nothing wrong.

However, the reality for many is that over-policing oftentimes leads to over-arresting and subsequent convictions because, once one is within the cycle of the criminal justice system, it often just perpetuates. The safeguards are limited.

When Mr. Tachie spoke, his words resonated with me and my personal life, considering the number of times, as someone who is racialized and who grew up in Scarborough, I have been stopped by the police. I continue to be stopped, and this is not something that is unique to me. It is the same for many people who may have grown up in my community. They get randomly stopped and questioned. This happens to me even as an MP. It did not stop when I became an MP, a parliamentary secretary or the candidate for the Liberal Party. It continued.

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Especially for young people, this means that oftentimes they are without the right supports, without the right legal advocacy and without parents who are able to support them, perhaps because they have multiple jobs or have jobs where they cannot take time off. It really does put young people at an enormous disadvantage.

• (1030)

I often reflect on what Mr. Tachie spoke about and on what my life might be like today if, during one of those half a dozen or dozen times when I had been pulled over or subjected to this type of inquiry, I had given the wrong answer or had been with the wrong people. This is the story for so many people, not only within my community of Scarborough—Rouge Park, but also in many other parts across Canada. It is so profound.

The incident that occurred with George Floyd two years ago really tells a story of the disparity we see in the U.S., but it is not unique. We know there have been a number of times in Canada where indigenous men and women have oftentimes been arbitrarily arrested or arbitrarily beaten up. We have seen where discrimination does not really stop, even with chiefs and people who have a national or local profile, because of who they are, and we see that particularly with young Black men.

In 2019, just before or around the election, I remember the current Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada came to my riding on his way to the GTA, and we were able to meet with a whole bunch of stakeholders, most of whom work with youth in our communities. The overwhelming message was that we need to ensure that mandatory minimum penalties are addressed. They have disadvantaged many indigenous and Black Canadians. It is a system that does not work. They are failed policies of the past and something we need to address. Louis March, who many members may know is the leader of the Zero Gun Violence Movement, was one of the people there. His entire life has been devoted to fighting gun violence. He profoundly stated that the system of mandatory minimum penalties does not work and asked that our government address it, so here we are.

First, we are here to repeal all MMPs for drug offences, tobacco-related offences and 13 firearm-related offences. I know that when we say we want to reduce the mandatory minimum penalties for firearms there are many in the House who may legitimately ask why we are reducing the penalties when the use of firearms is on the rise. It is a question that is very pertinent here because Bill C-21, which was introduced by the Minister of Public Safety, addresses that issue as it would increase the maximum penalty for gun-related offences from 10 to 14 years. We are saying there is a need for judicial discretion. That is what that bill would do, it would ensure judicial discretion. It would give discretion to the judge to look at the individual and the circumstances of the case and increase the penalty up to 14 years. I think that is a very important point that is sometimes missed in this debate.

Second, it would remove certain restrictions that would prevent a sentencing court from considering the imposition of conditional sentencing orders. That is a very important issue. It is important to note that our criminal justice system is an unfair system, and I have outlined the issues of systemic racism, particularly as they relate to

indigenous and Black Canadians, which not only results in over-incarceration, but also unfairly misclassifies people.

• (1035)

What conditional sentencing orders do is allow the judge to impose conditional sentences, which may be out of custody, on individuals who do not pose a risk to society. This is a very important point again. Oftentimes it is not about giving every offender a conditional sentence. It is about smart policy that says, when we put someone in institutions, we criminalize them even further. We do not give them the right supports. We take them away from their families, and we take them away from the addiction treatment they may need. We also take them away from their responsibilities of going to work, doing work in the community, being a member of their church or being part of the local community, which would give them the support they need to get out of the criminal justice system.

It is a very smart policy. Oftentimes it is mischaracterized, but this would not be available to everyone. It would be available to those who are deemed to not pose a risk to society.

If we look at the numbers over the years, prior to many of these mandatory minimum penalties coming in, there were over 11,000 conditional sentencing orders in Canada. That number is now down to about 6,000.

I know many colleagues who are very progressive would also say that this bill does not go far enough. I would tell them that this is an important bill because it would allow conditional sentencing orders to be expanded in a very smart way, which would allow judges the judicial discretion to place individuals who do not pose a risk and allow them to pay their debt to society while allowing them to continue their lives at the same time. This is about 5,000 Canadians, as per the statistics we have seen.

The final part of this is that we are looking to encourage alternate approaches at an early stage for responding to persons in possession of illicit drugs. I know the Minister of Mental Health recently supported the call from British Columbia and allowed British Columbia to take more control over issues around drugs. We know that the right supports are essential to ensuring that addictions and mental health are supported. This bill allows that.

Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient time to complete my speech. I do want to emphasize that this is smart public policy. This is smart criminal justice policy. I look forward to the support of all members here.

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• (1040)

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. Members would think that the hon. parliamentary secretary was speaking to the private member's bill just tabled by my colleague, the member for Kelowna—Lake Country, because he focused so many of his comments on the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. As somebody who worked in corrections, I can say that there needs to be reform, but why are we not doing the reforms there?

I want to focus on one of the sections. I believe it is proposed section 244.2, which essentially deals with drive-by shootings. There have been a number of incidents of gun violence. I would like this hon. parliamentary secretary to look into the camera and say “I am comfortable with people who commit drive-by shootings have a community-based sentence because...”

Right now, they will not be going to jail.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, this is the type of outrageous manufactured stories that we get from the Conservatives. This bill on conditional sentence orders does not—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. First of all, the hon. member had an opportunity to ask a question. I am sure he wants to hear the answer. For anyone else who is thinking out loud, I would ask them to hold off until it is time for questions and comments and to be recognized at that time when they can certainly participate in the discussion.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I want to be clear here. A conditional sentencing order is one tool that judges have at their discretion to ensure that public safety is protected. One of the prevailing issues is that the individual who gets a CSO does not pose a risk to society.

We could come up with the worst criminal offenders, the worst types of crimes, and we could manufacture all of these scenarios, but those offenders would not get conditional sentencing orders. Let us be clear on that.

This is about smart public policy, criminal law reform that is important that would address the issues of systemic racism.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think my colleague got some things mixed up in his speech.

I believe that we must work to stop profiling by police. However, I do not think that eliminating mandatory minimums with Bill C-5 for people who discharge a firearm with intent will help eliminate racial profiling.

I think that this sends a mixed message in Quebec, which is seeing a surge in gun crimes.

Could my colleague explain how removing mandatory minimums on people who discharge a firearm can help eliminate racial profiling?

• (1045)

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I have spoken extensively on systemic racism within the criminal justice system and why it is important to ensure that those who do not pose a risk do not end up in jail.

With respect to gun violence, it is a very important and real issue. My community of Scarborough—Rouge Park has dealt with this. I dealt with this when I ran a youth organization. I have buried my share of young people disproportionately in my community and it is an awfully painful process. It is one that I am still traumatized by.

What is important is that Bill C-21 addresses the issues that my friend opposite is talking about. It increases penalties for those firearm offences. It gives discretion to the judge to impose a sentence of up to 14 years, which is higher than we have right now.

What we are impressing in Bill C-5 is to make sure that those who do not pose a risk and maybe are first-time offenders are given an opportunity to get out of the criminal justice process and continue their lives.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for the good work that we managed to do together at committee to improve the bill.

We have just seen a couple of examples from the Conservatives and the Bloc of the attempt to somehow say that Bill C-5 threatens public safety. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could talk about the actual evidence we heard at committee on the impact of mandatory minimum sentences and how their impact, if anything, actually improves public safety by eliminating them.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend opposite for his very important work in improving the bill at every stage.

I agree with him. This is smart criminal justice policy reform. It is important to recognize that not everyone needs to go to jail. There is a need to have off-ramps that will support individuals who do not pose a risk to continue to be in their community, continue to be integrated as part of the community. If they pose any risk, the judge will have the discretion to put them in jail. That is precisely what the bill does.

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Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in my colleague's speech, he talked about the impact that he sees in his own community and how this would support people within his own community. I was wondering if he would share with us how the bill would have a direct impact on young people who are Black or indigenous in a city like Toronto to make sure they are able to get the full breadth of judicial discretion and the importance of judicial discretion when we are approaching this issue.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, Scarborough is one of the most diverse areas in Canada. I represent a riding that is highly racialized, particularly a very large percentage of Canada's Black community is in Scarborough. Every time I go door to door, I hear stories from mothers, from siblings, from young men who continue to complain about over-policing which in turn has led to over-incarceration. My community is a stellar community in every respect save and except for the trauma that they face with the criminal justice system.

I believe that Bill C-5 is a very important starting point in addressing the over-incarceration of Black and indigenous people, but this is not the only answer. As a government, we are working on a Black and indigenous justice strategy. We look forward to bringing that to Parliament.

• (1050)

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is probably very sincere in his remarks. However, I do have a legitimate concern regarding Bill C-5 with sexual violence against women. In Bill C-5, the conditional sentencing of house arrest would now be an option for sexual assault.

The member and the Liberal Party continue to refer to vulnerable communities. They mention Black and indigenous communities repeatedly. My concern is that someone would be sexually assaulted and the individual responsible for that heinous crime would be able to serve house arrest in the community or maybe even next door to the victim whom the individual sexually assaulted.

I am very concerned about that and would like to hear the member's thoughts on this serious issue with Bill C-5.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, again, I come back to the same answer. We can come up with a whole bunch of scenarios where, in fact, conditional sentencing orders may not be appropriate. What is important is that we give judicial discretion that allows a judge to look at the facts of the case to weigh the risk that an individual would pose to society and, when there is no risk, a conditional sentencing order may be appropriate. That is exactly what is happening here.

I do want to highlight for my friend opposite the over-incarceration of indigenous women. In terms of penitentiaries for women, over 50% of the people in penitentiaries for women are indigenous women. What does my friend have to say about that?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, does my colleague not think that in some specific cases in which a person discharges a firearm, as pointed out by the member

for Jonquière, this bill sends a rather odd message to the public, and especially Quebecers, given the many incidents involving firearms that have happened in Montreal in recent months?

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, Bill C-21 addresses the issues that my friend opposite has brought forward. Gun violence is a problem in our society. Bill C-21 addresses it in a holistic way. It imposes higher sentences when appropriate and allows judges the discretion to ensure that those who commit serious offences get serious sentences.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, one man is dead and at least seven people were injured in a rash of bloody attacks on the weekend as tensions reportedly escalate among drug dealers and gang members in a city already troubled by recent violence. At least two people were shot and five stabbed Friday evening to early Monday morning in addition to a slaying Sunday at West Broadway Commons, an apartment building in Winnipeg. Winnipeg police spokesperson Constable Dani McKinnon said on Monday that there have been 60 shootings so far this year. Tragically, a man named Austin Mark Chief, 24, later died in hospital. The death is being investigated as the city's 24th homicide of the year.

Mitch Bourbonniere, a community social worker whom we also had at the public safety and national security committee for our guns and gangs study, gave a comment to the Winnipeg Free Press for the story, where he said of the violence:

"It's intensified...meth and the opiates and fentanyl and the poisonings [have increased]...It's really violent out there right now...I've come to the conclusion that we are undeniably in a violent spike right now in our city."

"It's ongoing, but it's escalated. People are more desperate, more violent, there's more competition, it's more serious street drugs, there's more guns—there's just more of everything," he said. "Drugs, gangs and guns—those three words."

That was the top story in the Winnipeg Free Press just this morning.

Just last week, there was yet another story. This is almost weekly now in Montreal. The police are investigating three shootings in various areas of Montreal. Drive-by shootings have also increased in Montreal and cities like Toronto. Another story from just last week, June 6, 2022, in Winnipeg was told about an adult female with her infant child being robbed at gunpoint and having her car stolen in front of her. She was robbed at gunpoint with her infant child.

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These stories are becoming a weekly occurrence in Winnipeg and cities like Toronto, Montreal, Regina, Edmonton and Vancouver, so much so that I think the public is starting to become desensitized to the rising violent crime in our cities under the Liberal government's watch. It is fact that violent crime has increased steadily in the seven years the Liberals have been in power. It is fact that our streets are less safe under the so-called leadership of the Liberal government and the Minister of Justice.

Today, we are debating third reading of Bill C-5, which would remove mandatory minimum sentences for a number of serious crimes. I am going to go through them for the House.

The bill would remove mandatory prison time for firearm offences. From my recent discourse, I cannot wrap my head around how the government can claim it is getting tough on guns while Bill C-5 would remove mandatory prison time for dangerous gun crimes, for example, robbery with a firearm. In the story I just told, where a woman with her infant child in Winnipeg was robbed at gunpoint and her car was stolen from her, no longer would that individual who terrorized that woman with her baby face mandatory prison time under Bill C-5.

Other crimes are extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting knowing it is unauthorized and discharging a firearm with the intent to injure, which is firing a gun at someone with the intention to hit the person with the bullet. These would no longer have mandatory prison time in Canada if Bill C-5 comes into place.

Other such crimes are using a firearm in the commission of an offence and possession of firearms knowing their possession is unauthorized. Someone who is not allowed to have a firearm but has one would no longer have to face mandatory prison time. Meanwhile, we well know the stats show that firearm violence in Canada is by those who are not legally allowed to possess a firearm. Under Bill C-5, no longer would those individuals who would terrorize our communities be absolutely going to prison.

Other charges include possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition, possession of a weapon obtained by commission of an offence, possession for the purpose of weapons trafficking, and discharging a firearm recklessly. These are very serious gun violence crimes that would no longer face mandatory prison time because of Bill C-5.

I consistently hear from Liberal members that they are repealing these bad Conservative policies, but the fact is that many of these mandatory minimums were instituted by Liberal governments. In fact, one of them in particular, the use of a firearm in the commission of an offence, was instituted by Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government back in 1976. The Liberals are actually keeping a number of mandatory minimum sentences that the Conservatives did bring in, so their argument does not stand.

● (1055)

To be clear, the Liberals would be eliminating mandatory prison time for criminals who commit robbery with a firearm, weapons trafficking and drive-by shootings. They make the argument that it is soft on crime and say, "Let us go easy on criminals." They seem

to be more interested in defending criminals than the victims being terrorized with guns.

For example, the Liberals would expand conditional sentencing and would allow house arrest for crimes such as sexual assault. If a person sexually assaults someone, they could be serving house arrest in the neighbourhood of the individual they sexually assaulted. Conditional sentencing, house arrest and others would become more commonplace and more easily accessed by the courts because of Bill C-5.

Then there is kidnapping and abduction of a person under the age of 14. Abducting a child could mean house arrest. Arson for fraudulent purposes, so setting fire to things, could mean house arrest too, as could assault causing bodily harm or with a weapon, assaulting a peace officer causing bodily harm or with a weapon and trafficking in or exporting/importing schedule III drugs.

Let us talk a bit more about the drug offences, because this is really interesting. The bill would also eliminate mandatory prison time for drug dealers. Last year, over 7,000 Canadians died as a result of opioid overdoses from things like fentanyl and carfentanil. Addiction to drugs should be treated as a health care issue. The Conservatives believe that someone addicted to drugs needs to be treated. We need to have more access. It is why in the last election we proposed building more treatment beds. That is very clear.

However, the individuals responsible for pushing deadly drugs on Canadians, killing 7,000 people last year, deserve to go to prison, full stop. This bill would eliminate mandatory prison time for trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking drugs. That is drug pushers and drug dealers. It also includes importing or exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting. People who smuggle drugs into Canada that kill thousands of Canadians would no longer have mandatory prison time.

Consider the production of substances in schedule I or schedule II, which are drugs such as heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and crystal meth. The people who create these drugs, who kill thousands of Canadians, particularly young people in B.C. and Ontario, would no longer face mandatory prison time as a result of Bill C-5.

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This comes in light of the controversial decision in B.C. to decriminalize 2.5 grams of opioids and other hard drugs. For carfentanil, for example, 2.5 grams is capable of killing 1,250 people. What message does it send that we are decriminalizing at the same time as Bill C-5 is coming out? On one side, we are decriminalizing deadly drugs that killed 7,000 Canadians last year, and on the other side, we are saying there is no more mandatory prison time for the people who are responsible for making those drugs, smuggling those drugs or trafficking those drugs and preying upon vulnerable Canadians. What kind of message is that sending? Drug dealers are rubbing their hands at how much money they are going to make because of these actions.

It is devastating for families. I know there are different approaches for how to deal with the drug epidemic in Canada, but I firmly believe, as do other Conservatives, that anyone responsible for dealing these dangerous drugs that kill thousands of Canadians deserves to go to prison. It is over 7,000 people. Opioids are more deadly to Canadian young people than COVID was. That is how serious the drug epidemic is.

The Liberals are letting those responsible for taking advantage of vulnerable Canadians off the hook. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable to the 7,000 families that lost young people last year to opioid deaths.

This is all coming in light of violent crime stats going up significantly in Canada in the last seven years. For example, across the country, police reported 743 homicides in 2020, which is the highest number of homicides recorded in Canada since 1991. There were also 56 more homicides in 2020 than in 2019, a hike that pushed Canada's rate up 7% to almost two homicides per every 100,000 people in Canada in 2020. That is up from the year prior. Violent crime is increasing and the Liberal government is bringing in Bill C-5, which would let individuals who use firearms in very dangerous crimes off the hook.

• (1100)

There was also a recent Statistics Canada report released just a few weeks ago that said, per *The Globe and Mail*, “since 2009, the per capita rate of firearms being pointed at someone in the commission of a crime has nearly tripled, and the rate at which guns are fired with intent to kill or wound is up fivefold.” Again, as I said, these crimes, such as firing a gun with the intent to injure someone, are up fivefold, but no longer would those individuals face mandatory prison time.

The Toronto Police Service has proposed a number of solutions. It said that the federal government should look at requiring bail hearings for people charged with the most serious firearm offences to be heard by judges instead of by a justice of the peace. It is a move the police said would “clearly convey Parliament's view of the seriousness of these offences.”

Again, the things we do in this place have important symbolism as well. The message we send to criminals and victims alike is very important. I think I have outlined quite clearly the message the Liberal government is sending to criminals who endanger the lives of individuals, especially in our vulnerable communities.

The police are also proposing bail reform, and I recently spoke to a number of police in southern Ontario and got their thoughts on bail reform. Members may remember that a few years ago, in June 2019, Bill C-75, a Liberal bill, updated the bail provisions in Canada's Criminal Code for the first time since 1972. There are varying opinions on this. Police will say that some aspects were good and that some aspects were very bad.

In a story from last year, Victoria Police Chief Del Manak was asked, “Why are violent, prolific and repeat offenders being released from custody with little or nothing to prevent them from re-offending?” We hear this from police all the time. It is the revolving door. Police put themselves in danger to catch criminals who are terrorizing neighbourhoods and put them in jail, but they are out the next week. It is a revolving door of essentially 100 to 200 offenders in cities, particularly in vulnerable neighbourhoods. They are the cause of the vast majority of the violence. The police catch and released them every week, putting police lives in danger to secure the safety of vulnerable communities.

The police are catching these guys over and over again, so I have asked them about this. Last year, the Victoria police chief was asked about this too. Of course, we know that in Victoria and Vancouver, it is unbelievable to walk the streets and see the crime that is going on, but as the Victoria police chief said, per the *Victoria Times Colonist*:

The answer to that...lies in recent extensive changes to the country's bail system that were intended to address clogged courts and the over-representation of vulnerable populations....

The law makes it clear, said Manak, that police are to give primary consideration to the release of the accused at the earliest opportunity and under the least onerous conditions.

I asked police about this. Now, this was a couple of years ago, in 2019, and bail reforms had a bit of time to come into place. However, many in the police forces, the ones who see this more than anyone in the House, believe those bail reforms have further quickened the catch-and-release policies that we have seen. I bring this up to outline that we are seeing a rise in gun violence and violent crime in our cities, and many believe it is tied to the bail reforms from a few years ago, which are coming home to roost now.

We now have Bill C-5. Do members think it is going to get any better when we do not put violent criminals in jail for firing guns at people with the intent to injure them with a bullet, for robbing them at gunpoint or for pushing drugs on vulnerable Canadians and killing 7,000 people last year? What do we think is going to happen to the crime statistics when the bill comes in? Do we really think they are going to go down? I do not think so. Based on the recent policies on bail reform and the feedback I am getting from frontline police officers, I would guess that in a couple of years, we are going to be seeing increased violence in our streets and less safe streets than we have now because of Bill C-5.

House arrest is very interesting. If someone fires a gun at someone, they would not be serving mandatory prison time but would maybe get house arrest. What does that mean? I was not even sure what “house arrest” meant. I kind of thought it meant that a police officer would be stationed outside the house of a dangerous offender who shot a gun at someone, robbed someone at gunpoint or extorted them with a firearm, as they must be watched. It does not mean that exactly. This individual is put in their home in the community, often the one they terrorized, and is in essence left to their own devices.

Can members imagine what is going happen when a vulnerable community has been terrorized by a criminal with a gun, and rather than being removed from the situation and put in prison to serve time for the crime they did to their community, they would be serving a sentence surrounded by the gang influences that led them to a life of crime? How do we think that is going to work?

• (1105)

There were some comments from the members opposite, and I would ask them to consider sexual assault. I went through this already. A person can sexually assault someone and then serve house arrest in the community of the individual they sexually assaulted. It is in the bill. It really does not make a lot of sense to me.

We heard the speech before me by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice. I am sure he was very sincere in his speech, and I have a lot of respect for the member. However, whenever he and the Liberals are pushed on this and asked why they go easy on criminals who use guns in dangerous crimes, they say they are also increasing mandatory sentences for them. The argument does not follow. We ask why they are going easy on criminals with guns and they say they are increasing sentencing. It does not make sense. They say they are increasing sentencing, but they are also letting them off the hook to serve house arrest in the communities they have terrorized.

I just went over a situation where a woman with her child was robbed at gunpoint. Robbery with a firearm will no longer get mandatory prison time. That may be something members opposite are uncomfortable with, but that is in their bill. The individual who robbed that woman at gunpoint with her baby deserves to go to prison, no excuses. There is no other way to see it. It is unbelievable. That individual, who the police did catch, was charged with robbery with a firearm and violating his prohibition order for possessing a firearm. He had already been caught before, charged with something and then released. Now he has terrorized the community again and robbed a woman with a baby at gunpoint and will likely be out again.

Recently, I was in Grand Bend, a lovely community on Lake Huron, with the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. I was speaking to police on the ground there and they told me what has happened as a result of the Liberals' soft-on-crime policy on bail reform. An individual was stabbed to death outside a bar at 2 a.m. in this beautiful little tourist town. It is a very rare occurrence in this otherwise very safe, wonderful community. Two weeks later, when that individual was released on bail, he went into a gas station and threatened the lives of two teenage girls at the cash. This man murdered someone with a knife, an innocent man who was outside of

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the bar at the wrong time. He murdered him and was out on the streets two weeks later threatening the lives of two teenage girls. That is a result of bail reform and what the Liberals have done with their soft-on-crime policies.

If the Liberals would just take time to talk to the police in their communities, they would hear the same things I am hearing. It is unbelievable. It is as if parts of our communities are becoming lawless.

When we think of police, what do members think it feels like for police officers to endanger their lives and run after the guy I just talked about who robbed a woman at gunpoint? What do members think it is like for them? They are putting their lives on the line and he is back on the street three days later. What kind of incentive do they have to rush to the scene of a crime when they see the same guy they have been apprehending week over week? It is unbelievable.

I would like to move an amendment with my remaining time. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be not now read a third time, but be referred back to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for the purpose of reconsidering clauses 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 & 12 with a view to remove the provisions in the Bill that would eliminate a number of mandatory minimum sentences for very serious crimes, namely robbery with a firearm, weapons trafficking and discharging a firearm with intent, possession of a weapon obtained by commission of an offence and possession for purpose of weapons trafficking.

The purpose of this amendment is to take out the most insane parts of Bill C-5 so that individuals—

• (1110)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, the amendment has been read. The member should be submitting it to the Chair and should not be further debating.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary is correct. Once the amendment is read, there is no further debate.

[*Translation*]

The amendment is in order.

[*English*]

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

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Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe that, just before moving the amendment, the member actually said that police might choose not to do their jobs because of a policy that the government made. I thank God that the police forces throughout Canada do not operate in the same way that Conservative politicians do: picking and choosing when they think it is important enough to actually listen to the policies that have been created by this place.

Nonetheless, one would think, by listening to the intervention there, that individuals would not have to face any jail time whatsoever. We do not even have to read between the lines. The member said, and I quote, that this bill would let criminals “off the hook”. That is absolutely untrue.

What this bill would do is actually put the decision-making into the hands of the judges. They are the people who hear the cases, the people who deliberate over them and the people who render judgment at the end of the day. I am certain that those judges will continue to render strict decisions when necessary.

• (1115)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Battle River—Crowfoot that I did not ask him for questions and comments. I did not recognize him, and if he has questions and comments then he should get up and try to be recognized at that time. For anyone who is yelling “time”, I would just say I do have a clock in front of me and it is to my discretion.

The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I can tell that the member opposite is quite fired up about my speech, and that is good. He should be. He should be angry about his government bringing forward a bill that would allow house arrest for those who rape other people. Sexual assault now could have house arrest.

The member puts a lot of trust in judges. I respect our judges as well, but I do not always agree with them. For example, the Supreme Court recently said that if a person was intoxicated, that could be a defence for rape. Judges do not always get it right, and the member opposite should remember that.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I take particular exception to the remarks by the previous member that completely distort what is going on in Bill C-5. They distort not only what is going on in Bill C-5, but the position of police in Canada on the bill. Both the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Police Federation, which represents RCMP officers, appeared in committee and supported this bill. What is going on here by Conservatives is an attempt to distort the actual impacts of the bill and create some crisis in public safety when, in fact, the bill would do exactly the opposite.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I am shocked that the member opposite would suggest that there is not a crisis in public safety, following years and years of soft-on-crime Liberal policies. I talked extensively about that. I guess we will have to see. We will have to see what happens to the crime statistics after Bill C-5 comes in. I hope I am wrong. I hope there are not rapists serving house arrests next to the individuals they raped. Based on the powers of this bill to give discretion to judges, I am deeply concerned

that individuals who brandish firearms and shoot them at people in their communities now would not have to go to prison for it. I will not apologize for standing up for vulnerable communities and the risk to them, first and foremost, that this bill would present.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot about Portugal's successful experience with diversion programs. We have not heard much about what happened in Switzerland.

The Swiss tried a tough-on-drugs approach in the 1990s and it was a disaster. AIDS cases skyrocketed and drug houses appeared everywhere, among other issues. They implemented four measures that made all the difference: prevention, treatment, harm reduction and law enforcement.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on these successful approaches to diversion.

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, again I will reiterate that those suffering from drug addiction need that to be treated as a public health issue. That is why, in the last election, we ran on a policy to build more treatment beds for individuals who are suffering. Those who suffer from drug addiction should not be going to jail. They should be going into treatment. Unfortunately, we do not have nearly enough treatment beds in this country to help the thousands of Canadians who are addicted to dangerous and deadly drugs. I will stand by our position on eliminating mandatory prison time for drug pushers and drug smugglers. Those individuals are responsible for killing thousands of Canadians and should absolutely be behind bars.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier today, we heard one of the Liberal members talk about the high rate of reoffending. I fail to see how Bill C-5, if it lets people out of jail early, is going to do anything to protect the public safety when people are reoffending, which is what the Liberals said.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I just got some information today that there were 378 repeat offenders recently arrested for committing other crimes, who were also charged with 853 counts of breaching firearms prohibition orders.

Often in these communities, it is a small group of people who are consistently caught and released who are terrorizing these communities over and over again. These individuals are responsible for the deaths of people in vulnerable communities. They are responsible for firing firearms with the intent to injure individuals or robbing them at gun point, over and over again. The rap sheets of these criminals are getting longer and longer, yet they are allowed to continue walking the streets terrorizing vulnerable communities and Canadians at large.

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This is deeply concerning. It needs to end, but the only way that is going to happen is if we can get the Liberal government out of power.

• (1120)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, in response to my question, I could not believe what I heard. The member said, “I respect judges, but they do not always get it right.” That is just an example of the fundamental misunderstanding of the justice system and how it is supposed to be implemented.

The member should also be respecting the decisions that the judges make because that shows that someone generally understands, appreciates and respects the judicial system in Canada. Instead, what the Conservatives are trying to say through that comment is that we are going to try to put a fail-safe in place for when, in their opinion, the judges do not get it right.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I will ask the member opposite this: Does he believe the Supreme Court was correct in saying that intoxication for violent crime can be a defence for rape and homicide?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about crimes committed against women. That issue certainly was discussed at length at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In the case of call to action 32, the Liberal government proposed allowing judges to depart from mandatory minimum sentences in some circumstances of crimes against indigenous women. In this case, it gave judges the choice to impose such sentences or not, depending on the circumstances.

To send the right message in order to counter crimes against women, is this a solution the Conservative member might consider?

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her question. We have worked together on committee and I thank her for her hard work.

Winnipeg is the epicentre of murdered and missing indigenous women. It is an extremely serious issue that is wreaking havoc on Winnipeg's north end, in particular, and in our northern reserve communities. It is very serious. I know this issue very well, having worked for the provincial government at the time.

We can go back to Bill C-5. It allows house arrest for sexual assault and for kidnapping. It allows no prison time for firing a gun with the intent to injure, for robbery with a firearm and for extortion with a firearm. These are very serious offences faced most of all by the most vulnerable in our society. We see this time and again: There is story after story of indigenous women and girls suffering at the hands of criminals doing these exact crimes who will no longer have mandatory prison time as a result of the Liberals' Bill C-5. It is unacceptable.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for bringing up the genocide of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. I want to point to the national inquiry in which specific calls for justice called, in

fact, for the end of mandatory minimum sentences because of the over-incarceration of indigenous women. This includes the 98% of women in prisons in Saskatchewan who are indigenous. They call for a complete end to mandatory minimum sentences.

Does my colleague stand in solidarity with indigenous women, and will she support this call for justice?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her question and I applaud the work that she has done on this file. She is very knowledgeable. I would not claim to know as much as she does about this important issue. I deeply respect her.

I would say that we will disagree on mandatory minimums, particularly when it comes to violence against indigenous women with firearms. There are firearms offences that are extraordinarily dangerous in this bill and the individuals who are terrorizing vulnerable communities, including indigenous women, may no longer face prison time. In fact, they may be serving house arrest in the communities of the women they terrorized. I could not in good conscience vote for a bill that would do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Rh al Fortin (Rivi re-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Shefford.

Bill C-5 is another bill containing a mix of good and bad measures, and it puts us in a position where we have to hold our noses and accept the measures we would otherwise oppose.

The legislative summary reads as follows: “This enactment amends the *Criminal Code* and the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* to, among other things, repeal certain mandatory minimum penalties, allow—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order.

The hon. member said he would be sharing his time, but he needs to seek the unanimous consent of the House.

Mr. Rh al Fortin: Madam Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to share my time.

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

Agreed.

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

Seeing no opposition, I grant the request.

• (1125)

Mr. Rh al Fortin: Madam Speaker, I will start where I left off.

The bill summary reads as follows:

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This enactment amends the *Criminal Code* and the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* to, among other things, repeal certain mandatory minimum penalties, allow for a greater use of conditional sentences and establish diversion measures for simple drug possession offences.

For the Bloc Québécois, which has consistently advocated for diversion, rehabilitation and giving judges the discretion to determine appropriate sentences, this looks like motherhood and apple pie at first glance. However, as is often the case in the House, that pie was made with rotten apples that no one wants to eat. I am very pleased with the diversion measures. Too many people who need health care more than anything are unnecessarily crowding our courthouses and prisons. As unfortunate as addictions are, they need to be treated, not punished. This flawed and harmful paradigm needs to be set aside.

The same is true for conditional sentence orders. They are not a magic bullet, far from it. If they are used appropriately, and I have no reason to believe that our courts would be incapable of making sound decisions, they too will lead to better rehabilitation.

Most of the minimum sentences slated for repeal should be, and I applaud this expression of confidence in our courts. Judges who preside over trials hear very detailed adjudicative fact evidence, so they are in a better position than anyone else to determine the appropriate sentence for any given situation. I have faith in them.

That said, Bill C-5 is overly broad. Quebec and Canada are experiencing a widespread gun crime crisis, but the government's only solution is to abolish minimum penalties for some of these offences. I will go through some of them.

Section 244(1) of the *Criminal Code* states the following with respect to discharging a firearm with intent:

Every person commits an offence who discharges a firearm at a person with intent to wound, maim or disfigure, to endanger the life of or to prevent the arrest or detention of any person — whether or not that person is the one at whom the firearm is discharged.

That is pretty serious. The *Criminal Code* currently provides for a minimum penalty of five to seven years for these crimes if they are committed in association with or at the direction of a criminal organization.

Armed robbery is liable to a minimum penalty of four years pursuant to section 344 of the *Criminal Code*.

Subsection 346(1) of the *Criminal Code* defines extortion with a firearm as follows:

Every one commits extortion who, without reasonable justification or excuse and with intent to obtain anything, by threats, accusations, menaces or violence induces or attempts to induce any person, whether or not he is the person threatened, accused or menaced or to whom violence is shown, to do anything or cause anything to be done.

If a firearm is used in those offences, the minimum sentence is four years.

There are others, including robbery with a firearm, discharging a firearm with intent to wound, maim or disfigure and extortion with a firearm, but for those three examples, the *Criminal Code* currently sets out minimum sentences.

Are judges capable of applying the appropriate penalties for these offences? Honestly, I think so. I think our courts are quite ca-

pable of hearing the evidence and determining what is appropriate in these and other cases. However, at a time when gun violence is on the rise, especially in the Montreal area, but also elsewhere in Quebec and Canada, I think this sends the wrong message.

• (1130)

That is certainly not what I would call wise use of the power to legislate. The government could have proposed diversion and rehabilitation measures, as well as the repeal of certain minimum sentences, with the exclusion of crimes as serious as those committed with firearms. It could have done that.

At the start of the study of Bill C-5, the Bloc Québécois asked that the bill be split in two so we could study diversion in one bill and then the minimum penalties issue in another bill. We could have passed one bill quickly and worked on the other, perhaps crafting it to reflect what Quebecers and Canadians would want it to include. Unfortunately, the government is being obstinate, which I do not quite understand. In fact, I would say I do not understand it at all.

It seems that we will unfortunately also have to accept the rotten apples if we want to have the remedies of diversion and conditional sentencing and the elimination of certain minimum mandatory sentences for very specific offences. It is very disappointing to see the democratic process being taken hostage, and one day it is going to backfire. In the meantime, let us hope that the government will become a little wiser. Whether the government is Liberal or Conservative, let us hope that it will happen, and that one day it will accept the opposition's arguments. Even when the opposition parties disagree and their position may seem unfounded, it is often well-founded and represents the opinion of a large part of the population. Let us hope that the government will one day accept the opposition's arguments and split this type of bill so we can discuss each provision objectively and effectively in the best interests of the people of Quebec and Canada.

For now, given the circumstances, the Bloc Québécois will have to vote in favour of Bill C-5. We will support it because, once again, we believe that diversion is essential for the entire justice system. We need it. We will vote in favour of Bill C-5 because we believe that conditional sentences are judicious and essential to the proper functioning of our courts, to the proper functioning of the entire justice system and to the rehabilitation of many offenders. We will vote in favour of Bill C-5 because eliminating some of these minimum penalties is also essential to the justice system and to rehabilitation.

While we will vote in favour of Bill C-5, we will be holding our noses over this denial of democracy that the government is perpetuating by refusing to remove from Bill C-5 the provisions that will undermine the fight against organized crime, the fight against the daily and rampant shootings on our streets.

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[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his stated support of Bill C-5.

I realize and acknowledge the issues around gun violence. I want to point the member to Bill C-21, which is now before the House. It does, in fact, increase the penalties for firearm-related offences. This is the type of smart criminal justice policy that we are talking about.

We are, in fact, increasing the level of penalties available to judges for those who commit a crime with firearms. At the same time, we are ensuring that increased judicial discretion happens at the lower end of the spectrum where there are other alternatives for those who may be first-time offenders and those who may not pose a risk.

I want to thank my friend for the support, but I also want to reassure him that Bill C-21 will address many of the issues he has mentioned in his speech today.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, if the topic were not so serious, this kind of argument would make me smirk.

For weeks, or even months, the Minister of Justice has been trying to convince us that minimum sentences have no effect on the criminals who commit these offences.

Now they want to convince us that increasing the maximum sentences will impress them. I do not think so.

I think that what offenders do not want is to get caught. They do not want to go to prison, period. If a minimum sentence for the crime they are committing does not make them think twice, I do not think that a maximum sentence of 12, 14 or 20 years is going to change anything.

That said, Bill C-21 primarily addresses the issue of legal guns by restricting certain provisions, but it does not in any way address illegal arms trafficking, which the government is being asked to contain.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, personally, I know of very few criminals who are aware that mandatory minimums exist and I know of even fewer actual empirical studies that show any kind of connection between mandatory minimums and a decrease in crime.

Unfortunately, there are still some people in the House who are advocating a demagogic, cavalier and repressive “get tough” approach, when what we really need is prevention and rehabilitation. My question for my colleague is this: Does getting tough on crime really have to be this tough?

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, my colleague may be right.

That said, I do not want to repeat what I already said about the advantages of diversion and conditional sentences, but, once again, I think the bill is poorly timed.

Members know that Parliament has existed since Canada was founded. If we look back to a time well before that, before Christ, the Greeks were practising democracy and were likely doing a better job of it than us. I think that parliaments legislate based on specific problems that are of concern to the population.

Right now, we are hearing talk about gun crime and guns being recklessly discharged in our streets. I do not see how repealing minimum sentences for gun crime responds to the population's concerns. That is our problem with the government. It is not listening to what the population is saying.

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to hear that the member for Rivière-du-Nord has changed his position on Bill C-5 since he did vote against the bill at committee. I want to ask him about another vote at committee. He voted against my amendment that would add a provision to Bill C-5 to remove criminal records for personal possession for about 250,000 Canadians.

Does the Bloc still oppose removing criminal records for personal possession of drugs?

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, that is a whole other question.

I voted against it because it had nothing to do with Bill C-5. I do think the issue of criminal records should be discussed. It is very interesting and important.

However, to circle back to the amendments to Bill C-5, members will know that we proposed maintaining minimum sentences for these crimes, but adding a new provision to allow the courts to override them in exceptional circumstances. That recommendation came from an expert witness. It was discussed and, although I would not go so far as to say that everyone agreed, it was welcomed by government officials.

Unfortunately, when we brought these amendments forward, the government members on the committee voted them down, which was very disappointing. My NDP colleague also voted against them. Again, I think the issue here is not criminal records, but shootings.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, as I rise today to speak at third reading of Bill C-5, my mind is once again filled with questions and confusion.

As critic for status of women and gender equality, I have observed an uptick in the number of femicides and incidents involving gender-based violence. Like my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, whom I commend for his speech and for sharing his time with me, I wonder about the odd message the government is sending with this bill.

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I will therefore address the delicate question of mandatory minimum penalties by starting with my experience in the community sector. Next, I will address the bill's shortcomings. I will end with a few suggestions for countering violence and sending a strong message to end the acrimony currently surrounding the bill and, in particular, the disinformation we have been hearing, as my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot mentioned.

I have a background in community work, more specifically with an alternative justice and mediation organization. I sincerely believe in restorative justice. I am entirely in agreement with the Bloc's traditional position, which mirrors Quebec's position on mandatory minimum penalties.

When it comes to justice, the Bloc Québécois advocates for an approach that promotes rehabilitation and crime reduction. We believe that mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, have few benefits, that they do not deter crime and that they introduce many problems, including the overrepresentation of indigenous and Black communities in prisons, as well as additional costs to the system. The Bloc Québécois is therefore more favourable to the principle of repealing certain MMPs.

However, the Bloc also believes in timing, since life is all about timing. Now is not the right time to repeal MMPs for firearms offences, seeing as a number of cities in Quebec and Canada are plagued by a rash of gun violence, mainly because of the Liberal government's inaction when it comes to border controls.

Many women's groups are particularly concerned about this and would like to see better gun control measures to help reduce the number of femicides. Repealing MMPs without doing anything to stop the illegal flow of firearms across the border sends a mixed message.

Conversely, Bill C-21 would strengthen certain maximum penalties, but we must be careful not to mix up these two bills. Although we believe that repealing MMPs for firearms possession is defensible, the proposed repeal of MMPs for certain gun crimes, including discharging a firearm with intent and armed robbery or extortion, appears to contradict the government's claim that it will maintain MMPs for certain categories of serious crime.

We need to monitor this aspect of the bill closely, as well as the possibility of maintaining MMPs for second or third offences. As the Bloc Québécois suggested, the courts could be given the power to depart from the MMPs in cases of serious crime where justified by exceptional circumstances.

I would like to clarify that the Bloc Québécois expressed support for the introduction of the principle of diversion for simple drug possession during the last election campaign and the debates on Bill C-236. Let me remind my colleagues that some of the MMPs that are to be repealed involve drug production, at a time when the opioid crisis is claiming more and more lives in Quebec and Canada.

During the last election campaign, I was approached about this topic by community groups that work with the homeless and whose street outreach workers are doing an excellent job, like those in Granby. However, the Bloc Québécois would like to point out that such a measure will be effective only if investments are made in health care, to support health care systems and community organi-

zations. These institutions need resources so they can help people struggling with addiction and mental health issues, another subject that voters broached with me during the last election campaign.

The Bloc Québécois would like to note that we have still not gotten a response from the Liberal government on the issue of increasing health care funding to cover 35% of system costs, despite unanimous calls from Quebec and the provinces. Obviously, without that level of investment, it is hard for community organizations to meet the growing needs created by increased homelessness in municipalities like Granby. The pandemic only exacerbated the problem. Also, as critic for status of women, I see that homeless women are especially vulnerable.

Once again, the Bloc Québécois speaks for Quebec, where diversion is a well-recognized principle that has been integrated into several areas of the justice system. For example, in children's law, extrajudicial alternatives have been offered to young offenders since the 1970s thanks to Claude Castonguay's reform of the Youth Protection Act. There is also the alternative measures program for adults in indigenous communities, which allows individuals to opt for measures other than judicial proceedings.

• (1140)

There is the justice and mental health support program, which allows individuals who have committed a crime and are fit to stand trial to obtain a reduced sentence or, in some cases, benefit from diversion. There is also the general alternative measures program for adults, which is currently being implemented and which gives adults accused of certain crimes the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and resolve their conflict with the law in ways other than the usual judicial proceedings provided for in the Criminal Code.

For all of these reasons, I would like to salute the organization Justice alternative et médiation, for which I used to work. I would like to apologize for missing the general meeting, but I know that the organization's work on all the issues I mentioned is crucial.

Lastly, with regard to drugs, there is the Court of Quebec's addiction treatment program, which makes it possible to postpone sentencing to allow the offender to undergo court-supervised treatment for addiction. It also provides for close collaboration between the court and drug addiction resources to establish treatment methods, including therapy, rehabilitation and social integration. Unfortunately, this program is offered only in Montreal and Puvirnituk. It would be good if it could be expanded.

In short, as the previous examples show, the principle of diversion is not new in Quebec's judicial ecosystem. Quebec's Bill 32 was studied and also involved diversion. The CAQ government concentrated on securing the passage of this bill, which aims to promote the efficiency of penal justice. The bill introduced the concept of an adaptation program, which will give municipalities another option for administering statements of offence to vulnerable individuals, such as those experiencing homelessness or mental health or addiction issues.

As critic for status of women, I am always rather appalled to observe the overrepresentation of indigenous individuals in prisons and to note that the problem is more pronounced among women than men. Some 38% of women incarcerated in provincial and territorial prisons after sentencing are indigenous, while the corresponding rate of incarceration among men identifying as indigenous is 26%, so this affects far more women than men. In federal prisons, indigenous women account for 31% of offenders sentenced to prison, while indigenous men account for only 2%. These are huge numbers. Given these figures, could MMPs be contributing to increasing the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in the prison system? Certain signs point to yes.

Diversion is also beneficial for individuals. It reduces the stigma associated with drug use, as well as the negative consequences of a criminal record, which are disproportionate to the crime of simple possession. One last thing I should mention is that MMPs are expensive, because they generate long-term correctional service costs and court costs. MMPs have a major social cost because the money invested in putting people in prison is not devoted to social reintegration.

In conclusion, because of my background in community work, I am sensitive to many considerations associated with this bill. One thing is certain: It should not relieve us of our responsibility as members of Parliament, especially since gun crime is an important issue, given recent events where many innocent victims were killed by guns. Although we agree with the repeal of MMPs, we should not minimize gun crime or the importance of making the public feel safe and considering better gun control measures. That will be debated in another bill. Let us focus on the bill at hand.

I can say one thing. On the one side, we have the NDP saying that this bill does not go far enough. On the other, we have the Conservatives clinging to their "tough on crime" approach. Is that the way to go? I do not know.

Then there are the Liberals, who, as I mentioned, are playing both sides of the fence, especially in the case of crimes against women. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action 32 sought to allow judges to depart from MMPs under certain circumstances, by which I mean serious crimes against women. The idea is to allow judges to decide whether getting rid of the MMP is a good idea. This is meant to send a strong message, especially in the case of serious crimes against women. The Liberals managed to do this in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendation.

Once again, this bill reflects the Liberals' penchant for catch-all bills. Minimum penalties, maximum penalties, diversion: Everything is lumped together. In short, once again, the Bloc Québécois

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is acting like the adult in the room, trying to adopt the most well-reasoned and reasonable approach.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I heard the member say something earlier in her speech that gave me pause for reflection, and I apologize if it was lost in translation. Perhaps she could explain it.

I thought I heard her say that perhaps this is not a good time to remove mandatory minimums because of the fact that there is an increase in crime rates right now. That just seems an awkward statement to me, because I would think that one would believe that a policy is the right policy based on its implementation in other jurisdictions and based on data, not based on what happens to be the context in which that policy would apply at any given time.

Could the member expand on that and provide some clarity around that?

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for giving me a chance to reiterate our position, although our position has been clear.

On the one hand, this bill deals with diversion for certain drug offences. This is essential, because it is a public health issue. We need to get this done. This approach has had very a positive impact in Portugal, for example. For this to work, however, the government needs to invest in health care.

On the other hand, on the issue of mandatory minimum penalties, or MMPs, of course we are in favour of some form of rehabilitation. However, the context of this bill is indeed strange, and it makes one wonder whether MMPs should not be maintained for certain serious crimes.

In response to the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was actually the Liberals who granted judges an exemption to allow them to exercise discretion, which includes determining that this might not be the best idea, especially in the case of certain serious crimes, such as discharging a firearm and crimes against women, including indigenous women.

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

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I would also like some clarification as to the Bloc Québécois's position on mandatory minimum penalties. It is a little confusing because, on the whole, Quebecers agree that they do not work and provide a false sense of security. The Barreau du Québec is against mandatory minimum penalties. Studies show that they do not work. Now the Bloc Québécois is telling us it is against mandatory minimum penalties, but not all of them and not at this time.

If they do not work, why keep them?

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I repeat that studies show that mandatory minimum penalties do not work in every case. My colleague is correct. However, in the case of certain serious crimes, such as discharging a firearm and crimes against women, it might be better if we allowed judges to depart from MMPs, like we did in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action, so that they can take into account any exceptional circumstances surrounding a crime and determine whether it does indeed call for the minimum penalty. As I said earlier, this only applies in some cases, and the Bloc Québécois has based its position on what was proposed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very enlightening speech on the Bloc Québécois's position. The Bloc seems to have a number of concerns but is nevertheless planning to vote in favour of this deeply flawed bill. I have a simple question for my colleague.

This bill recognizes judges' ability to render judgements, but now they are saying they want to get rid of minimum penalties for serious crimes like the ones my colleague mentioned, while at the same time saying there should be maximum penalties in certain situations.

How can they say we need maximum penalties because there has to be a limit, but we do not need minimum penalties for serious crimes whose perpetrators need to be in custody?

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I think my colleague is conflating Bill C-21 and Bill C-5. I think we need to come back to Bill C-5, the bill we are discussing today.

As I said, we have stated our position. We agree with the introduction of diversion measures, but since this is an omnibus bill, it contains two confusing and intertwined items. We certainly have the right to ask questions about minimum sentences.

However, one thing is certain: For these reasons, especially since diversion is so important and has such positive effects, as we have seen in various countries around the world, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the bill. That said, as my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord so aptly put it, we will do it while holding our noses.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise virtually to speak to Bill C-5 at third reading, but I have to say that I look forward to the day when circumstances do not force me to give speeches through pinhole cameras, with all the technical problems that go with it.

I want to start today by talking about what Bill C-5 is and what it is not. I want to say clearly, as we approach third reading of this bill, that I am happy to speak in support of it because of what is actually in it.

Though modest, Bill C-5 is an important contribution to tackling the systemic racism in our justice system. All we have to do is take a brief look at the statistics, which show that despite no more involvement with drugs by certain communities and no more involvement in criminal activities, certain members of Canadian society, indigenous people and racialized Canadians, end up in prison far more often, far out of proportion to other Canadians.

The correctional investigator pointed out that indigenous people make up less than 5% of the population, but over 30% of the people in Canadian prisons. Canadians who identify as Black are about 3.5% of the population and over 7% of those who are in prison. The situation is worse when it comes to indigenous women and women who live in poverty. These women make up over 50% of the population in women's prisons. Again, if we look at Black Canadian women, they are about 3% of the population but make up over 9% of the inmates in correctional institutions. Clearly, we have a problem with systemic racism in our justice system.

Bill C-5 would also make a modest contribution to the fight against the toxic drug poisoning crisis in our country. Removing mandatory minimums for drug offences and increasing the ability of police and of judges to divert those who are struggling with addiction from prison to treatment will obviously help.

Is there more we can do on both systemic racism and the opioid crisis? Clearly there is.

Let me talk at the outset about what Bill C-5 does not do, because we have heard many outrageous claims, from the Conservatives in particular but sometimes also from the Bloc, about what the bill does. The bill does not in any way reduce sentences that judges will hand out for serious crimes. Removing mandatory minimums does exactly what it sounds like: It removes the minimum penalty for an offence, not the maximum, not the average, not the normal penalty, but the minimum.

The evidence we heard at committee, as well as the evidence in criminal justice, is quite clear. The mandatory minimums do not deter crimes. There are very few criminals who thumb through the Criminal Code to decide which offence offers them the best deal, obviously. We know from research what the real deterrent is, and that is getting caught. All criminals tend to think that they are the smartest in the bunch and will not get caught, but it is that fear of enforcement that is actually a deterrent to crime.

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The evidence shows us that mandatory minimums, if anything, actually increase the likelihood of recidivism and that in fact their existence makes the public, if anything, less safe rather than more safe. We should pay no attention to those who tell us that Bill C-5 is soft on crime. Instead, let us look for a moment at what it actually does.

It removes 20 mandatory minimum penalties: 14 from the Criminal Code and six from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. There are many more mandatory minimum penalties that could be removed, but we heard from experts that these 20 will make a significant difference when it comes to the overrepresentation of racialized and indigenous people in our correction system.

New Democrats do support maintaining mandatory minimums for the most serious, violent crimes, where there is evidence that longer times of supervision may make a difference and may be necessary for public safety, but we acknowledge that all mandatory minimums can and do have disproportionate impacts on indigenous people and racialized Canadians.

That is why we attempted to amend Bill C-5 at committee to add a waiver restoring judicial discretion in offences with mandatory minimums when it would be manifestly unjust to apply those mandatory minimums. This is in line with the Gladue principles, which require judges to consider the circumstances of aboriginal people when it comes to sentencing. Unfortunately, in the laws that exist right now, the Gladue principles do not apply where there is a mandatory minimum.

I do have to point out that I think the member for Rivière-du-Nord, from the Bloc, misremembered what happened at committee. There were several attempts by several MPs and parties to add this kind of waiver to Bill C-5, but due to the narrow drafting of the bill, unfortunately, they were ruled out of order, outside the scope of the bill, so no one voted against adding this waiver.

- (1200)

Again, New Democrats do support adding a parallel provision to the Gladue principles requiring judges to take into account the circumstances when it comes to sentencing racialized Canadians as well. This kind of waiver would be a further improvement to our attempts to attack the systemic racism that exists in our justice system.

Again, what is actually there? There are 20 mandatory minimums, most of which specify terms of imprisonment of less than two years, that would be removed. What this means is that if there is a mandatory minimum of less than two years, generally not much time would end up being served. When we take into account time that may have been served before the trial process, and when we take into account provisions for earlier release for good behaviour, which is essential for maintaining discipline within our corrections system, then the time served under these mandatory minimums would be very, very short in most cases.

It also means that the time would be served in provincial institutions, and those provincial institutions generally do not have extensive rehabilitation programs, due to the short time most offenders spend there. Obviously, if people are in custody only for a few months, they cannot really complete an addictions treatment pro-

gram. They cannot really get training that might allow them to get a better job when they leave the corrections system. They cannot even complete literacy training, which is often important for those who have come into the criminal justice system, in that very short period of time. There is not enough time spent in custody, under these mandatory minimums, to get any real help that would allow people to be rehabilitated back into society and make them less of a threat to public safety.

What there is under these mandatory minimums is a guarantee that the offenders would serve just enough time to lose their job, their housing and often the custody of their children. These are pretty heavy additional penalties that I do not think were ever intended for things like personal possession of drugs. It is just enough time to make it more likely that the offenders would return to the behaviour that got them into trouble in the first place, rather than become successfully reintegrated into their community.

Instead of mandatory minimums, Bill C-5, and this is important, would grant additional access to conditional sentences, so judges may choose conditional sentences over those mandatory minimums right now. This means that judges may assign penalties like serving time on weekends or serving time under house arrest. This is important, because the Conservatives are again distorting what the bill would do. Judges are allowed to use conditional sentences only in those cases where the penalty being assigned is less than two years in custody. The kind of extreme examples the Conservatives are giving of things that would be subject to conditional sentences simply are not in this bill.

What a conditional sentence might do, if people serve time on weekends, is allow them to keep their job and be able to continue supporting their family. Time served under conditional sentence in house arrest might allow people to be the primary caregiver of their children and remain in the home so their kids do not go into custody. It could allow them to keep their family together. We have all seen the terrible impacts on both indigenous Canadians and racialized communities of kids ending up in care in a system that has just as many problems with systemic racism as our justice system does.

Again, Bill C-5 does nothing that would reduce the amount of time judges hand out for serious crimes, nothing at all. Judges' discretion and sentencing guidelines mean that serious crimes would continue to get serious time in custody even after Bill C-5 passes.

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• (1205)

The third aspect of Bill C-5, the third major thing it would do that is actually in the bill, is that it would increase the ability of police and prosecutors to use warnings and diversions instead of charges when it comes to drug possession offences. The use of alternative measures, like warnings and referrals to counselling for low-level criminal offences, not only avoids wasting expensive court time and evades further delays in our court system, but there is the obvious connection made to diversion and avoiding future involvement in criminal activities. The obvious benefit of diversion is that it allows people to get drug treatment and get out of the addiction problems that led them into conflict with the criminal justice system.

All of these aspects of Bill C-5 would increase public safety and not, as opponents of the bill would have us believe, put public safety further at risk. No one denies that there are many crises in public safety we need to address, but what Bill C-5 does is create room in our criminal justice system to address the most serious crimes by taking the less serious crimes out of the justice system and allowing judges to apply penalties that would be the most appropriate, not just for the offender, but for making sure that offenders do not reoffend, thus helping defend or protect public safety in the community.

These three things, the elimination of 20 mandatory minimum penalties, increasing access to conditional sentences and increasing access to diversion, are why New Democrats said we would support the bill at second reading. Frankly, we were not that excited about this bill, because we had hoped the Liberals would be bolder when it came to tackling the problem of systemic racism in the criminal justice system. People may often hear that Parliament is dysfunctional and that we do not co-operate, but what we proved at the justice committee is that there can be co-operation to improve bills. At committee, we proposed four amendments, two of which were adopted, and I can say that personally I am now a lot more excited about the bill.

The first amendment adopted requires that records be kept on the use of discretion when it comes to diversion. That is important because keeping records on diversion will open up the use of police discretion to study and accountability. It will ensure that we can check that discretion is not just being used to favour those who are already the most privileged in society, but is being used fairly when it comes to indigenous people and racialized Canadians. The amendment also guarantees that warnings and diversions cannot be used in further court proceedings. That is an important factor in that it guarantees there is a real incentive to complete things like diversion.

The final amendment that was adopted tackles the question of criminal records for the personal possession of drugs. Bill C-5 would now guarantee that within two years all of these records will disappear, so that those who are often denied housing, employment, the ability to travel, bank loans and mortgages or the ability to volunteer with seniors or children will actually have those criminal records removed and be able to pursue rehabilitation into society that would allow them to make their way forward in life, just like other Canadians.

The Liberals previously set up a record suspension process for marijuana when it was legalized, but I have to point out that that process cleared the records of only 484 of the hundreds of thousands of people with records for simple possession. Bill C-5 will now clear them all. It will clear them all without an application process and without a fee.

Our amendment also dealt with future conditions for the personal possession of drugs, which is still possible after the government ensured the defeat of Bill C-216, the private member's bill of the member for Courtenay—Alberni, which would have decriminalized the personal possession of drugs completely. Since those convictions are still possible, what Bill C-5 now does, with our amendment, is guarantee that any new convictions will disappear from criminal records two years after the end of any sentence resulting from those convictions, and not result in a lifelong criminal record that has all those negative impacts I just talked about. This process, which the government is calling the “sequestering of records”, will make sure those criminal records do not show up in criminal record checks, and 250,000 Canadians will benefit directly.

Let us not listen to the naysayers who are trying to stir up public safety fears about Bill C-5. It is more than a little frustrating, when the bill will actually do so much more to help make our communities safer. It is frankly maddening to see opponents of this bill ignore its real impact in beginning to address the systemic racism that afflicts our justice system and makes the lives of so many indigenous and racialized Canadians that much harder.

• (1210)

Is this bill everything that community advocates hoped to see? No, it is not. The Liberals could have been bolder, as I said before, in addressing both systemic racism and the opioid crisis, but is Bill C-5 a significant step forward in addressing these concerns? I believe it is, and that is why New Democrats are happy to support Bill C-5 at third reading today.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There is clearly an issue with quorum.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There is quorum online. We have actually looked and there is quorum online.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank—

Mr. Warren Steinley: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, members' screens have to be on for them to count as being in the House.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

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I am not sure if the member for Regina—Lewvan is calling into question the ruling of the Chair here, but if he would like to do that, I am sure there is a process to do that, instead of just running into this chamber yelling and screaming the way he did.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I will take a moment to consult the table officers.

There is certainly quorum now, so we will proceed.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for his incredible efforts at the justice committee in strengthening this bill. I want to get his perspectives on conditional sentencing orders.

Much has been said by the opposition, particularly the Conservatives, on a whole host of accusations that CSOs would open up a floodgate for hardened criminals having “get out of jail free” cards. I am wondering if my friend opposite could talk about the impact the conditional sentencing orders would have on the criminal justice system and at what point the judges would be able to use those orders in order to ensure our communities are, in fact, safer.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, that is an important point we have been trying to get across in this third reading debate. The kinds of examples the Conservatives are raising and saying they will be eligible for conditional sentences will not be eligible for conditional sentences. Both the normal decisions of judges and the sentencing guidelines in use in Canadian courts mean that for serious crimes, conditional sentences will not be allowed. For anything where the sentence is over two years, that time will be served in custody and that time will be served in a federal institution.

The importance of conditional sentences is that they allow the judges to look at the circumstances of the offender and whether the offence is associated with an addiction problem or whether it is associated with a mental health problem and to come up with a sentence that actually fits the needs of the community to be safer by making the sentence fit the needs of the person who came in conflict with the law. There is an additional benefit to public safety when judges are allowed to use conditional sentences for those less serious and less violent crimes.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member of the justice committee's remarks. I think there is a misconception out there, and I know he knows the bill well, so I would like his comment on it. The government has talked repeatedly about simple possession of drugs, and I would like his perspective. Conservatives believe that trafficking, production and importing are the offences for which mandatory minimums are being removed for schedule I and schedule II drugs, which include fentanyl, cocaine and heroin, which are some of the drugs that are plaguing our streets.

I would like his comments on the removal of the mandatory minimum penalty for those specific offences, which are clearly not simple possession.

• (1215)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I am going to take a moment here to do what the Conservatives like to do and use an anecdote.

What about the case of a woman who is travelling with her boyfriend and he is involved with drug trafficking and he puts the drugs in her bag? When they come across the border, she is caught. Does she deserve a mandatory minimum sentence for importing drugs, or can the judge take into account the circumstances here that she may have been financially dependent on her boyfriend, or she may or may not have known he was trafficking drugs? As the law currently stands, she is going to end up in serious custody and do serious time in detention.

Just like the Conservatives like to give those extreme examples, there are many examples of where the law right now catches people and sentences them to mandatory prison time, when it is obviously not in the interest of the public to do so.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member's speech was thoughtful. He is quite knowledgeable on the bill, but I do not agree with him on balance on the bill, and I am not going to support it.

The part that I would like him to comment on is the section that opens up community sentencing for serious sexual offences. We know that victims of sexual assault are severely disincentivized to report the crime because of the continued victimization that occurs. The prospect of the perpetrator of a sex crime being able to serve a sentence in the community is one that troubles me.

I wonder if the member could comment on that portion of the bill.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I do have a great deal of respect for the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge as a member of Parliament.

Again, I think we are talking about something that is not going to happen here.

The penalties for sexual assault rarely come in under two years in custody and so anything with two years in custody is not eligible for a conditional sentence. It is not eligible for house arrest. It is not eligible for serving time on weekends.

I do share with him the concern about the way sexual assault is treated in our criminal justice and policing system and I do share his concern that we need to do better by victims, not just of sexual assault but of all crimes in our community.

In fact, allowing judges to use conditional sentences to get a sentence that fits the crime, fits the offender and fits the community is an important piece of progress in Bill C-5.

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Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his hard work on this file and on the justice file in particular. One of the things that we will see is a shift in the law but also, too, there is an opportunity to enhance the bill and adjust things later on. I would like his thoughts on how the bill, as he pointed out, has shortcomings in a few elements, but also there is the ability to adjust things and to be able to plan and go forward, whereas we have not done that to date on this file.

Whether it is a three-year or five-year review or a quicker review, what is his suggestion on how we monitor and continue to move toward a health-based approach for dealing with this?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Windsor West is such a good colleague in all aspects of parliamentary work. I want to take a moment to congratulate him on his work on the first urban national park in his riding.

This bill now calls for a mandatory review of what is happening with these kinds of things. I have to say that we had some discussion about the number of years for that review. I believe we ended up at four, but I would have to check. We had a debate between three and five. I think it is important that we take a look at what has happened as parliamentarians with law within a period of three to five years and re-examine whether there is more that could be done, or whether there are things that need to be corrected. That is always an important part of our work as parliamentarians.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the comments that I have heard Conservatives react to today, in particular I remember the parliamentary secretary for justice making this comment, was when we suggest that the Conservatives' policies with respect to incarceration are pretty much just to lock them up and throw away the key. They are not interested in rehabilitation so that we can reintegrate individuals back into society.

They are heckling me now. One would think that just from a financial policy perspective, it makes more sense to help reintegrate people back into society because, quite frankly, it costs a lot to keep people incarcerated. If not for the reason of the social good of it, one would think that the Conservatives would be interested from the perspective of the financial implications of what it costs to keep people incarcerated.

I realize that the member's main drive here is toward the social impact of it, as it should be, but I am wondering if he could speak to the dilemma that the Conservatives seem to be in, in relentlessly being in favour of mandatory minimums.

• (1220)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, while I might not use quite as broad a brush in condemning my Conservative colleagues as the hon. member did, I think he draws attention to an important ancillary benefit of these changes in Bill C-5.

We certainly heard that one of the problems that comes from the existence of mandatory minimums is that they prevent the ability to plea bargain and keep cases out of court that take up valuable space in our courts that could be used for tackling, without delay, the

more serious crimes. They increase court delays. They increase court costs.

Of course, when we keep someone in custody, as I talked about in my speech, for only a short period time, it is very expensive to do so and, at the same time, guarantees that they will not get the rehabilitation and training they need to successfully rehabilitate into society. It is not a good economic deal, as well as being not a good justice deal, as well as being not a good public safety deal.

Eliminating mandatory minimums will help us make progress on all of those fronts.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Halifax West.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Today I would like to address necessary amendments proposed in Bill C-5.

Our criminal justice system continues to perpetuate a cycle of systemic racism, a system which is disproportionately overrepresented by indigenous peoples, Black Canadians and members of marginalized communities both as offenders and as victims. Sentencing laws within the Canadian criminal justice system have historically focused on punishment through imprisonment rather than ensuring that the responses to criminal conduct are fair, effective and prioritize public safety.

Adopting the proposed amendments to Bill C-5 are imperative to stop the cycle of systemic racism and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, while taking steps towards addressing the disparities experienced by vulnerable groups. The proposed amendments maintain the courts' ability to impose serious penalties in appropriate cases for firearms offences, ensuring that sentencing is proportionate to the crime.

I have the privilege of serving as the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Our committee recently completed a study on this bill. We heard from experts, law enforcement, legal representatives, and those who are marginalized and who have interacted with the criminal justice system. The testimony encompassed the diverse experiences of those who have encountered the consequences of Bill C-5 from across the country. The testimony recounted racialized and marginalized individuals' intergenerational experiences with racism in policing and sentencing, arguing that a colonial system of incarceration is not encompassing of the needs of Canadians.

Bill C-5 would address the concerns raised by the witness testimony we heard around racism and overrepresentation in the justice system by promoting judicial discretion and prioritizing individualized sentencing. This process ensures that an individual who is found guilty is sentenced appropriately to the degree of responsibility of the offender and the seriousness of the offence. A sentencing court must look at all mitigating and aggravating factors specific to the case, including the offender's risk to public safety, circumstances specific to the offender and instances of systemic racism experienced by the offender.

When it comes to crimes, specifically gun crimes and youth violence, I have been working hard with groups for over decades. I can tell colleagues that minimum mandatory penalties have not deterred or reduced gun crime. Prevention, intervention or tough enforcement at borders have been effective. Most of these young folks need help and jail is not the answer.

A criminal justice system which utilizes a mandatory minimum penalty as a model of reform is not reflective of Canadian values or the needs of racialized and marginalized communities within Canada. We can see from the statistics that the Canadian criminal justice system has historically been ill-equipped when considering individuals who are vulnerable, struggle with mental health and substance use, are experiencing homelessness, live in poverty or lack access to essential and social services. We must ensure that Canada does not use the criminal justice system to address social issues. Rather, we must ensure public safety, accountability and justice.

Research shows that in Canada indigenous people, Black Canadians and other racialized persons are more likely to come in contact with the criminal justice system, often due to systemic racism as well as other social and economic factors. These statistics are further exacerbated by the fact that members of these communities are overrepresented in correctional facilities.

Between 2007-08 and 2016-17, indigenous and Black offenders were more likely to be remanded to federal custody for an offence punishable by a mandatory minimum in the last 10 years. The number of indigenous adults admitted to federal custody for a firearm-related offence punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty increased by 23%.

Despite representing only 5% of the Canadian adult population in 2020, indigenous adults accounted for 30% of federally incarcerated inmates. In 2018-19, Black inmates represented 7% of the federal offender population, but only 3% of the Canadian population. If we continue to support a system which perpetuates systemic racism, the cycle of incarceration will continue to be the path for many marginalized communities.

• (1225)

There are 13 mandatory minimum penalties related to firearms offences that would be removed, empowering the courts' ability to impose proportionate and individualized sentencing to offenders.

Bill C-5 would repeal the firearms-related mandatory minimum penalties for possession of a loaded firearm, prohibited or restricted firearm, possession of a weapon obtained by crime, possession of

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an unauthorized firearm, and importing a firearm knowing that it is not authorized.

Repealing mandatory minimums for these offences would allow for greater use of conditional sentence orders in cases where an offender faces a term of less than two years' imprisonment and does not pose a threat to public safety. It would also require police and prosecutors to consider measures aside from incarceration.

The reality is that the restricted availability of conditional sentencing has contributed to the disparities experienced by racialized and marginalized communities in Canada. Consistent with the government's commitments, mandatory minimum penalties would remain in place for offences related to robbery, extortion, discharging a firearm with intention to cause bodily harm, firearm trafficking and importing, and making automatic weapons.

A justice system that unfairly targets indigenous peoples, Black and marginalized communities is not effective. It does not keep us safe and must be changed. For those who say that Bill C-5 is not tough enough on crime, those who commit serious offences will continue to receive serious sentences.

Our bill is about getting rid of the failed policies that filled our prisons with low-risk, first-time offenders. They do not need to be put in jail; they need support. These failed policies did not deter crime in the past. They did not keep us safe and they did not make our justice system more efficient. They target vulnerable and racialized Canadians.

Canadians see the devastating effects that come from firearms on a daily basis. I am no exception. However, I recognize that a one-size-fits-all system, where mandatory minimum penalties are considered just and fair, is not representative of those who are disproportionately impacted by the Canadian criminal justice system.

For those who are a danger to the public, or are serious or repeat offenders, a judge would be able to award stiff and harsh penalties in some cases higher than the minimum sentences. This is not a soft-on-crime approach. This is an approach that separates social issues from judicial issues, and allows the judiciary to make the appropriate sentence.

To end the cycle of overrepresentation, we require a tailored approach that encourages rehabilitation and acknowledges the historical and ongoing injustices faced by Canadians across the country. Repealing select mandatory minimum penalties does not mean that firearms offences are considered serious offences; rather, it provides the courts with the ability to impose appropriate and proportionate sentences.

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The changes we make today to our criminal justice system will have an impact on current and future Canadians. It will change the way we engage with racialized and marginal communities. This includes providing meaningful support for victims, accused persons, offenders, their families and their communities.

Our government is committed to maintaining public safety, and has taken urgent and significant action to make Canada safer.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to hear his comments on the allocation of resources. If we take people out of the prison system in the hope of rehabilitating them and turning them into useful members of society, we must have the resources to do so. I am thinking, for example, of social services, which are under provincial jurisdiction. My colleagues can no doubt see where I am going with this. Once again, I am raising the issue of health transfers.

No doubt the government expects to find efficiencies in the prison system. Will this allow my colleague to pressure his government to finally provide decent funding for social services and health services?

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, that was a good question in terms of the supports needed. Obviously, when we need conditional sentencing or we need diversion programs, we will need those supports. Let me also say that they will cost a lot less than incarcerating somebody and throwing away the keys for five years.

For those provincial jurisdictions that save on under two-year prison sentences where they are now incarcerating fewer people, they can afford to use those funds to help rehabilitate them, give them diversion programming and give them conditional sentences to help make them better human beings and better members of society.

When it comes to health transfers, the federal government always has been there and always will be there for the provinces.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, prior to this, I worked as an employment specialist on behalf of youth at risk. One of the things that we found was that, ironically, some of them actually had drug convictions for possession of small amounts of marijuana on their criminal records. If we fast forward to today, we can buy it in several locations and it is no longer a criminal offence.

There was anguish among young people from either having made a mistake at that time, in a moment, or being around other people who made a mistake. That anguish lasted as we tried to find them employment, housing and other things as they often came from broken homes or were on their own at the age of 16 or 17. I would like the hon. member to talk about how we are not going to brand young people for a potential short-term mistake that can lead to long-term problems and bring them into a poorer cycle of life versus a life of moving forward. That is really what is at the heart of many situations.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, those are exactly the types of supports that are needed. I have seen dozens, if not hundreds, of young people who have made small mistakes in their lives, including mistakes that now are not even considered criminal, such as smoking marijuana or possession of marijuana. Some mistakes are even small thefts, or being in a car with somebody who had a loaded firearm or who had drugs on them, and the people are facing sentences.

When they had conditional sentences, it was an opportunity to give people a second chance to reflect on their mistakes and to become good citizens. If, in that conditional sentence period, they acted appropriately, took the appropriate classes or did the volunteer hours or therapy that they needed, in most cases they became very good citizens of society. In fact, rather than getting incarcerated, they got jobs and good skills and they became good members of society.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend in the chair of the justice committee for his speech today. I want just to reflect on the last few weeks, when Bill C-5 was studied at the justice committee. I wonder if my friend could talk about some of the witnesses who came forward. I really want to highlight the intervention by the president of the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers. Reflecting on what systemic racism means, and as someone with some lived experience, could the member reflect on why this bill is so important for us?

• (1235)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has worked very hard on this issue. It really is an important issue for him, his community and his constituents. Speaking to people such as those who were from the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers and others, we saw how it affected and actually disabled people who could become great members of society, because we already have a lot of challenges. We are looking at systemic racism, where a lot of young folks who are marginalized or are from Black Canadian populations get targeted and picked up quickly. It actually reduces their ability to become good citizens and become future inhabitants. That is why it has been disproportionately represented. Along with them, the indigenous population has been even more so, and we know the challenges they face.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am rising virtually this afternoon to speak to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

[English]

This bill is an important step forward in our ongoing work to acknowledge and address systemic racism in Canada's justice system. Our response to systemic racism must be comprehensive, and I acknowledge there will be more to do after Bill C-5 to reform our criminal justice system and ensure that Canadians from all backgrounds and indigenous people are treated fairly when they become involved with the court system.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I heard the testimony of many witnesses and on-the-ground experts calling for reforms. Canadians want responses to criminal conduct to be fair and effective while ensuring that public safety is maintained.

[Translation]

The bill proposes three reforms.

[English]

The first part is to repeal the mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for 14 of the 67 offences in the Criminal Code, and all six offences under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, to address the disproportionate impact on indigenous and Black offenders as well as those struggling with substance use and addiction. The actual empirical evidence on mandatory minimum penalties is clear on their failure as deterrents, the strain they add to our justice system and their harm in adding to the over-incarceration of Black and indigenous people who already face marginalization. They are failed policies that did not keep Canadians safe or make our justice system more efficient.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the hon. member. We have no interpretation at the moment, and perhaps advise her to lower the microphone slightly.

Please proceed.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Speaker, they are failed policies that did not keep Canadians safe or make our justice system more efficient. What they did was fill our prisons with low-risk first-time offenders who needed help.

Bill C-5 removes mandatory minimum penalties that target lower-risk and first-time offenders and have been shown to increase the over-incarceration of racialized and marginalized groups. Removing these mandatory minimum penalties does nothing to prevent serious penalties from being imposed on those who commit serious crimes. We are not preventing police from charging people with gun offences or prosecutors from pursuing convictions.

We are restoring judicial discretion so that sentencing judges can impose just sentences that are proportionate to the degree of responsibility of the offender, and the seriousness of the offence, and take into account all aggravating and mitigating factors, including the risk to public safety, the individual in front of them and their experience with systemic racism.

These could include terms of imprisonment that are lower or higher than the mandatory minimum penalties, which would be repealed. Mandatory minimum penalties would continue to exist for

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offences including murder, high treason, sexual offences, impaired driving offences and serious firearms offences.

Second, the bill would allow for greater use of conditional sentence orders in cases where an offender faces a term of less than two years' imprisonment and does not pose a threat to public safety. Bill C-5 would restore greater availability of conditional sentences, so that judges would have the flexibility needed to allow offenders who do not pose any risk to the public to serve their sentences in their communities with strict conditions. These conditions would include a curfew, house arrest, abstaining from the consumption of drugs and alcohol, abstaining from owning, possessing or carrying a weapon, abstaining from communicating with victims, and attending a treatment program approved by the province.

As witness Michael Spratt pointed out:

Offenders can be required to take counselling, seek employment, perform community service and make reparations to the victims of their offences.

That is because, unlike other sanctions, CSOs allow courts to focus on rehabilitation. Less serious offenders who receive CSOs would have access to treatment programs and other supportive services while keeping their families together, having the benefit of community supports, and costing the system dramatically less money. This would help to promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of those who do not pose a risk to society, and by extension would deter crime and ensure our communities are safe. We know that locking up less serious offenders is a poor tool for supporting rehabilitation. I certainly saw that during my time as Attorney General in Nova Scotia.

I would like to quote Brandon Rolle of the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute, who testified in front of us at committee. He said:

...we know that when you go to jail as a Black person, you're not going to have culturally informed programming. You're going to be deemed a troublemaker more often. You're going to be classified at a higher risk. You're not going to come out of that situation in a place to successfully reintegrate into the community.

If there is an opportunity, then, to have less serious offenders serve their sentences in the community alongside their support systems, when there is no risk to public safety it behooves us to provide that option if we are truly interested in rehabilitating those who have been convicted of a crime. The way to do that is to restore judicial discretion to allow the flexibility. I have confidence in our judges and our witnesses, including Mme. Guerin Skalusat, from the Musqueam Indian Band and Manager of Indigenous Relations with British Columbia Infrastructure Benefits, who said exactly that. She said:

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I would say that, yes, I have confidence in the judges. I think the implementation of Gladue went pretty well. I think it's something that our community members and those who are facing the criminal justice system are very familiar with. We have lots of resources to support that process. Yes, with that same level of support, I think it would be good.

I want to add that Bill C-5 would not make CSOs available for the offences of advocating genocide, torture, attempted murder, terrorism, serious criminal organization offences or any offence carrying a mandatory minimum penalty.

• (1240)

Third, this bill would require police and prosecutors to consider other measures for simple possession of a drug, such as diversion to addiction treatment programs, rather than laying charges or prosecuting individuals for simple possession of an illegal drug. The proposed amendment reinforces our government's commitments to address the opioid crisis and to treat problematic substance use as a health issue rather than a criminal issue. This would prioritize getting people the help they need rather than further stigmatizing and punishing them. This is the additional benefit of avoiding the costs associated with an individual's defence. If an individual is charged, they can still be diverted by the Crown prosecutor.

We understand that police and prosecutors will need tools and guidance to make this work, and we will be there as a government to provide that. As the exemption recently granted to British Columbia clearly demonstrates, we believe the opioid crisis is a public health crisis, and diversion is the better option for those struggling with addictions rather than locking them up. That is how, ultimately, we are going to make a difference in crime reduction.

Finally, for Canadians watching and seeing that the debate here has grown more polarized, I want to say to Halifax West residents, Nova Scotians and Canadians that we worked collaboratively on this bill in committee and have adopted a number of amendments. In conclusion, I cannot stress enough the significance of Bill C-5. We have a serious over-incarceration problem in Canada.

As a final note, literally, in the middle of our committee's study on the bill, we all read a troubling headline in the paper: "Indigenous women make up almost half the female prison population". Indigenous women make up only 4.9% of Canada's female population. If this does not call out for reform, I do not know what would. The trend and the trajectory cannot continue. We have to get serious about restorative justice and supporting communities impacted by poverty and intergenerational trauma. I call on all parliamentarians to join us in passing this bill and committing to work together to develop smart-on-crime policy solutions.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her interesting speech.

I will ask her the same question I asked my Bloc Québécois colleague earlier. She mentioned that she wants to restore judicial discretion so that judges can set minimum sentences based on their judgment. If that is the objective, why have maximum sentences yet not give judges the same discretion when it is a serious crime pun-

ishable by a sentence of more than 25 years? I do not understand the double standard.

Having said that, I want to make it clear that I am not in any way against the goal of reintegrating and rehabilitating people, but it needs to happen at the appropriate time. In the case of serious crimes, like the gun crimes being committed in the greater Montreal area at the moment, it seems to me that a minimum sentence would be entirely appropriate. The fact that Bill C-5 will eliminate them is deeply troubling to me and to many citizens in Quebec and in Canada.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Speaker, at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, we heard countless calls for change from experts on the ground and in communities.

I would say to my colleague that these measures are an important step forward in the fight to eradicate systemic racism and make the justice system more effective. As far as firearms are concerned, we promised to do more to get dangerous firearms off our streets. We have every intention of keeping that promise.

What we are doing here is ensuring that the most serious criminals are punished severely while addressing the overrepresentation of Black, indigenous and racialized Canadians in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague to explain why Bill C-5 combines two fundamentally different elements: the repeal of minimum sentences for offences involving the use of a firearm, and diversion measures for simple possession.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Speaker, as I just said, these measures represent a step towards a criminal justice policy that keeps our communities safe.

We know that the existing penalties do not work, which is why we introduced this bill and worked very hard in committee, where we heard from many experts.

I urge my colleagues to work with us to pass this legislation and to get on board with making positive changes for all Quebeckers and Canadians.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for mentioning the systemic racism that continues to be perpetrated against indigenous women.

I am certainly glad to see some amendments to mandatory minimums in Bill C-5, but I want to point specifically to *R. v. Ipeelee*, a Supreme Court of Canada decision which reaffirmed the court's previous findings in the Gladue case. It states:

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courts must take judicial notice of such matters as the history of colonialism, displacement, and residential schools and how that history continues to translate into lower educational attainment, lower incomes, higher unemployment, higher rates of substance abuse and suicide, and of course higher levels of incarceration for Aboriginal peoples. These matters...on their own, do not necessarily justify a different sentence for Aboriginal offenders...Rather, they provide the necessary context for understanding and evaluating the case-specific information presented by counsel.

I ask that question because, with a sweeping decision made by former prime minister Harper, he put in place mandatory minimum sentences and totally disrespected a Supreme Court ruling, which has resulted, in the process, in a massive over-incarceration of indigenous women. I wonder if my hon. colleague feels that the bill goes—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. member for Halifax West 20 seconds to answer.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Speaker, that is why we are doing what we are doing. We need to restore greater availability of conditional sentences. We need to give judges more flexibility to ensure fairer sentences. Criminals will still get harsh sentences, but we need to take into consideration people's personal circumstances, and that is exactly what we are trying to do with this bill.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the member for Dufferin—Caledon.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-5, an act that would amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. It is a bill being spun by the NDP-Liberal government as beneficial to Canadians, but it is far from it. This bill focuses on eliminating mandatory minimum sentencing for heinous offences. Thus, in a true NDP-Liberal fashion, it is prioritizing petty politics and the interests of offenders over the safety and security of the vulnerable and innocent in our communities.

Even after repackaging what was once Bill C-22 from the last Parliament, the government claims that Bill C-5 focuses on the fair treatment of offenders and some demographics' overrepresentation in our correctional facilities.

Upon closer inspection, the bill proves not only that the government will do anything to remain in power but also that it will also completely disregard the safety and security of Canadians in the meantime. The approach proposed by Bill C-5 is critically faulty and appalling. Quite frankly, it is a slap in the face for Canadians who have placed their trust and faith in the government to do what is right and advocate for common sense solutions to protect vulnerable Canadians' sovereignty and security.

This bill suggests some highly concerning amendments to both the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and the Criminal Code of Canada by removing mandatory minimum sentencing not only for offences relating to the consumption and distribution of illicit drugs and substances but also for offences involving firearms.

It does not stop there. Apart from pushing to loosen gun restrictions in Canada, the government is also advocating for the availability of conditional sentences such as house arrest on heinous crimes, which would substantially put lives at risk. These crimes include but are not limited to attempted murder, torture as inflicted on another person, advocating for genocide, sexual assault, kidnapping

and abduction of a person under the age of 14, human trafficking for material benefit, and firearms smuggling.

What I just listed are just some of several offences that could qualify for conditional sentencing, such as house arrest, if mandatory minimum sentencing is lifted under Bill C-5. The government seems to heavily rely on the theme of protecting the offenders and punishing Canadians, thus providing more opportunities for criminals to be emboldened to terrorize. They are now abetted by the government.

The NDP-Liberal government is turning a blind eye to illegally procured firearms by not cracking down on gang operations and activity. It is also sparing these criminals from incarceration at correctional facilities by removing mandatory minimum sentencing for serious offences, such as those involving firearms.

Furthermore, Bill C-5 would add to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act by highlighting a series of principles peace officers and prosecutors should use when determining whether or not to lay charges for drug possession. Again, the government is failing to address its alleged aim to lessen overrepresentation of under-represented communities in our penitentiaries, because peace officers, law enforcement and prosecutors already have the authority and flexibility to decide whether or not to lay charges for simple possession of drugs or illicit substances.

A directive from the Public Prosecution Service of Canada was also previously issued to direct prosecutors to limit their involvement in the prosecution of simple drug possession unless there were proven and immediate public safety concerns. Conservatives argue that offenders involved in serious, violent crimes committed with firearms, including substantially horrific offences, deserve prison time and most definitely not to be tucked away in their individual homes with a slap on the wrist.

Furthermore, drug offenders should be presented with mandatory participation in Canadian drug treatment courts to end the cycle of crime and drugs, and to provide them with rehabilitative, therapeutic opportunities in lieu of premature reintegration into communities or being subjected to correctional facilities and the criminal justice system.

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• (1255)

To date, this rehabilitation program is critically limited through strict eligibility criteria and non-mandatory participation. The government's proposal to lift mandatory minimums is a performative stunt that does nothing to address the root of the drug and crime crisis in our country. I also find it questionable how the government insists on conditional sentencing for alleged low-risk offenders, as if our police officers have the time and resources to continually monitor these people serving their conditional sentences in their respective communities and ensure their compliance.

Contrary to what the NDP-Liberal government claims that this bill suggests, the elimination of offenders' mandatory time in correctional facilities will not alleviate the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous communities in our penitentiaries, but will only offer more opportunities for criminals to infiltrate and prey on the vulnerable and innocent.

In addition, the government claims to state that it will be removing mandatory minimum penalties for simple possession, but how can the Liberals do that when mandatory minimums for simple possession do not exist? Instead of pushing Bill C-5, we Conservatives believe in establishing mandatory participation in support and rehabilitation centres for those struggling with addictions, reinforcing our borders to prevent firearms smuggling and abolishing conditional sentencing opportunities for crimes that threaten the safety and security of Canadians.

Why is the government weakening our gun laws, standing up for criminals, blatantly disregarding the grief and trauma experienced by victims and being lenient with the deterrence and punishment of offenders, instead of defending our communities? These actions only show that the NDP-Liberal government prioritizes the interests of offenders and is not serious about protecting the safety and security of Canadians.

With regard to drugs and illicit substances circulating in neighbourhoods, Conservatives believe that all mandatory minimum sentences should be sustained, not only as punitive damages for committing crimes outlined under the Criminal Code, but also to serve protection and justice for the vulnerable, the innocent and the victims of these abhorrent transgressions. How can the Liberals claim that they are doing what is best for Canadians when they are proposing to keep offenders under house arrest as opposed to having them placed in rehabilitation centres if their crimes were fuelled by substance abuse, or behind bars for serious transgressions?

The government claims that it would rescind mandatory minimum sentencing for simple possession, but it must be highlighted that our officers already have that discretion in place, offering offenders treatment programs or other support services as opposed to prison time.

Regardless, mandatory minimums for simple possession do not exist. It is simply time the government gave up the act of performative activism and actually invested in the rehabilitation of offenders and put the security of victims and the vulnerable first.

Considering the questionable tactics that the government has advocated for in the past, this is simply a missed opportunity to prove that the Liberals are here for Canadians, for survivors and the ap-

propriate rehabilitation of offenders while protecting the security of our communities. It is time for the government to go back to the drawing board with Bill C-5 and sustain mandatory minimum penalties for the offences aforementioned and all others outlined under the bill.

In conclusion, I recommend that the government closely reconsider its advocacy for Bill C-5 and prioritize the safety and security of all Canadians through the close reconsideration of lifting mandatory minimum sentencing, the consumption and distribution of drugs and illegal substances, and mandatory minimum penalties for serious offences.

I now welcome questions from my colleagues.

• (1300)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park was asking a question of the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, he spoke of manufactured outrage. I cannot think of an example that would better demonstrate manufactured outrage than that speech we just heard.

I realize that the member was probably just reading a speech that was given to him by the Conservative propaganda machine, but nonetheless, he should seriously reflect on the words that he delivered in this House over the last 10 minutes. He actually said that if somebody is convicted of human trafficking, they will probably just be locked up in their house. That is absolutely ridiculous. For starters, the whole part about conditional sentencing would only apply at a judge's discretion if the sentence was less than two years. I am not following this bill that closely and even I know that.

Can the member please explain how he justifies that comment about human trafficking?

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, that is what the problem with the whole bill is. There is a lot of subjectivity of how the bill can be interpreted. That is the problem. The Liberals are trying to address a problem by not actually addressing the problem. It is a lot more sensationalism and symbolism according to our court of law. They are trying to say they know there is overrepresentation of certain minorities, but the problem is the bill is not addressing any of that. There is leeway in the bill for judges to make that discretion on whether they consider an offence serious or not, whether it is a first-time offence and potentially give house arrest for such serious crimes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I do agree on one thing, which is that the government needs to go back to the drawing board with this bill.

We would like to split the bill and separate the diversion measures, which are most important, from the provisions regarding mandatory minimum penalties. It is awkward timing to be debating those mandatory minimums, given all of the gun incidents we have been seeing in Montreal.

The member said that mandatory minimums should be sustained, but studies show that they do not work and do not have much of an impact. Would the member tell the organizations in Quebec that are working hard on rehabilitation and alternative justice that the work they are doing is pointless and ineffective?

I would like to hear his thoughts on that, because there are some organizations in Quebec that are working very hard on this and proving that these methods do actually work.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, no, I am not saying that at all. Actually in my speech I spoke several times about how we really need to invest more money in rehabilitation, in making sure criminals are getting drug treatment programs and making sure they actually take them. If we are not trying to address their drug addiction, then how are they actually going to break that cycle?

Definitely we need to work more on rehabilitation, on managing the drug problem and on making sure they get the care that they deserve. If they do not break this continual cycle, they are never going to change their lives. Definitely, let us create organizations to work on breaking the drug addiction crisis.

● (1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, but if there is anyone sensationalizing this issue, it is the Conservative Party.

It has taken the position of being tough on crime with mandatory minimums even though every study has proven that they do not work. They are not a deterrent and have many unwanted side effects.

Just because we want to repeal mandatory minimum sentences does not mean that there will be no sentence at all. The person will go to jail, but the judge will decide for how long. Why do the Conservatives not want to let judges do their job and judge the criminals?

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, the point of all this is that we are trying to deal with systemic racism and we are doing it in a judicial system. That is exactly what we have been saying. The judges should have the ability to make that determination, but at the same time, we want to make sure that criminals are getting their drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation properly.

We are not asking to change the whole world instantly. We have to make sure we get a handle on their mental state. Usually their mental state derives from the fact that they have a drug addiction or some other type of addiction. They need to have proper adherence and proper treatment, more so than just getting a slap on the wrist and house arrest.

Government Orders

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am in the chamber often and I certainly hear from members on the other side of the House this constant refrain: “We listen to the experts.” When Conservatives talk about vaccine mandates, the Liberals say, “We listen to the experts.” When we ask where those experts are or to produce that expert report, of course, it never gets produced. “We listen to the experts” would be the Liberals' mantra, so let us talk about some experts.

The first thing we should talk about is that gun crimes in Canada have almost tripled over the last decade. We have an epidemic of gun violence. What do some of the experts have to say about the gun violence that is happening in Canada?

At the public safety committee, Toronto's deputy police chief said that 86% of gun crimes come from illegal guns and it is on the increase. He then went on to say, “Our problem in Toronto is handguns from the United States.” There is the expert and the expert's position on what is happening with gun crimes.

What does the government do in response to listening to the experts? It is going to eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for weapons trafficking. Yes, that is going to solve the problem of illegal guns coming into the country from the United States. We are going to eliminate a mandatory minimum sentence for gun trafficking. That will solve it.

When we eliminate a mandatory minimum sentence, the judge now has the discretion to give a lower sentence. We can bet dollars to doughnuts that is exactly what is going to happen. The government wraps itself in the shroud of experts and says that it listens to the experts, but where is it listening to the experts here?

If anything, we should be increasing penalties for weapons trafficking. The weapons traffickers are the ones who are directly responsible for the carnage that goes on in our streets, in cities like Toronto. It is getting worse. It is not just the fact of an increased number of guns. The chief also testified it is the increased number of rounds being discharged. Police recovered 2,405 shell casings in 2021. It is up 50% from 2020. Again, what is the response? Let us lower sentences for that.

It is for weapons trafficking and eliminating the mandatory minimum penalty. It is for importing and exporting knowing it is unauthorized. On both sides of the weapons trafficking, people are now getting a reduced sentence. How is that for an incentive to stop doing what someone is doing? I do not think that is going to work.

Where is the conversation about victims? When we stand here and talk about gun crimes, there is always a victim. Victims want to see justice done. There has to be an appearance of justice. When a weapons trafficker is going to get a lower sentence, the victims of crimes from these weapons certainly are not going to think that justice has been done.

Government Orders

We can talk about all kinds of ways to deal with sentencing for indigenous people and for people from racialized communities. Those can be actual factors that judges consider for reduced sentences when sentencing. We can put those in the sentencing guidelines. However, what we do not do is make broad changes to the sentencing for serious offences. Not everyone is going to be from an indigenous community or from a racialized community. This change will apply to everyone. Everyone will then get that reduced sentence.

• (1310)

I sat on the justice committee from 2011 to 2015, when we brought in increased sentences for trafficking in persons. This is a very serious crime, and the damage done to victims is extensive. They came to committee to tell horrifying stories that stick with people for the rest of their lives. This is an extraordinarily serious crime that has long-lasting impacts on victims, so why would the expansion of conditional sentencing be allowed for trafficking in persons?

I just heard the member opposite say that they would have to get a sentence of less than two years. Yes, that is true, but why let the option be there? Why let someone convicted of trafficking in persons have the possibility of getting a conditional sentence? If it has happened once, it has happened too much.

That is why this bill makes no sense. There might be some good aspects to the bill, but I am not here to talk about those. What I am going to talk about is the dangerous precedent being set here.

It is the same thing with sex assault. This is an incredibly serious crime, but there is a conditional sentence including house arrest for sex assault. Yes, someone would have to get sentenced to less than two years, but if they commit a sex assault and get house arrest, what is the victim going to think of the justice system? When we talk about the justice system, we have to think about the integrity of the system within the view of the public. If the public loses faith in the justice system because they see that it does not deliver justice, then we have a very serious problem.

The bill would allow conditional sentences to be brought in for crimes such as sexual assault, trafficking in persons and kidnapping, and that is just three. Imagine the victims of any of those crimes. They have to show up at court to testify. It is not an easy process for victims to testify in court. They often describe it as re-traumatizing.

Then they have to do a victim impact statement. I have been in court to listen to victim impact statements. They can be absolutely devastating, because we know that the effect of crime on a victim's life is long term, long lasting and devastating. Then imagine they hear a verdict of house arrest for any of the things I just listed. That is the sentence. A person who committed a sex assault gets a conditional sentence with house arrest.

I think the government may have good intentions with this bill, but it is missing the mark in so many ways. This is going to have serious consequences. In its gun buyback program, it is making certain guns illegal, but that does not work. The Toronto deputy police chief just said at committee that 86% of guns used in the city of Toronto are illegal guns coming from the United States.

I can tell members that gun traffickers can see that the mandatory minimum penalty for trafficking in weapons is gone. Do members not think that will have an effect? Do members not think that is going to say to them that this is now even more advantageous for them? It is financially advantageous, of course, but now they do not have to worry about a mandatory minimum penalty.

These are the kinds of things the government thinks are going to make a difference. Maybe they sound good, but the practical reality of the bill is this. It is not going to reduce crime. It is not going to protect victims. It is going to have victims once again feel like the justice system has done them wrong.

I hope the government will study this bill in great detail and will bring in victims to talk about it. This bill should not proceed.

• (1315)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the hon. member, and he spoke at length repeating the same lines we continue to hear from the Conservative Party of Canada. He said we are reducing sentences. We are not reducing sentences. What we are doing is removing the mandatory minimum penalties that are attached to them. We are giving discretion to judges, so to say that we are reducing sentences is simply wrong. Judges continue to have that discretion.

Has the hon. member actually read the bill? Does he know the impact these mandatory minimum penalties have on indigenous people, Black Canadians and marginalized people, whose populations in our prisons continue to grow as a direct result of the mandatory minimum penalties brought in by the previous government?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, for the parliamentary secretary to have such little knowledge of the justice system makes sense given this bill. That question displays a stunning amount of ignorance. By eliminating mandatory minimums, the judge has discretion to go lower. The judge always had discretion to go higher. A mandatory minimum is not a maximum. The member should look that up.

When we say that this would lead to lower sentences, it is because the floor is gone. Judges would have the discretion to say, if the minimum was five years, that they do not have to give five years and can give three years. That is a lowered sentence, and that is what will happen for weapons traffickers, human traffickers and a whole host of other offenders. I do not know how the Liberals do not see it.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is very amusing to listen to the major parties criticize one another. However, to change things up I would like to ask a substantive question.

Can my colleague talk about his vision for drug and opioid use? In the case of the possession of small quantities of drugs, would it be possible to take an approach that focuses more on public health than criminalization? Does he not believe that, in many cases, repealing minimum mandatory penalties could be a good thing?

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, we have to look at certain ways of reducing harm with respect to drugs and drug addictions. This is a great way of doing things, but eliminating mandatory minimum sentences is, perhaps, one tiny aspect of it. Where is the funding to help people transition off of a life of addiction and other things? There can be ways to deal with that, but where is the real hard work that needs to be done through funding programs and other things? I think that is what should be done. I do not think tampering with the criminal justice system is always the sole answer.

• (1320)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, there were dozens of mandatory minimum sentences added to the Criminal Code under the Harper government, and now there are even jurisdictions in the U.S., such as Texas, that have declared mandatory minimums expensive failures. Canadian courts have been striking them down as unconstitutional, yet we see the Conservative Party digging in further and further.

The hon. member said that the parliamentary secretary did not know what she was talking about, yet the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Police Federation appeared at committee and supported Bill C-5. I assume they know what they are talking about. Could the member explain why he does not believe they know what they are talking about?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, the first problem with that question is that it compares the mandatory minimums in the United States with the ones here. The ones in Canada are significantly lower. Yes, some may have been struck down by the Supreme Court, but that does not mean we should strike all of them down. Does the member actually believe we should strike down—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to stop the hon. member, as there is no interpretation.

It is working now, so the hon. member can start his answer again.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Speaker, the problem with the question is that it compares American justice with Canadian justice and compares American mandatory minimums, which are extraordinarily high, with Canadian mandatory minimums, which are quite low in most cases. That is a false narrative and a false comparator.

Mandatory minimums can serve a whole bunch of purposes, including showing society's denunciation of what is happening. When we look at the context of the gun crime going on in this country, the fact is that almost all of the guns are coming from the United States. Does the member agree that we should be reducing mandatory minimum penalties for gun traffickers? These are the people

who are bringing the weapons in that are used to commit all these terrible crimes. That is just one example of why I believe this should not happen.

[Translation]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Oakville North—Burlington.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak about our Bill C-5 and, especially, about the need to reform our justice system so that we can learn from the mistakes of the past and put an end to misguided policies, such as mandatory minimums.

Mandatory minimums do not help make our communities safer and have disproportionate and prejudicial consequences on racialized and marginalized communities. With Bill C-5, our government is taking a new approach that turns the page on Harper-era policies.

[English]

I am pleased today to rise to discuss Bill C-5 and particularly why it is important, in my view, that we respond as a government to the many ways in which mandatory minimum sentencing in Canada has hindered rather than supported the administration of justice in Canada, and why it is so critical now, in light of the data, to do away with the policies introduced by the Harper government to expand mandatory minimums. Instead, let us allow our judicial system to do its job and allow our judges to assess the facts before them so they can apply the appropriate sentences in the circumstances.

The practice of imposing mandatory minimums has clearly resulted in the over-incarceration of marginalized and racialized Canadians. To give members just one example, indigenous women represent over half of the female prison population in federal prisons. That is absolutely egregious. The legislation would help reduce the overrepresentation of Black people, members of marginalized communities and indigenous people in our justice system and would afford more opportunities for rehabilitation, which is very much needed in our fight against the opioid crisis.

I would also like to discuss important amendments that were made to this bill at the justice committee. I think it is very relevant to note that in the spirit of collaboration, our government accepted amendments from all parties. Four amendments have been made to enhance the underlying objectives of this bill.

• (1325)

[Translation]

The first amendment would clarify the kind of information to be kept in the police record on warnings or referrals, the use of such records and to whom they may be disclosed.

Government Orders

[English]

The amendment responds to concerns expressed by many of the witnesses who testified before the justice committee. They were worried that records of previous warnings or referrals would somehow negatively impact persons who came into contact with the Canadian judicial system after they had been diverted in the past.

[Translation]

The proposed amendment is based on the existing alternative measures regime set out in section 717(4) of the Criminal Code. It sets out the circumstances under which police records or warnings and referrals can be disclosed in order to limit the negative impact that a prior warning can have on an individual who is charged with simple drug possession.

[English]

This amendment would ensure that a record of a warning or referral could be made available to a department or agency of the Government of Canada that is engaged in the evaluation of the effectiveness of alternative measures, but would not permit the disclosure of the identity of the person. What is more, the information could be shared with a judge, a court or a peace officer for any purpose relating to the offence of simple possession or the administration of the case, but only for the offence to which the record relates.

The amendment would also limit the potential for improper use of such records, which could have lasting impacts on individuals who are trying to fight problematic substance use and may require more than one chance to achieve successful rehabilitation. Police officers have legal and ethical obligations to take notes, and this amendment would ensure that they will continue to support the operational needs of the Canadian judicial system without frustrating the objectives of the bill.

[Translation]

The second amendment would provide a mechanism to reduce the stigma associated with convictions for simple possession of drugs by specifying that past and future convictions must be kept separate and apart from other criminal convictions after a certain period of time.

[English]

Again, this subsequent amendment is consistent with the underlying objective of the bill to address the negative consequences associated with simple possession. The amendment acknowledges the calls from public health organizations and those who work with individuals with addictions. It helps address barriers to successful reintegration into society and also helps address a contributing cause of the ongoing opioid crisis, namely the stigmatization of people who use drugs.

[Translation]

As we all know, when people apply for a job or an apartment or have to have a background check done for any reason, any criminal record will surface. Criminal records have a lasting impact on the ability of rehabilitated individuals to successfully reintegrate into society after overcoming personal challenges in their lives. Treating simple possession of drugs as a health and social issue means elimi-

nating the stigma associated with convictions for simple possession.

A third amendment in Bill C-5 would codify the innocent possession common law defence under specific circumstances. Social workers, medical professionals and service providers would not be subject to charges if they come into possession of drugs in the course of their duties, when they have the intent to lawfully dispose of them within a reasonable period, of course.

Lastly, Bill C-5 includes a new clause 21 requiring a comprehensive review of the act on the fourth anniversary of its coming into force.

[English]

This four-year review period is consistent with our government's evidence-based policy-making and will provide us with an opportunity to evaluate the effect of the legislation in practice on the ground.

Finally, we know that Canada, like many countries around the world, is experiencing an overdose crisis and that this problem has been exacerbated and worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Translation]

As Bill C-5 recognizes, psychoactive substance use is a public health issue rooted in complex social factors. Bill C-5 is just one part of our plan to reduce the number of drug-related deaths. Our government is also looking at every other option for preventing overdoses, improving health outcomes and saving lives.

● (1330)

[English]

To this end, I would like to draw everyone's attention to our government's announcement on May 31 of this year, just a few weeks ago, granting a time-limited exemption under section 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act so that adults 18 years of age and older will not be subject to criminal charges for personal possession in British Columbia. This exemption will take effect from 2023 to 2026. This drug decriminalization pilot project in British Columbia is absolutely a step forward in the right direction to treating addiction for what it is: a health issue. It is also another step forward in allowing us to collect data and real-time information that will allow our government to better develop policies to address the opioid pandemic.

There is much more work to do, and I look forward to one day reaching a point where a national decriminalization framework could be developed and implemented and we would have the tools to provide this health-based response to the issue of drug addiction right across our country. The legislation before us, Bill C-5, which changes our approach to sentencing, improves our judicial system, encourages rehabilitation and critically moves us forward in the fight against the overdose crisis in Canada, is of critical importance. I therefore urge all members of this House to support this important legislation, because we simply cannot wait any longer.

Government Orders

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite talked about the addiction crisis that is facing Canada, which is a very serious issue. What I do not understand about Bill C-5 is that it would allow people producing and trafficking drugs to potentially get house arrest instead of going to jail. I wonder how that will help the addiction problem in the country. Perhaps the member could clarify.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, it is important to clarify that what the bill before us would actually do is allow judges to evaluate the circumstances before them. Removing mandatory minimum sentences means empowering our judges. It means that if someone poses a threat to society—for example, as the member cited, a drug trafficker—certainly a judge is capable of evaluating the person before him or her and imposing a sanction or sentence that fits the crime. Therefore, we absolutely support judges in exercising that discretion, and where they are warranted, we would insist on high sentences.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, as a number of Bloc Québécois members have indicated, we tend to agree on the substance of Bill C-5 in relation to diversion and eliminating mandatory minimum penalties. We are just wondering about the timing. Violent gun crime is on the rise these days in Montreal, Toronto and across Canada. This has been stressed repeatedly. We have been asking the government about this during question period.

Is my colleague not a little concerned about the message that we are sending by passing Bill C-5 at this particular time?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his question and for the Bloc's support for Bill C-5.

Obviously, we are all concerned about gun violence, which is on the rise. That is precisely why we introduced Bill C-21, which seeks to ban the sale and importation of assault-style weapons. We will also continue with our plan for a mandatory buyback of assault-style weapons. We are tackling the proliferation of weapons across the country. We hope to have the support of the Bloc Québécois for Bill C-21 as well.

• (1335)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the concerns that I have with the process that will carry itself out if the bill passes is whether there is going to be support from the government to deal with systemic discrimination, not only with the bill but also with other programs and services that could actually deal with that, whether it be employment insurance, employment equity or other things that are creating some of these systemic problems.

I will point to my own private member's bill. The government whipped its members to vote against it. It dealt with climate change and it has the support of our indigenous community in Caldwell First Nation. If the government voted to actually shut down those voices of support for going to committee, what assurance can I get from the member, who voted against my bill, that the government is

not going to do the same thing to the uprooting of systemic discrimination that is necessary in other types of work?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question. I know that many members in government have also been working on similar private members' bills.

It is important to recognize that we are debating Bill C-5, which is before us today, and I certainly hope the NDP will be supportive of it. As I mentioned, it does move the needle significantly toward ensuring that we end discriminatory practices in our judicial system.

I mentioned several statistics in my speech, and it is absolutely alarming that over half of the female prison population at the federal level is composed of indigenous women. This bill would help solve that issue in this country, and I think that is of critical importance.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today about the important amendments that are proposed in Bill C-5 as part of our government's effort to address systemic racism and discrimination. These are realities that are faced by racialized Canadians and indigenous peoples who come into contact with the criminal justice system, from initial interactions with law enforcement through to sentencing, incarceration and release.

We have heard Conservatives in this place question whether their "tough-on-crime" approach of mandatory minimum penalties perpetuates systemic discrimination in the criminal justice system. It does.

In 2020, indigenous adults accounted for 5% of the Canadian adult population but represented 30% of federally incarcerated individuals. Indigenous women now account for half of all federally incarcerated women. Black people are also more likely than other Canadians to be admitted to federal custody for an offence punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty, an MMP. Data from the Correctional Service of Canada from 2007 to 2017 shows that 39% of Black people and 20% of indigenous people who were federally incarcerated between those years were there for offences carrying a mandatory minimum penalty. Repealing those mandatory minimums is expected to reduce the overall rates of incarceration of indigenous people, Black Canadians and marginalized people.

Bill C-5 includes three categories of reforms. First, it would repeal mandatory minimum penalties for all drug offences, some firearm offences and a tobacco-related offence. Second, it would allow for greater use of conditional sentence orders, also known as CSOs. The third and final category of reforms would encourage police and prosecutors to consider alternative measures, such as diverting individuals to treatment programs, when exercising their discretion in cases involving simple possession of a drug.

Government Orders

These measures brought in by the previous government, while claiming to reduce crime, have proven to be ineffective, expensive, harmful and racist. The reforms found in Bill C-5 respond to calls from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. More recently, the parliamentary Black caucus, in their June 2020 statement, also called for the elimination of mandatory minimum penalties.

Let me be clear: These reforms will not negatively impact public safety and they do not signal to courts that these offences are not serious. MMPs would remain for such serious offences as murder, sexual assault, all child sexual offences and certain offences involving restricted or prohibited firearms, or when the offence involves a firearm and is linked to organized crime.

Bill C-5 will also increase the availability of conditional sentence orders, or CSOs. A conditional sentence order is a sentence of incarceration of less than two years that is served in the community under strict conditions, such as a curfew, house arrest or abstaining from possessing, owning or carrying a weapon. This proposed reform would increase access to alternatives to incarceration for low-risk offenders. Evidence shows that allowing offenders who would not pose a risk to public safety to serve their sentences in the community under strict punitive conditions can be more effective in reducing future criminality.

I have told the story of Emily O'Brien before, but I think it is worth repeating. Emily was sent to federal prison for four years after her partner coaxed her into smuggling narcotics across the Canadian border. She was sent to Grand Valley Institution on a mandatory minimum penalty. During her four years there, she noticed how prison did not prepare women for integrating back into society. Once she was released, she knew she had to make it on her own because there were no supports, so she created her own popcorn company, Comeback Snacks, which not only makes delicious popcorn but has a mission to hire women who have been sentenced to prison so they will not re-enter the criminal justice system.

Emily's story is the exception to the rule: Most women who come out of the criminal justice system after MMPs actually come out much worse. Emily knew the privilege she had as a white woman with a post-secondary education. She had more resources and support when leaving prison than most women do.

We know that mandatory minimum penalties impact indigenous women at a higher level. I saw this first-hand when I visited Grand Valley Institution for Women and talked to many indigenous women from the prairies who were sent to Ontario because women's prisons out west were too full.

● (1340)

It became clear to me that MMPs were one of the reasons for the overcrowding of women's prisons out west, which had caused indigenous women to be separated from their communities, their families and their homes to serve a prison sentence. I met a woman from Flin Flon, Manitoba who had not seen her children in years because she had been sent to Ontario. She was heartbroken. I cannot help but wonder how, if this woman and others like her had been given a conditional sentence in her community, this would have impacted her children's lives and her relationship with them.

Grand Valley Institution for Women has seen the number of indigenous women grow from 13 to 60 over the past two years, which is a direct result of the current sentencing regime of MMPs.

Through testimony at the public safety committee on the study of guns and gangs, as well as through my own conversations with community leaders, it is clear to me that community-led gang diversion and rehabilitation can have a profound impact. In many cases, prisons in Canada are an avenue for gang recruitment. I just finished reading *The Ballad of Danny Wolfe*. In it, author Joe Friesen reinforces that Canadian prisons served as a key avenue for gang recruitment to this indigenous gang founded by Danny and his brother. They played a major role in the growth of the gang, which later became the largest street gang in Canada.

My conversations with a parole officer and dedicated community leader who has been working in corrections for decades reinforced that it is critical to differentiate between hard-core criminals and young men who are seeking a sense of community through gang involvement due to connections between family and friends. By forcing judges to apply MMPs, which have been repeatedly found to be unconstitutional, our justice system fails to acknowledge the mitigating factors in a case that heighten young people's susceptibility to gang recruitment.

Rather than sending people to prison and heightening the likelihood of them being recruited into gangs at alarming rates, it is important to support life-changing programs such as Liberty for Youth. Liberty for Youth is an amazing organization that advocates for second chances and assists at-risk youth in Hamilton, while providing a safe space where youth feel accepted regardless of their mistakes, struggles or life circumstances.

Funding community organizations such as Liberty for Youth, the Bear Clan Patrol and OPK in Manitoba, and Str8 Up in Saskatchewan, which are on the ground in our communities and supporting individuals' transition away from crime, would have a greater impact on our public safety than putting vulnerable people behind bars. Supporting these young people in their communities is the rationale behind CSOs. However, CSOs are currently unavailable for all offences prosecuted by way of an indictment that are punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of 14 years or life. They are also unavailable for all offences punishable by a maximum term of 10 years' imprisonment if the offence resulted in bodily harm, involved drugs or involved the use of a weapon. The proposed reforms would remove many of these limitations on CSO eligibility.

Government Orders

Finally, while it is important to enact sentencing measures that aim to reduce recidivism and over-representation, it is equally essential to ensure that there are adequate off-ramps from the criminal justice system at the earliest stage of the criminal process, especially for conduct that could have been more appropriately treated as a health concern rather than a criminal one. To this end, Bill C-5 would require police and prosecutors to consider alternatives to laying or proceeding with charges for simple possession of drugs. Available alternatives would range from taking no action at all to issuing a warning or, if the individual agrees, diversion to an addiction treatment program. These measures are in line with a public health-centred approach to address substance use and the opioid epidemic in Canada.

It is time for us to take a new approach. We will ensure that serious criminals continue to receive serious sentences, but we will put control of this back in the hands of judges. The reforms in Bill C-5 would be transformational for those most impacted by the systemic racism built into our criminal justice system, and I hope that members of the House will support it.

• (1345)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite and I have worked together for a long time in this place on issues related to the status of women, so my specific question is on sexual assault. I have a real concern, with Bill C-5, that somebody who committed a sexual assault could actually not go to jail but be on house arrest in the community where they committed the offence. We know that although judges do great work, sometimes they do not get it right. We did hear lots of testimony about the judge who said to a complainant to keep her knees together, and a few other things like that. Does the member share my concern that maybe there should be more controls put in place?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I could be incorrect, but I do not believe sexual assault is included in the package of reforms. Having said that, when we put people in front of the criminal justice system we need to rely on our judges to be able to provide sentences that are appropriate.

I know the hon. member was part of a study we did on indigenous women in the criminal justice system, and getting rid of mandatory minimum penalties was one of the recommendations that came out of that report. It is seeing women be sentenced to time in prison when time would be far better spent treating their addiction, dealing with mental health issues and dealing with those core issues rather than sending them to a federal institution.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. I have had the chance to talk with her at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and even at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security when I have had to replace my colleague at times.

We agree. As far as mandatory minimum sentences are concerned, we know and see that there are more indigenous women in prison, as I mentioned in my speech earlier.

Politics is all about perception. Does my colleague think it would have been a good idea to split Bill C-5 in two?

Let me explain. I agree that diversion measures are crucial and that opioids are a public health issue. However, we are debating mandatory minimum sentences at a time when crime is on the rise. My colleague knows that from the work at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, including on the issue of firearms.

In the current context, given the perception and the sense of public safety, it might have been a good idea to split Bill C-5 in two so that we could work on diversion and look at mandatory minimum sentences later. That would have given us more time to debate.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the work we have been able to do together in this place.

When it comes to mandatory minimum penalties, I do not agree, first of all, that the bill should be split. This is an important aspect of ensuring that women are not being sent to prison when they should not be sent to prison. The intent of this bill has been misconstrued in the debate today. I heard debate earlier from the Conservative Party that is giving Canadians the impression that public safety would be at risk, and it would not be.

Public safety would actually be enhanced if we are not sending people to prison. In my speech, I talked about how prisons are used to recruit people into gangs. If a young man, and it is predominantly young men, goes to prison and is not a gang member when he goes in, in all likelihood he will be a gang member when he is released. If we can find alternatives for those individuals, our public safety is greatly enhanced.

• (1350)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the areas we heard about over the course of this debate was people who are arrested and sent to prison for possession of narcotics for personal use. Often, what happens after they are eventually released is that they are prevented from being able to move on with their lives with respect to having criminal records and being able to find gainful employment.

Could the member elaborate on how this would help people be able to correct the behaviour, get on with their lives and become productive members of society?

Government Orders

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, the hon. member's question gives me the opportunity to talk about two women I met at the Edmonton Institution for Women. Both women had been trafficking in drugs. Both women were trafficking drugs because they were poor, had developed drug addictions of their own and had a man who was controlling them. They ended up in prison. They specifically told me that they were there because of mandatory minimums. With those women, we need to deal with the poverty issues they were facing and the drug addictions. They are not being served by sitting in the Edmonton Institution for Women.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. At the outset, I will note that I will be splitting my time with the member for Provencher.

Believe it or not, this is an area that is close to my heart as somebody who previously taught a sentencing class and somebody who worked in the criminal justice system, both in federal corrections as a defence lawyer and then as a Crown prosecutor. This is an area that I find a great deal of interest in. I have heard different perspectives, some more compelling than others today. What I find noteworthy is that most parliamentarians want to get to the same place when it comes to this debate. The question is: how do we get there?

I was quite struck by some of the commentary that we have heard today because it was talking about where we want to be. The question, in my view, is whether this bill actually gets us there. If we look at the issue, I believe everybody in the House would resoundingly and unanimously say that they want gun crime to go down. There is no doubt about it. Nobody wants to see any more people shot, especially innocent civilians caught in the proverbial crossfire. The question then is whether this is the right mechanism to do so. I note that not once does the word “victim” appear in Bill C-5 or Bill C-21.

Gun crime, in my view, and I think in the view of a lot of people in the House, is out of control. No one here wants to see more gun crime. We have two different approaches in Bill C-5 and Bill C-21. Bill C-5, with the elimination of mandatory minimums, has been a failed approach. I will note here something that is not brought up very often. The reality is that most mandatory minimums, when it comes to gun crimes, were actually struck down.

When we talk about a failed approach, if the approach failed, it has most recently been since the time that the mandatory minimums were struck down. We have essentially been operating in a time where mandatory minimums have been struck down for most gun crimes, but not for robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm or reckless discharge. Those minimums remain, but under section 95, for instance, that was struck down in the *R. v. Nur* decision many years ago. It is not as though we are talking about statistics as of last week, last month or last year when mandatory minimums were in effect. Most mandatory minimums have been struck down.

I want to now turn to what the parliamentary secretary said. When we look at the issue of overrepresentation, there will be no issue from me. I remember being a 22-year-old and a 23-year-old going to work in federal corrections for the first time and noting the overrepresentation of indigenous people, for instance, in the justice system. At that time, it was about six to one in terms of overrepre-

sentation, so it was very substantial. As a young man, it was something that I had to learn about and, frankly, the decisions I made had to address. That is something I am quite proud of.

It is also something I had to address as a prosecutor. We have the *R. v. Gladue* decision, the *Ipeelee* decision, and we also have subsection 718.2(e), I believe, that address this specific issue of overrepresentation. I was bound by those ethical precepts to address Gladue considerations in sentencing, and I always took great pride in putting those considerations at the forefront of my decision-making.

Where the parliamentary secretary and I part company is where he notes, on behalf of the government, that we are looking at alternatives to incarceration while keeping the public safe. This argument might hold water, but for the fact that there are serious offences that are included in this bill. I am going to fast-forward to them. For reckless discharge with a firearm, section 244(1) reads that, “Every person commits an offence who discharges a firearm at a person with intent to wound, maim or disfigure, or endanger life”.

● (1355)

We are talking about public protection. We are talking about gun violence. We want to reduce gun violence overall, yet this provision was included in Bill C-5. This allows what I would characterize commonly as a drive-by shooting. Rather than signal we are not going to allow a community-based sentence for such a serious offence, the question should be the length of incarceration. It is paradoxical.

I asked the parliamentary secretary about this, and I cannot remember his exact response, but essentially it was that I was using rhetoric. I am not using rhetoric. I am simply pointing out that a sentencing option now exists for drive-by shooters to serve their sentence in the community. I am not sure how we get here. I just do not know how the principles of sentencing in section 718 are enhanced and put forward by conditional sentence orders for drive-by shootings.

The hon. parliamentary secretary spoke about systemic racism, and he then spoke about corrections. My point is that I have no issue with targeting racism anywhere in Canada, none whatsoever. He talked about the custody ratings scale. As someone who has completed the custody ratings scale and who previously worked in corrections, I know that, if he wants to address the custody ratings scale and the overrepresentation of people in maximum security in federal custody itself, then he should do that. We would do that by amending the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, not by allowing conditional sentence orders for people who commit offences such as extortion with a firearm, robbery with a firearm, or most seriously, reckless discharge or discharge with intent.

The hon. parliamentary secretary talked about Conservatives wanting to lock people up and throw away the key. Nothing could be further from the truth. What we want is a safe society with just sentencing—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry to interrupt, but I will try again to get some silence in the outer chamber because the noise is very disturbing.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary referenced Newt Gingrich, saying that mandatory minimums were not successful in the United States. In my view, the United States' experiment with mandatory minimums was completely different than the Canadian approach. In the United States, sentences are often 10 times what they are here, and it has the three-strike rules. We do not have that in Canada.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

SHIREEN ABU AQLA AND GHUFRAN WARASNEH

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I ask members to say their names: Shireen Abu Aqla and Ghufuran Warasneh. They were women Palestinian journalists killed while doing their jobs, covering what was going on before their eyes.

They were killed by the Israeli military and, somehow this is even more shocking, their funerals were attacked by the Israeli military. The pallbearers were blocked as they tried to take them to their place of eternal rest. The Vatican representative in Jerusalem denounced this as brutally violating decades-old agreements to hold Jerusalem sacred to the three main theist religions, all of whom find spiritual significance in Jerusalem.

We must, in this country, say something. We must do something. We call for an independent inquiry into the killing of these two brave, women Palestinian journalists. Canada must step up.

* * *

OWO CHURCH ATTACK

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to express my sadness and anger at the horrific terrorist attack

Statements by Members

that took place in Owo, Nigeria, on June 5. I send my condolences to the families of the victims, to Nigeria and to our Nigerian community here in Canada.

This senseless act of hate occurred at St. Francis Xavier Church as the congregation was gathered for Sunday service. During the closing hymns of their Pentecost celebration, several armed men entered the church and opened fire, killing over 50 men, women and children.

These innocent worshippers were murdered simply because they were practising their Catholic faith. It is disheartening to see that in many countries around the world, including here in Canada, hate-based violence has been on the rise in recent years. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their community, regardless of their religion, culture, sexual orientation or ethnicity. Now, more than ever, we must stand together as one human family against hate and intolerance in all its forms.

* * *

SOUTH SURREY AND WHITE ROCK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour of rising in the House today to recognize the South Surrey and White Rock Chamber of Commerce, which is celebrating its 85th anniversary of serving the business community this year.

I am proud member of this organization, and I have enjoyed working with its leadership on multiple occasions to champion local businesses, including popular information town halls during the pandemic lockdowns. The chamber has always been a community builder, bringing together residents and businesses through unique events and initiatives, such as chamber chats and the recent “Let’s Get Local!” campaign, launched as part of the celebration this year. This campaign is all about supporting and promoting entrepreneurs and local businesses, large and small. It could not have come at a better time as Canada recovers from COVID-19.

* * *

[Translation]

END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR IN VIMY

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, students in Vimy and across Canada will be finishing their school year in the next few days. I still remember how stressful and exciting June was, what with exams, graduation ceremonies, prom and the start of summer vacation.

I am proud of the dedicated teachers and staff at the excellent schools in my riding of Vimy, such as Laval Junior Academy, École Socrates-Démosthène and École Secondaire Saint-Maxime. I encourage all students to keep working hard and stay curious, because they will become the future leaders who will enrich our society.

Statements by Members

[English]

A good education will lead to a better and more fulfilled life. I want to thank all the teachers, school staff and family members who support our future leaders in their endeavours.

To the students of Vimy and across Canada, I remind them that the sky is the limit, and I wish everyone a safe and memorable summer.

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[Translation]

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, ethnic cleansing continues to claim thousands of lives in Tigray, Ethiopia.

Sexual violence is being used as a means to destroy Tigrayan women's reproductive capacity. Children are suffering the effects of armed violence and hunger because of a blockade imposed by Amhara militia groups and Ethiopian government forces.

While the war in Ethiopia threatens to destabilize the Horn of Africa, the Tigrayan diaspora in Canada and Quebec has been demanding for the past two years that the Canadian government impose sanctions on the Ethiopian government for crimes against humanity in Tigray.

We can only admire the courage of the members of United Tegar Canada. These Tigrayan men and women are fighting hard for their cause while Canada turns a deaf ear. Tigrayans in Canada and Quebec have only one question for this government: When will it impose sanctions on the Ethiopian government and demand access to humanitarian aid for Tigrayans?

* * *

● (1405)

ANNE BOUTIN

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to pay tribute to Anne Boutin, who will celebrate her 35th anniversary this year as the executive director of Pointe aux jeunes youth centre in Gatineau, an organization that I visit often.

Ms. Boutin has dedicated her career to working with teens in the community. From the early days of her career, she has been determined to develop many bold and innovative projects that bring youth together and offer them a healthy, vibrant environment.

Ms. Boutin is steadfast and creative in her work, overseeing initiatives such as the Caravane à vélo, movies in the park, and winter coats for children in need.

On behalf of myself and all of my colleagues here in the House, I sincerely thank her for contributing so much to the youth of Gatineau. Happy 35th anniversary.

[English]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove, we celebrate Canadian Environment Week by planting trees. They are mere seedlings now, but in the process of growing up, they will add beauty to our community and greening for the planet.

On Saturday, June 4, with the help of Langley Environmental Partners Society, we gave away 500 native tree seedlings. Admittedly, 500 trees is not nearly as impressive as the two billion trees the government keeps promising, but our trees are real trees. As they grow up, they will add real pleasure and contribute to the greening of our planet.

I want to thank our friends at LEPS Nichole, Carmen and Ben; my volunteers Jane, Jim and Elizabeth; and Home Depot for hosting us once again. Of course, I also want to thank the constituents in my riding for celebrating Environment Week in this very real and tangible way.

* * *

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, languages are at the core of who we are. They are the means through which we express ourselves and our culture, share stories and pass on knowledge throughout the generations. Languages are at the heart of our cultural identity and integral to our collective well-being. Since colonization, hundred of indigenous languages and dialects in Canada have been lost. According to UNESCO, 75% of the remaining 17 indigenous languages in Canada are endangered.

As we mark National Indigenous History Month, I want to thank the elders, knowledge keepers and teachers of indigenous languages. I want to honour the resilience of those who persevered to maintain these precious languages. As we continue to march toward reconciliation, I want to highlight the work of the recently appointed Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, Ronald Ignace, who is here in Ottawa today.

Let us work together to support indigenous people's right to self-determination and the right to maintain, reclaim and revitalize their languages as a fundamental tenet of reconciliation.

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[Translation]

CDKL5 AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, June is CDKL5 Awareness Month.

[English]

Amelia is a five-year-old resident in my riding. She is a young girl in Pierrefonds—Dollard who suffers from this rare disease. CDKL5 is a neurodevelopmental condition caused by a rare gene mutation. It also is one of the most common forms of genetic epilepsy among young girls.

[Translation]

Amelia lives with this disorder, and it is an honour to talk about her bravery here today.

[English]

Amelia's parents have been making her home accessible for her, fundraising so that her home is safe. Throughout it all, Amelia has been cheerful, spreading love and joy all around her. CDKL5 Awareness Month's motto is, "Hope. Love. Cure." I encourage Canadians to learn about this disorder during this month.

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• (1410)

SASKATCHEWAN OIL AND GAS SHOW

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on June 1 and 2, the city of Weyburn hosted the Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Show 2022. The event was a resounding success, with people coming from all over the country to see and learn about the latest developments in Canada's vital oil industry. I send my congratulations and thanks to the chair, Dan Cugnet, and all of the organizing committee.

Unfortunately, one topic often discussed was the astronomical price of gas and the negative impacts it is having on the people of Saskatchewan. With the current price of gas hovering over \$2 per litre, people in rural areas are going to have to start choosing between things like driving to work that week or putting food on the table.

The people of Souris—Moose Mountain deserve more than a Liberal government that sits by and watches them suffer while refusing to use the tools they have available to fix the situation. My constituents and all Canadians deserve a break. While the Prime Minister continually says he has Canadians' backs, the only thing he has done is twist their backs to the verge of breaking.

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PRIDE SEASON

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no matter the age, rainbows are a symbol of hope, peace, equality, luck and new beginnings, and throughout Pride Season, we see the rainbow flag proudly displayed across Canada, because Pride is a time to celebrate our differences and, yes, support one another.

This Pride Season, we join the LGBTQ+ community across Canada. We acknowledge their history, the hardships they have endured and the progress that has been made while recommitting ourselves to continue building more inclusive communities where everyone is free to be who they are and love whom they love.

Statements by Members

This evening, youth from across the 905 region will come together to celebrate Pride Season in a conversation with our Minister of Tourism, and after a two-year hiatus, this Saturday, June 18, residents across York Region will join York Pride to celebrate Pride on the Riverwalk and walk the York Pride dream. I hope to see members there.

Happy Pride Season, everyone. Love is love.

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NHL COACH OF THE YEAR

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from the rolling ranch and farmland in Viking, Alberta, came a band of brothers who changed the hockey world forever. They all began their junior careers with our Red Deer Rustlers in the 1970s and 1980s before moving on to the WHL's Lethbridge Broncos. Their exceptional talents on the ice were only surpassed by their unique knowledge of the game, with four of the boys continuing on to ply their trade as managers and coaches.

Last week, the NHL Broadcasters Association voted Calgary Flames coach Darryl Sutter as a recipient of this year's Jack Adams Award as NHL coach of the year. Darryl took a team that had missed the playoffs the year before to sixth place this year.

In typical Darryl fashion, his reaction to the news was to thank family first and then remind everyone how proud he was that his brother, Brian, who had won the same award as a young coach in the 1990s, was the one to break the news to him. Whether at the rodeo grounds, working the land or behind the bench, Darryl's unique philosophy of life and excellence always shine through.

On behalf of hockey fans everywhere, we congratulate Darryl Sutter on his well-deserved award.

* * *

TRIBUTE TO A FATHER

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?" That is my father's favourite quote.

Daryl Kramp was first elected as a member of Parliament in 2004 and he served until 2015. He then went on to serve as our MPP from 2018 to 2022.

My dad is a thinker, a compassionate leader, a statesman and a man of his word. He is competitive in nature, steadfast in his love of family and has earned the respect of many. In his time in office, he and his team made a huge impact on the lives of many. He has delivered millions of dollars to our riding. He has proudly represented Canada abroad on many missions.

Statements by Members

For all who know him, they can expect a firm handshake and for him to look them in the eye. He will ask hard but thoughtful questions. He will encourage people to evaluate the why. We can anticipate that the love of his life, Carol Ann, his firecracker, my mother, is always by his side and often leading the charge.

Today, I am proud to rise in the House to wish my dad and my mentor a very happy birthday. Also, to all of the dads out there, may they enjoy a very special Father's Day this weekend.

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[Translation]

YOUTH IN HOCHELAGA

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of meeting with children and youth from Hochelaga who are part of the committee on the rights of the child at the Dr. Julien Foundation's social pediatric centres, the Garage à musique and La Ruelle d'Hochelaga.

Out of the mouths of babes come words of truth and wisdom, so the saying goes, and I promised these young people that I would bring their voices and the ideas they shared with me to the House.

Here is what they said: Take care of people sleeping on the street and people in wheelchairs so they have access to buildings and streets; build more soccer fields and basketball courts; have more splash pads in parks and more swimming pools; create green neighbourhoods; tell people to pollute less and switch to cleaner vehicles; make parks and alleys safer; have adults listen to us more; and empower student councils to make decisions.

These children have spoken out on issues that are important to the people of Hochelaga and across the country. I urge all my colleagues to meet with youth and children in their ridings.

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● (1415)

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the 11 years that I have been a member of this House, I have never seen this before.

The government services currently being provided to the public are awful, a total disaster. People are lining up at 3:00 a.m. in the hopes of getting their passports. One woman in my riding has been waiting for her EI cheque since February. This is June. Has anyone here ever tried to speak with someone at Service Canada? You have a better chance of winning the lottery.

I know of one case involving a foreign-born nurse who is going to lose his work permit if the deadline for his permanent resident status is not met. Let me be clear. We risk losing a nurse from our health care system because Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is not doing its job.

There are hundreds of cases like this. Our business owners are tearing their hair out, and people are living in uncertainty and anxiety. One of the essential duties of any government is to provide good services in a timely manner.

I am asking the Liberal government to get its act together and, out of respect for Canadians, allocate the resources needed to make things work.

* * *

RENÉ LÉVESQUE

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the word “dignity” is central to René Lévesque's legacy.

It is a dignity that is not always clear, but it takes on its full significance, even 35 years after his death and 100 years after his birth, when we take an inspiring look back at a time when Quebec values were solidified.

Yesterday, in Montreal, the Fondation René-Lévesque launched its commemoration of the centenary of his birth. The honorary president of the festivities is a prominent former leader from this Parliament, Lucien Bouchard, whom I salute.

At this event, we saw glimpses of what we each believe René Lévesque was like, based on the broad strokes of our shared understanding of his life. It is a life that looms large for my generation, but it is unknown to those for whom René Lévesque is merely a black-and-white photo in a book about a history that is no longer taught.

What a wonderful opportunity to teach young people about this giant, a man like no other, whose love for Quebeckers was so profound that he sacrificed everything to try to give them a country of their own.

“The future lasts a long time”, he would say. It is just beginning for Quebec, thanks to René Lévesque.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, airports are in chaos. The passport office is snowed under. Inflation is out of control. Ministers are misleading Parliament. The government's current priorities are an incoherent mess.

Bill C-5 would drop sentencing requirements on violent offenders and drug traffickers and open the door for sex offenders to serve community sentences near their victims. Bill C-21 pretends to address gun violence, but literally only affects people who obey Canada's existing strict firearms laws. Bill C-19 would remove any pretense of fiscal control from the undisciplined and unserious government. Bill C-11 is a bill that would give the CRTC the power to control what Canadians find and post on the Internet. None of these bills would do anything to fix any of Canada's serious problems.

If these are the government's priorities for the next two weeks, I suggest it quit now and spend the summer coming up with a real agenda to help Canadians.

• (1420)

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to recognize my constituent and a long-time dedicated employee of the House of Commons.

Mr. Claude St-Germain, assistant sergeant-at-arms and risk management and investigations officer, is retiring after 35 years of outstanding service. Mr. St-Germain joined the House of Commons security services on September 21, 1987, moving to Ottawa from his hometown of Sudbury.

[Translation]

Over the years, Claude rose through the ranks of the House of Commons Security Services, where he served as sergeant of the civilian unit before joining the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms.

[English]

His professionalism, dedication, commitment, kindness and vast knowledge of this place is deeply appreciated and will be greatly missed.

I ask all hon. members to join me in thanking Claude for 35 years of unfailing and dedicated service.

The Speaker: Before going to Oral Questions, I want to remind all hon. members that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly. If there is anything in their questions or answers, I would ask them to scratch it out now before I have to act. It will make my life a lot easier.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians should be able to trust that what their government tells them is the truth. Telling the truth is especially important when setting the serious precedent of invoking the Emergencies Act. We now know the Minister of Public Safety has been misleading Canadians. No police force asked for the act. He knows it. We all know it. There was no misunderstanding. The minister has lost credibility and trust.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and ask the Minister of Public Safety to step away from his duties?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when illegal blockades paralyzed our economy and hurt workers and communities, police, municipal and provincial leadership told us more tools were needed to bring them to an end. The former Ottawa police chief said at the time, “We cannot do it alone” and “We are grateful for what they provided, but we need more.” Even Alberta’s Minister of Municipal Affairs wrote that the local RCMP “have exhausted all local and regional options.” We listened. We determined that the Emergencies Act had the tools necessary to end this and it worked.

Oral Questions

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no misunderstanding, and this is too important to try to skew the words. This is vitally important.

No police officers or agencies asked for the act to be invoked. The Minister of Public Safety said that they did. He was not telling the truth. He misled Canadians. He cannot be trusted. He has lost the confidence of this House to do his job.

Has he lost the confidence of the Prime Minister? Will the Prime Minister ask him to resign?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Law enforcement should never be able to grant itself extraordinary powers. That is up to government to choose to do, as we did with the Emergencies Act.

Once in place, the Emergencies Act allowed police to, according to the commissioner of the RCMP, refuse entry of individuals travelling to the illegal protest with the intent of participating. It gave police “the power to arrest individuals who continue to supply fuel, food and other materials and to compel individuals to provide essential towing services”. Canadians remember how—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has abdicated and failed in his responsibility to be truthful with Canadians. He is a lawyer and a former federal prosecutor. He knows full well how to choose his words carefully. He knows full well how to be precise in his language, yet he said over and over again that law enforcement requested the Emergencies Act. Those were his words. We now know his words were not true.

How can the Prime Minister have any faith in the minister? Will he ask the minister to resign?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is crystal clear is how much the Conservative Party is hoping Canadians forget that the Conservatives stood with the illegal blockaders and that they stood with the people disrupting the daily lives, the economy and the communities of Canadians from coast to coast.

Police services needed more tools to deal with these blockades, and that is why we stepped up to protect Canadians. We invoked the Emergencies Act, and it worked to end the illegal blockades and keep Canadians safe.

* * *

• (1425)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our responsibility is to stand up for Canadians who have been misled by the minister.

Oral Questions

Canadians were shocked and disgusted to learn that last week-end, the Minister of Foreign Affairs sent one of her delegates to share champagne and caviar with Russian diplomats. While Putin and his thugs continue an unjustified and violent war on innocent civilians in Ukraine, can the Prime Minister tell us how, in the name of everything that is good, did he allow this to happen? We are supposed to be friends of Ukraine. Why did his minister send one of her delegates to party with Russian diplomats, who are still being allowed to stay in Canada?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not a half an hour ago, I got off a 45-minute phone call with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to talk about everything Canada has been doing and will continue to do, including leading conversations at the Summit of the Americas last week, and continuing to deliver on toughened sanctions and on more equipment and ammunition. We will continue to step up to support Ukraine.

Obviously, it was absolutely unacceptable for any Canadian representative to be at this event. It never should have happened, and we denounce it thoroughly.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his minister is either incompetent or complicit in what happened, maybe both. Either way, it is a complete failure on behalf of the Liberals. Canadians expect that their Minister of Foreign Affairs will lead by example, by condemning and isolating Putin's regime, not sending senior officials to party at the Russian embassy.

The Prime Minister and his foreign affairs minister claim to be great friends of Ukraine. I hope he apologized to President Zelenskyy, because what kind of friend sends a delegate to their enemy's house to enjoy champagne and caviar?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Leader of the Opposition, and indeed all Canadians, that President Zelenskyy and I had an extremely positive conversation where this issue did not come up because, obviously, there are much more important issues, like how we continue to deliver munitions that are desperately needed by Ukrainians, how we continue to mobilize international support for Ukraine in condemning Russia, how we continue to engage every single day to stand up for Ukraine, and, indeed, how Canada is so completely and totally unequivocal in its support for Ukraine and its condemnation of Russia.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I read The Globe and Mail every day, and I learned from this morning's edition that the government's own experts told it that its 2030 greenhouse gas emissions targets were not feasible before they were unveiled.

That means that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the Prime Minister knowingly made bogus announcements. Can the Prime Minister at least do what he often does and apologize for misleading Quebecers and Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we have one of the most comprehensive emis-

sions reduction plans in the world. It will deliver clean air and a strong economy for all Canadians.

Experts agree that our plan credibly outlines the contributions that every sector must make to achieve our climate targets. The Canadian Climate Institute, Équiterre, Clean Prosperity and other leading scientists have all approved our final plan.

We promised an ambitious and achievable plan and that is exactly what we delivered.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is some climate humour right there.

His very own experts, the ones he quotes when it suits him, say that the only way we just might be able to meet the targets is, one, forget about this sequestration nonsense and, two, cut production.

Will the Prime Minister at the very least cut all oil industry subsidies?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the analysis my dear colleague is referring to was a premature comment that did not take into account new measures, investments and regulations.

That is why prestigious organizations, such as the Canadian Climate Institute, the Pembina Institute, the Business Council of Canada and Petroleum Technology Alliance Canada, have confirmed the feasibility of our plan and modelled projections consistent with those laid out in our emissions reduction plan.

We have the only real, concrete plan that can deliver on the targets, and that is what Canadians need to know.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one out of every four Canadians in this country has reported that they would not be able to afford their home if interest rates continue to rise. The Bank of Canada estimates that mortgage payments will increase by 45% by the year 2025. In response, the Liberal government said that it is not its fault that inflation is going up. That does not cut it. That is not going to help Canadians keep their homes.

Will the Prime Minister increase financial supports directly to Canadians by increasing the GST tax credit and the Canada child benefit to help families keep their homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know full well that housing prices are a real concern, especially for middle-class Canadians hoping to buy their first home.

Oral Questions

Through budget 2022, we are making investments to double housing construction this decade, help Canadians buy their first home with extra savings, curb unfair practices that drive up the price of housing, and support the construction of affordable housing. Of course, there is much more work to do, and we are watching interest rates with concern as well, but we will continue to be there for Canadians with housing affordability, because that is the strong foundation on which an economy is built.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one in four Canadians will not be able to keep their home if interest rates continue to rise.

That means some Canadians will lose their homes, and the Liberal government says it is not its fault if inflation continues to rise. This shows a lack of leadership. The government must act now to help families.

Will the government increase direct financial assistance to families who need it to keep their homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, inflation is indeed a global issue, but we have a responsibility to be there to help Canadians who are facing these price increases.

As far as housing goes, we know that it is a real cause for concern, particularly for middle-class Canadians who hope to buy their first home. That is why the 2022 budget invests in doubling home construction over the next decade, helping Canadians buy their first home with a dedicated savings account, and curbing unfair practices that drive up housing prices.

We will continue to be there for people.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a Minister of Public Safety who has repeatedly said that the serious decision to invoke the Emergencies Act was made at the request of police authorities.

All the police forces deny having requested the Emergencies Act. The minister knows this, and as a former Crown prosecutor, he knows the importance of telling the truth and nothing but the truth.

Since he cannot take back what he said and a major decision about civil liberties was made, will he now do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we understand our responsibility when it comes to public safety. That is exactly why we invoked the Emergencies Act.

We sought advice from police forces. We used that advice to make the decision to invoke the act.

I want to know why those on the other side did not offer to cover the expenses for their own role in extending the illegal blockade. That was even worse; it was very bad. They need to offer to cover those expenses now.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Emergencies Act cannot be invoked when other legislation can do the job.

The Minister of Public Safety knew that, which is why he justified his decision by stating repeatedly that the police had requested these extraordinary powers. No police officer, police force, chief of police or commissioner has confirmed the minister's assertion. There is no misunderstanding. This Liberal minister no longer has the confidence of Canadians.

When will he be honest with Canadians and resign?

• (1435)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition keeps rejecting the RCMP commissioner's testimony.

She was the one who said that the Emergencies Act was necessary to restore public safety. The Commissioner of the RCMP said that, yes, the government did consult police forces before invoking the Emergencies Act. The Conservatives were the ones who helped prolong the illegal blockade. It was very bad. There should be an offer to cover those expenses now.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety continues to spread misinformation and cannot be trusted. As a former Crown prosecutor, he knows full well that his choice of words matters. He would have also known, when invoking the Emergencies Act in Canada, that everything he said would be tested against the law. However, the minister cannot find anyone to corroborate his story that law enforcement asked for the Emergencies Act to be invoked.

The only matter left unresolved is the minister's resignation, so when will he resign?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for highlighting my professional experience as a federal prosecutor before I came into politics. I got into politics to make sure we could protect Canadians. On this side of the House, we know what is necessary when it comes to the protection of the health and safety of Canadians. That is why we invoked the Emergencies Act. We obviously consulted police. We sought their advice. We heard the commissioner say before the committee that we got that advice and we used it.

Oral Questions

I just want to know why it is, to this point in time today, that the Conservatives refuse to apologize for their role in putting in danger the lives of the people who live in Ottawa and right across the country with their reckless statements.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister outlined his ministerial standards of conduct in his “Open and Accountable Government” document, and let me quote what it said:

To be worthy of Canadians’ trust, we must always act with integrity. This is not merely a matter of adopting the right rules, or of ensuring technical compliance with those rules. As Ministers, you and your staff must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality....

The Minister of Public Safety no longer meets any of those standards. When will he resign?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be unequivocally clear that we invoked the Emergencies Act amidst “unprecedented...acts of civil disobedience”, in the words of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which also said, I might add, that we invoked the Emergencies Act to fill in existing “gaps” as it related to existing authorities.

I wonder if that member would hold the same standard against the comments of the interim CPC leader, who said, in the middle of the blockades, to make this the Prime Minister's problem, to make it a political problem. That was wrong, she knows it, and she should apologize.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is wrong is that the Liberals froze bank accounts, discarded our democracy and ignored our Charter of Rights, all predicated on a fabrication. Invoking the Emergencies Act was an unprecedented power grab, all based on misinformation. No police force ever asked for the Emergencies Act to be invoked. The fact is that the public safety minister has been caught misleading Parliament and deceiving Canadians.

Will he do the honourable thing? Will he do the right thing? Will he resign?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if that member had read the Emergencies Act, he would have seen that all the measures we introduced were charter-compliant and were absolutely targeted toward an unprecedented act of civil disobedience, which the Conservatives continue to deny. It is they who are engaging in revisionism. It is they who engaged in reckless abandon and who, while Ottawa residents were unable to go to work, take their kids to child care or navigate the city, were encouraging blockaders to double down. They put at risk the lives of the people in this city. It is wrong and they should apologize.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a fact. On April 28, the public safety minister said, “It is also a fact that we invoked the Emergencies Act only after police forces agreed.” We do not believe him, Canadians do not believe him and police forces do not believe him. They do not believe him, because this never happened. No police force ever asked for the Emergencies Act to be invoked.

What has happened, and this is the fact, is that the public safety minister has been caught misleading Canadians and misleading Par-

liament. No more talking points and no more skirting the blame. Will he do the right thing and resign?

• (1440)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, talk about disinformation. Talk about a distortion of the record. We heard from the commissioner of the RCMP, who went before committee and said that she needed to use the Emergencies Act to get the job done as quickly as possible. She spoke about the consultation between government and police forces to ensure that we use their advice to make that decision in an informed way.

It is the Conservatives who continue to bury their heads in the sand. In what was an unprecedented moment of civil disobedience, we worked with law enforcement to protect public safety. It was the Conservatives who undermined it.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, internal documents obtained by The Globe and Mail show that when the minister announced his plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, he knew that it was a lost cause. He knew that his department projected that the oil and gas industry would reach only 53% of its reduction target for 2030. He knew that the only way the industry would reach that target is if it cut production, but the minister refuses to force it to do so. He knew that he was publishing a plan that was doomed to fail.

Why did he mislead Quebecers?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. I completely disagree with her characterization.

Our reduction plan is ambitious, but achievable. It shows, sector by sector, how Canada will meet its targets. It is the most transparent plan in the history of the country. We are not the ones saying so. It is a whole host of non-governmental organizations and experts.

The analysis that The Globe and Mail obtained was one of many initial internal contributions, but that analysis does not take into account all of the new measures that have been announced, including investments and regulations. Environment Canada organized many technical information sessions with external experts, and we have been completely transparent on how we got our figures.

The Speaker: Order. Before we move on, I would like to remind all members that it is hard to hear what is happening in the House when there are so many discussions going on.

[English]

It is nice to see members get along and talk, but please either whisper lower or temporarily go out and come back in a moment or so.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Repentigny.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, consider this. It was proven by his own department in the leaked documents that the only way the oil and gas industry can get anywhere near its 81-megatonne reduction target for 2030 is by cutting production.

Despite knowing this, not only is the minister not asking the industry to cut production, he is actually increasing production. A week after tabling his plan, he approved the Bay du Nord project.

How would a former environmentalist like him describe a minister who tables such a plan, knowing that it has no credibility?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would invite my colleague to read the entire Globe and Mail article, and not just the headline, because two experts are quoted who believe that what the oil industry is being asked to do is indeed ambitious. What Canada hopes to do is ambitious.

I would have expected the Bloc Québécois to support an ambitious approach in the fight against climate change.

This plan focuses on the lives of over 30,000 Canadians. It has been applauded by organizations such as the Pembina Institute, the World Wildlife Fund, Environmental Defence, Équiterre and the David Suzuki Foundation.

Our government will ensure that this plan is implemented so that Canada can meet its targets.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps saying that the increased production of oil will not affect his plan, but his own department warned him that such is not the case.

What is worse, the minister does not even include the extra barrels in his calculation. When he approved the Bay du Nord project, they were talking about 300 million barrels. That figure rose to 500 million last week and is now expected to go as high as one billion barrels.

The minister, however, keeps saying that everything is fine, that no matter how many barrels are produced, it will all be net-zero.

I could not even make this up. Is the notion of green oil a matter of wishful thinking or is it just incorrect?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I encourage my hon. colleague to read the latest report from Canada's official greenhouse gas inventory, which showed that, although oil production in Canada increased by 700,000 barrels in 2019 compared to 2018, greenhouse gas emissions were reduced in 2019 and in 2020. This all shows that our plan is working.

Oral Questions

We have decided to tackle pollution. We will reduce our methane emissions by nearly 45% in the oil and gas sector by 2025. Our objective is to increase that figure to 75% by 2030, which is the most ambitious objective in the world.

* * *

● (1445)

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on multiple occasions, the Minister of Public Safety said that police forces had requested the Emergencies Act. We now know that was not true. Even worse, the minister doubled down on his false claims on multiple occasions in the House, in committee and in the media. He even sent his deputy minister to committee to try to clean up his mess, saying he was misunderstood.

There is no misunderstanding here. He knows exactly what he did. He misled Canadians and he knows there must be consequences.

Will he do the honourable thing, the right thing, and announce his resignation today?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to double down on the truth, which is on this side of the House.

The truth of the matter is that an unprecedented moment occurred last winter when we saw blockades at ports of entry. We saw people put out of work. We saw families hurt. We saw lives endangered. We took the decision that was necessary, as informed by the consultation and advice we got from police services and as we heard the commissioner of the RCMP say at committee.

I do not understand why, to this moment, the Conservatives have refused to accept their egregious role in extending the danger that was put on public safety as a result of comments made during that unprecedented moment. They should apologize.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is critical here is getting to the truth, because the truth is critical for the parliamentary committee investigating the invocation of the act. The truth is also critical for the judicial inquiry charged with investigating the rationale for invoking the act.

What is known is that the truth has been corrupted by the Minister of Public Safety. He knows his words matter. Making false claims in trying to justify invoking the Emergencies Act matters. It matters a lot.

Will the minister do the right thing, the honourable thing, and resign?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only honourable thing is for the member to look to the interim Conservative Party leader of Canada and ask her to resile from the comments she made during the illegal blockade, which put at risk public safety. It is an absolutely egregious thing to have done. On this side, we were working 24-7 with law enforcement to protect Canadians. It was the Conservatives who put their safety at risk. That was wrong and they should apologize.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about things being egregious and unprecedented, and what is unprecedented is the lengths the minister will go to spread his disinformation and continue to try to divide and stigmatize people the government disagrees with. It is the Liberals' pattern to try to punish Canadians who disagree with them.

On April 26, he said it was the advice of law enforcement that he followed to invoke the Emergencies Act, but we know that is not true. We heard it directly from police.

Will the minister come clean with Canadians, tell them that invoking emergency powers was actually a Liberal power grab and resign today?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is astonishing to hear the member ask that question when I have repeatedly cited law enforcement community leaders who said they needed the Emergencies Act, that it helped to restore public safety and that it helped to fill in existing gaps among authorities, which were ineffective at restoring public safety.

The member should be looking right down the aisle at his interim Conservative Party leader, who undermined public safety as a result of comments by trying to make this a political problem for the Prime Minister. That was fundamentally wrong.

They are soft on crime, they are weak on law and order and they should apologize.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answers are not credible. It was unsafe, yet they continued to let all parliamentarians and all staff come into the precinct. The minister has lost absolutely all credibility—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I have to interrupt the hon. member. I am hearing shouting back and forth and I am having a hard time hearing the question.

Go ahead, from the top, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the minister has lost all credibility. He says it was unsafe, but they continued to let all parliamentarians, ministers, the Prime Minister and residents of downtown Ottawa come down here.

The risk Canadians have is a minister and cabinet who are spreading misinformation. We have a minister who refuses to take accountability and instead divides and stigmatizes Canadians, looking to pit neighbour against neighbour and government against Canadians if they do not agree with him.

Will the minister do the honourable thing, stand before the House and deliver to the Prime Minister his resignation today?

● (1450)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is June 14 and the Conservatives have still buried their heads in the sand about what is necessary to protect the health and safety of Canadians. That is why we invoked the Emergencies Act. We sought and consulted with police forces before we took that decision, and it is the Conservatives who undermined public safety. What they should do is take a mirror and take a hard look at themselves for the way they contributed to the undermining of public safety. It was wrong and there should be an apology today.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, internal documents show that the government knew the Prime Minister's net-zero reduction plan had net-zero chance of meeting its emissions targets. Well, what a surprise. I remember when the Prime Minister went to COP26 and promised the world that he was bringing in an emissions cap. Then he came back to Canada and promoted massive oil increases through Bay du Nord and TMX.

The planet is on fire and generations of Canadians will pay the price for his inability to deliver a credible plan on a just transition or the emissions cap. Does the Prime Minister not understand this?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what strikes me is that the member does not seem to have read the 2030 emissions reduction plan, because it is a plan to reduce our emissions by 40% to 45%. There is a plan for net zero by 2050, and that plan is coming.

If he had read the 2030 plan, the member opposite would see that we have, for the first time in the history of this country, shown how we get to our 2030 targets per sector. That has been validated by a number of experts, including the ex-leader of the B.C. Green Party, IPCC scientists and a number of other experts across the country.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are facing a disaster at the border. Preventable staff shortages are causing endless delays at our land crossings. Small businesses are suffering and Canadians cannot travel. The NDP has called for a safe border task force since the beginning of the pandemic that would work with all sectors to relieve this pressure, but the Liberals have refused and it has led to confusion and frustration. These problems are not going away.

Will the government finally put together a safe border task force that will help Canadian travellers and businesses?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for raising this important issue. I know that he speaks on behalf of his constituents, who are in a border community that I am very familiar with. Of course, the government is committed to collaborating with my hon. colleague to set up this task force and to use other existing platforms to ensure we have a smooth flow of commercial goods and manufacturing goods, while at the same time protecting the integrity of our borders.

I want to thank my colleague for his advocacy during the illegal blockades. He, unlike the Conservatives, understood that there was an unprecedented act of civil disobedience. It was thanks to his collaboration, and that of all members on this side of the House, that we were able to restore public safety, no thanks to the Conservatives.

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as always, many Canadians are looking forward to summer, one of the best times of the year to be outdoors with family and friends. However, as firefighters in many of our communities are warning us, we are also entering wildfire season. Thanks to the impacts of climate change, Canadians are at a greater risk than ever before.

Can the Minister of Emergency Preparedness explain to this chamber what the federal government is doing to help communities at risk?

Hon. Bill Blair (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for this very important question.

Our government shares the concern we all share about the increasing severity and frequency of wildfires and all natural disasters. That is why we have invested, through budget 2022, over \$515 million to help provinces, territories and indigenous communities mitigate and respond to wildfires that threaten our communities. This includes equipment for firefighters and training that specifically incorporates indigenous traditional knowledge in fire management.

Throughout the coming fire season, we will continue to work with our provincial and territorial partners. We are prepared to act in response to any request for assistance.

Oral Questions

• (1455)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote what Andrew Coyne wrote in *The Globe and Mail*: “If the Liberals were trying to convince people they had something to hide with regard to the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act, they could hardly do a better job.”

The situation is serious. The Minister of Public Safety misled Canadians. He must resign. When will he step down?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we, on this side of the House, have nothing to hide. We are very proud of the work this government did during the illegal blockades. It was an unprecedented situation. We sought the advice of police when making decisions. The Conservatives are the ones who endangered public safety with the comments of the interim leader of the Conservative Party. They need to give us some answers right now. This has gone on far too long.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Andrew Coyne also wrote, and I quote, “well, there is a penalty for this sort of thing. And the penalty, in the conventions of Westminster-style parliaments, is resignation.” The minister basically misled Canadians.

When Jody Wilson-Raybould was minister, she acted according to her principles. The Minister of Public Safety has no principles. When will he resign?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House did the necessary work in an unprecedented situation. We sought advice from police forces when deciding whether to invoke the Emergencies Act. The Conservatives were the ones who posed a threat during these illegal blockades. They need to look in the mirror and apologize for their remarks at that time.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 26, the Minister of Public Safety said, with regard to emergency measures, “I don't want to speak for every last serving member of law enforcement, but there was a very strong consensus that we needed to invoke the act.”

We now know that there was no such consensus at any time. He has misled Canadians. He no longer deserves the confidence of the House.

Will the minister do the only honourable thing left to do: apologize and resign?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible that the member has never listened to what the head of law enforcement said about the situation and the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said that the Emergencies Act was needed to ensure public safety. It advised us when making our decision in this process. The Conservatives should apologize for the troubling role they played during the illegal blockades.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always someone else's fault. Being a minister comes with great responsibility.

The minister stated several times, "It was on the advice of law enforcement that we invoked the Emergencies Act." However, law enforcement never asked for draconian measures.

Rex Murphy wrote in the National Post that, for the sake of his integrity, the minister should resign.

What is he waiting for—

The Speaker: Order. Everything seemed to be going well today and I want it to continue.

I will let the hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis finish her question.

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Speaker, my question is very simple.

He misled the House, so he should apologize and step down. Period.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Official Languages told La Presse that the provisions in Bill C-13 regarding federally regulated businesses are exactly the same as those found in Quebec's Bill 96. It would be a serious mistake to believe that.

Bill 96 would require that all businesses in Quebec comply with the Charter of the French Language. Bill C-13, however, allows businesses to choose whether to comply with the Charter of the French Language. The minister knows that there is a difference between being required to use French at work and being able to choose between English or French.

Why is she misleading Quebecers?

• (1500)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the serious mistake here is that the Bloc Québécois does not want to work with us on Bill C-13. We designed this bill to do everything we can to protect and promote our beautiful language.

Once again, we have a shared objective with the Bloc and the Government of Quebec. We want to do whatever we can to protect our beautiful language.

I do not understand why the Bloc and the opposition members do not want to work with us to pass this bill as soon as possible.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is trying to pull a fast one. She was right yesterday when she said that the only minority language in Canada is French. Those are her words. She said it was French, end of story.

Why then does her Bill C-13 protect the majority language, English? Why is she giving the Air Canadas of this world the choice to operate in English in Quebec? Why is she giving these companies the choice to circumvent the Charter of the French Language?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, French is in decline in North America, including in Canada.

Yes, French is the only minority language in Canada. That is why we are moving forward with an ambitious bill. Like the Government of Quebec, we want to do everything we can to protect and promote our beautiful language.

Again, I hope that the Bloc Québécois and all members of the opposition will work with us and stop playing political games. This bill will make a real difference. This new version of the bill has more teeth. I hope they will work with us to get it passed as soon as possible.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is desperate to blame someone else, but there is only one person who is under investigation and that is the Minister of Public Safety. The state of his credibility is grievous and irremediable. It is completely untenable to have a Minister of Public Safety who misleads the public about advice he is receiving from the police.

Respectfully, so that his important office can be filled by someone who the public can trust, will the minister please resign?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to inform my colleague, as I have on many occasions, that we invoked the Emergencies Act because it was necessary. We invoked the Emergencies Act because, on this side of the House, we know what it takes to protect the health and safety of Canadians. It is Conservatives who need to take a hard look in the mirror and really reflect on the way in which they put public safety at risk by trying to make it a political problem for the Prime Minister. We will never apologize for doing what we needed to do, which was to invoke the Emergencies Act, yes, after consulting and, yes, seeking the advice of police, as colleagues heard the commissioner of the RCMP say before committee.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is only one person who is under investigation, and that is the Minister of Public Safety. The minister broke the law. The minister continues to mislead Canadians about why the government invoked the Emergencies Act. On May 2, he said, “At the recommendation of police, we invoked the Emergencies Act to protect Canadians”. We know now that it was never requested.

Will the minister acknowledge that he deceived Canadians about his actions and resign from his position?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here we are again, and Canadians should pay very close attention to the language that is being used by Conservatives, saying that there is some investigation that does not exist. They know that.

I will say something else. This is consistent with the pattern of behaviour of reckless abandon when it comes to public safety. When it comes to the economy, perhaps Canadians should buy themselves out of affordability issues with cryptocurrency. How does that sound today? It is not so great.

I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker. We know what it takes to protect Canadians, and we will always do what is necessary.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is only one person who is under investigation, and that is the Minister of Public Safety. The minister broke the law. How can Canadians be expected to trust the minister when he continues to spread misinformation about the Emergencies Act? The minister said that invoking the Emergencies Act was on the recommendation of authorities, but it has been confirmed by law enforcement that it was not in fact true.

Will the minister take accountability for his words and resign?

• (1505)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague enjoys certain privileges in the House that allow her to be rather reckless and loose with language. I invite her to say those words outside of the House. I scarcely think she would, because she knows it is not true. I invite the House to actually encourage her to retract those words. It debases the importance of this debate.

We will always do what is necessary to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec announced over \$40 million for Quebec's tourism industry.

Le Monastère des Augustines in Quebec City will be receiving \$100,000 to modernize its facilities, while the Microtel project in Lachute will be getting a \$1-million contribution toward the construction of a 72-room hotel.

Can the minister update the House on these important measures to support Quebec's tourism sector and therefore its economy?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Sport and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Lac-Saint-Louis for his question. I would also like to highlight the outstanding job he is doing for the people in his riding.

Tourism accounts for \$102 billion in economic activity in Canada, 1.8 million jobs and 2% of Canada's GDP. These figures demonstrate how vital the tourism industry is to Canada's economy.

The \$40 million in funding that was announced will benefit 60 projects in 50 cities across Quebec. We know that the pandemic continues to affect the tourism sector, which is why we are actively supporting it and will always be there for it.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to spread misinformation and cannot be trusted. Like me, the minister was a lawyer in his prior life. We both taught in a law school. I taught about the necessity of being honest. I trust he was honest with the courts.

Being honest with Parliament is even more important. He repeatedly told the House that law enforcement requested the Emergencies Act. They did not. This misled Canadians.

Will he resign?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all we have heard today in the exhibit of the trial of who can tell the truth and who cannot are the Conservatives, who have deliberately continued to mislead on what has been said in the House on the state of affairs last winter when there was an unprecedented act of civil disobedience, on the fact that the government, yes, consulted police and, yes, sought their advice prior to the invocation of the Emergencies Act, as we heard the RCMP say before the committee. That is what has gone on today, and the Conservatives should be apologizing for their role in prolonging those blockades. It is wrong.

The Speaker: I just want to remind the hon. minister that, in the House, we can say that someone is misleading someone. That is an accident. People do that. That is normal, but “deliberately misleading” is not acceptable language in the House.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will expect the apology afterward. How dare the minister wag his finger at me, given his conduct in the House. The minister needs to stop diverting, stop deflecting and start divulging. He said that law enforcement asked for the Emergencies Act. They did not. He misled Canadians and put his own integrity into question.

Will he offer his resignation today, yes or no?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat entertained by my hon. colleague who complains about wagging fingers and then proceeds to wag fingers at the government. He ought to live up to the high standards that he purports to set for us, which includes being very straight up with his interim Conservative Party of Canada leader, who made recklessly abandoned statements during the blockade—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

I just want to make sure that everything is calm now.

We want to hear the question from the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

• (1510)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me update the minister. His use of the Emergencies Act is subject to a judicial inquiry and a parliamentary committee. The minister is misleading Canadians. The minister has been misleading Parliament. He is undermining Canadians' confidence in democracy and in our justice system. He has had all of question period. He has had many months to finally come to the realization of what he has done. He has misled Canadians. He has misled Parliament. It is time to resign.

Will the minister resign?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very confident, on this side of the House, that the invocation of the Emergencies Act helped to restore public safety, helped to ensure that Canadians could get back to work, helped to ensure that family members could take their kids to day care and helped to ensure that we could restore public safety.

We will always defend that decision. We will never apologize for doing what is necessary, and it is the Conservatives who have some serious atoning to do after their performance today in question period.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we witness the devastating effects of gun violence in Canada. My constituents in Surrey Centre are no different. As violence increases, we find ourselves relying on programs such as the Surrey Anti-gang Family Empowerment Program, which provides a coordinated approach to address youth gang violence.

Recently, in a survey conducted by my office, my constituents identified community safety and crime prevention as the issues of greatest importance.

Can the minister please update the House on how strengthening gun control will keep our community safe?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for all of his hard work and leadership on keeping our communities safe. As he knows, and all members know, we have introduced Bill C-21, which, among other things, would introduce a national handgun freeze and would take on, yes, organized crime by raising maximum sentences for illegal traffickers and would reverse the alarming trend around the connection between domestic violence and guns. It is my sincere hope that we will be able to work with all members and yes, maybe, who knows, the Conservatives too. We live in hope, so that we can better protect all Canadians from the scourge of gun violence.

* * *

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indigenous women, girls and diverse gendered individuals continue to experience high rates of violence, go missing and are murdered, yet out of the \$724.1 million allocated for the violence prevention strategy announced in 2020, guess how much the Liberals have spent? Zero.

I have something they can spend it on: an adequate 24-7 low-barrier safe space in Winnipeg for women, girls and diverse gendered individuals. It will save lives.

I ask the minister: Why are the Liberals hoarding this money while people continue to lose their lives?

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the violence that we have seen in Winnipeg is absolutely heartbreaking. Too many vulnerable women, girls, two-spirit and LGBTQQIA+ people have lost their lives. Frankly, one person is too many. The work of frontline organizations like Velma's House is absolutely essential. They are literally saving lives. We are working across government to find immediate solutions for a 24-7 safe space because we know that time is of the essence.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new UN report on the occupied Palestinian territory in Israel has alarming findings: increased discrimination, ongoing human rights abuses and a deepening asymmetrical conflict. Israel clearly has no intention of ending the illegal occupation.

This UN report adds to the list of reputable reports that the government is ignoring. Human rights are human rights everywhere in the world. The cycle of violence will continue as long as the government stays silent. Why will the government not even consider this United Nations report and revisit its policy towards Palestine and Israel?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again it is an honour to talk about the steadfast friendship that we have with Israel. We are a friend and ally of Israel and we are a friend of the Palestinian people.

In that context, we are committed to the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We know that this is not easy. It takes time, energy and commitment, and that will always include the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel. This is consistent with Canada's long-standing position. We will continue to work with every member of this House to make that vision a reality.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I am afraid that is all the time we have today.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Her Excellency Elzbieta Witek, Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, accompanied by a delegation including the Deputy Marshal of the Senate.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: I believe the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has two minutes and 30 seconds left of further debate.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have only two and a half minutes left for my speech on Bill C-5. The point I want to emphasize to the House is this: There is a middle ground.

Government Orders

We have talked about what the government wishes to accomplish and we have considered how the government should go about accomplishing it. What I would propose and have proposed is to add a mechanism to this law that would allow mandatory minimums to remain in place but make an exception, by way of an exceptional circumstances provision, for somebody who represents a group that is overrepresented in the justice system or has had a life-changing event. This would enable the government to maintain mandatory minimum sentences, but in exceptional circumstances they would not apply.

This would do exactly what my counterparts on the other side of the House have advocated. It would allow for judicial discretion where necessary, but would still communicate to the public that gun offences will be taken seriously and that things like robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm and reckless discharge, as in a drive-by shooting, would still result in a substantial sentence, absent very significant circumstances.

Such a provision would be constitutional, and it is my belief that it would strike an appropriate middle ground. I wish the government had done the same in this circumstance; it did not, and I exhort the government to do so in the future.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent speech. His experience in the past has really made him knowledgeable on this issue.

I am very concerned about this bill and the fact that drug traffickers and drug producers could end up with house arrest. I think this would exacerbate the drug addiction crisis that is happening in Canada. Does the member agree?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, we are experiencing an opioid epidemic, and at times I have seen the impacts of that first-hand. There should be serious consequences, particularly when it comes to the trafficking of certain opiates, like fentanyl. I believe we should be denouncing and deterring such behaviour with substantial jail sentences, and in my view a minimum sentence for trafficking in things like fentanyl would be appropriate.

• (1520)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in our region we have seen an unprecedented level of civil problems because of the opioid epidemic in downtown areas, particularly in communities like Timmins, North Bay and Sudbury, where people are afraid to go downtown. When we have community meetings, the police have been really clear in saying that they cannot police their way out of what has become a massive medical crisis. People's lives are falling through the cracks here.

Would my hon. colleague agree with me that we need to take a medical treatment approach to the people who are on the streets and find a way to start to address this crisis that is not only killing people by the thousands but is making our streets increasingly unsafe?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I know he cares a great deal about this issue and his constituents.

Government Orders

When we look at penalties, they are just one part of a bigger puzzle. When we look at Bill C-5, we are asking what the appropriate penalty is. If the member were to consult our recent election platform from 2021, he would see that we have been advocating treating substance abuse disorder as the health problem it is.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention. I certainly have a lot of respect for his experience.

From his experience as a prosecutor, what kind of message does he think it sends to criminals, as well as to the victims and their families, when we have bills like Bill C-21, which attacks law-abiding firearms owners, and Bill C-5, which would lessen mandatory sentencing? What kind of message is this sending to Canadians, to victims and their families, and also to criminals?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague brings up a great point.

Section 718 of the Criminal Code deals with sentencing, and it talks about the principles of denunciation and deterrence. When we think about these things, we are asking, "What message are we sending to the public?"

I would answer the question with a question: What message do we send when a reckless discharge of a firearm can result in a community-based sentence?

In my view, the message that we are sending is that we are not serious enough on this issue. I am sure that everybody in the House has their heart ache when they hear about anybody being shot, particularly an innocent civilian, and I am worried about our messaging when we do not go hard on these very serious offences.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask another question, because I have a lot of concerns about Bill C-5 when it comes to victims of sexual assault.

I have spent a great portion of my career here in Parliament defending the status of women in Canada, and to think that someone could be sexually assaulted and their attacker could actually get house arrest in the same community is very worrisome to me.

Does the member have a comment on the perspective of the courts?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, this question allows me to raise a vital point.

The sentence for robbery is a maximum of life in prison. Breaking and entering has a maximum sentence of life in prison. These are offences that we often see. Robbery is taking property by force from somebody. Sexual assault is taking a person's dignity by force, a person's sexual inviolability, yet sexual assault has a maximum of a 10-year sentence, while robbery has a maximum of life imprisonment. Why the discrepancy?

Parliament needs to act on this.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege to rise in the House and to speak to legislation.

I will start by making the point that I find the intent behind this bill, at least expressed by the Prime Minister, to be troubling. I will admit it is rare that I find merit in any legislation put forward by the

Liberal government. However, in this case, as we get into the conversation about drugs, rather than exclusively treating simple drug possession as a criminal issue, we need to also recognize it as a health issue. There is some merit in that. That is where we are as a party, and I think that is where we are as a country, so that is the conversation we should be having. The problem is that, as usual, the Liberal government has taken a nugget of common sense and buried it so deeply into a larger piece of legislation that is so rife with contradictions and virtue signalling that, unfortunately, that semblance of a good idea gets lost.

We saw this just last week when Conservatives asked the government to break Bill C-21, which I also look forward to speaking to, into two bills. We asked that the government do this because we agreed with parts of the bill as they appeared to have merit and we thought they were a good idea. It is always a good idea to protect women and children and that is something everyone in this House can get behind. We asked, in good faith, if the government would be willing to split the bill so we could vote in favour of the good part that we agreed on and expedite the passage of that bill, while continuing to debate the ideas that we did not agree with. The government refused. It is the all-or-nothing approach that the Liberals keep taking that is behind their inability to present coherent legislation that we can all agree on.

We have a Prime Minister who is so convinced that he knows better than anyone else, better than this House and better than Canadians, that he takes these big legislative swings and misses. Because he did not bring this House along with him, he did not bring the country along with him. From what I have been reading in the news of late, it sounds like he has lost any interest in bringing his own party along with him. It is just the Prime Minister out there on his own, doing his own thing and not particularly concerned about the consequences because he knows best. He is not concerned about the consequences because, if we are honest, when has the Prime Minister ever been accountable for his actions? He would not know a consequence if it jumped up and bit him somewhere unparliamentary.

Government Orders

In fact, the only time the Prime Minister expresses any concern for outcomes is when his own political fate may be jeopardized. Then he cares. High inflation does not affect him. When was the last time the PM set foot in a grocery store, other than, of course, for a quick photo op? Regarding house prices, let us just say he has options. He is in Rideau Cottage while the family is at the lake. There are a mere 38 rooms between them all, but I hear they are getting by, unlike many Canadians. Regarding gas prices, he is still jetting around the globe to take pictures and lecture people about emissions, so obviously, the price of gas does not affect him. With respect to rising crime rates and gang violence, he has never had to live in downtown Winnipeg or Thompson or Thunder Bay. Let him live in a rooming house on Magnus Avenue or Regent Park and see what he says then, but he does not and he will not. He would not even visit those neighbourhoods.

It should not come as any surprise to anyone that we keep getting this out-of-touch legislation. It was the Prime Minister's father who stated that the government has no business in the bedrooms of Canadians. I find it quite ironic that the government wants to be not just in the bedroom, but in every room, every device and every thought. There is no aspect of Canadian life that the Liberals do not feel they need to control. Despite that, they are still so out of touch with the reality of everyday Canadians. It is actually very sad.

I wonder if the government spent a little less time pushing narratives and virtue signalling and a little more time actually listening to Canadians, it would not be better off. Perhaps then we could get legislation that deals with the root causes of these problems, rather than just the symptoms.

Let us take a look at this bill, because this bill is a great example of what I am talking about. It gives great insight into the Liberal mentality, at least that of the PM and his cabinet and the inconsistency of their government's reasoning. Why put this bill forward? The Prime Minister was clear when he spoke in the House last week. He said our previous Conservative government's tough-on-crime agenda was racist. The PM claims our attempts to crack down on serious crime and put victims first was really just a cover to discriminate and put Black and indigenous Canadians in jail. That assertion is as false as it is insulting as it is ridiculous.

Here is our position. If someone commits a crime in Canada and is convicted of that crime, that person should be held accountable for that crime, period. Race does not come into play. The law is colour blind. I wish the government would be intellectually honest enough to try to stop bringing race into every equation, and that it would stop with the identity politics and stop dividing Canadians.

● (1525)

People who are convicted by a court of law and sent to jail are not in that position because they are victims. They are in that position because they are criminals. They have victimized another person. That is not to say that they themselves were not victimized somewhere along the road. They probably were, and that needs to be part of this discussion. However, being the victim of a crime does not entitle someone to commit crimes. However, we know that hurt people hurt people, and that is the bigger conversation.

Do we need to have discussions surrounding the extenuating circumstances that might have contributed to that choice? Absolutely,

we do. We need to address poverty. We need to address housing, the cost of living, education and opportunities. We need to discuss the role of the entertainment industry and media. We need to discuss the role of parents, or in too many cases, the lack of parental involvement that leads to young people being out on the streets.

There is a lot we need to talk about, but at the end of the day, those external circumstances aside, that person standing before the judge made a choice. They did not make that choice because of the colour of their skin, and to insinuate they did is the very definition of racism. The ability to make choices between right and wrong has nothing to do with skin colour.

The government can throw around all the talking points about intersectionality it wants, but it does not change the fact that somewhere in that situation somebody made a choice, and choices have consequences. I know Black Canadians, white Canadians, Asian Canadians and indigenous Canadians, many of whom have been through difficult times and circumstances, had terrible things happen to them and had their backs up against the wall, and they did not resort to crime. In fact, too often, what we are seeing happen is that in those same racialized communities that a disproportionate number of offenders come from, we also see a disproportionate number of victims.

I look at this legislation, and on the face of it I can only see one message the government is trying to send: that it has actually come to believe that racialized Canadians somehow lack the ability to choose between right and wrong. It is ridiculous and it is insulting. I am not about to speak for those racialized communities, but if it were me, I would find this legislation incredibly insulting, because rather than empower racialized Canadians and fight racism, this bill enshrines a racism of lowered expectations, one that will harm the very communities the Liberals actually genuinely want to help.

That is the first big inconsistency, and here is the second: At the same time the government is lowering penalties for serious offenders, as it has done before, it is once again targeting law-abiding Canadians. The government will not address illegal guns flooding across our border, but it will go after farmers. It will not deal with illegal border crossers flooding into Canada, but try to cross the border without completing the ArriveCAN app. People can burn down churches, and the Prime Minister says that he understands their anger, but try parking a truck in downtown Ottawa.

That is how backwards the Liberal mentality is. If someone commits a serious crime, they are a victim, but if they obey the law, they are clearly a danger to society. It is backwards. It is not progressive. It is regressive.

There is one more thing. We started by talking about drugs. I would like to end there as well.

Government Orders

The government touts the fact that 75% of mandatory minimum prosecutions were for drug offences. What it does not and will not tell us is that 89% of those cases were for drug trafficking. It was not for personal use or simple possession. It was for dealing. I am fine if we want to shift to diversion programs and treatment for simple possession for those who are addicted, as addiction is a medical issue, but I am not okay with diversion programs for those who peddle this poison to our kids.

All we need to do is look at downtown Winnipeg or Vancouver to see the deadly consequences of drug use. I believe that those who are instrumental in causing the chemical carnage should not have the option of house arrest, that they should go to jail, yet still there are those in the government and in this House who would say to take away penalties, legalize drugs and remove the stigma. For those who do that here, we have another inconsistency and another illogical gap, because saying that eliminating penalties and legalizing drugs will help fix drug addiction is like trying to extinguish a fire with gasoline. It would not be laughable if it were not so true.

Once again, we have an example of legislation that addresses the symptoms, but fails to address the root causes of the problem. It is a backward approach that would harm the very people it claims to want to help.

This is typical of the government's failed approach. That is why I will be voting against Bill C-5.

• (1530)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the member has done a big injustice in his comments about how racialized individuals can end up being in a correctional system that has a lot of systemic problems with it, because we just have to look at the data. Indigenous people make up 5% of our population in Canada, yet represent over 30% of individuals who are incarcerated.

Can the member not at least accept the fact that there are systemic problems that exist within our justice system that are leading to this perpetual cycle? If he cannot, can he explain why it is that indigenous peoples only make up 5% of the population in Canada yet over 30% of incarcerated individuals?

• (1535)

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I wish the parliamentary secretary had listened a little more carefully. He is usually a great listener and I am surprised he was not this time.

I was clearly saying that the racism that comes through this bill is actually perpetuating the thought that people of colour, people from the indigenous community cannot make a decision between right and wrong.

As I also clearly said, while this bill attacks the symptoms, it does not address the root causes. I would agree with him to the extent that he says there are systemic problems that need to be addressed. That is what this bill should be talking about and it certainly does not.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess what I am struggling with is there seems to be a relatively

straightforward connection and a couple of principles that underpin this bill. One of them is that we have a very high percentage of people locked up in our country who are suffering from mental health or addiction problems. In fact, when I was the public safety critic for the official opposition and toured Canada's correctional institutions, that number was 70%. The second thing is that mandatory minimums operate on the principle that if we just lock people up for a longer time, the problem will be solved.

I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that. Does he believe that locking up people who are suffering from addiction or mental health issues will actually help integrate them into society or reduce recidivism, or does he agree with me that we need a better approach to actually help these people deal with their fundamental problems so that when they come out, they do not reoffend?

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, yes, I said during my speech that I absolutely agree that people with addictions should be treated more from a health concern perspective than from a criminal justice perspective. I also made it very clear that of the folks who are being incarcerated right now under various drug charges, 89% of them are in there for trafficking. They are the ones providing this poison to individuals who are addicted.

Absolutely, if people need help, I think we need to turn the conversation to how we can provide help and initiate actions in this House that will give people the help they need to be freed from those various addictions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the debate on Bill C-5, I often heard colleagues from all parties state that they were in favour of diversion and preventing addicts from being criminalized. However, the problem with this bill is that it combines two completely different issues.

Can my colleague tell me why he thinks the government combined these two issues into one bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. I think that is a question we ask ourselves over and over again: Why do they always mix the good in with the bad? It was something that I talked about in my speech earlier.

It is just like with Bill C-21. There are aspects of that bill that we as Conservatives strongly believe are good and we would like to have further discussion on. I think we can see ourselves supporting those ideas. Then again, the Liberals put aspects in there that are absolutely not palatable which we will need to debate further and come to a better resolution. It is disappointing that two separate ideas and concepts are put into the same bill, because it makes it unsupportable.

Government Orders

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the wonderful member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-5. I have to reference the previous speaker's speech. All of us come to the House to make life better. We have different opinions on how we achieve that goal, but after listening to the previous speaker, so much of what is on this side of the House is on all sides of the House. We all care very much about trying to make a difference in the lives of so many people. In some areas we agree, and in other areas we do not agree, but clearly we all feel that some changes need to be made, and we are moving in a direction we hope will improve public safety and make life easier for people.

As parliamentarians, we have specific causes that we all want to champion, and one of the most important for me, of course, is public safety and how we can not only better protect Canadians but also prevent young people in our society from getting themselves into a complete downward spiral, going in the wrong direction. When mandatory minimum sentences of incarceration were initially introduced, I was here, and I thought they would help us and that they would deter crime. People would know that, if they were to commit a certain crime, they would end up with a minimum of two years, four years or 10 years. They knew that we would throw the book at them.

That was very much how I thought, but seeing how mandatory minimum sentences have played out since 2007, especially in ridings like mine, I see that it did not help. They proved to be unjust at the end of the day in the eyes of many, contributing to systemic racism, the overcrowding of correctional facilities, delays in the justice process and people reoffending. It is very different from what everybody thought it would be when they were initially brought in.

Since the introduction, the Supreme Court of Canada has seen an influx of charter challenges due to these mandatory minimum sentences. In fact, as of December 3, 2021, the Department of Justice indicated that 217 charter challenges exist due to mandatory minimums and account for 34% of all constitutional challenges to the Criminal Code. Of those challenges, 69% related to drug offences were successful and 48% of firearm-related challenges were successful.

As far as I am concerned, anybody who uses a firearm in the process of any kind of unlawful activity, should have the book thrown at them. When they use firearms, it is a very different thing than some of the other issues we are talking about today, so why are these challenges successful? It comes down to an inequality of justice. They subject those facing charges to a punishment that may not fit their crimes and take nothing into account for the situations that led to the committing of those crimes.

Removing mandatory minimums would allow judges to do their job. Going before a judge is not just about facing consequences; it is about allowing judges to use their judgment in a case. Mandatory minimums do not allow for this and, therefore, hinder judges from fulfilling the role they have been assigned.

Mandatory minimums also contribute to the overrepresentation of indigenous and Black Canadians, and other groups of colour. Of federal offenders, 23% are indigenous, even though only 4.3% of our population is indigenous, and 9% are Black or another group of colour, while they only represent 2.9% and 16.2% of the population. There is something clearly wrong with those numbers.

Mandatory minimums mean mandatory time in a correctional facility. We know that, and we have seen from past practices, as much I sometimes support the theory of locking them up and throwing away the key so they can never get out, this does not deter crime. Much to my disappointment, it actually increases the likelihood of someone reoffending.

● (1540)

A person going through the Canadian justice system, including correctional facilities, is at particular risk of reoffending, and we have seen it time and time again. It is very disappointing, but that is the reality of what happens. Once they are incarcerated, they do not come out better for it, they come out worse for it. The prevalence of recontact with the police is even higher with youth. A 2019 Statistics Canada study found that “62%...of individuals who went through the full justice system into correctional...had re-contact with the police”, and this rate was 77% for youths.

In my riding of Humber River—Black Creek, it is the youth numbers that are particularly troubling. They made me stop and question the whole issue of mandatory minimums, which I indicated earlier that I was very supportive of at the time, but I have seen that it is just does not work, much to my dismay and the dismay of others.

Many youth in my riding are considered part of the at-risk community and subject to guns, gangs and pressures that many youth outside of condensed urban settings do not necessarily face. Mandatory minimums put them at risk of having their future completely destroyed, and this is not just at-risk youth, those who would be charged as juveniles. I mean those age 12-25, half of whom would be considered adults in being charged.

Mandatory minimums can cause a mistake to ruin the rest of their lives and statistically send them on a completely different path. We still believe in serious consequences for serious crime, which is why some mandatory minimum sentences will remain in place, such as the ones for murder, high treason, sexual offences, impaired driving and serious firearm offences, as I indicated earlier.

However, we do believe that cases with a sentence of two years or less, and certain other offences, would be better suited to move from mandatory minimums to conditional sentencing orders, except for instances of advocating genocide, torture, attempted murder, terrorism and serious criminal organization offences.

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Again, we are talking about continuing with the mandatory minimums for the very serious crimes and anything involving a firearm. These orders will allow judges to look at all aspects and assign a sentence that fits the crime, the person and the circumstances. These allow for those sentenced to remain in their communities, contributing via work, and to still be around their support systems. For some groups, such as indigenous people, remaining within that community is essential.

Conditional sentencing orders allow for the consideration of other measures for simple possession of drugs, such as diversion to an addiction treatment program. This means that, instead of facing prison, those suffering with addiction can receive help, not punishment. We have seen how the opioid crisis is impacting Canadians. People of all demographics are struggling with it. In what way does putting them behind bars help them or society? The only way to help them is through addressing the trauma and addictions through treatment.

Conditional sentence orders would allow courts to focus on real rehabilitation and can ensure someone struggling with an addiction does not have their future destroyed by a criminal record. This is also vital for youth, as I have stated before. As mandatory minimums were introduced, our court systems became further backlogged. We saw fewer people taking plea deals and a forced an overreliance on correctional facilities.

Prisons were designed not as the only means of punishment for a crime, but as a way to keep communities safe. This is why we need to see reforms to our entire justice system, allowing for a more holistic and restorative approach. A 2018 report by the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General says, “The criminal justice system in Ontario is struggling to address the high needs of vulnerable...individuals”.

I am thankful to say a few words on an issue that I know we all care about very much in the House. We are all trying to do the best that we can do.

• (1545)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know how hard the member works and how much she loves this country, but I would reject the notion that mandatory minimums are racist. By definition, regardless of the colour of one's skin or ethnicity, one gets a mandatory minimum.

Because there is no rehabilitation and there is such a high rate of recidivism, would it not be better to address the root causes of this overrepresentation, such as poverty, abuse, mental health and addictions? Would the member not agree?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree. Those are the areas we are trying to work in.

When there is an imbalance and we look at the fact that 9% of people who are in prison are indigenous, we have to ask why and look at the root cause. I agree with my colleague completely.

That is why I said, in response to the previous speaker, that we could be sitting down, quite possibly around this beautiful table, figuring out how to solve some of these problems, doing it together.

All of us in this House are looking for the same answers to find a solution to decrease the crime in our communities.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague, the chair of the Standing Committee on International Trade, and thank her for her speech.

We agree on a number of points, including the fact that minimum sentences are utterly ineffective. They do not work, and all of the studies have shown that. However, we are questioning the timing of abolishing such sentences for gun crime, given the problems on the streets of Montreal right now.

What do we say to our constituents and fellow citizens who are concerned about gun violence in Quebec's largest city?

[*English*]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that Bill C-21 has been introduced and very soon we could be dealing with the issues of firearms.

As I indicated earlier, anyone who uses firearms in any kind of circumstances should receive much more of a penalty, not less.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a younger life, my wife and I lived and worked with men coming out of prison, and we worked with people on the streets.

What we saw was the enormous amount of public money that gets wasted when police sit all night in an emergency ward with people who should be in detox or when people were jailed over the weekend. There is a failure to deal with the mental health issues we see in people on the street and in marginalized communities.

We talk time and time again about fixing this, but it always thrown at us that we are being soft on crime or that we are hugging the thugs. I would like to ask the hon. member about the larger sociological issues of a society that treats people as disposable, locking them away in places such as the jail in Thunder Bay, without the support networks to actually get people off their addictions and back into civil society?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we have put millions of dollars into the issues of addictions and mental health in the last several years. I think we are finally recognizing that arresting people and putting them in jail is not going to help.

I was recently in Vancouver and was absolutely blown away by the number of people I saw living on the street, suffering from mental illness. The other day I was on King Edward Ave. here in Ottawa, and I saw the exact same thing. There are so many people suffering from addiction who should be getting help, not sleeping on the streets of our cities. We are going ahead to find ways to continue to do the investments our government is doing to help these people.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated the beginning of the member's speech when she talked about the fact that she was here decades ago, although she must have first gotten elected when she was six years old, and was part of the parliamentary process when these mandatory minimums were brought in. However, she has since had time to reflect on that and come to a different conclusion.

That is what this place is all about. It is about continuing to evolve. I am wondering if the member could just expand on that slightly.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Mr. Speaker, we are all doing what we are doing with the best of intentions, and in 2007, when mandatory minimums were introduced, many people thought they would really help to reduce crime and improve public safety. What we have seen is that they have done far more damage than good.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak to this bill.

As I was preparing my speech, I was thinking back to the 1990s, when I came to Ottawa as a legislative assistant. It was after the 1993 election. The winds of change had swept through this place. The Bloc Québécois was the official opposition and the Reform Party had a big presence, with around 50 members. I remember following question period, which was part of my job. I do not mean to be partisan, and this is not a partisan tone, but I remember that in question period member after member of the Reform Party would get up and ask questions about criminal justice. They would talk about specific cases and describe these cases in great detail. The message in every question was that one could not trust the courts. The questions were intended to impugn the courts and to make people believe that judges were not approaching issues with an objective framework but just injecting their own personal biases into the decisions they made. I think that is very dangerous.

I think we are heading in this direction more and more in our political culture. That is very unhealthy for our democracy. I am looking more toward the United States right now, where I think people are starting to view the courts as an extension of the political system. When people start doing that, they just lose faith in the constitutional democracy.

I read something in the paper the other day and I was just flabbergasted. The state legislature of Ohio passed a motion. It came down to party lines. It is a Republican-dominated state legislature. The Republicans voted for it and the Democrats voted against it. The motion was that Canada should be put on the watch-list of states that suppress religious freedom, ignoring the fact that we have a constitutional democracy and that we have courts that defend charter rights and so on. I think this is a very dangerous thing. It is a kind of new populist relativism and it is not healthy for democracy.

Let me get more specifically down to the bill.

There is unconscious bias in sentencing, for sure. This bias is embedded in the long-standing practices of sentencing. It is embedded in the system. For example, according to Canada's prison ombudsman, Ivan Zinger, whom I had the opportunity to meet when I

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was the public safety critic in opposition, indigenous women now account for half of the female population in federal penitentiaries, whereas only one out of every 20 women in Canada is indigenous. Similarly, recently the Auditor General found that Black and indigenous prisoners are more frequently placed in higher-security institutions at admission, compared to their white peers, and that they are not paroled as often as others when they first become eligible.

Personally, and this is not a partisan statement, I believe the Harper government's approach to sentencing reinforced and aggravated this bias. At the time when the Harper government was introducing tough-on-crime legislation, one after the other, to my knowledge those bills did not have to be accompanied by a charter statement the way they have to be today. That meant that the Harper government really pushed the limits on this issue. That is why so many of the bills that have been struck down by the courts were passed between 2006 and 2015. I am referring to a document from the Library of Parliament, a multiple-page document.

That said, sentencing has been used intentionally to suppress racialized groups, not to my knowledge in this country, but it can happen. Someone said before in the House that the same sentence applies to everybody regardless of creed, colour or whatever, but sentencing has been used to suppress particular groups.

I want to read a quote. As I said, I am not attributing anything to any Canadian politician I know, but it is interesting to see that it can be used deliberately. John Ehrlichman, counsel and assistant to Richard Nixon and a Watergate co-conspirator, is quoted as saying:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people.... We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.

• (1555)

Of course, that was a particular period of American history, one that was extremely divisive.

What about Bill C-5? It is not about being soft on crime. It is about having sentences that fit the crime and the circumstances. It is about law reform, a work in progress that draws on evolving and accumulated wisdom. It is about removing an approach to sentencing that has proven not only discriminatory but also costly and, in many cases, futile and ineffective.

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It is costly because minimum sentences clog up the courts. There is no incentive to plead guilty. It is ineffective because they involve a greater use of prosecutorial discretion. For example, a research paper by Doob, Webster and Gartner, from the University of Toronto and the University of Ottawa, stated:

On 1 April 1995, a sentencing referendum (Measure 11) brought in by the voters in Oregon resulted in long mandatory minimum sentences.... [I]t was found that there was a decrease in the prosecution of Measure-11-eligible cases and an increase in the prosecution of "alternate" cases (typically lesser degrees of the same offences which did not attract the mandatory penalty). Trial rates for Measure-11-eligible offences also increased in the first two years after implementation, and then reverted to their former levels. But the nature of pleas changed: there was an increase in the number of cases in which the accused decided to plead to lesser included offences, and a decrease in pleas involving the original charge.

It is futile because a slew of Harper-era minimum sentences have been struck down by the courts, and I just referenced a document from the Library of Parliament a moment ago. There is something called "deterrence through sentencing", and this is the policy that was adopted in the Harper years. Again, Doob, Webster and Gartner state:

At this point, we think it is fair to say that we know of no reputable criminologist who has looked carefully at the overall body of research literature on "deterrence through sentencing" who believes that crime rates will be reduced, through deterrence, by raising the severity of sentences handed down in criminal courts.

We need to realize that there is nothing objectively true about minimum sentences. They are not something handed down by Moses. Those who advocate for minimum sentences do so based on an accepted but false intuition whose appeal is a simple but misleading logic: The greater the penalty, the greater the deterrent. However, intuition is often wrong. This is why we invest in research and analysis.

Even without the benefit of science, there are some who possess uncanny insights at different times. John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, is quoted as saying, "Certainty of punishment, and more especially certainty that the sentence imposed by the judge will be carried out, is of more consequence in the prevention of crime than the severity of the sentence."

Doob, Webster and Gartner said:

We suspect that what Macdonald meant by "the certainty that the sentence imposed by the judge will be carried out" is simply the certainty that there will be a criminal punishment. But whatever John A. Macdonald meant by that phrase, clearly he did not think that "severity" of sentences was very important. He was almost certainly correct in this.

They also said, regarding the assumption about minimum sentences, "An additional problem is that people really don't have much of an idea about what the sentences are likely to be for ordinary crimes.... Most offenders do not meet the relevant 'thought' requirements—that is, believing they might be caught".

There are a lot of misconceptions and a lot of policies in the last few years that have been based on a sort of intuition. We know that intuition can sometimes be correct, but sometimes it can be extremely misleading.

Bill C-5 is about reaffirming trust in our judicial system, and this is fundamental to a healthy constitutional democracy. I know that is something that everyone in this House desires. The Conservatives used to believe that our institutions needed to be respected because they evolved organically and contained the inherited wisdom of our

forebears. Those values seem to be from a bygone Conservative era, long ago, before the party veered into hard-right politics.

• (1600)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to order made on Monday, May 2, I request that the hour of daily adjournment for the next sitting be 12 midnight.

• (1605)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, May 2, the motion is deemed adopted.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, this is a question on the point of business that was just referred to by the government House leader. The Conservatives would like to know which opposition House leader was consulted, because it certainly was not the Conservatives. I believe the government owes Canadians and the House a little more transparency and openness.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for his intervention. As the Chair has previously pointed out, the motion adopted on May 2 simply states that a minister must have had the agreement of another House leader. It does not require that the parties to the agreement communicate to the House. In making the request, the minister implicitly acknowledges that there is an agreement. There is a long-standing principle that takes members at their word. There is therefore no reason to doubt the existence of an agreement at this time.

Returning to questions and comments, the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

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CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think Bill C-5 is a remarkable missed opportunity to make some really good progress in Canadian justice. We have an opioid crisis. People are dying by the hundreds and the thousands through a poisoned drug supply, and they are being held back from the services they need and the medical attention they need by the fact that they are considered criminals.

We should be decriminalizing simple possession of drugs, and yet the Liberals and the Conservatives voted against Bill C-216, which asked for that. They could have put it in Bill C-5, but they did not.

Why are the Liberals refusing to make real progress and save the lives of Canadians?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that our government has come to an agreement with the Government of B.C. to decriminalize. However, decriminalization without a proper framework that involves the forces of the law and that involves those who work on the front lines in mental health and addiction, that kind of simple decriminalization would just lead to more problems. We need a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach. That is what I believe is going to be taking root in B.C., but I am not at all certain that the situation has evolved to that point in other provinces. I believe the government has said that if other provinces request this, it will consider that request for decriminalization.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech.

When I spoke with the member for Rivière-du-Nord, who is the Bloc Québécois critic on this issue, he began reading me the list of offences for which mandatory minimum sentences would be repealed, including using a firearm in the commission of an offence, possession of a firearm or weapon knowing that its possession is unauthorized, possession of a prohibited firearm, possession of a firearm obtained by the commission of an offence, and weapons trafficking. When he read all this to me, I must admit that I felt worried.

Will the bill we are discussing this afternoon make the public feel safer, or will it make them feel worried?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I personally believe that the bill should make Canadians feel safer, unless doubts are put into people's minds.

Unfortunately, that is what is happening in the House, as the opposition reads out a whole list of crimes and tries to lead people to believe that judges will be obliged to impose house arrest.

This is not the case. Judges have the choice, if the sentence is less than two years. It is judges who are in the best position to determine whether offenders pose a danger to society or whether they have a better chance of rehabilitating in a context of community supervision.

It will depend on the judge, and judges will know more than we do here in the House of Commons, where we can only speculate on hypothetical situations when it comes to the Criminal Code.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Lac-Saint-Louis sharing how mandatory minimum penalties contribute to systemic racism. He made many important points in his speech. However, Bill C-5 only repeals

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mandatory minimums from 14 of the 67 offences in the Criminal Code that currently carry them.

The Black Legal Action Centre is the only legal clinic in Ontario that focuses specifically on anti-Black racism. I wonder if the member is aware that the Black Legal Action Centre, among many other organizations, has been calling for the removal of all mandatory minimum penalties to more fully realize the government's stated commitments to racial justice and indigenous reconciliation.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I understand that stakeholders often make requests that are quite broad and far-reaching. The role of the government is to consult, yes, but also to use the best judgment possible with access to the best experts possible, legal and otherwise. These are the crimes with minimum sentences that have come up in the bill, and I trust the Minister of Justice and others in the government on this. I believe they are doing the best they can at the moment.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, a few minutes ago, there was a discussion about the hour of adjournment for tomorrow's sitting.

The official opposition asked which leader had agreed to that. I want to make it clear that it was not the leader of the Bloc Québécois, and we would also like to know who it was.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention.

As the Chair has previously pointed out, the motion adopted on May 2 simply states that a minister must have had the agreement of another House leader. It does not require that the parties to the agreement communicate to the House. In making the request, the minister implicitly acknowledges that there is an agreement.

There is a long-standing principle that takes members at their word. There is therefore no reason to doubt the existence of an agreement at this time.

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, at third and final reading.

I will be splitting my time with the amazing member for Lakeland, who served our caucus very well in a previous Parliament as the shadow minister for public safety.

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This is yet another bill brought back from the previous Parliament that died when the Prime Minister called his snap election. To say that I am extremely disappointed with the introduction of this ill-conceived bill, as opposed to something that is wanted and needed by Canadians, would be an understatement. There are so many other issues facing Canadians that are more important than this misguided legislation.

First and foremost for Canadians would be relief from the rising inflation tax brought on by the government's out-of-control spending. The price of everything is increasing, and the government has decided that now is the time to decrease sentences for criminals. Another top-of-mind issue for Canadians has been ending all federal mandates. It seems the pressure by Canadians has finally had the desired effect. However, in the case of this bill, the Liberal government is doubling down on its soft-on-crime agenda and making life easier for criminals.

While the government claims that its focus is on protecting Canadians from harms, such as COVID-19, it is making society less safe with this proposed legislation by eliminating mandatory minimum prison time for criminals. With the bill, the Liberals would eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for firearms offences, including robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting knowing it is unauthorized, discharging a firearm with intent, using a firearm in the commission of offences and more.

As Canadians learn more about this proposed legislation, they are alarmed and are finding it difficult to believe. Imagine a convenience store worker, maybe making minimum wage. It is one in the morning when suddenly someone walks into the store, pulls out a gun, fires one shot into the ceiling and then points the gun at the worker, demanding cash. The trauma that this scenario would create for someone is difficult to comprehend. What the Liberals are saying, however, is that the criminal in this realistic but made-up scenario should not receive a mandatory minimum sentence for what they have done.

Why are the Liberals doing this? They believe that mandatory minimum prison sentences are unfair. Really? Unfair to whom? Obviously, the Liberals are taking the side of the criminal.

By eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, the government is standing up for criminals and completely ignoring the victims. What about fairness for the victim of the crime? What about fairness for the family members of the victim who will need to support the loved who has gone through such a traumatic experience? What about fairness for the community, as a whole, in which the crime was perpetrated?

Remember, we are talking about convicted criminals, not innocent people. When someone is sentenced, they have already been found guilty of the crime for which they were charged. Why are the Liberals more concerned with the impact of mandatory minimum sentences on criminals than on the benefit and reassurance they provide to the victims and the community at large?

I cannot leave the subject of eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for firearms offences without commenting on the cognitive dissonance held by the Liberals as it relates to firearms policy.

On one hand, they want to eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for offences such as weapons trafficking and importing or exporting a firearm knowing it is unauthorized, but on the other hand, they are increasing rules and regulations for law-abiding firearms owners. Talk about a lack of fairness.

According to the Prime Minister and his government, if a person follows the rules and does not commit a crime, they will punish that person. However, if a person commits a crime, they will make that person's sentence lighter.

If this was not bad enough, not only would Bill C-5 eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for certain firearm offences, but it would also eliminate mandatory prison time for drug dealers for crimes such as trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking, importing and exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting, and production of substances such as fentanyl, crystal meth and others. To be clear, we are not discussing simple possession. We are talking about eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for those who traffic or produce these harmful drugs.

• (1615)

I would like to read a few lines from a Global News story from last September in relation to a drug bust carried out by the Saskatoon Police Service. It states:

Police said they seized a total of 6158.3 grams of methamphetamine, 339.8 grams of powdered cocaine, 5.2 grams of psilocybin and 0.3 grams of fentanyl.

Cellphones, scales, packaging materials and over \$67,000 in cash were also seized, police added.

"The message must be clear, organizations responsible for the importation, manufacture and distribution of illicit drugs in Saskatoon are responsible for an overwhelming proportion of harm within our community. The drug trade is intrinsically linked to guns, violence and victimization," Supt. Patrick Nogier said in a release.

"The Saskatoon Police Service will continue to focus on organizations benefiting from illegal activities as they pertain to the drug trade in Saskatoon."

These are the types of crimes that the legislation proposes to eliminate mandatory minimums for.

These criminals prey upon people with addictions. Furthermore, as the quote by Superintendent Nogier indicates, these criminals use violence in carrying out their activity, which negatively impacts the broader community in which they exist. Police forces across Canada do their utmost to protect the communities they serve. They are not helped by this type of legislation.

I would like to read a section from another Global News story from last fall. It states:

Superintendent Patrick Nogier with the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS) said drug and general seizures have increased by almost eight per cent over the last year and SPS is continuing with efforts to reduce drug trafficking.

"These are significant seizures that are taking a product off the street that has the potential of doing a lot of harm to your community," said Nogier.

The Street Crimes Unit alone has seized over 15 kilograms of crystal meth over the last year.

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How can any member of the House say he or she supports the police and the work they do while at the same time supporting this legislation? Criminals belong in jail and addicts need help to break free of their addiction. With this bill, criminals would spend less time in jail and addicts would not get the help they need.

Lastly, I want to highlight my opposition to one more misguided aspect of this bill, and that is the expansion of conditional sentencing options for many violent crimes.

If passed, this legislation will allow criminals convicted of serious crimes, such as prison breach, sexual assault, kidnapping, trafficking in persons for material benefit, assault causing bodily harm or with a weapon and many others, to serve their sentence in some way other than in jail, such as through house arrest. Once again, what about the victims? How does allowing a criminal convicted of sexual assault or trafficking, for example, to serve their sentence in the community, and potentially the same neighbourhood as the victim, make any sense?

The Liberal government is eroding our justice system by passing laws that support convicted criminals while ignoring the victims of crime. I will vote against this bill, and I encourage all members to join me.

• (1620)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the member's comments. We know that time and time again the courts have struck down mandatory minimum penalties as unconstitutional. The Conservatives were in full-throated support of charter rights during the truckers' convoy, yet that seems to be expendable during this debate.

The question I have relates to judicial discretion. Mandatory minimums take away judicial discretion. The Conservatives and the Liberals have both appointed some excellent judges. Why do the Conservatives not trust them?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his observation. My answer will be to the point, as was his question.

It is up to Parliament to decide what the minimum and maximum sentences for an offence should be and it is a judge's duty to decide how he or she will apply those maximums and minimums based on the circumstances in each case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am by no means an expert in this field. It is true that, at first glance, I feel a little worried.

However, I have done some reading and learned that we have known for some time that mandatory minimum sentences do not deter certain crimes. For example, the United States has the toughest mandatory minimum sentences for drug use, but they have had no effect on people.

If mandatory minimums have no effect, what could the member suggest to ensure that our society is better off?

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member if she supports mandatory minimum sentences that remain for crimes such as murder, high treason and other violent crimes. If she does not, then we should do away with those mandatory minimums as well. Victims of crime deserve better from the government and this Parliament, and I would encourage all members to reject this bill.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, literally dozens of mandatory minimum sentences were added to the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act under the Harper government. Now, even when jurisdictions in the U.S., like Texas, have declared mandatory minimums as expensive failures and the Canadian courts have been striking them down as unconstitutional, have Conservative members changed their minds and recognized both the ineffectiveness and injustice of mandatory minimum penalties?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that it has been entertaining to watch New Democrats, since March 22, contort themselves into a pretzel to support whatever the government introduces and to continue to import American politics into everything that is happening.

When someone commits a crime and is subsequently convicted of it, there is always a victim. I do not understand why the NDP claims to support victims, but then is so inconsistent when its support for the government is reliant on a bill that would do anything but.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek think our country is going in the right direction when warning labels on the front of beef are coming soon and the fact that my kids are going to grow up in a country where there are warning labels on beef, but fentanyl is decriminalized? Does she think the government is going in the right direction on that?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. I hear from constituents every day who are deeply alarmed about the direction in which this country is going under the Liberal government.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-5 is a perfect example of the Liberals' backward approach to crime and justice. Liberals seem to believe that public safety means treating criminals like victims and treating law-abiding citizens like criminals. That is the reality of their soft-on-crime pattern. It is most obvious with gun crimes.

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The Liberals implement a billion dollar confiscation of legally acquired firearms from lawful owners, hunters, farmers, collectors and sport shooters that the Toronto Police Service says is not an effective public safety measure, while Bill C-5 will get rid of mandatory jail times for gangsters and criminals who terrorize Canadian communities with drive-by shootings, robbery with guns and all kinds of existing gun crimes relating to illegal possession and trafficking, all crimes that, by the way, are skyrocketing in places like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver under the Liberal government. Meanwhile, it would also allow for dangerous criminals to remain in communities among their victims instead of in prison where they belong.

Of course, the Liberals are limiting debate and pushing through this deeply flawed bill with time allocation. As our colleague, the MP for Barrie—Innisfil, said last week:

[O]nce again, we are privy to a front row seat to the decline in democracy. Bill C-5, the soft-on-crime bill, has gone through committee, and there have been thousands...of dissenting voices on this bill. There have been advocates and stakeholders, and there have been police chiefs and police forces across Canada that have spoken against this bill....

The minister claimed during committee hearings that Bill C-5 “will have no negative impact on public safety and will not signal to the courts that the offences concerned are not serious.” The minister also often suggests that others have not read this legislation, but it appears he himself does not understand the consequences of the bill or he is being deliberately obtuse about it.

Here is the reality. Under Bill C-5, a victim of sexual assault or a victim of kidnapping will be more likely to have to be back at home or in the same neighbourhood with the very predator convicted of assaulting or traumatizing them in the first place. Drug manufacturers and traffickers do not have to worry about mandatory baseline jail sentences either. Between Bill C-5 and the Liberals' plans to decriminalize significant and dangerous amounts of fentanyl, the Liberals are keeping addicts as open prey for emboldened dealers who are already usually chronic repeat offenders. It just makes no sense.

How can the minister tell Canadians that public safety will be protected by Bill C-5? Law enforcement, victims advocates, policy experts have all spoken out against it precisely because it will undermine public safety.

At committee, the executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre said the conditional sentencing provisions of Bill C-5 “put women at greater risk. It puts them in harm's way. It puts them in the communities where the offenders are going to be.”

The chief of the Brantford Police Service said, “With Bill C-5 we are now going to see sentencing become a joke. Victims will live in fear of gun violence and fearful of retaliation by armed criminals.” Importantly, Chief Davis is a Mohawk from the Six Nations of the Grand River territory where Brantford is and the only indigenous leader of a municipal police service in Ontario. Chief Davis has served more than half of his career in indigenous communities, with most of that time in Six Nations and also in Ontario's far north. He said, “Conditional sentences” as suggested by this Liberal government under Bill C-5 “clearly will not work.”

This serious warning is echoed by the president of the Association of the Chiefs of Police of Quebec. At committee he said, “For

the public to maintain confidence in the justice system, criminals who commit serious crimes, particularly with firearms, must face serious consequences.”

The truth is in Canada right now, the entire system, from charges to release, is already set up to support and protect rights, rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders, however, usually not very effectively given the high rates of recidivism. I would note that the Liberals have taken no action on the private member's bill by the Conservative MP for Tobique—Mactaquac, which actually is about resources and new strategies to reduce recidivism. The truth is there is actually very little by way of institutionalized, systemic and ongoing support for victims who can never get past or pardoned or freed from what was done to them.

However, the Liberals seem to see nothing wrong with setting up even more conditions that would enable criminals to revictimize people who have already been harmed. The Liberals' mixed messages and contradictions on gun crime are particularly mind-boggling. The Liberals talk a lot about cracking down, usually right after a tragic shooting that takes the lives of innocent victims and leaves loved ones and communities struggling with a lifetime of fear and grief. The truth is that over many years, the Liberals have failed to stem the tide of illegal weapons entering Canada, to stop the rise in gun crimes which has actually escalated while they have been in government or to make communities safer.

● (1630)

There is a gun trafficking problem in Canada, but the Liberals, actually through Bill C-5, are going to lower penalties for it.

The Conservatives have always taken a more realistic approach to combatting gun crimes and to keeping communities safe. We would increase funding and coordination for border security to combat illegal smuggling, ensure a floor of jail time for violent gang members, and target gangs and criminals instead of making life more difficult for law-abiding firearms owners, retailers and the airsoft sector, by ending automatic bail, revoking parole for gang members and new and tougher sentences for ordering or involvement in violent gang crimes. These are the kinds of measures that can and do make streets and cities safer, not the Liberals' approach, which helps criminals get softer sentences while subjecting law-abiding Canadians to warrantless searches and confiscating legally acquired property.

I can understand the Liberals want to claim otherwise, but Bill C-5 will eliminate mandatory minimum jail time for many serious existing firearms offences, like robbery, extortion, trafficking, unauthorized importing or exporting and possession, discharging with intent, using guns for offences, possession of prohibited or restricted firearms with ammunition, possession of weapons through an offence, trafficking, and discharging a firearm with recklessness.

Stéphane Wall, the retired supervisor for Montreal's police service, stated:

[W]e see young people laughing at the justice system.... We are already in this situation.

The passage of Bill C-5 would lead to lower standards and trivialize the possession of firearms for a criminal purpose.

The chief of police of the Six Nations Police Service pleaded with MPs to, “consider the well-being not only of the people of Six Nations, but also of all indigenous communities on Turtle Island” with regard to Bill C-5. He also stated, “We deserve to feel safe and, more importantly, our children deserve to grow up in a community free from violence”, which is exactly what indigenous leaders and constituents in Lakeland have said to me, but the Liberals are ignoring him and all of them.

The Liberals also often claim Bill C-5 will assist people struggling with substance abuse to get the help they need. Conservatives believe addicts should receive treatment, and with the discretion of law enforcement to decide between charges and recommendations for treatment or options in sentencing, as already exists with, for example, the Edmonton drug court, but that is not what Bill C-5 is about. The bill will eliminate mandatory jail time for convictions of trafficking or possession for the purpose of trafficking several types of illegal drugs. It will let drug manufacturers and traffickers off the hook, while Liberals have the gall to suggest it will help people get the treatment they need. Actually, the Liberals are great for dealers, but bad for addicts.

One of the more perverse aspects of Bill C-5 is it enables the greater use of conditional sentences like house arrest for extremely serious offences, such as prison breach, criminal harassment, sexual assault, kidnapping, human trafficking, abduction of kids under 14, thefts, breaking and entering, being unlawfully in someone's house, arson, fraud, causing bodily harm by criminal negligence, assault causing bodily harm or with a weapon, and assaulting a peace officer causing bodily harm or with a weapon. These are not minor offences. They are major or permanently damaging and traumatizing crimes for which I know the vast majority of people in Lakeland believe convicted offenders should be in prison where they belong with an automatic mandatory minimum penalty, not out on the streets or back at home where they can revictimize their targets or harm others.

Law-abiding Canadians, victims of crime and their loved ones deserve to live freely and without fear. Government must ensure the laws and systems deliver justice for victims, real consequences for offenders and deter criminal activity. The only thing worse I think than a government that fails in this core duty is one that promotes conditions that will ultimately lead to and frankly guarantee that violent criminals will strike again.

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Bill C-5 will not do anything to make Canadians safer. It will put victims of crime and innocent Canadians in harm's way. It ignores the rights of victims completely. All of this and more is why Conservatives, and certainly the vast majority of people in Lakeland who I represent, oppose it.

● (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock, Health; the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York, Taxation.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. colleague for her speech, but I was left a bit concerned, because every piece of research out there shows that mandatory minimums do not work. Every piece of research in Canada, the United States and around the world shows that the only people who are disproportionately affected by mandatory minimums are people of colour. What I would love to understand from the member opposite is how—

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to have to stop the member. There is no translation. I am going to let the member back up and get is question in.

The hon. member for Vancouver Granville.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's speech, but I really fail to understand it. There is no data that shows mandatory minimums work. In fact, every piece of data says mandatory minimums do not work, whether from Canada or the United States. The only thing it does prove is that people of colour, indigenous people and Black people are the ones who are disproportionately affected by mandatory minimums.

Can the member opposite share any data she has that proves mandatory minimums work and that they do not disproportionately affect people of colour and indigenous people?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I would point out the lack of coherence in the member's argument, as well as the argument by the NDP-Liberals overall on this bill. If that is their premise, then, as my colleague for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek said, he should be up in arms and encouraging the government to remove the other 67 mandatory minimum penalties that continue to exist under the government.

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Here is where we have a conflicting world view: There are disproportionate representations in prisons of populations who live in situations of domestic violence, who are at risk, who have a lack of education and job opportunities, and who are being traumatized by gangs. I am glad that the government followed the lead of the former Conservative government to recognize, for example, the impacts of residential schools and the sixties scoop that destroyed individuals, families and communities, and led to what we see today, which are disproportionate socio-economic challenges and challenges with the justice system.

If what the Liberals want to get at is actually dealing with that disproportionate representation, then they need to deal with the root causes. They need to ensure there are educational opportunities, Internet service, basic infrastructure for quality of life, standard of living, mental health supports and services, and services for victims of violence. They need to ensure there are opportunities and hope for people who are ending up in criminal lifestyles, because they do not have those things. They should fix the corrections system to make it functional and effective, but frankly, Bill C-5 does not do any of that.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, given that Bill C-5 mixes two issues, diversion for addiction and simple possession of drugs, and mandatory minimum sentences, I will ask my colleague a two-part question.

First, with respect to mandatory minimum sentences, does she not believe that, in the current context of gun violence in Montreal and other areas, it would have been better for the government to accept the Bloc Québécois's amendment, which involved maintaining these minimums but giving judges, whose prerogative is to determine the sentence, the possibility of deviating from them in mitigating circumstances?

I will limit myself to this first question, Mr. Speaker, as you are indicating that my time is up.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, the member raises an interesting point on which to challenge the Liberals for another one of their chief premises of this bill. The Liberals could have taken the approach to have some sort of exceptional circumstances provision where judges, in certain factors or cases, would have the ability to choose something other than the mandatory minimum, while maintaining mandatory minimum penalties for serious crimes. They are not doing that in Bill C-5, either.

The brass tacks are that Conservatives believe there should be stronger, stiffer and tougher sentences for all crimes, including and especially gun crimes, which are terrorizing the streets of cities across the country, and real action against gangsters who do not follow the laws already, and who traffic and trade in illegal gun smuggling, which is a major source of gun crime in this country.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hear some of the critical points raised by the member, but I am wondering how she can reconcile the need to be tough on the root causes of crime with the agenda of the Conservatives,

when they were in power, that saw the expansion of our prison system and led to greater representation of indigenous and racialized inmates, including indigenous women. The reality is that when the Conservatives were in power, they were not tough on the root causes of crime, and instead turned around to further criminalize communities that are overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

How can we believe that the Conservatives now want to actually come up with sound policy when it comes to Canadians on the margins?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, that is just not true, given that the former Conservative government is actually the government that launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was the first government in Canadian history to review education outcomes and programs for indigenous people right across the country and to actually propose improvements. It was the first government, on a whole host of issues, to try to better the outcomes and the lives of indigenous Canadians everywhere, especially young indigenous Canadians who are disproportionately the highest growing group of young people in the whole country.

I happen to be a person of Ojibway descent, so it is pretty wild to get accused by Liberals of only being hard on indigenous people. I proudly represent multiple indigenous communities in Lakeland, just as I proudly do every other citizen. Every single one of those leaders and those people tells me they deserve to live in safety and peace with equal opportunities and better outcomes, just as every other Canadian does. That is what I will keep fighting for.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although it may be true that the former Conservative government did launch the truth and reconciliation report, it is extremely unfortunate that, once it received the results from that report and the recommendations contained therein, it had absolutely no interest and said publicly that it would not move forward with any of the recommendations, but I digress.

In any event, I would actually like to start my speech today, if I could be indulged for a moment, as this is one of the first times I have had the opportunity to rise to give a speech since the last provincial election, by congratulating Ted Hsu.

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Ted was the Liberal candidate for Kingston and the Islands running for the Liberal Party. He was elected as the member of provincial parliament in the last election. Ted's name is not unfamiliar to this place, because Ted was elected under very similar circumstances here in 2011. In the provincial election two Thursdays ago, Ted was elected as one of only two new Liberal MPs in the Province of Ontario. Back in 2011, he also was elected to this place as one of only two new MPs who were Liberal, the other being the member for Charlottetown. They both entered into the House at the same time. My best wishes to Ted as he embarks on this new journey in his life as the member of provincial parliament for the riding of Kingston and the Islands. I am glad to see a strong Liberal voice representing the riding of Kingston and the Islands.

I have had the opportunity to be here throughout the entire debate today, listening to the various claims that have been made throughout the House, and I cannot say I am surprised with a great degree of the rhetoric that I have been hearing. One of the things I would like to touch on first is a comment made by the member for Humber River—Black Creek. She did that only about an hour ago in this debate.

She said that she had been here a few decades ago, when mandatory minimums were being introduced and brought on board, and that she was supportive of them at the time. She thought they were the right things to do. I say this because we have heard a lot of rhetoric from Conservatives, indeed before today's debate but in particular today, about the fact that mandatory minimums were not just introduced by Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, but by Liberals in the past.

The reason it is so important to point is that we have one of those Liberal MPs who was here back then saying she was in favour of it back then, but has since come to realize that mandatory minimums are not serving the purpose we thought they would when they were introduced. I think it takes a lot of courage for a politician to come forward and say they have changed their mind on this and that this is not an effective way of dealing with problems we have when it relates to sentencing individuals.

I want to thank her for those comments. I think we can learn a lot as time goes on. We evolve through the various policies we have and our approaches to them. I think that if the Conservatives would take a look at what is going on in other parts of North America right now, they would realize that Canada certainly is not unique in starting to understand and turn against the idea of mandatory minimums, not just because in many cases they are deemed unconstitutional, but also because they are not producing the results they were intended to.

I am very concerned about that rhetoric, but it really comes down to this: When Conservatives are putting forward this notion that there will be endless lineups of people who should be incarcerated out on the streets, they are trying to paint this picture that some of the most heinous crimes out there will result in people being given house arrest or literally not being sentenced as a result of not having a mandatory minimum. That is absolutely false.

What Conservatives are doing is preying on the emotional side of this debate. They are preying on the fact that they know this will touch a chord and hit a nerve with people, and it will have their

emotional side see a reaction as a result of what the government is proposing.

• (1645)

That is what they are trying to feed off right now. That is what they are trying to capitalize off politically. It does not come as a surprise to me. Many issues come before this House under exactly the same circumstances, and we see it time and time again.

In my opinion, it comes down to a fundamental difference between small-c conservatives and progressives, or in this case capital-C Conservatives and capital-L Liberals. It is a fundamental difference. If there is one issue that clearly divides Conservatives from Liberals, this would be the issue. It comes down to incarceration.

Conservatives believe that the answer is to impose a penalty: Lock them up and throw away the key. Give them a mandatory minimum that will force them to sit in their cell for x number of days, and at the end of their time, they will have completed their sentence and they will somehow be rehabilitated. That is the Conservative approach. I can appreciate the approach. The Conservatives certainly would not be the only political party that has taken that approach.

I happen to think the solution is different. I come from a riding that used to have seven correctional institutions in the area, but the Conservatives closed Kingston Penitentiary the last time they were in government. What we have is this scenario in which the default response is just to put people in prison and leave them there. Then, after a set time has elapsed, based on what politicians believe is an amount of time that would properly do the job, suddenly people would be rehabilitated and walk out of there as new, changed individuals.

Liberals look at it differently. We believe in helping to rehabilitate individuals when possible—and most of the time it is possible—so that they can be reintegrated back into society and become productive members of society.

What surprises me the most about the Conservative response is that they do not even have to accept the social argument here. They do not even have to, from a Conservative perspective, believe in rehabilitation. They do not even have to do that. However, one would think that at the very least, their interest would be tickled by the financial benefit. Incarceration costs a lot of money. I know this as an individual who has six prisons within a 40-kilometre radius of my home. It costs a lot of money to keep people incarcerated. If we can rehabilitate people and reintegrate them into society, they can become productive members of society and actually give back.

There is a real, solid, financial argument there that I would think would interest Conservatives when it comes to talking about our correctional facilities, but I fail to see it. They do not ever seem to come forward with that.

My idea that all Conservatives care about is “lock them up and throw away the key” does not come just from this debate around this issue but from a whole host of issues. Let us look at the whole prison farm issue.

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Prison farms have been seen, not just by inmates and former inmates but indeed by community activists and people throughout the community at large, including many farmers in southeastern Ontario, as productive ways to help rehabilitate individuals. However, the Conservatives have absolutely no interest in them. They do not want to see the opportunities. They almost look at inmates participation in these programs as some kind of luxury that they do not deserve.

I know this because we lived through this in Kingston. We had activists going out and standing in front of Collins Bay Institution every Monday night since the prison farms were closed until they were reopened under this government. Every Monday night they would go out there and hold a protest. These were not former inmates; these were concerned citizens from my riding and beyond.

● (1650)

What is the response now that the prison farms have been reopened and are being utilized, giving opportunities to inmates who in their own words and testimonies say that the farms rehabilitated them to become productive members of society again? What is happening? The member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston is standing up Friday after Friday, followed by late show question after late show question, to challenge the prison farms that are helping farmers in his own riding. He gets up week after week and challenges them.

There is no doubt in my mind that if Conservatives were to get elected again, one of the first things they would do with respect to correctional facilities is close those farms.

We are seeing this behaviour, and it is a pattern that leads to the simple conclusion that all Conservatives care about in terms of our our correctional institutions is providing a sentence to somebody, locking them up, throwing away the key, and when the sentence has expired, the individual, according to their logic, will suddenly be rehabilitated and can go back to society. However, it does not work that way, and the proof is that we see people continually going into and out of our correctional institutions through this revolving door.

I will go back to the rhetoric that I have been hearing, and I have heard a lot of it today, particularly as I was listening to various members. There were things that they were saying. The member for Kildonan—St. Paul specifically said that this bill will let criminals off the hook. How can somebody rationally think that from looking at the bill? The bill would put the power in the hands of judges, so to make a comment like that is just saying that they do not trust judges to do their job. That is what Conservatives are essentially saying: They do not have the trust in judges to perform the responsibilities that are given to them through those appointments.

The member for Yellowhead, when talking about conditional sentencing, suggested that those who were convicted of human trafficking would be able to stay at home under house arrest. That is absolutely ludicrous. Conditional sentencing, as included in this bill, specifically gives the opportunity for a judge to allow for an individual to be under house arrest. However, I would invite those members who have been giving their speeches to go back and read the bill, because it says that a conditional sentence would allow an offender who does not pose a threat to public safety to serve their

term of imprisonment in the community under strict conditions, including house arrest and curfew.

Furthermore, unlike other sanctions, the conditional sentence orders would allow courts to focus on rehabilitation by requiring an offender to attend an approved treatment program. The bill is saying that in certain circumstances a judge, under the judge's discretion, can decide that a person is not going to be rehabilitated if we lock them up and throw away the key and that it might be better to put the person under house arrest so that they are not allowed to leave their house but also have to complete a set number of things while they are there. That is called "rehabilitation". That is trying to get at the core of what the problem is.

Of course, Conservatives will want to spin that, such that a person could murder, be a rapist and do all this stuff and then just sit at home watching Netflix. That is the way they like to portray this bill. Indeed, if we listened to some of the speeches today, that is exactly what they have been saying. The bill specifically points out, as it relates to the conditional sentence orders, that for offences of advocating genocide, for torture, attempted murder, terrorism and serious criminal organization offences, CSOs would continue to be unavailable. The bill addresses some of the rhetoric that we are hearing from across the way, as if we need to be very clear about that.

● (1655)

It really concerns me that rather than trying to have honest discussions about what is in the bill, we instead hear a huge amount of rhetoric coming from the other side of the House, with the intent, as I indicated earlier, to play off people's emotions, to drum up fear and to manufacture outrage. That is exactly what Conservatives are doing and they are doing it with the intent to motivate and rally the troops, probably for the member for Carleton so they can go to his website and sign up to support him, but that is—

● (1700)

The Deputy Speaker: There is a point of order by the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative leadership race has nothing to do with the member's speech and he should not be getting into it.

The Deputy Speaker: That is getting into debate.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am always absolutely fascinated by the member for Kingston and the Islands, but I have not been able to follow the last 10 minutes of his speech, so I do not think the Conservatives are correct in saying this may not have anything to do with it because it has been very hard to get a coherent message of what he is actually saying.

The Deputy Speaker: That was not a point of order either.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Timmins—James Bay making that comment. Perhaps we can sit down and I could get into more detail if what I am saying is not resonating with him. I would be more than happy to do that at the appropriate time.

The reality of the situation is that we are seeing the Conservatives try to drum up fear out there, because they are doing it in ways that do not represent what is actually in this bill. I already made this point clear earlier, when I talked about the member for Kildonan—St. Paul saying—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I know people are trying to be helpful, but the member has three minutes and 33 seconds remaining in his speech and I am sure he wants to finish.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I will end with the Bloc's position on this. I will stop picking on the Conservatives and I will turn to the Bloc. I see this wicked and very dramatically evolving change of heart with the Bloc in terms of its position on this bill. Bloc members seem to now be sitting on the fence. The member for Shefford said earlier that this just might not be the right time for this bill, as if in a couple of months it might be or maybe a few months ago it could have been. They are on the fence. I think they just need a bit of a push at this point to come over.

The member for Shefford, if I remember correctly, also talked about exceptional circumstances. She said she thinks that under certain exceptional circumstances, mandatory minimums might be appropriate, but under other circumstances, more regular circumstances perhaps, they would not be. I would suggest it is very clear, based on what we have seen in our own data as to what has happened over the past few decades, that mandatory minimums do not work and that it is time we actually start to develop strategies that help to rehabilitate individuals so that they can indeed become productive members of society again. At the end of the day, that is what we want. That is what we should want.

I get a kick out of it. The Conservatives are clapping right now in a very facetious manner, as if to suggest that should not be our overall objective and goal, and I think it should be. We have a role. We call it “corrections” because we are looking to help people get better and to change their lives so that they can become productive and contributing members of society once again. Unfortunately, time after time, we see Conservatives go down the exact same road with respect to their approach on this. I certainly disagree with them, and I most certainly will be voting in favour of this bill.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting that during his speech, the member said we are not going to be dealing with conditional sentence orders on some sort of sexual offence, as I heard it, but I cannot remember the term he used.

I will remind him that about two weeks ago, I brought up a case in the House where a seven- or eight-year-old was victimized by the child's caregiver. That person received a conditional sentence order. My reason for rising on that very point was to say that it is incumbent on Parliament to change the framework that led to these types of decisions. This decision may have been a rarity, but the point is that Canadians come to us, as I am sure they do to the hon. member and certainly to me, and say an outcome was unacceptable.

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Why is it so wrong, if Canadians think an outcome is unacceptable, that it is being represented in the House through a mandatory minimum?

• (1705)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not know the details of that case, so I do not think it would be appropriate for me to speculate on it. I will say that I have faith in our justice system. I have faith that individuals will be tried properly, including by, I am sure, very fine prosecutors, such as the member used to be, and perhaps he would like to go back to that profession, I do not know. Maybe there is a good Liberal in his riding who would like to replace him. I say that in a joking way. I have a lot of respect for the member.

I think we need to put faith in the institutions. I have no problem when individuals get up to say that they are not happy with an outcome, but we heard the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, earlier today, get up to say that they respect judges, but judges do not always get it right. Well, one should also, as I am sure this member, as a former prosecutor, would agree, respect the decision. If one respects the institution, one respects the decision.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope to provide a bit of wisdom to the House. I may not have a lot of experience, but I am the right age for the job. In response to the member's speech, I want to make something clear right away. The Bloc Québécois has been saying since this morning that it will be voting in favour of the bill. It is time to stop asking questions and interpreting our colleagues' comments.

We can see the glass as half full or half empty. We have decided to see it as half full because several measures, including the diversion measures for some offences and the abolition of certain mandatory minimum sentences seem justified. However, we must not think that keeping people out of prison is going to save us a pile of money. It will take money and support to help those individuals and there is no mention of that in the bill.

Why is the Liberal Party, who accuses the opposition of all sorts of things, unable to do some nuanced thinking itself? Why is it rejecting the amendments proposed by the Bloc Québécois, which included removing the offence of discharging a firearm from the list of offences requiring a mandatory minimum sentence? That is the type of example that called for nuance, but the Liberals do not understand the meaning of that.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on why Liberals are not accepting amendments, one would have to talk to the Liberals who are on that committee. Again, I do not have all the details, so I am unable to provide an answer to that, but I will say, to the member's first point, I realize that today the Bloc has come on board, but that was not the case a week ago. That was not the case two weeks ago. As a matter of fact, this morning, the member for Shefford said that this might not be the right time to look at mandatory minimums, given the recent crime rate. She said that.

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It is very clear to me that the Bloc is just recently kind of on board with this. For the member to suggest that it is all in and it always has been, I think it is a massive stretch.

I will say, on the last point that she made about investing money, I agree completely. It costs money, and we have to invest in the right things. I would suggest that, instead of investing in more prison guards, which, by the way, would be great for my riding, what we should be investing in are the tools and resources and programs to help rehabilitate people. At the end of the day, that is what is much better for society.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the, I think, good things about the bill is that it removes mandatory minimums for drug sentences, but it leads to a larger question of consistency with the government. The member and the government voted against the NDP Bill C-216, which would have treated addiction as a health issue and decriminalized it for everybody. The government continues to say that it does believe that it should treat substance use as a health issue, yet it continues to criminalize substance use through the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

If it is right to remove mandatory sentences from people suffering from addiction in the bill, why is it not right to treat all drug addicts across the country with the same empathy and ensure they are treated as patients, not as criminals?

• (1710)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, that is because we cannot do it on our own. It involves getting the provinces involved too. They are the ones responsible for administering our health care system. That is why we were able to do it with British Columbia because British Columbia came to the table suggesting that we sit down to talk about how we can do this. Collectively, we were able to put together the framework.

What the member is suggesting is that, through a private member's bill, we should have just ripped off the band-aid for the entire country and exposed the entire country, without making sure that the provinces were in place to help with this along the way and to participate in their way throughout this process. I know this member knows that. That is why doing this, working with provinces, as we have seen in British Columbia, is the right and responsible way to do it.

I have no doubt that the federal government will look to other jurisdictions and the other provinces to see if there are more opportunities to continue to do the same.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this bill and this government have consistently been painted by the Conservatives as being soft on crime. I would like to ask my hon. colleague whether all mandatory minimums are being repealed or only a subset. If it is a subset, why that subset?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, what we have here is an opportunity to remove the mandatory minimums that have been set out in the bill because we see a greater good in helping rehabilitate individuals so they can become productive members of society again.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I am continually being heckled by the other side, but what is really at the core of this is that Conservative desire to play off emotions, hype things up and manufacture outrage.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the member's speech, he acknowledged and actually waxed eloquent on the member for Humber River—Black Creek's ability to reflect and look back on decisions made.

I want to provide this member with the opportunity to correct the record when he stated that the former Conservative government made the decision not to act on the truth and reconciliation report, given that interim report was tabled in May and the final report was only tabled in December of 2015. In between the two there was an election and a different government.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, if that was the case then I certainly would. From my recollection of the events at that time, the Conservatives were very reluctant to suggest that they wanted to move forward with any of the recommendations.

I have no problem. If the member is correct, then I send my deepest apologies to the Conservatives whom I offended in making that comment.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to my hon. colleague across the way, I know for a fact that in June of last year, in the last Parliament, I saw my private member's bill, Bill C-228, go through and become law. The purpose of that bill was to work effectively between non-profit, faith-based and government organizations, both provincial governments and the federal government, to establish a federal framework for the reduction of recidivism through effective partnerships.

I was thankful to largely have all-party support in the House, and I know it unanimously passed through the Senate. It is now law. We still have not got a report back from the Minister of Public Safety, which is due back this month. This is a proactive step that we could take to make sure that we stop the revolving door in our prison system.

I would love to hear what the member's thoughts are on that.

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like I voted in favour of it in the last Parliament, so it must have been a great bill. I congratulate the member.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 9, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the amendment.

[English]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the amendment be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 15, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 so we can start Private Members' Business.

The Deputy Speaker: 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.

It being 5:30, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY ACT

The House resumed from March 31 consideration of the motion that Bill S-214, An Act to establish International Mother Language Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ) Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois welcomes Senator Mobina Jaffer's Bill S-214, entitled an act to establish international mother language day.

In November 1999, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization proclaimed International Mother Language Day. The United Nations General Assembly called on its member states to encourage the preservation and protection of the languages spoken by the peoples of the world.

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss said, and I quote:

A language is a monument that is just as important as a stone monument, if not more so. Each culture represents a repository of considerable human wealth. Each people has its own repository of beliefs and institutions that represent an irreplaceable experience for humanity as a whole.

This is in keeping with the Bloc Québécois' historic commitment to defending and promoting the French language in Quebec, Canada and America, which in turn is in keeping with the fight for cultural and linguistic diversity in the world and people's right to self-determination.

We know that the right of peoples to ensure the survival and vitality of their language and culture is part of their fundamental right to self-determination. Under the United Nations charter, every peo-

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ple has the right to self-determination, whether they are Scottish, Catalan, Palestinian, Kabyle or Québécois.

With neo-liberal globalization, the entire world is experiencing the commodification and anglicization of culture. U.S. mass culture is steamrolling national cultures.

It is therefore important that we ask ourselves whether we want globalization in a form that makes all national cultures and languages uniform, or one that ensures mutual respect among peoples. I believe that the latter path is the only one that can result in a peaceful and progressive solution that fosters world peace.

It is estimated that half of the 7,000 languages spoken on Earth today will disappear by the end of the century. Biodiversity loss does not just affect nature and wildlife. It also affects the world's linguistic heritage, which is in serious jeopardy.

We are seeing it here. Indigenous languages are at serious risk of disappearing, and the status of French in Canada shows that it is in decline. For example, only 2.4% of francophones outside Quebec speak French at home. French is critically endangered.

Language laws exist all over the world. In the study of various language planning models, they are grouped into two broad categories: models based on the principle of territoriality of collective rights and models based on the principle of personality, of individual choice of languages in a given territory.

Wherever personality models are used, the result is the assimilation of minority languages, because the free choice of languages always favours the majority languages. Moreover, virtually all scholars around the world agree that territoriality is the only approach that allows for the protection of minority languages.

Bill 101 is based on territoriality. We know that the Quebec model, with its Charter of the French Language, aims to make French the only official and common language on Quebec territory.

This is one of the Quebec government's main demands. We are discussing it here in the context of modernizing the Official Languages Act. We want Quebec to be the master of language policy on its territory, while respecting the historical English-speaking minority and recognizing the right of first nations to maintain and develop their original languages and cultures.

In 1977, Camille Laurin made the following statement:

By proclaiming French as Quebec's official language and by recognizing the right of all Quebecers to use French in all facets of their lives, we are making our language a national public asset, an asset belonging to all Quebecers, the best way to unite us all and promote dialogue among Quebecers of different origins. We are giving Quebecers a way to express their identity to the world.

What I despair to share is that her story is not unique. There are far too many Inuit, first nations people and Métis who have stories similar to hers. Canada is founded on Inuit, Métis and first nations lands. Canada thrives as a first world country based on the injustices it caused to indigenous peoples. While Métis, first nations people and Inuit have been voicing their stories for generations, their voices were suppressed, ignored and not allowed to be understood by mainstream society.

• (1730)

Canada is a so-called bilingual country with two official languages, English and French. Meanwhile, UNESCO estimates that 75% of indigenous languages in Canada are endangered. Regular Canadians, settlers, have also been victims of Canada's colonial history. Regular Canadians, settlers, have been robbed of their sense of being Canadian. After all, many are proud of being Canadian. What most do not realize is that they are proud of Canada's suppression. They are proud of Canada's oppressive policies. They are proud of colonial laws and policies that continue to impact current generations through intergenerational trauma. They are proud of the chronic underfunding that ensures that Inuit, first nations and Métis remain suppressed, in poverty, undereducated and not able to overcome the mental health challenges of intergenerational trauma.

Indeed, I myself used to be proud to celebrate Canada Day. I too was robbed through Canada's colonial education system. During my participation in the PROC study on the viability of indigenous languages in federal elections, I learned more about first nations and the extent of how endangered their languages are. We were provided data by Statistics Canada reflecting 2017 figures. There are over 70 indigenous languages spoken in Canada, but only 15.6% of the indigenous population have the ability to have conversations in any of these mother languages. We were told that only 170 of those who identify as Kutenai, 255 of those who identify as Tlingit and 455 of those who identify as Haida speak their mother language. These figures must be understood in terms of just how strong Canada's colonial laws and policies are today. The extent to which these languages are endangered shows just how hard we must all work to indigenize Canada's history. We must ensure that all first nations, Inuit and Métis are supported and resourced in order for these beautiful mother languages to be revitalized.

I am thankful to both Bangladesh and UNESCO, which in 1999 proposed that International Mother Language Day be established. By 2002, it was recognized by the United Nations General Assembly. I understand that starting in 1948, the Bengali stood up to the imposition of Urdu by the Government of Pakistan in Bangladesh. I am thankful the Bengali people demanded that their mother language be an official language alongside Urdu. The atrocities experienced by the Bengali are physically and collectively terrible. Once the Bengali demanded change, many were injured and killed at a protest organized by students of the University of Dhaka against the government's repression of Bengali. This protest happened on February 21, 1952. *Qujannamiik* to the Bengali people. We must acknowledge their enormous sacrifices and celebrate their history.

I must acknowledge what has been attempted to promote and protect indigenous languages. In 2014, Matthew Kellway, a New Democrat, introduced a private member's bill to recognize this day. As we debate this today, we know it did not pass. We now have the

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Indigenous Languages Act, which created the position of the indigenous languages commissioner. I had the pleasure of meeting the indigenous languages commissioner, Ronald Ignace, and directors Robert Watt, Georgina Liberty and Joan Greyeyes, at their first meeting here in Ottawa. I look forward to the great work they will do to promote and protect indigenous languages.

• (1735)

I do suggest that the bill be amended to replace the word “aboriginal” with the word “indigenous”.

I conclude by stating that the federal government must provide the same resources, rights and privileges to indigenous languages as it does for the two official languages. I conclude that I will gladly support the passing of this bill into law.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my work to pass International Mother Language Day dates back to the 42nd Parliament. At the time, I brought Senator Jaffer's bill to the House. It was reintroduced in the 43rd, and now the 44th, Parliament. The meaning behind International Mother Language Day is rooted in Canadian multiculturalism and openness and diversity. It is also an empowerment of our indigenous languages and a loud symbol of acceptance, internationally, during a dark time in world history. I would like to thank my colleague, Senator Jaffer, for her commitment to the bill, as well as my colleagues for Fleetwood—Port Kells, Beaches—East York and Surrey—Newton for their continued support for the bill.

If the bill passes, it will establish International Mother Language Day, a day that promotes the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world on February 21. If this had been in effect this year, it would have been just three days before Russia invaded Ukraine, partially based on the false pretext that the Ukrainian language and its people are pseudo-Russian.

We, as Canadian parliamentarians, have a duty to protect and preserve Canadian values, including multiculturalism. Ukrainians and peoples around the world have had to fight to keep their languages from imperial, jingoist and colonial powers. We have always stood up for minority groups around the world, and that is why we see so many people immigrate here. They know we offer a safe country for them. Establishing this day is yet another reinforcement of this multiculturalism.

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We are not perfect, though. I just mentioned that peoples have had to fight colonial powers from taking their languages from them. That has happened here in Canada up until very recently and, even now, indigenous communities and individuals are struggling to restore the knowledge and languages lost.

International Mother Language Day promotes not only international languages but the more than 60 indigenous languages from within Canada that are not officially recognized. While this is not an official call to action, it should be seen as a small but important step on our path towards truth and reconciliation.

To my Bloc colleagues, this bill would fully and explicitly recognize that English and French remain Canada's only official languages, and this would not change. Rather, it would promote the preservation of all languages.

I know the Bloc and Quebec are adamant allies of peoples around the world seeking the right to exist as unique, distinct nations with their own languages. This day epitomizes those values. Whether it is the Ukrainian language, Catalan or any other language, the Bloc and Quebec have also stood up for people's right to speak their own language. I ask you to support this bill today for the same reason.

I would like to add that asking for support for this day is not novel. The city of Surrey, which is part of my riding, already recognizes International Mother Language Day and so does the province of British Columbia. Canada would be the first country to do so. We never shied away from standing up for those without voices before, so why stop now? It is beyond time to recognize this day.

If the symbolism in Ukraine, multiculturalism groups, promoting indigenous languages, protection of minority languages or established precedent have yet to convince some of my colleagues, perhaps a story from one of my constituents will.

The late Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam, constituents from Surrey, immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh. Abdus is still a constituent of my riding in Cloverdale—Langley City. This issue is dear to Abdus's heart, and was to Rafiqul's, as Bengali speakers. Both have been fully aware of what it means to not be allowed to speak their mother language and of the pain that came with fighting for the right to speak it by their elders, dating back to 1952 in what was then East Pakistan.

They had lived in Bangladesh during a time when Bengali was not officially recognized, and people would be discriminated against if they did speak it. The identity of a people was in question.

After Britain left the Indian subcontinent in 1947, dividing it into India and Pakistan, the West Pakistani ruling class declared from the outset of the new country that only Urdu would be the official state language of Pakistan. English was to be taught and recognized as a second language. Bengali, the dominant language spoken by 54% of the total population of Pakistan, was excluded.

This threatened to sideline Bengali speakers from involvement in politics. It limited their ability to succeed in all spheres, including practising their own rich language and culture. It was another ex-

ample of how colonial rule led languages and peoples to be oppressed.

These discriminatory laws soon came under pressure from Bengali speakers to be changed. This was led by student protests that called for the government to include Bengali as one of the official languages.

On the 21st day of February, 1952, in the streets of Dhaka, while people were protesting and demonstrating for the right to establish Bengali as one of the official languages of Pakistan, the police opened fire on this unarmed protest. This killed at least five students on the spot and injured several more. Some were later known to have died in the hospital.

● (1740)

The deaths of these students and student protesters sparked national unrest and eventually the central government relented and granted official status to the Bengali language in 1956, along with Urdu, in the Pakistan constitution of 1956.

This language movement had a major cultural impact on Bengali society. It inspired the development and celebration of the Bengali language, literature and culture. February 21, celebrated as Language Movement Day, is a major national holiday in Bangladesh. While Bengalis had to fight for this, Canada now takes this for granted.

This also impacted Rafiqul and Abdus when they arrived in Vancouver as immigrants. They saw that Canada is a land where all kinds of different nationalities have come together. Along with the indigenous-rich culture, it was a mosaic of inherent beauty and strength among people, but they also realized that many small languages were dying away. These two men formed an organization named Mother Language Lovers of the World and brought in eight other people from different linguistic backgrounds.

Apart from these two Bengali speakers, there were two English-, two Filipino-, one German-, one Cantonese Chinese-, one Hindi- and one Kutchi-speaking individuals. They petitioned first to the UN and then UNESCO in early 1998 and, through various processes and protocols of UNESCO, finally International Mother Language Day was declared unanimously on November 17, 1999. The inherent beauty and unique mutual respect hidden in this for all languages and cultures was recognized by the world at UNESCO's 30th general conference. It was a big victory for all the mother languages of the world. Since 2000, the world observes International Mother Language Day on February 21.

We should recognize International Mother Language Day in solidarity for those who did not and still do not have the ability to freely speak their own language. We should recognize it in support of Ukraine today. We should recognize it because it represents our multicultural roots. We should recognize it because it promotes indigenous languages. We should recognize it because it highlights the need for protection of minority languages.

Today, I ask all my colleagues to join me in recognizing International Mother Language Day. In doing so, Canada can be a beacon for the rest of the world to follow in this peaceful gesture.

I have appreciated the opportunity to speak to this bill.

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, a few years ago, I read a National Geographic article about endangered languages. I do not remember the names of the specific languages, but I know there was one in Russia, one in India and a series of them in Mexico.

This article not only gave a voice to some of the people who still speak these languages, but it also illustrated the richness of these languages and the difference they make in people's world views.

A language is a way to describe the world, after all. The more ways there are to describe our world, the more accurate picture we will have of that world and its features. An international mother language day would allow us to highlight those features, take time to acknowledge them, love them and promote them.

I want to tell my colleague from Cloverdale—Langley City, whom I hope is still listening, that the Bloc will be supporting Bill S-214.

My speech in support of Bill S-214 will provide a brief history of the idea of mother language day and some statistics. I will also spend a few moments on the mother tongue aspect of languages and give some examples of the richness of different languages.

UNESCO has been observing International Mother Language Day since 1999, when it was adopted unanimously. When this day was added to the calendar, UNESCO noted that 43% of the languages spoken today are at risk of disappearing. In fact, one language disappears every other week on average. It is alarming. That is what will happen now and in the future if nothing is done to preserve and promote the languages. That does not even include all those that have already disappeared over time.

In 2007, the UN General Assembly asked its members to encourage the preservation and protection of all the languages spoken by all peoples in this world. At the time, many languages had already disappeared and many others were disappearing. Why does this happen?

There were events that took place in the past. Civil wars between nations and colonization are two examples of history and its impact, which weakened several languages and made them disappear. We have to acknowledge that and be able to look to the future, make things right and move forward. We have to be able to recognize the mistakes of the past so as not to repeat them.

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These days, educational systems, the online world and the belief that English is the only international language of business all contribute to making languages vulnerable. Just a few hundred languages in the world are supported by existing educational systems, and even fewer are supported by the online world and social networks. If you were to go by social networks alone, it would be easy to assume that English is the world's only economic salvation, but people do business in almost every language in the world, not just in English.

When we are conscious of what puts languages in danger of disappearing, we are in a better position to take action, to find solutions and to foster relationships of respect. Mutual respect allows us to see languages as complementary, rather than incompatible or incongruous, ways to talk about and see our world.

Have you ever wondered why we use the expression “mother tongue” instead of “father tongue” or “birth language”? It is simply because the first words children hear are usually spoken by their mother. These words are usually tender and kind, and those sentiments reflect our attachment to our mother tongue.

Like mitochondrial DNA, the mother tongue is passed down from the mother. For example, when French settlers arrived in Quebec, they had several different accents, because France did not, and still does not, have only one nationwide accent. Today, there is the Norman accent, the Parisian accent, the northern accent called the Ch'ti accent, and the southern accent, from the Marseille or Toulouse region. At the time when the first French settlers came to America, it was the same. It was like that then, and it still is today.

How did the distinctive Quebec accent come to be?

● (1750)

Let us talk about one of Quebec's accents, because it is wrong to claim that there is just one. There is the Montreal accent, the Quebec City accent, the Gaspé accent, the Acadian accent, and so on. The first Quebec accent is thought to have come from the *filles du roi*. They were poor girls or orphans, sometimes belonging to the genteel poor, who were educated at the expense of the French king Louis XIV. The accent we hear today, with words like “moi” and “toi” pronounced like “moé” and “toé”, is the Parisian accent of the 17th century. To those who tell us, even today, that our French is not French, I would say that our French is the legacy of what created French in France and the international French of today. Our expressions are a gateway to history. The same goes for all the world's languages. Some are modern, while others are doors to the past, to nature, and more.

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A few years ago, when I was in university, my English second language professor confessed that she adored French. I get that. Even though it was not her mother tongue, she adored it because she found French to be more vivid and precise than English. Take it easy; those were her words. For example, she said that, in English, there is blue, light blue and dark blue, but in French, there is a whole spectrum of blues. She found English interesting because it is a fast language made up of short words. She loved her mother tongue, but she was able to perceive the charms of another language. We should all be like her.

This is true of other languages too. There are words that exist in one language and not another. If I remember correctly, in Inuktitut, there are several dozen words for snow. That makes sense because it was crucial that they be able to describe snow precisely. It was a matter of survival. It helped them find their way. By comparison, in French we have wet snow, loose snow, packed snow, icy snow, slush, powder, and a couple more I have probably forgotten. We do not have that many.

It is only by taking an interest in lesser-known, rarer languages that we can discover the breadth and beauty of the world we live in. Mother tongues should be celebrated. We need to share them, to share the insight that each of them gives us into our world, our emotions, our spirit. The more words a person has, the more precise their vision of the world, both physical and abstract, is. By sharing our languages, by respecting and honouring them, by doing everything possible to protect endangered languages and by allowing these languages to be passed on, we are sharing world views, sharing our visions, and learning to respect one another. As the great Pierre Bourgault said, to protect a language is to protect all languages from the hegemony of one, whatever it may be. A nation can have one, two or three official languages, and individuals can have many more. It is this individual richness that must be preserved and praised.

In conclusion, a language is a system of concepts. It is the basis of every individual and of the construction of the psyche. The more we do to keep the world's languages from disappearing, the more we will enable people to have a strong psyche that is rich in imagery, and the more we will love this diversity. The world's mother tongues are also part of diversity, and we must love them, no matter what they are.

I want to close with this final thought. International mother language day is a bit like Valentine's Day. Lovers love each other all year round, not just on Valentine's Day. We must love our mother tongue all year round, not just on February 21. We have to demonstrate it every day. Still, I do hope we will all celebrate international mother language day together next February 21.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am tremendously grateful to my colleagues from all parties here in the House of Commons for the support they have offered over the last two sessions of debate on this Senate bill to create international mother language day across Canada.

As my friend from Cloverdale—Langley City noted, it has taken a few tries to make this a reality, and in this regard I have to recog-

nize the tireless and persistent efforts of British Columbia Senator Mobina Jaffer and, again, the support and efforts of my friend and colleague the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City for sponsoring earlier iterations of Bill S-214. Of course, Mr. Aminul Islam from our home community of Surrey, himself from Bangladesh, has been the drive and spirit behind this effort.

Speaking of spirit, what we just heard from the hon. member from the Bloc, and what we heard from the hon. member for Nunavut, really drive home the point of the beauty and music of our languages and why Canada is a richer country because we have them.

The message in the first hour of debate, and again here today in the second hour, is a solid indication that, when this bill comes to a vote, we will at last fulfill the dreams of many who have wanted Canada to join the rest of the world in celebrating international mother language day this coming February 21.

This is more than symbolic. Our deliberations here have recognized that our own indigenous languages need our urgent attention and support to prevent their extinction. Also, since becoming a member of Parliament, I have maintained a home in Gatineau's Aylmer community, and more than ever I have come to treasure the unique and enriching value that French means to Canada, and it not just the language, but the culture and spirit that comes with it.

I was young, many, many years ago, French was the language of international diplomacy. I will add, by the way, in a moment of self-gratification, that I am celebrating the 25th anniversary of my 50th birthday today. However, a long time ago, French was the language of international diplomacy. It has been supplanted by English for a long time now, and anglophones, like me, will find English in most places we visit in the world.

In that regard, I noted with some personal embarrassment the words of a Bloc Québécois colleague in the first hour of our debate when he expressed frustration and resentment with the hegemony of the English language. It made me recall the words attributed to the person famous for weaponizing English speech in the Second World War. Sir Winston Churchill, who, perhaps also feeling that same sense of discomfiture, is said to have once said that English is a language that lurks in dark alleys, beats up other languages and rifles through their pockets for spare vocabulary. However, the legislation we are supporting today makes some amends for that.

Beyond our standing as a bilingual nation, our embrace of multiculturalism in Canada sets a table of unparalleled cultural richness. All across our country, we find languages that have come here from the homelands of the people who have chosen our country to be theirs. As I mentioned in my opening comments on this bill, the iconic symbolism and idioms of those languages can teach us much about how many of our fellow Canadians see the world.

As a Liberal, I firmly stand with the proposition that we are stronger because of our differences, not in spite of them. Part of the reason is, looking through those differences in culture, custom, dress, religion and language, we have discovered, as Canadians, the common things that bind this unlikely nation together. We love our families. We work to earn and enjoy the prosperity and privileges our nation offers. When it counts, we are all ready to stick up for our rights and what we believe in with the confidence that this country allows, indeed expects, us to do so.

Thus, to confidently enjoy the opportunity to celebrate our heritages says a lot about Canada and who we all are to each other and to the rest of the world. This is something we can affirm next February 21, and as I have noticed, something we can vote to support tomorrow here in the House of Commons.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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.

• (1800)

[*English*]

The hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to come back tonight and question the Minister of National Defence or the parliamentary secretary and follow up on a question that I asked on March 22, a number of months ago, about the fact that the people of Ukraine are fighting for their freedom, their democracy and even their lives. They have asked for more help from Canada.

The Canadian Armed Forces, as I highlighted in that question for the minister in March, is in the process of divesting many of its armoured vehicles, such as the Coyotes, the M113s and the Bison ambulances, and replacing them with the current armoured combat support vehicle project. My question for the minister at the time was whether these vehicles will be donated to Ukraine, and if so, when.

I am confident, having worked with the parliamentary secretary and in getting to know the minister well, that they have the answers. They have had a couple of months to dig up the answers and

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know this. There were already sources in the news recently talking about the fact that the Government of Canada may be willing to donate 40 Coyote vehicles to Ukraine. This is good news.

My question is, what about the hundreds more? We have more Coyotes and more LAV IIIs. In fact, one thing that is absolutely critical to Ukraine is Bison ambulances. These are great vehicles. They are fighting a war, and later I will get into the reason these armoured vehicles are that much more important.

The question that I am hoping the parliamentary secretary or the minister will answer tonight is this: When can Ukraine expect to receive these critical vehicles that Ukrainians need, as they are fighting for their lives against this illegal invasion by President Putin?

This was highlighted again just yesterday by the Ukrainian MPs who are here visiting Canada. One was on *Power & Politics* yesterday. The Ukrainian member of Parliament was asked whether Canada has provided a response to Ukraine and when they can expect these vehicles. I was flabbergasted to watch that interview and understand that no, Ukraine is still waiting for a response from the government on when it can expect those armoured vehicles. These are vehicles, as they rightly know, that Canada is not using. They could be there to support Ukraine and save lives.

There is also ammunition. I do give the government credit, as it has donated 155 millimetre howitzers, artillery pieces that are critical, but Ukraine needs the ammunition. Anybody watching the news knows they are going through this ammunition at a critical pace.

To finalize the importance of this, I note that I read a professor's paper earlier today that talked about the famine that is going to come out of this war, the world famine, and the backlog that is occurring with the blockades that the Russians are adding against Ukraine. This is something Canada should be doing more to resolve. I will quote the final paragraph of that paper: "Canada's inability or even unwillingness to be agile during this unprecedented crisis puts us into the back row of reliable nations. It is a paralyzing combination of fear, bureaucratic stagnation and a crippling lack of creativity that holds us back and forces us to watch our hard-won value system circle the drain. Hundreds of millions of people are at risk because of the Putin regime's actions. What is Canada going to do about it?"

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague for his service to this country, as well as his consistent advocacy for members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and for Ukraine and Ukrainians.

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Canada has made it very clear that we stand firmly with Ukrainians in the face of this unjustified and unprovoked attack on their country. Following Russia's occupation and the attempted illegal annexation of Crimea, we launched Operation Unifier in 2015. Over the last seven years, we have been working alongside Ukraine in training over 33,000 members of its security forces, training and learning valuable skills from one another. We were privileged to witness the complete transformation of Ukraine's security forces over the past several years. This is the force that is bravely and effectively defending itself against invading Russian forces today.

We have also helped bolster Ukraine's resilience in cyberspace, in conjunction with the Communications Security Establishment. We continue to work closely with our international partners and various government departments to ensure that Ukrainians have what they need in order to defend their country.

Canada has already committed \$262 million for military aid for Ukraine since February 2022, and that includes anti-tank weapons, rockets, M777 howitzers, drone cameras, 155-millimetre ammunition and rifles, armoured utility vehicles, and satellite imagery and technology. Our military donation includes both new equipment and equipment from Canadian Armed Forces inventories. I am pleased to say that some of the military aid coming in does come from the \$500 million that our government announced in the last federal budget. This is the case for the 20,000 155-millimetre artillery rounds that the Minister of National Defence recently announced, at a cost of \$98 million, which will be crucial in Ukraine's current fight to defend its eastern territory.

In addition, Canada has deployed two CC-130 aircraft to Europe to transport military equipment toward Ukraine. This includes equipment from Canada and our allies. These aircraft have delivered over two million pounds of aid so far, on over 100 flights, and this work continues every single day.

We are conducting an assessment of what further equipment we can buy or donate based on Ukraine's list of urgent requirements. However, we need to ensure that we are donating equipment that can be integrated with their existing fleet and that they can maintain it during this time of war. We are focused on addressing the most pressing defence needs that Ukraine communicates to partners and allies at forums like the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting, which the Minister of National Defence will be attending on the margins of this week's meeting of NATO ministers of defence. As we announce further aid to Ukraine, we will continue to respond to the requests of Ukraine's government. Canada's defence minister remains in close and frequent contact with her Ukrainian counterpart on how Canada can best assist Ukraine as it fights to defend itself.

I want to reassure the member opposite and Canadians that Canada will continue seeking every opportunity and every avenue to support and help Ukraine. We will continue to work with our international partners as well to ensure that we continue supporting Ukraine in effective and meaningful ways to best respond to its needs.

I look forward to further discussing this issue with my friend and colleague and, once again, thank him for his service to this country.

• (1805)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, first off, I offer my congratulations to the member for Milton for his promotion, in my view, to become the parliamentary secretary of defence, as I guess that is why he is answering the question tonight.

The parliamentary secretary failed to answer the question. It is the same question I asked the minister three months ago, and it is almost the same response. I do not need a history lesson, nor does anybody in this House, nor Canadians. We can all read the news. We know what Canada is doing, but what Ukrainians need is armoured vehicles. This is what they have asked for and, as confirmed as recently as yesterday, the government of this country has not even given the Ukrainians the courtesy of responding as to when they can expect to get those armoured vehicles.

Ukraine is in peril. People's lives are in danger. Why can Canada not simply give old armoured vehicles to Ukraine?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I would personally never dream of second-guessing my colleague and his expertise in military affairs, but I would say that we are all aware of how urgent the need is. I would also reiterate how close that contact has been between our defence minister and theirs and how steadfast we are in our support of Ukraine and its people.

So far, we have responded to Ukraine's requests for aid in coordination with our NATO allies. I am proud to say that tomorrow Canada will be represented at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting in Brussels by our defence minister, who will make it clear that Canada is serious about supporting Ukraine as this conflict extends into the long term. We will continue to work with our NATO allies, international partners and various government departments to ensure that Ukraine has exactly what it needs to defend itself against President Putin's unjustified attack.

I will close by once again thanking my friend and colleague for his consistent advocacy and his service to this country.

• (1810)

HEALTH

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to follow up on a question I asked the government.

In May, I asked the Minister of Transport, once again, when he would allow Canadians to fly and end the travel mandates. I pointed out how Canada is virtually alone and an outlier in requiring vaccinations to fly. Iceland, Sweden, Ireland, France, the U.K., Argentina, Costa Rica, Denmark, Hungary, Jamaica, Thailand, Mexico, Norway and Poland are just a few of the many countries that have allowed their citizens to fly vaccine-free.

I would also note that a country the Prime Minister has an interesting relationship with, Cuba, also allows its citizens to fly without being vaccinated.

I have risen in this House many times—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. I believe the hon. colleague was insinuating that the Prime Minister has some sort of close relationship with Cuba. I would ask him to withdraw that comment as unnecessary in the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member was making a comment on the countries that have eliminated vaccine mandates. I cannot really judge the intentions of the hon. member in his comments.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I have risen in the House many times and asked many questions raising issues around the Liberals' punitive, divisive and discriminatory vaccine mandates.

I have spoken to many individuals across the country, particularly one gentleman named Cayle, a young man who drove all the way here from Vancouver Island because he could not fly to protest these vaccine mandates.

I know that the parliamentary secretary will want to talk about how the government is now suspending the vaccine mandates as of June 20. While this announcement will bring relief to those who have been stigmatized by the Prime Minister for their personal medical decisions, I want to ask specifically why the Liberals are suspending the mandates.

Today's media release quoted the repeated claim that these were always meant to be a temporary measure. I have heard a lot from the Prime Minister and the government about how these measures were always going to be temporary. The government then went on to say that it would only suspend these required vaccination requirements for domestic and outbound travel, federally regulated transportation sectors and federal government employees. Why is the government only suspending them? If the government really believed that travel mandates were just a temporary measure, it should be ending them, not suspending them.

In the announcement, the Liberal government was clear that it was not eliminating the mandates but was temporarily removing them while keeping them active. The mandates are not really gone, but just not being enforced for now. In everyday life, when we see or hear about a suspension, it is something that is short. In a hockey game, a player can get a suspension for a game or two but then he goes back to the normal life of playing hockey.

With the Liberals' "temporary suspension" of the vaccine mandates, one can believe that will be coming back. Is this suspension a temporary thing? Were the mandates a temporary thing? It seems that there is now a new normal, with vaccine mandates being the

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norm. I hope that this is not going to be the case, but we have seen how the government has been following political science regarding its COVID policy instead of actual science.

To review, over the past year, the government has suspended the rights of millions of Canadians to travel and see their families. Now it is announcing that it is temporarily un-suspending these rights. With this approach, maybe the Liberals should amend the Constitution to the "Charter of temporary rights and freedoms".

Members can consider that if one has been convicted of a sexual crime against children, as long as they have a vaccine, here is a passport and off they go. There are 42,000 convicted sex offenders in this country, and the government has only refused eight passports to people who are considered likely to exploit children in another country.

However, the government is spending \$30 million to implement—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, since the beginning of this pandemic, our top priority has been the health and safety of Canadians. We are more than two years into this pandemic, and our priority remains exactly the same. That is why we continue to take actions at the border.

Canadians have stepped up to protect themselves and the people around them from COVID-19 by getting vaccinated. Today, nearly 90% of the eligible population has been vaccinated, case counts have decreased and the rates of hospitalizations and deaths are also decreasing across this country. Indeed, we continue to have access to vaccines, boosters, therapeutics and rapid tests. This allows us to be more flexible in our approach at the borders, and it also means that Canada has one of the lowest death rates in the world.

That is why we have eased some of the requirements for vaccinated travellers in recent months, including our decision to move COVID-19 testing for all travellers off-site. The Government of Canada will pause mandatory random testing at airports between June 11 and June 30 as we transition to a model whereby testing occurs outside of airports.

Additionally, our government announced today that as of June 20, it will suspend vaccination requirements for domestic and outbound travel, federally regulated transportation sectors and federal government employees.

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While the suspension of vaccine mandates reflects our improved public health situation in Canada, the COVID-19 virus continues to evolve and circulate in Canada and globally. Given this context and because vaccination rates and virus control in other countries vary significantly, current vaccination requirements at the border will remain in effect. This will reduce the potential impact of international travel on our health care system and serve as added protection against any future variant.

Other public health measures, such as wearing a mask, continue to apply and will be enforced throughout a traveller's journey on a plane or a train.

Our government's decision to suspend the mandatory vaccination requirement for the domestic transportation sector was informed by key indicators that include the evolution of this virus, the epidemiological situation and modelling, the stabilization of infection and hospitalizations across the country, vaccine science and high levels of vaccination in Canada against COVID-19.

Our government will continue to evaluate measures and will not hesitate to make adjustments based on the latest public health advice and science to keep Canadians and the transportation system safe and secure. Canadian citizens and Canadian permanent residents returning from international destinations who do not qualify for the fully vaccinated traveller exemption continue to be required to provide a valid pre-entry test result and remain subject to day one and day eight molecular testing, as well as quarantine for 14 days.

In addition, all travellers entering Canada are required to input their mandatory information in ArriveCAN within 72 hours before their arrival in Canada. Travellers who arrive without completing their ArriveCAN submission may be subject to day one and day eight molecular testing, as well as to quarantine for 14 days and fines for other enforcement actions, regardless of their vaccination status.

Some exemptions remain in place for certain unvaccinated travellers. For example, agricultural temporary foreign workers, resettled refugees, asylum seekers and those with a medical exemption would also be permitted to enter. Our government recognizes that for weeks there have been various issues causing delays at airports, and we continue to work closely with airport authorities, airlines, testing providers and many other partners to manage traveller flow and make sure travellers are processed as efficiently as possible.

• (1815)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, as I suspected, the parliamentary secretary does not really believe Canadians' rights are absolute, but rather exist at the whim of the government.

One of his colleagues has stated, "The massive majority of Liberal MPs want the mandates to end." His colleague also noted that "There's never any straight or particularly convincing answer". Again, we see that right here today.

There is no evidence for imposing these discriminatory mandates and no evidence for suspending the rights of Canadians. Now there is no evidence for the mandates to be suspended, even though the Prime Minister has proven that even with three shots, one can still get and spread COVID.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary again: What evidence is the government relying on today that changed from yesterday?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I admire my colleague's desire to stand up for rights in this country, and I just wish he would also stand up for the rights of women to access reproductive health services and abortions.

The goal of Canada's COVID-19 response is to mitigate the risk of importation of COVID-19 and variants of concern. The government is committed to limiting social and economic disruptions, continuing to improve the overall traveller experience and supporting Canada's aviation industry, which is an important sector of our economy. As we adjust our border measures, we will continue to use current data and a science-informed approach. We will also continue to work with provincial and territorial colleagues and indigenous partners, as well as international counterparts.

Canadians travelling abroad should exercise caution and be aware that if they test positive for COVID-19 while they are abroad, they might have to extend their trip.

TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Madam Speaker, the price of gas has risen over 40% year over year. If we look up the price of gas in the GTA right now in, from Toronto to Richmond Hill, we will see that it is currently around 209.3¢ per litre. The cost of gas is up, way up, and so is the price of food.

Even if someone does not drive, farmers drive to plant, to harvest and to do so much more, and they need gas. To get the food they grow to our grocery stores, they need gas. Gas prices are up 40%. It is no surprise that food prices have risen almost 10%.

We have seen the largest increase in the cost of food since 1981. That is a 41-year record. In 1981, I was not even born yet. My parents were still in a refugee camp. If we take into account the fact that Canada's median age is 41.1 years, that means for half of Canadians, myself included, the increase in the price of food is the highest it has ever been in our lifetime. The price of gas is also the highest I have ever seen in my lifetime.

The soaring cost of gas and food is crushing Canadians, but while Canadians are struggling, the government is just raking it in. How much is it bringing in? Let us do the math. Annually, 65 billion litres of gasoline and diesel are sold in Canada. The GST revenue that the federal government collects from just these two fuels alone works out to about \$6 billion a year.

However, members will remember that gas prices are up 40%, so the federal government stands to pocket \$2.5 billion extra that it never budgeted for or earmarked. Those billions of dollars belong to Canadians.

I know I have much more time to speak, but I am going to jump straight to the point. The federal government has a duty to give this slush fund back to Canadians. I will ask this of the government, yet again: Will the government provide relief to struggling Canadians, just as the fiscally prudent and compassionate Liberal Paul Martin government did? Yes or no?

● (1820)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the important question of affordability tonight. Our government understands that Canadians are being hard hit by rising prices, particularly as they apply to energy and gasoline. That is why we are taking effective action to meaningfully support Canadians so they can continue to deal with this challenge.

The current rate of inflation, which is very high, is a global phenomenon that is being driven by unprecedented supply chain disruptions resulting from COVID-19 and the severe commodity disruptions that are arising from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. It is a complex and multi-faceted problem, but it is not one that we are facing alone.

That is why we are already focused on implementing realistic measures to help families make ends meet. Our government has already cut taxes for the middle class, while raising them on the top 1% of earners, and we have also increased support for families and low-income workers through such programs as the Canada child benefit and the Canadian workers benefit.

In budget 2021, our government laid out an ambitious plan to provide Canadian parents with, on average, \$10-a-day regulated child care spaces for children under six years old. In less than a year, we have reached agreements with all provinces and territories.

The economic benefits of providing families with subsidized family care and child care spaces really cannot be undersold or understated. The fact is that families are going to save thousands of dollars. By the end of this year, families across Canada will have seen their child care fees reduced by an average of 50%.

To support vulnerable Canadians at the other end of the demographic spectrum, we have also increased the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit for low-income, single seniors and enhanced the GIS earnings exemption. We are also increasing old age security for Canadians aged 75 and older in July of this year. This 10% increase will provide more than \$766 in additional benefits to full pensioners over the first year. More than three million seniors will benefit from this.

Our government is also returning the direct proceeds from the federal carbon pollution pricing system to their province or territory of origin, with most of those proceeds going directly to families in those jurisdictions. In 2022-23, these payments mean a family of four will receive \$745 in Ontario, \$832 in Manitoba, \$1,101 in

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Saskatchewan and \$1,079 in Alberta. In addition, families in rural and small communities are eligible to receive an extra 10%.

We do understand that Canadians have to pay more for gasoline these days. However, these price increases are due to events abroad, and they are completely out of Canada's control. They are the results of market forces. That is why our government will continue to help Canadians make ends meet through targeted support measures here at home. As I made clear, our government is focused on implementing realistic measures to help families make ends meet.

We will continue to do the right thing and take actions that will create jobs and growth to make life more affordable for all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Vuong: Madam Speaker, I will acknowledge that there are countries around the world that are facing challenges with inflation. I acknowledge that point by my colleague. He mentioned there are certain things out of the countries' control. What is within the federal government's control is what it will choose to do with \$2.5 billion extra that it did not plan to have.

Canadians are struggling now. What about single Canadians? Family support is fantastic and \$10-a-day child care is great. What about those who do not have children? One in seven Canadians lives in poverty. They are struggling now with the cost of gas, the cost of food and so on.

I will ask, for the third time now: Will the government help struggling Canadians and provide relief following a precedent that a previous Liberal government had done?

● (1825)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, this government has done more to address affordability and poverty in this country than any previous government, and I would say that we have actually built on the great legacy of previous prime ministers such as Paul Martin.

I am someone who grew up in community housing in Oakville, Ontario. My parents, at different times in their lives, struggled with affordability. When I look at budget 2022, all I can see is really positive news for poverty reduction in this country. We have recovered 117% of the jobs lost to this pandemic compared with just 96% in the United States.

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I will answer the question from my colleague directly. Let us talk about the things we are doing for single people, including the Canada workers benefit. A family of three will get \$2,300 more this year, but single workers will get a good share as well. Single seniors will get an increase in OAS, \$815 in benefits, and the Canada child benefit is indexed, as are the GST credit, CPP, OAS and GIS, to inflation. We are also working on a Canada disability benefit. These are all programs and policies that are going to support Canadians in need, and this government has committed more than any

previous government, I would say, to reducing poverty in this country.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:27 p.m.)

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