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(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 7, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 7, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2018-19

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 79.22 of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled “Supplementary Estimates (B), 2018-19”.

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[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, four treaties.

The first is entitled “Exchange of notes between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America constituting an agreement amending Annex IV of the Treaty between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America concerning the Pacific Salmon”, done at Ottawa on November 27 and December 19, 2018.

The second is entitled “Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean”, done at Ilulissat on October 3, 2018.

The third is entitled “Exchange of Notes between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America concluding amendments to the Treaty between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on Pacific Coast Albacore Tuna Vessels and Port Privileges”, done at Ottawa on May 22 and 24, 2018.

Finally, the fourth is entitled “Agreement on Environmental Cooperation among the Governments of Canada, the United Mexican States, and the United States of America, done at Mexico City on November 30, 2018, at Washington on December 11, 2018, and at Ottawa on December 18, 2018.

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, entitled “Supporting Families After the Loss of a Child”. I would like to thank all those involved in producing this report and especially all those who came to speak to us and contribute to this report.

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

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage entitled “Bill C-369, An Act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Indigenous Peoples Day)”.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

PENSIONS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to table a petition on behalf of my constituents from the great community of Quesnel in the incredible riding of Cariboo—Prince George. They call on the Government of Canada to withdraw Bill C-27, an act to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act.

Routine Proceedings

They would like to add that this is yet another promise broken by the Prime Minister.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition from constituents from Nanoose Bay, Qualicum Beach and Courtenay in coastal British Columbia. They draw the attention of the government to the twinning of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and to concerns that around 40,000 barrels of oil have leaked from the existing Trans Mountain pipeline, including two major spills in Burnaby since 2007.

They are concerned that the oil will not be refined in British Columbia, sold to benefit Canadian consumers or used to meet Canada's energy needs, but instead will be shipped by tanker to foreign markets. This pipeline would pass through densely populated urban areas, such as the territories of 15 first nations, and the construction and operation of this new pipeline will negatively impact the city of Burnaby, as Kinder Morgan is seeking the use of publicly funded municipal resources and infrastructure.

The petitioners call on the government to immediately act to prevent the twinning of this oil pipeline from proceeding through Burnaby.

•(1010)

DEMENTIA

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition to the government with regard to the over 550,000 Canadians living with dementia. This number will double by 2030. Sixty per cent of people with Alzheimer's will wander at least once during their disease. Wandering is common as the disease progresses.

Silver Alert is a public notification system to quickly help find seniors who wander because of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

A Silver Alert would provide information to media outlets and activate an emergency alert system through law enforcement agencies. The Province of Alberta and the Province of Manitoba have established a Silver Alert through an amendment to their missing persons amendment acts.

The petition concludes:

We, the undersigned, citizens of Canada, call upon the Government of Canada to develop a National Silver Alert strategy for all Canadian provinces and territories.

INFANT LOSS

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I table this petition today on behalf of parents from across Canada who have suffered pregnancy or infant loss. There are thousands of signatures on this petition. Those parents, in their most difficult time, have seen government programming often cease to exist, causing more unnecessary and emotional financial hardship for them.

Today, as we just heard, the human resources committee's study on the impact of pregnancy and infant loss on parents was tabled, and it recommends that EI accommodate a bereavement leave, so on behalf of all bereaved parents in Canada, I table this petition today. It calls on the government to act immediately on these committee

recommendations and introduce changes to show more compassion and sympathy toward grieving parents.

EATING DISORDERS

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of people from across Winnipeg, today I have the honour of presenting a petition in favour of a pan-Canadian strategy to address eating disorders.

Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia have the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses, but the sooner someone receives treatment, the higher their chance of having a full recovery.

Currently, there are children as young as seven who are affected by eating disorders. They have been diagnosed and are being hospitalized for them. More than one million Canadians suffer, and families have been negatively affected physically, emotionally and financially by these struggles; hence the call for a pan-Canadian strategy to address these disorders.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a supplementary response to Question No. 2050, originally tabled on January 28, 2019, could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 2050—**Ms. Tracey Ramsey:**

With respect to the federal agency Invest in Canada and its board of directors: (a) what is, to date, the total amount of expenses of the Chair of the board and the members of the board, broken down by type of expenditure; (b) what are the details of implementing a national strategy to attract foreign direct investment to Canada; (c) how many new partnerships have been created, to date, with the departments or agencies of any government in Canada, the private sector in Canada, or other Canadian stakeholders interested in foreign direct investment; (d) how many activities, events, conferences and programs to promote Canada as a destination for investors have so far been created; (e) how much information has so far been collected, prepared and disseminated to assist foreign investors in supporting their foreign direct investment decisions in Canada; (f) how many services have been provided to foreign investors, to date, in respect of their current or potential investments in Canada; (g) who are the foreign investors that the agency has met, to date; (h) what are the suppliers outside of the federal public administration which the agency has used to date; (i) what, to date, are the providers of legal services outside the federal public administration on which the agency has relied; and (j) what are the filters and anti-conflict-of-interest requirements to which the members of the board are subject?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ACT

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.) moved that Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in this House today to discuss Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages.

I want to begin by acknowledging that this House sits on the ancestral lands of the Algonquin Anishinabeg.

I also want to acknowledge the significant role indigenous people have played in Canada's history, and the importance of our relationship, as a government, with indigenous people. The importance of that history and relationship underpins our indigenous languages legislation. The indigenous languages act is historic. Its impact will be felt by many future generations.

[Translation]

This indigenous languages act is a historic piece of legislation. It will have a profound impact on future generations. I am honoured to have a small role to play in moving this legislation forward.

Before going any further, I want to remind the House why this act is so important.

• (1015)

[English]

Before European contact, indigenous people spoke about 90 different languages. These vibrant languages and cultures defined people's identity, customs and spirituality. This changed in a significant and very negative way as European settlers began colonizing the country. This began a process that can only be described as forced isolation and assimilation.

We should not take lightly what assimilation meant. It was a conscious act of taking away a people's identity—their languages and cultures—and replacing it with another. Much of this happened through Indian residential schools.

On June 11, 2008, the Government of Canada acknowledged these mistakes in a statement of apology. That apology stated:

Two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. ... Indeed, some sought, as was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child".

Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

Over the span of 130 years, more than 150,000 indigenous children were sent to residential schools. Their parents, often threatened with jail time, were forced to give them up. In these schools, indigenous children were abused, neglected and isolated from their culture. They were beaten or humiliated for talking to each other in their own language. Many children grew so afraid that

Government Orders

they just stopped speaking altogether, and in losing their language, they lost a part of themselves. It is a sad legacy and a dark part of the nation's history.

There are other factors that have had a detrimental impact on indigenous languages and cultures. They include creating reserves and relocating people away from their traditional homelands and ways of life; moving indigenous communities to non-indigenous communities, such as big cities where there were limited supports in place; separating children from their families and communities and placing them with non-indigenous foster parents; and putting a disproportionately high number of indigenous people in the corrections system, a place where youth and adults had limited support for their languages. This period in our history has led to a loss of culture, identity and language.

[Translation]

According to UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, of the roughly 90 indigenous languages spoken in Canada, none is considered to be safe. In fact, UNESCO has designated three-quarters of the living indigenous languages in Canada as endangered.

[English]

The state of indigenous languages in Canada has been the subject of much research and many reports. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported that speakers of an indigenous language formed a small percentage of the indigenous population itself; that indigenous language speakers were aging; and that with fewer and fewer young fluent speakers, even the languages heard most frequently were in danger of disappearing.

[Translation]

In 2004, the government of the day created the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures. This task force included representatives of the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis Nation.

In 2005, the task force released a comprehensive report containing 25 recommendations, which were submitted to the Government of Canada. These recommendations were aimed at preserving, revitalizing and promoting First Nation, Inuit and Métis languages and culture. Sadly, the response to this report was muted, and the vitality of indigenous languages continued to deteriorate.

Government Orders

• (1020)

[*English*]

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission challenged Canada to act on these issues. The TRC had three specific calls to action addressing languages. Call to action 13 was to acknowledge that aboriginal rights include aboriginal language rights. Call to action 14 was to enact an aboriginal languages act founded on a number of principles, including that aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, that the federal government has a responsibility to adequately fund the revitalization and preservation of aboriginal languages and that this work is best managed by aboriginal people themselves and their communities. Call to action 15 was to appoint an aboriginal languages commissioner, in consultation with aboriginal groups, and that this commissioner would help promote aboriginal languages and report on federal funding of language initiatives.

Clearly there is a need for urgent action. We have to act now, because as we all understand, language is who we are. It is our identity. The Prime Minister recently said that languages are the fundamental building blocks of our sense of self. It is how we transmit our heritage and culture. It is how we tell our own stories and connect to the world.

[*Translation*]

As someone who is lucky enough to speak three languages, while trying hard to learn a fourth, I know just how strongly related our language and identity are. I cannot imagine what it would be like to be prevented from speaking my mother tongue, the only language I spoke for several years, Spanish.

However, that is exactly what happened to thousands of indigenous children. They were prevented from speaking their language. They could no longer use it. We cannot change the past, but we can and must work together to change the future.

[*English*]

As national chief Bellegarde said to me a couple of days ago, “We’ve drawn a line in the sand—no more indigenous languages lost.”

Restoring and strengthening indigenous languages is a fundamental part of reconciliation, and reconciliation drives much of our work. That is exactly why, for example, every minister’s mandate letter includes direction to renew our relationship with indigenous peoples, a relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

[*Translation*]

As we speak, our government is working in partnership with indigenous peoples to improve their access to clean drinking water, fight poverty in indigenous communities and reunite families that have been separated by discriminatory policies.

That is also why, in Budget 2017, we allocated \$90 million over three years to help preserve, promote and revitalize indigenous languages.

[*English*]

Most recently, members of Parliament agreed to support interpretation services so that indigenous languages can be used in this House. That is huge.

Although these are positive steps, more work is needed, and I will continue to work with my colleagues to improve the lives of indigenous peoples. Increasing the vitality of indigenous languages requires a framework designed with the long term in mind, and I am proud to say that this bill would do just that. It would do exactly that.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

This is a historic bill. It is absolutely essential, not just for indigenous peoples but for all Canadians. This bill draws a clear line in the sand. It is the product of two years of hard work with indigenous peoples across the country, in every region. It all began with a promise made by the Prime Minister in December 2016 that Canada would enact a law to preserve, promote and revitalize first nations, Inuit and Métis languages. He also promised that the law would be developed in co-operation with indigenous peoples.

To that end, in June 2017, my hon. predecessor and the leaders of the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council stated their very firm and clear intention to work together to draft this legislation. Following that declaration, the government took action and we began to work together.

[*English*]

In over eight months, the Department of Canadian Heritage led more than 20 round tables across the country with a wide range of experts, practitioners and academics of indigenous languages. The feedback from those sessions, as well as those conducted by each of our partners, was used as the basis of the 12 fundamental principles that set the foundation for this legislation.

My officials also conducted some 30 intensive engagement sessions across Canada with first nations, Inuit and Métis participants. Our online portal collected some 200 questionnaires and electronic submissions. Sessions were held, and presentations were made, as requested, with self-governing and modern treaty groups.

Other organizations that provided feedback include the Native Women’s Association of Canada, the National Association of Friendship Centres and the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres, and the list could go on.

My colleagues in the House have also worked hard, talking with Canadians and indigenous people about the need for this very important legislation. As members can see, the process leading to the legislation has been very robust.

[*Translation*]

As I said, the bill is based on 12 principles that were established and approved by the four partners. The bill reflects and embodies these principles.

Government Orders

This bill provides a concrete framework to help meet the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which covers indigenous languages. Furthermore, I want to remind the House that our government committed to implementing the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This bill directly addresses three of those calls to action directly relating to indigenous languages. These calls to action have the support of indigenous peoples, and our government clearly and sincerely committed to implementing them. I am pleased to say today that this promise has been kept.

Now, I want to talk about the mechanisms set out in our bill. To start, the bill recognizes that the rights of indigenous peoples recognized and affirmed by the Constitution Act, 1982, include rights related to indigenous languages. This is fundamental.

Our bill also includes measures to facilitate the transfer of adequate, stable and long-term funding to support the reclamation, revitalization, strengthening and maintenance of indigenous languages. It obliges me, as minister, to consult various governments and indigenous governing bodies so that we may achieve this goal together. This is a testament to our commitment to investing in indigenous peoples and their communities, to investing and working together for their future.

Our bill also establishes an office of the commissioner of indigenous languages. This office will help promote indigenous languages, conduct research and help indigenous peoples defend their language rights. The bill also presents a legislative framework that will enable the Government of Canada to enter into agreements with provincial, territorial, indigenous and other governments. This will ensure that we can take the unique needs of various indigenous peoples and communities into account.

The ultimate goal of the bill's provisions is to help indigenous peoples recover and preserve proficiency in their language, to ensure the survival of their culture. It is important to note that this bill was intentionally drafted so as not to be either restrictive or exhaustive. On the contrary, it was designed to be flexible, so that it may be adapted to every possible reality.

• (1030)

[*English*]

This past Tuesday, the Métis National Council said that this bill is a “giant first step in Canada’s support for our longstanding struggle to preserve, revitalize and promote the use of Michif”. The Assembly of First Nations described it as “landmark legislation” and said that because of it, “now there is hope”.

[*Translation*]

Some might say that this legislation does not go far enough. In fact, it was drafted in such a way that it can be built upon. It offers the possibility of incorporating agreements that will be developed in line with the aspirations and needs of each indigenous nation. These agreements will guarantee that the unique circumstances of each distinct group, the first nations, the Inuit and the Métis, can be reflected and addressed. This bill is flexible and takes into account the needs of different groups, different communities, different regions. As I said many times, we are committed to keep talking and working together until this legislation is fully implemented.

[*English*]

I recently learned that the word “Dakota” means allies. I believe that this is a good way to describe how we have approached this proposed legislation. It is as allies, as partners with indigenous people. While it is my voice being heard in the House today, the voices of indigenous peoples are here too. Their voices are here with us today as our partners, our Dakota.

This proposed legislation is about all indigenous languages in Canada and all indigenous people. It is meant to benefit all indigenous people, regardless of their age, gender, linguistic or distinction grouping or where they live.

Five generations of harm inflicted upon indigenous peoples have brought us where we are today, but today we are making a real difference. The message is clear: It is time to act. Let us do it together.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in just a few minutes, I will have an opportunity to talk about the importance of the legislation, legislation that we will support at second reading. However, I want to go to a bigger picture, and that is how the minister started his speech with respect to this important relationship. That is simply a veneer.

Everyone was so proud that the former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada was an indigenous woman. We congratulated her on her amazing success. We are now learning that the government threw her under the bus

On October 30, she said that she had not always received the respect she deserved from cabinet. In her own experience, serving as an indigenous person as Canada’s Minister of Justice and Attorney General, it had been reinforced that when addressing indigenous issues, it did not matter what table one sat around or what position or title one had. She talked about marginalization.

Today, it was reported by The Globe and Mail that the Prime Minister’s Office, in backing SNC-Lavalin, its friend, had thrown the minister under the bus.

Therefore, I would like to suggest it is simply a veneer. I would like the minister to justify how the Liberals can be so disrespectful to someone and create such a veneer that is not the reality of what they believe and do.

• (1035)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, my colleague had a wonderful occasion to say that she supported such an important bill, which is supported by indigenous groups across the country. The bill has been co-developed with indigenous groups from every region. It is based on things that are extremely important for them, for example, the response to the calls to actions 13, 14 and 15, which are extremely important not only for indigenous people but for our government. We have a chance to work together to change history, to draw a line in the sand and to say that no indigenous language will be lost. That is our intention. I hope the Conservatives will collaborate with us.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, I get the impression after this morning's announcements that the most important relationship to this government is the one it has with corporations like SNC-Lavalin.

Clause 7 of the bill states that the minister must consult with diverse indigenous groups on budgetary and financial considerations. Have these consultations already begun, considering that the budget will be brought down soon?

It is important to have consultations on this. It is vital that this budget contain the necessary funding to respond to not only the needs, as the Minister said, but also the diversity and urgency surrounding indigenous languages in Canada.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I would like to congratulate him on all the work he has done in support of indigenous languages. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for everything he has done so far.

I want him to know that we have had, are having, and will continue to have discussions with indigenous peoples because this bill affects them. Their priorities, needs, hopes and dreams will guide us in determining the next steps we take with this bill and allocating the necessary financial resources.

This is all happening in collaboration with indigenous peoples and will be done quickly.

[English]

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for bringing this important legislation forward.

I come from the Northwest Territories. I grew up in an era when strapping and spanking was common practice in the school I attended for speaking any word that was not English. I am a product of that time. I have lost two indigenous languages through that process. I have lost the ability to speak my mother tongue, which is the Michif language, and I am glad it is incorporated in this document. I also lost the ability to speak to the language of the Dehcho Dene, which both of my parents spoke.

In the Northwest Territories, we have done a lot of work in recognizing indigenous languages as official languages. We have 11 official languages, nine of which are indigenous. I see in the legislation that there is an ability to work with jurisdictions to enhance what they are already doing.

Maybe the minister could talk about how this would help places in the Northwest Territories that are very intent on saving languages. We have languages there that may have 10 years before they disappear. There is a real sense of urgency. Once these languages disappear, nobody else can speak them in other parts of the world.

Could the minister respond to that?

• (1040)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his leadership on the indigenous languages file.

As I mentioned before, the legislation is flexible in order to adapt to the reality of the different regions of our vast country. It draws a line in the sand and says that no more languages will be lost, that we should start to work together by providing long-term provisional financing, by giving the tools and the opportunities to the various communities to do exactly what they need to do in their own regions based on their own realities.

The government is not going to tell them what to do to achieve their objectives. They will tell us what they need to do and we will be there to support them.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I support the legislation. Many in the House know that my wife and my children are first nations. They, too, do not know their culture or the language.

I stood in the House last Friday and gave a statement with respect to Lheidli T'enneh elder Mary Gouchie who passed away. She was one of four remaining elders who were left who knew the Dakelh language. In her passing, she left with a full dictionary essentially of the language.

I want to go back to the question that my hon. colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo brought up earlier.

The hon. minister is now part of cabinet, but he was the government whip for a time as well. The former minister of justice in her speech on October 30, mentioned that no matter the title she had, she was the first female indigenous justice minister, one that we were all proud of, she, too, faced marginalization at the cabinet table.

Our colleague on this side of the House brought up a serious question and the minister failed to address it. I would like to know how the minister squares his speech today with the actions by cabinet to the former justice minister who, in her own words, faced marginalization from her own team?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for supporting this legislation. It is really important that we all support it because it will send a very strong message to our indigenous friends in all regions of the country.

I am not sure exactly what the link is to the bill with that question. The bill is about preserving and revitalizing indigenous languages. As my colleague said, too many languages have been lost. It is time for that to be over. This has to end. We have to revitalize the languages and we have to provide the necessary resources for indigenous people to do it. It is not about us. It is about indigenous people. It is about their children and their grandchildren. It is about our country and how we can do this together.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to Bill C-91 today. I want to start with a very personal story. The reason is not directed to the indigenous peoples who have worked so hard to see the reality of this bill being presented in the House. It is for my colleagues who will be supporting the bill, but really do not understand why is it important as well as other people and for people who may be listening at home, thinking this sounds important, but really do not know what it is all about.

I am a *shama*. I learned that word when I was 25 years old. I had a degree under my belt and maybe two years of nursing experience when I went in search of adventure. My adventure took me to an indigenous community where I was hired as its nurse. I was one of the first nurses hired by the band, as opposed to the federal government. That in itself was very unique, because it was the first step in the devolution of services.

What was the experience of that 25-year-old, urban, white person who had a university education and lived in a big city, going to a community? It was quite a shock to be quite honest. As a nurse, the first week I was in that community, there were three suicides, and it was devastating. In this case, it was three young men who took their lives.

I would visit homes, perhaps very small homes that needed a lot of work, in which up to 16 people would live. They were very poor living conditions. I witnessed some of the abuse, some of the destructiveness of alcohol. That was my initial experience and impression. It was devastating to see what was happening in the community.

It did not take very long though before I had some great mentors. A drug and alcohol worker took me under his wing as did the youth probation officer. Also community health reps made sure I saw more than just the devastation. They made sure I was part of the feasts, where the communities would come together and enjoy food together. Every fall, there were the fishing camps, where they would fish and hang the salmon up to dry. There was the berry picking. Of course nothing was more special than the drumming, the dancing under the moonlight and stars and the jokes.

I saw two worlds: a community that was devastated and the beauty and richness the people were trying so hard to recreate in their community.

That community gave more to me with respect to knowledge and life experience than I could ever give to them as a young nurse with two years' experience. Maybe I was pretty good at vaccinating the babies and giving a little information, but truly that experience gave me a life education.

I want to talk about the elders. In 1980, the elders of that community had been born pre-residential school time. When I would visit the elders, I would witness the beautiful cedar bosquets and the giant gardens. I had an interpreter with me because many of the elders did not speak English. That was my opportunity to interact with the elders. What was really important about that experience was when their children would return home from residential schools and could not speak the language.

• (1045)

Imagine a mother whose children have been taken away to residential school, and when they come back, she cannot communicate with them anymore. For many elders, their knowledge of English was very limited and they lost the ability to talk to their children when they came home. The children had no interest, because when they were in the residential schools, they became ashamed of their language. Many were not able or did not want to relearn their language again because of their experiences in the residential school.

We saw the pain of grandparents who could not talk to their children or their grandchildren. We saw the pain in their eyes as they witnessed what had happened to their children, with some lost to alcohol and all sorts of other destructive areas. Therefore, it was an opportunity like none other to see what has happened and understand the actual destruction that occurred in these communities.

In the residential school apology from the previous prime minister, he talked about the residential schools being a place where languages, culture and practice were prohibited. He said, "The government now recognizes that the consequences...that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language".

We acknowledged in 2008 that we were part of the destruction of these languages and cultures. Therefore, the government must be part of the solution in terms of helping to bring the languages back, and part of that is Bill C-91.

We absolutely support Bill C-91 in principle. We recognize that we are going to need to do our due diligence. Of course, our due diligence means examining whether the bill will accomplish what it sets out to accomplish, which is promoting the protection and revitalization of languages.

The example I have in terms of my nursing experience is that the percentage of these language speakers in the community is 3%. In the 1980s, it might have been significantly higher, but it is now down to 3%. However, people in this community do have a plan and are working very hard to get that back. Bill C-91 needs to support them in moving that work forward.

There are many different languages that we are talking about here, but we need recognize that it will be the communities who will drive how they renew and revitalize their languages. Certainly, when there is only 3% of the community speaking the native language, the strategy has to be very different from some of the more commonly spoken languages where there is a larger number of fluent speakers. Therefore, we need flexibility within the bill to recognize that different strategies will be needed for different languages. However, the goal is the same.

Government Orders

There are a number of components in Bill C-91. The rights would be affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act. Therefore, at committee, I think it would be good to have some constitutional lawyers to help us understand what that would actually mean. Also, we need to make sure that the office of the commissioner's powers and duties have been laid out. However, not only will we have to look at the powers and duties, but we will have to make sure that we monitor this office in the long term to make sure the bill would do what we have asked it to do. Therefore, the ability to research and monitor will be absolutely critical.

• (1050)

I have talked about the bill and about language, but I want to note Kukpi7 Ignace in the riding that I represent from the Skeetchestn Indian Band. I would note others as well, but he is from my riding so I want to give a special shout-out to Kukpi7 Ignace. He has made this his life's work. I run into him regularly, at times on an airplane because he is coming to Ottawa to do important work around language, and also in the riding. He is another teacher for me in terms of the importance of language and the importance of culture. I want to give him a special shout-out because I know for him today is important.

I came in today and wanted to talk completely about Bill C-91, but I have to say that I am terribly disturbed by the reports in *The Globe and Mail* today that speak to the government's veneer. The government has a veneer that this relationship is the most important relationship to them. I really appreciated my colleague's comment that, no, its most important relationship is with SNC-Lavalin. I thought of how appropriate that was, in terms of his comments. I think we need to be absolutely worried.

What we had was great pride in 2015. I mean we were, of course, disappointed to be on the opposition bench but I think we greeted the former attorney general of Canada and justice minister, the first indigenous woman, into her role and celebrated. We celebrated with Canada. We celebrated with British Columbia in terms of her taking on that very important role. We were all very curious because we saw a minister who negotiated the very difficult legislation about medical assistance in dying through the House. We saw her move a number of important initiatives. I would suggest if any minister needed a demotion it might have been the finance minister for not following through on his promises.

However, I think there was great puzzlement when the former attorney general of Canada and minister of justice was moved to veterans affairs. She talked about truth to power and she also, in a speech of October 30, talked about how even though she was in one of the most powerful positions in this country, she still had a feeling of marginalization at the cabinet table. The Liberal government is responsible for that feeling that she had. What is happening when someone in a powerful position is getting pressured by the Prime Minister's Office to make decisions that are absolutely inappropriate for a justice minister to make?

Again, I am repeating from a very comprehensive article today. It is widely reported in *The Globe and Mail* that the business interests of the Prime Minister's friends at SNC-Lavalin were more important to him than the integrity of his justice minister doing the job that she was supposed to do. That is absolutely shameful and showing a

pattern by the Liberal government in terms of neglect and marginalization.

That is one example there and I think we have other examples of what the government has done. The Prime Minister stood up. He promised rights and recognition legislation. I am not sure where it is.

Gender equity legislation was another promise by the Liberals. Bill S-3 was an absolute mess and it is still a mess. It did not do what it was supposed to do. We have not seen any fixes come back, although it passed. The government did the bare minimum and had consultations. However, it did not fix Bill S-3 in terms of any of the fixes that it needs.

What is happening to the child welfare legislation? It was the Prime Minister who said that child welfare legislation will be tabled in the House in January. It is February 7. There are 12 weeks left in the House and there is no child welfare legislation. I do not see any conceivable way the government will get the child welfare legislation done before the House rises.

What we have is, again, a bill that we absolutely support. We support the revitalization of languages and Bill C-91 moving forward. However, I think if we look at the government and its record, for all of its stated promises, it is abysmal. The Liberals should be ashamed. They should be ashamed of how they treat women. They should be ashamed in terms of the ethics and the immoral depths to which they have gone.

• (1055)

I would like to close by moving out of this negative frame. It was such a stunning revelation today. It is a very concerning revelation. It is a moral and ethical failure of the government, and there will be more heard and said on it.

However, I want to go back to the communities. I want to go back to the communities that have taught me so much. We are now in 2019 and we still have a long way to go. The bill might be a step in the right direction, but we need to move forward. We know that the revitalization of language and culture is integral to the success of people as humans. It will also be integral to the success of communities. Economic opportunities will be another critical piece in terms of working towards success in communities, because jobs are important.

We have one piece of the puzzle with the legislation. We will be supporting it at second reading. I do think the government needs to be very reflective about its overall record in all the other areas.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I go to questions and comments, I just want to remind everyone that the acoustics in this room are fantastic. They are very good and we can hear everything. I noticed some members taking their phones outside into the hall that surrounds the Chamber. Some members are very blessed with having a voice that carries, and when they are on the phone we can hear their conversation coming into the Chamber.

Government Orders

I just want to remind everyone that, if they are going to speak on their phones, to please whisper or to go into their respective lobbies so that it does not interfere with the discussions that are taking place in this wonderful room, and so that we do not hear their private messages.

Questions and comments.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although this question seems off-topic, I feel I must respond to something that was part of the hon. member's speech. She referred to what has happened with our former justice minister, who is now the veterans affairs minister. The member referred to the minister having been thrown under the bus.

I would think that all members of the House would have more respect for our veterans than to consider a transfer to the ministry of veterans affairs as being thrown under the bus.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, when we have a justice minister who is saying, "I am marginalized at the cabinet table," that is being thrown under the bus. Absolutely, the veterans affairs portfolio is a critical portfolio. The justice minister of this country is an absolutely critical portfolio.

Clearly, now we know why this happened. The reason is that, as the minister indicated, she was speaking truth to power. The Prime Minister's Office cared more about its friends than it did about listening to someone with integrity and compassion.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague sat through the committee study on Bill C-262, which was on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The things that are contained in the bill are one thing, but what is omitted from the bill is quite another. I would like to ask the member about the place that the UN declaration has in the bill. Clause 6 talks about the recognition of the right to indigenous languages, yet it only refers to section 35 of our Constitution of 1982. It does not refer to the specific articles on indigenous language in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Could the hon. member comment? The government has especially referred to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the basis for its new nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have said that we see the UN declaration as a very important guiding document. We have expressed a few concerns about how we put a declaration in Canadian law, and we have pointed out where there might be some consistency issues.

Having said that, the government has not expressed those same concerns. The government committed to supporting Bill C-262, whereas we expressed some reservations. The fact that the Liberals have chosen not to be inclusive with the language in this bill is another example of their hypocrisy.

Maybe they have the same concerns we have in terms of how to make the declaration work. The conventions, we know, are meant to be law in countries. They may have the same concerns as us, but

they were not willing to say it or put it in the bill. Again, it is another example of their hypocrisy.

• (1105)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for acknowledging that the Conservative Party will be supporting this bill at second reading.

The member thinks along the same lines I do, in that we find it very troubling that the Prime Minister pretends. I use that word because he talks the talk, but does not walk the walk. What happened to the now Minister of Veterans Affairs, the former attorney general, is obviously not something a true feminist would do to a female minister. The other troubling aspect is that he has said he supports native rights, native culture and so on, but his actions all speak contrary to that.

If the member could respond to that, I would appreciate it.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his comments and we will miss him in the next Parliament for sure due to his recently announced retirement.

I noted in my speech the number of promises the government made and has not followed through on. They are innumerable. The Prime Minister has a good bedside manner. Going back to my health care analogy, he says what people want to hear, but he is sure not the guy one wants doing one's surgery, because we see that his ability to execute the things he has committed to executing is very minimal and restrained.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify the purpose of the act. It is very clear under paragraph 5(g), which says that one of the objectives of the act is to "advance the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it relates to Indigenous languages." In the preamble, there are a number of references to UNDRIP, so I am a little perplexed as to her previous comments, when she questioned inconsistent views.

It is very clear that this bill, in part, is a response to UNDRIP, as well as to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action 13, 14 and 15, along with a number of other national and international mechanisms that have called for the protection, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages.

I wonder if my friend could comment on that.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, we note that there are articles in the UN declaration and calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that have guided the development of this legislation. My colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is probably going to talk very articulately in his speech about how he believes the UN declaration is not properly incorporated in this bill. He is an expert in that area, and I expect to hear a fulsome response from him.

Government Orders

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[Cree text interpreted as follows:]

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to speak Cree in this House and to be given that privilege. It makes me really proud to speak my own language in the House, and I thank everyone for this opportunity.

Before I speak to Bill C-91, I would like to begin by offering thanks to my parents. I would like to thank my mom for teaching me how to speak Cree. I would also like to thank the people of Waswanipi, who helped me to make it here and speak my language. I am really thankful to the people of Waswanipi.

I also want to thank all the Crees across the Cree nation, as well as all aboriginal people across Canada. They also helped me make it here so I could speak about the things we have gone through in the

past and will be facing in the future. I would like to thank all the people who have stood by me so I could be given the privilege to speak my language. I always think about the people who came before me and have passed on. I always remember them.

Members know a lot of us speak our indigenous language, and it is something that helps us in our lives. In things one thinks about and goes through, one's own language is something that helps. When I first came here eight years ago, I asked if I could speak my native language to ask questions or when I rose to speak to bills. It is something I asked for, and I was told that I could only speak English. That was all I was told.

I felt really sad when that happened, but I did not let it go. I kept asking to speak my language, and now I am able to speak my own language in the House, and everyone can hear me speak it. It really touches my heart to be able to speak my language in front of everyone, and I want to thank all members for helping me achieve this.

Regarding Bill C-91, there are things I agree with, but there are also things that have not been included. I will speak about those today. I will stand by all members in order to make this bill pass, but if we want things to go well, we are going to have to do it the right way. We are going to have to try to bring in the things that have not been included in this bill. These things are needed to make it right, and this is what I am going to try to do before the bill is passed. This is what I am going to ask. I am going to help.

•(1115)

I remember when the Prime Minister spoke to us about a year ago. He spoke to us for a while, and I stood to answer, and when I was done speaking, I went up and spoke with him. I thanked him. I even told him I could help him if he needed help. I would allow myself to, with all of us working together, when it involved indigenous rights across Canada or our people who are still struggling.

I remember when he spoke to the chiefs in Gatineau and talked about the bill. It has almost been three years since he spoke about it. I remember when he brought it up. Everyone stood up and thanked the Prime Minister. When I saw that happening, I stood too. I was really happy when he brought that news to the chiefs. I was happy when he said that the bill would be written, that we would try to speak our indigenous languages. I was really happy, but I was not sure if he understood what was going on when everyone got up, that he had made everyone proud. I do not know if he understood that part.

[English]

Those were some words in Cree as an introduction to my speech. I will come back to Cree in my concluding remarks, but I see that the time is moving fast.

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

Government Orders

While I am here and have the opportunity, I have been asked by the Nuu-chah-nulth people to take every opportunity to thank the member for standing and defending indigenous rights that are protected under the Constitution and for standing in solidarity with the Nuu-chah-nulth people. I say *leekoo* in their language and *meegwetch* in his language.

The member talked about the sense of urgency. Les Dorion, president of the Ucluelet First Nation, spoke about there being 15 native speakers of the Barkley dialect of the Nuu-chah-nulth language in 2015. Today there are only nine.

We are losing speakers of our important languages. The Province of British Columbia was waiting for the federal government to move forward with legislation and money to understand the sense of urgency to protect languages. It could not wait any longer and has invested \$50 million to get things started, which is far from enough.

I would like to ask my friend and colleague if he could speak about the sense of urgency on getting money rolling to help support our elders and youth to learn and protect languages.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Mr. Speaker, my friend's question is a fundamental one and a central one.

The money that goes with this bill needs to take into account the diversity and especially the sense of urgency, as I have mentioned.

Once again, when I asked the minister about that, he pronounced the magic words, buying time policy words, "We will consult; we will consult and we will consult again." There is an urgency. There is a budget coming down pretty soon. Why are there no provisions in either the bill or in the speech given by the minister? That is pretty concerning for many people.

Many people expected a lot of things from the government with respect to the legislation and we did not get those important questions answered today.

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.):

[Member spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:]

Ó:nen aesewatahonhsí:yohste' kenh nikentyohkò:ten tsi nahò:ten í:'i karihwayentáhkwen.

Tyotyerénhton, í:kehre takwanonhwerá:ton' akwé:kon ken:'en kanónhsakon sewaya'taró:ron tahnon wa'tkwanón:weron' tsi enhskwatahónhsatate' ón:wa kenh wenhniserá:te. Í:kehre ó:ni taetewatenonhwerá:ton tsi yonkwaya'taró:ron raononhwentsyá:ke ne Ratirón:taks. Tahnon tehinonhwerá:ton ne Shonkwaya'tison ne akwé:kon tehshonkwá:wí.

Kén:'en tewaktá:'on akwahthárhahse' ne Kanyen'kéha, nè:ne raotiwen:na ne Kanyen'kehá:ka. Enkhthá:rahkwe' ne kayanerénhtshera aorihwá:ke nè:ne enkahretsyá:ron' tsi yontá:tis onkwehonwehnéha Koráhne.

Akwáh í:ken tsi onkwatshennónnya'te' sha'akwate'nikonhrísa' kén:'en kanónhsakon, taetewawennaté:ni' ne ó:nen háti ónhka ok yetsyénhayens á:yenhre' ayontá:ti' ne onkwehonwehnéha. Yorihowá:nen ayehthina'tón:hahse' ratikorahró:non tsi tewawennakwenyénhstha ne onkwehonwehnéha ne kèn:tho, kanaktakwe'niyò:ke Koráhne, kanáktakon tsi ratinorónhstha ne ratikorahró:non.

Yawehronhátye, akwáh í:ken tsi sénha yorihowá:nen ne kí:ken kayanerénhtshera ne onkwehón:we raotirihwá:ke. Ratinyén:te ahatiwenahní:rate' ne raotiwen:na, owén:na nè:ne wahoná:ti' tókani wahonwatíhkwa'. Tentewarihwahskénha' ne kí:ken kayanerénhtshera, kén:'en tahnon ó:ya kanáktakon. Enyonkwaya'takénha' sénha ayonkwa'nikonhrayén:ta'ne' ne kí:ken kayanerénhtshera. Enskar-ihwahserón:ni' ne karihwaksén:tshera tsi nahotiyé:ra'se' ne onkwehón:we, tahnon enkanónhstate' tsi sénha enkarihwakwénnyenhste' ne raotiwen:na tahnon nihotirihò:ten ne onkwehón:we Koráhne.

É:so niyonkwè:take rotirihwanontón:ni, "Oh nontyé:ren tsi teyotonhwentsyóhon Koráhne aetewatewéyén:ton' tahnon aonsetyón:nite' owennahshón:'a nè:ne yah thaón:ton konnonhá:'ok akonnónhke?" Ta' non é:so niyonkwè:take ayonnonhtónnyon' tsi yah the tehatirihwayenté:ri nè:ne eh ratirihwanón:tons ne kí:ken tahnon sakerihwahserón:ni' nè:ne aesewa'nikonhrakewáhton né:'e tsi wa'kerihwanón:ton', nek tsi yorihowá:nen tóhkara niyori:wake takerihwahthe'te' ne káti ayako'nikonhrayén:ta'ne' tsi nahò:ten yoterihonte ne Koráhne. Enkate'nyén:ten' aontakerihwa'será:ko' ne karihwanónhtha né:'e tsi enkhthá:rahkwe' ne ón:kwe nè:ne wahontá:ti' ne Rotinonhsyón:ni raotiwenahshón:'a, skawén:na nè:ne Kanyen'keha.

Shontahón:newe' ne kèn:tho ne Onhwentsyakayonhró:non, é:so niyonkwè:take wahontá:ti' ne Rotinonhsyón:ni raotiwenahshón:'a. Rotinonhsyón:ni ton nè:ne akwáh í:ken tsi yotshá:niht. Onhwentsyá:ke thonnónhtonskwe Ohiyò:ke tsi ya'tewahsólthos tsi niyò:re Kanyatarowá:nen tsi tkarahkwíneken's. Yonhwentsyowá:nen ratinákerihkwe, onhwentsyá:ke tsi tkarahkwíneken's nonká:ti nè:ne kenh wenhniseratényon tewana'tónhkwa Koráhne tahnon Wahstonhronón:ke.

Teyotonhwentsyohónhne Onhwentsyakayonhró:non skáhne ahotiyó'ten' ne onkwehón:we tahnon tahontatya'takénha'. Teyotonhwentsyohónhne ahatinonhkwa'tsheraenté'ra'ne' ne Onhwentsyakayonhró:non. Teyotonhwentsyohónhne ahatiweyenté'hta'ne' tsi ní:yoht ahonnónhkehke onhwentsyá:ke. Teyotonhwentsyohónhne ahonatenró'tsheri:yo'ne' tahnon tahotirihwayenawakónhake ne onkwehón:we ne káti ahonnónhke. Sha'onkwe'tanákere'ne' ne ratihnará:ken wa'thontekháhsi' tahnon tahontáhsawen' tahontateri:yo'. Tetsyarónhkwen nonká:ti tehotirihwayenawá:kon ón:ton' ne onkwehón:we ne káti sha'tekarihwatò:ken akénhake ne tetsyarónhkwen nonká:ti.

Né:'e tsi tehonterané:ken wahonterí:yo' ne Tyorhenhshá:ka, Wahstonhró:non wahóntsha'ahte' tahnon wahatiká:ri' é:so nikaná:take raoná:wenk ne Rotinonhsyón:ni tahnon wahshakotíhkwa' onhwentsyowá:nens raonawénkhahkwe. E'thótsi aonsetewehyá:ra'ne' ne kí:ken.

Government Orders

Tókat yah skáhne teyonkwayó'tén:’on ne onkwehón:we eh shikahá:wi, tókat yah teyonkwatenró'tsheriyo:’on ne onkwehón:we eh shikahá:wi, tókat yah teyonkwarihwayenawá:kon teyotó:’on ne onkwehón:we eh shikahá:wi, yah thakénhake ne Koráhne nè:ne tewayenté:ri nón:wa. Tsi wateri:yo ne sha'té:kon yawén:re tewennyá:wer tékeni yawén:re shiyohserá:te, ronteri:yos ne onkwehón:we tahnon tehatinekwenhsayéshon, é:so tsi nahontyerányon' ahshakotiya'takénha' ne Korahró:non tahnon Tyorhenhshá:ka ratinén:ra ne káti tahonwanatya'tón:ti' ne Wahstonhró:non tahnon ahatinónhstate' ne kí:ken onhwéntsya. Tsi wateri:yo, tóhkara niyohsénhserote ronteri:yos ne onkwehón:we wahonteri:yo' tehonterané:ken ne sótar ne Tyorhenhshá:ka tahnon Korahró:non.

Akwáh kenh náhe, kanónhsakon ne kèn:tho, wa'tetshitewahsenakará:tate' ne Levi Oakes, nè:ne wá:ratste' raowén:na ahariháhsehte' tsi wateri:yo tékeni watón:tha, ne káti skén:nen tahontathárhahse' ne sótar Korahró:non. Karihwahétken ná:'a, ne ó:nen Koráhne wa'thonwanatonhwéntsyohe' ne onkwehón:we, wahonthonkárya'ke'. Tahnon nón:wa, skén:nen í:ken, tahnon é:so tsi niyonaterihwayén:ni ne raotiwén:na, ayethi'nikonhrotá:ko'. Yoyá-nerekhwe sha'teyonkwarihwayenawakón:ne ne onkwehón:we ne ó:nen tetewateranekénhne shetewateri:yo'. Nek tsi nón:wa, skén:nen í:ken, tahnon yonkwarihwatá:wén tsi yethirihwakwenyénhstha skén:nen tayonkwarihwayenwakónhake ne onkwehón:we.

Akwáh í:ken tsi roti'nikonhrakarewáhton ne onkwehón:we oh nihotiyerá:se tsi yontaweya'táhkwa ronwati'terontáhkwa. E'tho nón:we wahonwatinénhsko' ne raotiwén:na tahnon nihotirihó:tens. Íhisi nón:we ne éhskat tewennyá:wer niyohserá:ke nikari:wes, Koráhne, raotikoráhsera tahnon yonterennayentahkwahshón:'a, wáhtonste' yontaweya'tahkwahshón:'a ronwati'terontáhkwa ahatiká:ri' raotiwén:na tahnon nihotirihó:tens ne onkwehón:we ne kati onkwehón:we ahatirihwahseréhonhátýe ne ó'serón:ni nihotirihó:tens. Ne ok ne ó'seronni'kéha tókani ó'seronni'ón:we wá:tonskwe ahontá:ti' kanonhsakónhshon ne ronteweyénhstha. Wahonwathiré:wahte' yo'shátste' ne ronteweyénhstha, tókat wahontá:ti' raotiwén:na. Akwáh í:ken tsi wahotironhyá:ken' ne é:so nihá:ti. Akarihwahetkénhake, tokenske'ón:we, tayonterihwathe'te' tsi nihotiya'tawé:n:’on e'tho nón:we.

Akwáh kí' nón:wa, kheyanonhtónnyon ne tsyeyá:ta Kanyen'kehá:ka, Oronhiokon, Gladys Gabriel, yontátyatskwe, ye'terón:tahkwe ne Shingwauk yontaweya'táhkwa, Sault Ste. Marie nón:we. Eh wahshakotiya'ténhawe' ne wisk sha'teyakaohseriyá:kon. Akwáh í:ken tsi wa'ontatya'ti:sake' nako'nihténha nek tsi yah tetsyakoh-téntyon tsi niyó:re yá:yak yawén:re na'teyakohseri:ya'ke'. Yah teyotón:’on ayontá:ti' ne akowén:na tsi yontaweya'táhkwa nek tsi yonsayerihwá:reke'. Wa'erihwáhsehte' tsi takyatathárhahse' ne Kanyen'kéha ne akohtsi:'a Wari niya'tekahá:wi ne ó:nen yah ónhka teyakothón:te.

Oronhiokon tayakéhtahkwe' tsi Shonkwaya'tison wahshakorihón:ten' ayontóhetste' ne akowén:na ne ronwatiyen'okón:'a. Tayakéhtahkwe' tsi ahonwa'nikonhrakaré:wahte' tókat yah tehonhrónkha ne akowén:na. Yah teyakotká:wén tsi yontá:tis ne akowén:na tsi yontaweya'táhkwa. Eh wahonwatiya'takénha' ne ronwatiyen'okón:'a, nè:ne Gabriel raotihwá:tsire Kanehsatá:ke nithoné:non, ahontkón:tahkwe' tsi ronhrónkha ne Kanyen'kéha tsi niyó:re ó:n:wa kenh wenhniserá:te. Wakerihwá:reks ne Oronhió:kon akoká:ra ase'kén

kheyenté:ri ronátýa'ke ronwatiyén:'a tahnon ronwanateré:'a tahnon wakerihwasé:se tsi órye khena'tónhkwa.

Yah eh tehonaterahswiyóhston ne é:so niyonkwé:take tahnon wahoná:ti' raotiwén:na. Ótya'ke wahontéhen' ne raotiwén:na aorihwá:ke né:'e tsi kakoráhsera tahnon yonterennayentahkwahshón:'a wahonté'nyén:ten' ahshakonónnyen' ne onkwehón:we tahonté:ni' ne káti ó'serón:ni ahón:ton'. Wè:ne tsi yah teyonkwatá:wén tsi tewatshterihstha ne onkwehonwehnéha ne káti aonhá:'ok akatá-tyeke. E'tho káti sakarihwahserón:ni' ne Kakoráhsera nek tsi yah é:so teyonkwatý:ren aonsetewarihwahserón:ni' ne karihwaksén:tshera tahnon ka'nikonhrakarewáhtonhsthera nè:ne nahotiyé:ra'se' ne onkwehón:we.

Kenh wenhniseratényon, onkwehón:we ronhrónkha íhisi nón:we ne yá:yak niwáhsen nikawén:nake Koráhne tahnon thó:ha akwé:kon yonaterihwayén:ni. É:so niyohsénhserote niyonkwé:take ronhrónkha ótya'ke nikawén:nake. Tsyeyá:ta tókani tehniyáhsen ok nihá:ti yonhrónkha ne ó:ya. Akwé:kon yotiwenakenhé:yon. Ótya'ke yonenheyénhátýe.

Tókat yah othé:nen thayotiyén:ta'ne' ne kaya'takenhá:tshera, yohsnó:re, tóhkara ok enyonatatenrónhake. Nek tsi enwá:ton ayakorhá:rahkwe. Ne ó:nen khekwáthos Freedom School ne Akwesáhsne, Onkwawawén:na Kentyóhkwa ne Ohswé:ken, tókani Ratiwennahni:rats ne Kahnawá:ke, khé:kens ronteweyénhstha ronatonnháhere, niya'tehonohseriya'kónhshon, nè:ne ronaronhkha'onhá-tye. Wakerhá:re. Khé:kens shakotirihonnyén:nis ótya'ke nè:ne ronateri:yo íhisi nón:we ne tewáhsen niyohserá:ke nikari:wes ne káti tsyori:wat ne onkwehonwehnéha ahatinónhstate' – raotiwén:na.

Tahnon í:se, teyonkwarihwayenawá:kon kenh kanónhsakon, tahnon ratikwé:kon ó:ya onhwéntsya:ke nè:ne ronateri:yo ahatinónhstate' ne Ó'seronni'ón:we, owén:na nè:ne yoterihwayén:ni tsi tekyatkénnyes ne Ó'seronni'kéha, e'thohtsi ayokén:take tsi nahó:ten wá:ken. É:so niyonkwé:take ratirihwayenté:ri ne ate'nyenten'tá:tshera tahnon ronateriyén:tare tsi ní:yoht tsi na'teyotirihwayenawá:kon ne káti ayontatyenterihake tahnon aontayonnónhton' tsi niyontyérrha. Ayá:wén's tsi enhatihretsyá:ron' kayaneren'tshera nè:ne enkarihwahni:rate' tsi tkarihwayé:ri ahontá:ti' raotiwén:na ne onkwehón:we, ne káti enhotiya'takénha' onkwehón:we aontahonónhton' oh nahóntyere' tsi niyénhén:we. Tahnon ó:ni, enkahretsyá:ron' sénha niyonkwé:take ahontá:ti' ne onkwehonwehnéha thiyonhwéntsya'kwé:kon Koráhne. Tókat yah thaón:ton' naetewá:yere' ne kí:ken, yah í:'i teyonkwe'tò:ten tsi ní:yoht tsi ítewehre.

Enkatewennò:kten' akhthá:rahkwe' niwakerihó:ten.

Wakatá:ti ó:n:wa wenhniserá:te ne Kanyen'kéha. Yah akowén:na té:ken. Takatáhsawén' akatéweyénhste' teyohserá:ke tsi náhe. Tyóhtkon wá:kehre' akkwé:ni' akatá:ti' nek tsi kyaneren'tsheron:nis kakorahserá:ke táhnon í:kehre aonke'nikonhrayén:ta'ne' raotiwén:na ne Kanyen'kehá:ka, onkwehshón:'a nè:ne kén:'en ratinákere kari:wes ohén:ton tsi niyó:re tahón:newe' ne akonkwé:ta.

Government Orders

Wakerihwatshénryon ok nahò:ten nè:ne sénha niyori:ware tsi ní:yoht tsi teyakwatawenná:wis. Wakerihwatshénryon tsi wakkwén-yon aonke'nikonhrayén:ta'ne' akenákta tsi yonhwentsyá:te tahnon yah tewakerihwanonhwé:'on ká:ron tsi niyó:re takatáhsawen' akeweyentéhta'ne'. Ó:nen'k tewakatahsawe aonktó:ten'se' tsi niyoterihwanehrákwat ne owén:na, tsi niyokwátshe, tsi niyoyánere. É:so tsi sénha niyori:ware tsi ní:yoht ne ó:ya ne akewén:na.

É:so nihá:ti wa'onkwatenro'tsheri:yo'ne'. Kheya'tatshénryon nè:ne ronnonhwentsyanorónhkwa tahnon akwé:kon káhave ne onhwéntsya nè:ne tetewakháhsyons. Wake'nikonhrahserón:ni, akwáh í:ken, tahnon tekhenonhwerá:ton akwé:kon nè:ne yonkya'takénhen aontakatahsawen' akeweyentáhta'ne'.

Wa'tkwanòn:weron' akwé:kon nè:ne sewatahonhsatá:ton ne akewén:na. Ayá:wen's tsi skén:nen aeseWANONHTONNYÓNHSEKE.

E'tho nikawén:nake. Tahnon ó:nen e'tho.

[*Mohawk text interpreted as follows:*]

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members in this assembly, listen well to the matter that has become my responsibility to speak about.

I first want to greet and acknowledge everyone gathered in the House and thank them for listening to me today. I also want to acknowledge that we are meeting here on the traditional lands of the Algonquin people, and I thank the Creator for everything he has given to us.

I am risen here to speak in *Kanyen'kéha*, the language of *Kanyen'kehà:ka*, the Mohawk people. I will speak about a law that encourages the speaking of indigenous languages in Canada.

It greatly pleased me when we decided here in the House that we would provide translation when any member of Parliament wanted to speak in an indigenous language. It is important that we show Canadians that we respect native languages here, in the capital of Canada, in a place that Canadians cherish.

Nevertheless, this law is much more important to the indigenous people. They are on a mission to strengthen the indigenous languages they lost or that were taken from them. We will debate this law here and in the other chamber. It will help us understand this law better. It will make amends for the wrongs that were done to the indigenous people and it will ensure that indigenous languages and cultures in Canada will be more respected.

Many people have asked: Why does Canada have to preserve and bring back to life languages that cannot live on their own? Many people may think that the ones asking do not know anything about this and I apologize to those who might be offended that I asked, but it is important for me to explain several matters in order to understand Canada's responsibility. I will try to answer the questions by talking about the people who spoke Iroquoian languages, one language being *Kanyen'kéha*, the Mohawk language.

When the Europeans arrived here, many people spoke an Iroquoian language. They had created a confederacy that was brilliant. They controlled the land from the Ohio River in the west to the St. Lawrence River in the east. They occupied a large territory of what is now eastern Canada and the United States.

The Europeans and indigenous people had to work together and helped one another. The Europeans had to learn about the medicines. They had to learn how to live off the land. They had to become friends and partners with the indigenous people to survive. When the white population increased, they became divided and began to fight among themselves. Both sides made alliances with the indigenous people so that both sides would be equal.

● (1140)

Because the Iroquois fought alongside the British, the Americans burned and destroyed many Iroquois villages and took large tracts of Iroquois land. We should remember this.

If we had not worked with the indigenous people at that time, if we had not been friends with the indigenous people at that time, if we had not made alliances with the indigenous people at that time, the Canada we know now would not exist. During the War of 1812, indigenous and Métis warriors greatly aided the Canadian and British forces in repelling the Americans and protecting this land. During the war, several thousand indigenous warriors fought alongside the British and Canadian troops.

Recently, here in this House, we honoured Levi Oakes, who used his language as a secret code during the Second World War so that Canadian soldiers could safely communicate with each other. It is truly an ugly matter that when Canada needed indigenous people, they volunteered, but now, in peacetime, when their languages are in such danger, we would disappoint them. It was good when we were in an equal relationship with the indigenous people, when we fought side by side, but now it is peacetime, and we have stopped respecting indigenous concerns and stopped having a good relationship with them.

The indigenous people are deeply wounded by what was done to them at residential schools. Their languages and their cultures were stolen there. For more than 100 years, Canada, its government and the churches used residential schools to destroy indigenous languages and cultures so that indigenous peoples would follow the ways of the white people. The students could only speak English or French in the schools. Students were severely punished if they spoke their language. Many of them suffered greatly. It would be an ugly truth to describe what happened to them there.

Right now, I am thinking of a Mohawk woman, Oronhiokon, or Gladys Gabriel, who attended the Shingwauk residential school in Sault Ste. Marie. They took her there when she was five years old. She missed her mother greatly, but she did not go home again until she was 16 years old. She was not allowed to speak her language there, but she resisted. She hid the fact that she would speak Mohawk with her older sister, Mary, on every occasion when no one was listening.

● (1145)

Oronhiokon believed that the Creator had given her a duty to pass on her language to her children. She believed that she would offend the Creator if her children did not speak the language. She did not quit speaking her language at residential school. That helped her children, the Gabriel family from Kanasatake, to continue speaking the Mohawk language to the present day. Oronhiokon's story compels me because I know some of her children and grandchildren and I am proud to call them my friends.

Government Orders

Many people were not that lucky and lost their language. Some people became ashamed of their language because governments and churches tried to make indigenous people change into white people. Obviously, we have not quit messing with indigenous languages so that they could continue on their own. The government apologized, but we have not done much to make amends for the bad acts and trauma that indigenous people have suffered.

These days, indigenous people speak more than 60 languages in Canada, and almost all of them are in trouble. Thousands of people speak some of these languages; just one or two people speak others. All of the languages have been weakened. Some are dying.

If they do not get help soon, only a few will remain, but there is hope. When I visit the Freedom School in Akwesasne, Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa at Six Nations or Ratiwennahnirats at Kahnawake, I see excited students of all ages becoming speakers. I am hopeful. I see teachers, some of whom who have fought for more than 20 years to protect one element of indigenous identity, their language.

For my colleagues in this House and all the others in the country who have fought to protect the French language, a language that has issues competing with English, what I have said should be self-evident. Many people know about the challenge and how identity and self-determination are so interrelated. Hopefully, they will support a law that will strengthen the right for indigenous people to speak their language so that it will help them control their future and where it is going. It will also encourage more people to speak indigenous languages all across Canada. If we cannot do this, we are not the kind of people we think we are.

I will end my words by speaking about some personal matters.

I have spoken today in the Mohawk language. It is not my language. I began studying two years ago. I have always wanted to be able to speak the language, but I am a member of Parliament and I want to understand the language of the Mohawk people, people who have lived here long before my people arrived.

• (1150)

I have discovered something that is more complicated than sharing words with one another: I have found that I have become able to understand my place on Earth, which I did not appreciate before I began learning. It has now just begun to make sense to me how amazing the language is, how rich it is, how exceptional it is. It is a lot more complicated than my other languages.

I have made many good friends. I have found people who love this Earth and everything on it that we share. I am very pleased, very much so, and grateful to everyone who has helped me begin learning.

I thank those who have listened to my words. I wish them peace.

Those are the words. That is all.

• (1155)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across the way and applaud him for his perseverance in learning a language. I wish I could ask my question in Mohawk, but unfortunately, I do not speak Mohawk.

As we have mentioned, we will be supporting the bill to go to committee. One of the questions I have heard from several people is about the cost implications of putting this bill in place and doing the extra translation work that is needed. Does the member have an idea of what that would be?

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for her support for the bill. Clearly, funds would need to go to the right places, the right institutions and the right people, those who have been struggling to preserve languages, sometimes against our leadership, our previous governments and even local governments.

We know some of the gut-wrenching stories, one of which I told in my speech, of people speaking a language in private and ensuring its survival. We need to put up the money necessary, not only to correct the wrong that was done by our people but also to ensure vitality.

I thank the member for thanking me for my learning Mohawk. It is an extremely complex and rich language. I encourage anyone to learn at least the greetings, but hopefully the whole language.

It is not for me to be speaking here in Parliament. This is a very symbolic act, an act of respect. The most important thing is to ensure that children are speaking it in communities, taught by the people who know best how to do it, who have been preserving it for years, against us.

The cost will be significant, so I would encourage the member's support within her caucus for those funds when they are announced.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate my friend on the hard work he has done in learning the local language in the unceded territory where he lives. I want to commend him. It is inspiring for all of us to see the effort the member has put forward in learning that language and how it connects him to the land and the people where he lives.

A good friend of mine from the Nuu-chah-nulth people, and from the Ahousaht Nation, Cliff Atleo, always reminds us that our language is what identifies us. He says we are nothing without our language. We are losing speakers all the time, as the member knows and as I cited earlier today. The Barkley dialect, for example, has gone from 15 speakers since the government was elected to nine. They have been waiting for funding. I got a note today from a councillor from Tseshaht Nation, Ken Watts. He said that as a council member in his community who has helped apply for language funding, that is one of the most important things. He wrote, "Without funding behind this, nothing will change. They also need to send money directly to communities. I respect the work of some organizations, but communities need it, as they know what's best for their nation's languages."

Government Orders

Tseshah's position is that language funding should not be competitive. He spoke a little about the importance of the language funding going out to where the needs are. I want to ensure that the member is going to enforce and ensure that when the government rolls out the funding, it will not be a competitive process and that everyone who needs it is going to be able to have access to it, especially in areas where there are language holders. We know many of them are aging out in certain areas.

I also want to understand whether the government is going to inject money immediately. We are losing language speakers now, and as we lose these holders of knowledge and holders of the language, we lose our whole cultures in certain communities. We lose languages in certain nations. It is important this be backed up with funding.

• (1200)

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his very insightful comments as to where and how the funding should flow. If he wants to learn some words, there are some people who may or may not be here who are fully versed on how to teach it, my teacher Brian Maracle and his wife Audrey.

We are already funding schools, as we speak. Under the current funding envelopes we tripled investments. Certainly that is not enough and certainly the models have been heavily criticized as to their perennity and as to their predictability. Courses can take two or three years. People who are fully immersed give up their jobs in order to take up this language. They are at the prime of their earning career and they have to drop everything and spend two or three years learning the language they are brave enough to reclaim.

We are funding now in schools and this has to be a multi-pronged approach. It needs to be at an early age, within the K to 12 system, where it is taught in a fashion that is respectful of language, that is respectful of culture and is taught by indigenous people, and not simply for the effectiveness of that, but because we know that the outcomes are great and the graduation rates are equal, if not above, non-indigenous graduation rates.

We know that there are real effects of putting language and culture into the K to 12 system, putting it into kindergarten and putting it into the immersion system, which is essential in ensuring that generations can pass it on and speak it at home because the work is not sufficiently done in the schoolroom. It is important to have the funds at their disposition and I have no particular objection to the member opposite's question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to commend the member for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs for his courage and determination to learn the Mohawk language.

When he visits those communities, how is he received by indigenous peoples who can now speak to him directly?

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for his very relevant question.

By learning to speak Kanyen'kéha, I had the opportunity to meet people I would never ordinarily have met. I had the opportunity to visit immersion schools and to meet people who are passionate about

tradition and culture. Under normal circumstances, these people would not have the opportunity to meet a Canadian government official.

I had the honour of discovering a people I did not know, even though I have been living in this area since I was born in 1973. I learned a lot in meeting with people who are passionate about culture, language and the vitalization of indigenous languages. I could have said “revitalization”, but “vitalization” is really the right term for it. This new legislation will recognize that indigenous language rights are inherent.

Everyone was very kind to me, and I am grateful to them for that. Obviously, language is a sensitive issue, as francophones are well aware, and dealing with sensitive issues can have consequences.

[*English*]

I know the member thanked me, but I would like to note at this time that the real thanks is the translation services, which have been done by a woman called Margaret Cook-Peters, or Margaret Cook-Kaweienon:ni, who has been the translator in the House allowing everyone here today to hear such wonderful words.

I hope I am not outing her, but she is also the person who translated the residential school apology into Mohawk so that a lot of communities could have that apology formally acknowledged in Mohawk from our government. She is behind that with her wonderful team and group. She has been fighting for years for her language, fighting in her community, fighting against governments, and I want to thank her profoundly for the work that she has done today in the House.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, to the hon. parliamentary secretary, I want to say he has done spectacular work in learning Mohawk.

[*Member spoke in Mohawk as follows:*]

Serihwakweniénsthak.

[*Mohawk text translated as follows:*]

Keep on being respectful.

[*English*]

I apologize if I did not pronounce it right.

The bill certainly is full of good intentions. We have heard concerns about funding. I wish we could get this through second reading today and get the committee work happening in the coming week. However, I wonder why in drafting legislation in 2019 that cites indigenous rights, the legislation does not specifically cite the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Certainly this was an opportunity to do so.

Government Orders

• (1205)

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I note the effort and I really applaud it. When a lot of people speak a new language, they feel insecure because language, particularly as politicians, is what we are defined by and if we stutter, whether it is in English, French or a language we are not familiar with, we get very insecure. We have to get out of our comfort zone and do that. There are people available if the leader of the Green Party wants to learn it.

We are at second reading. There is plenty of opportunity to get input. I will note that the rights that exist and are acknowledged today are not pursuant to any declaration or particular law. They are acknowledged and need to be perfected by the House, but they existed way before our people got here.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

I am happy to rise today to speak to Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages. This is my first time standing in this new House of Commons. It is an honour and a privilege to speak in this historic building, the House of Commons for our country. It is also an honour to continue representing the hard-working constituents of Bow River in this place.

I have a deep respect and appreciation for language. I speak English, that is my background, but I have two grandchildren that have spent 13 years in French immersion and are fluent in both languages. The time that I had the opportunity to learn a second language was much more limited than what is available to our youth today.

It concerns me that so many languages are going extinct around the world. By at least one estimate, 90% of spoken languages will be extinct by 2050, if action is not taken soon. Languages have long, proud histories that are fundamental to culture. Their etymologies provide clues into a culture's distant past and their dynamic nature reflects their speakers' present-day lives. Their present-day lives are affected by the language they spoke historically.

English is the language most familiar to me. Through its evolution we can chart the history of those who inhabited the British Isles. For example, in the pre-Roman period, we can see the influence of Scandinavian invaders, the Norman conquest in 1066 and a thousand additional years of historical evolution since. I trace my family back to 1200 in Scotland but I doubt today whether our language would be similar. I might have a difficult time understanding my Scottish ancestors of 1200. Language changes and evolves.

Indigenous languages have many more words for certain things than English do. Things that are important to indigenous culture are described in a way that would be unfamiliar to someone not familiar with their culture. It is an amazing example of how language and cultures are interwoven. For example, the Inuit have extensive different words to describe the weather, the snow, the ice, as it is so critical to their culture. They have many more words to describe those elements in their culture than we have in English.

There are approximately 7,000 languages remaining in the world and I am certain all are the product of incredible cultural legacies. According to 2016 census data from Statistics Canada, over 70

indigenous languages are spoken in Canada and 260,550 first nations, Métis and Inuit people speak these 70 different languages.

However, the percentage of people that say they can speak these languages has declined significantly in the last few decades. This is a trend that should be reversed. These proud languages unquestionably deserve to be preserved in the future wherever possible. It is important to note that in far too many cases, their continued existence is threatened by globalization and former colonial policies.

Our previous Conservative government recognized through our residential schools apology that such schools had a damaging impact on indigenous languages. I have met with elders of the Siksika of the Blackfoot Confederacy and they have told me stories of how they were treated for speaking their indigenous language in the schools. As my colleague the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has stated, the Government of Canada was part of the destruction of indigenous languages and we need to be part of the solution.

The legislation would create an independent commissioner for indigenous rights. It seeks to affirm that indigenous language is part of section 35 of the Constitution. It would allow the translation of federal services into indigenous languages.

• (1210)

These are laudable goals. I note the commissioner would have a mandate to take many of these measures to help promote indigenous languages. They would support the efforts of indigenous peoples to reclaim, revitalize and strengthen their languages and thus their culture.

I would like to highlight that fantastic efforts are already under way in my riding to do just that. Siksika Nation, which is part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, has decided to take the first steps to offer immersion programs in Blackfoot language this September for the first time. To start, the immersion program will be offered to kindergarten and grade 1 students. This is a huge challenge, but one Siksika has undertaken in its education department. This is an incredible step to ensuring its language and culture are strengthened through future generations. I hope this program is a great success.

Siksika has been a leader in many things as part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, and education is an area where it is gaining strength in teaching its culture and providing its youth with a link to its past. Using this format in education, immersion in the Blackfoot language will strengthen students' connection to their elders and their past.

Government Orders

The commissioner would also promote public awareness and understanding of the link between indigenous languages and the cultures of indigenous people. As I have noted, I strongly share the view that language is a fundamental component of culture. For indigenous people in Siksika, I know very well that oral history is a critical piece of their culture. The elders still know the language and the culture, but communicating that oral history to the generations that have come next, their grandchildren, is so difficult when the names and the words they use are not part of the English vocabulary the youth know.

It will affect their culture when this indigenous generation of elders is lost. When they pass on, the knowledge they have will be lost, because the indigenous words used in their culture will also be lost unless they are taught to the youngest generation.

The elders of the Blackfoot Confederacy Siksika talk about their language being a tonal language. The Blackfoot Confederacy language is a different language in North America. It is not related to most of the other indigenous languages on this continent. It is mostly related to other languages that are tonal. The elders who speak to me about this language are very proud of the distinction between their language and other indigenous ones, as well as the culture it represents.

I was happy to see this acknowledged in the commissioner's mandate. I am pleased to support sending this bill to committee. As a member of the heritage committee, I look forward to carefully reviewing its contents. I also look forward to hearing from stakeholders and learning about the possible ways it could be improved. We need to do more than listen. There has been a lot of listening by the government in preparing the proposed legislation with indigenous people, but the action needs to follow.

I must note this legislation was first promised in December 2016, but it is now 2019. What are the chances of this legislation agenda being finished in this term? There are just 13 sitting weeks remaining. It is late in this mandate.

I also note that ITK has stated that it does not approve of this bill. The day the bill was tabled, ITK president Natan Obed released a statement that read:

Despite being characterized as a reconciliation and codevelopment initiative, the Government of Canada engaged Inuit in bad faith throughout this legislative initiative. The absence of any Inuit-specific content suggests this bill is yet another legislative initiative developed behind closed doors by a colonial system and then imposed on Inuit.

Despite three years having passed, I am disappointed Liberals have failed to accommodate such an important aspect as the one this leader has identified.

The Conservatives believe protecting Canada's indigenous languages is protecting our shared Canadian heritage. We recognize the importance of preserving indigenous language and culture. I hope this bill will be successful in achieving these objectives, and I look forward to studying it further at committee.

● (1215)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member indicated that this bill is being introduced close to the end of the mandate. However, I

would note that the previous Harper government had 10 years to protect indigenous languages in this country. In fact, it cut indigenous language services in every single budget, with just \$5 million invested to protect, preserve and enhance over 90 languages in Canada. It is a shameful past, and it is unfortunate that the member cast doubt on the ability of this Parliament to be able to pass this proposed legislation.

This is a very bold initiative by the government, supported by the Assembly of First Nations and the Métis National Council. It was co-developed with all three indigenous organizations.

I would like assurance from the member that his party will support this bill going to second reading and to committee to be studied right away, starting today.

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, but maybe not for his statement when he said that I am shameful.

Let me see. There is the child welfare legislation promised by the end of January. Where is that? There is the promised consultation on Bill S-3, on gender inequity in the Indian Act. Where is that? There is the Enbridge northern gateway project, which was cancelled without consulting the bands who had equity agreements. What was that?

Therefore, when the member talks about this in the sense of saying 2019 is soon enough, there is a litany of other things that have been promised that have not been finished.

The last response I would have is on the role of committee in the sense that when I deal with indigenous people in my constituency, they are looking for serious responsibility to do this themselves. They are not looking for us to make another piece of legislation that tells them what to do. Therefore, in consultation, we need to understand that they need to have the structure that provides them the opportunity to implement this, and not be told what to do.

● (1220)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the very important calls to action through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the creation of an indigenous languages commissioner.

I would ask my friend from Bow River whether, if the Conservatives were to form government at some point, they would ensure that the indigenous languages commissioner would be left intact and that the creation of this body would be protected under a Conservative government.

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's interest in this and his dedication to his constituents. I appreciate his understanding of his role and how well he does it.

However, it was not the Conservative government that took out some pieces of legislation affecting indigenous people. The Liberals took some stuff out that the Conservatives had legislated, which indigenous people agreed with. It was the Liberals who took it out, not the Conservatives.

The member asked if we would be in government again. Of course we will be in government again. That will happen as surely as the sun rises.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I notice the parliamentary secretary has twice asked if we are ready to move this legislation on. However, the government introduced it on Tuesday and we are debating it on Thursday. We are being very reasonable. This is an important piece of legislation, but the government has left very little time.

We intend to be productive and we intend to be supportive, but the fact that the government has such poor House management skills is what it should really be concerned about.

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, I have a very brief response for my learned colleague who has much history in this building. I agree 100% with what she has just said.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise in the House and applaud the excellent speech by my colleague from Bow River, as well as his knowledge of and commitment to indigenous issues in Canada.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, our indigenous affairs critic. She is doing very important work on a very sensitive file.

Before rising, I listened to several speeches. I would like to come back to something said by a colleague from Vancouver Island, the member for Courtenay—Alberni. He said something that was very important and, in my view, in keeping with the tone set today. He said that language defines our identity. That is the very crux of the bill introduced today. We are talking about the identity of not just anyone, but of the people who lived here before the arrival of Europeans.

As my colleague mentioned, this debate is taking place in the new House of Commons located in the West Block.

On June 11, 2008, I was in the House and I had the opportunity and privilege to listen to Prime Minister Stephen Harper offer a full apology to residential school survivors on behalf of all Canadians.

What is the link between that apology and the bill before us today?

The bill before us today draws on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, established by the Conservative government in 2008.

A six-year study was conducted. During that time, we gathered a lot of testimony that at times was very emotional from indigenous people who attended these schools.

Prime Minister Harper said that for more than a century, residential schools separated more than 150,000 indigenous children from their families and their communities. Nearly seven generations of young people were in some way uprooted from their culture and language while they were attending school. As my colleague from Vancouver Island said, language is an essential part of identity.

Remarkably, the hon. member for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs delivered his speech in the Mohawk language. He said that when we learn a language, we become open to a new culture. He has opened himself up to the Mohawk culture.

As someone with an Irish-sounding name who was lucky enough to learn French growing up, I am keenly aware of linguistic issues. That is why, as a Conservative and a Quebecker, I am proud of our party's position. Our party will support the bill since we want it to go even further.

I also want to revisit one of the points raised by Mr. Harper. He stated, and I quote:

Two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.

That sends a shiver down my spine.

He also said, "It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered."

As everyone knows, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and a support program for aboriginal people affected by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement were put in place.

I would actually like to come back to the recommendations that were made. Three calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report relate to the subject we are discussing here today. Calls to action 13, 14 and 15 call on the federal government to recognize that aboriginal rights include aboriginal language rights.

● (1225)

Recommendation 14 calls on the federal government to enact an aboriginal languages act that incorporates the following principles.

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

These recommendations were made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, if I remember correctly. It is now 2019. As my colleague from Bow River said, the government waited a long time. We are now approaching the end of this Parliament, and the Liberals seem to be steamrolling through this, even though the Prime Minister promised to address the issue more than two years ago.

In essence, we support this bill. As my colleague just said, we want to do a thorough job, to make sure this bill achieves its objectives. The Assembly of First Nations supports the bill, as does the Métis Nation, but the Inuit are quite dissatisfied, so we need to give this bill careful consideration. Like my colleague from Bow River, I am privileged to be a member of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We want to examine this bill to ensure that it both meets these communities' needs and achieves the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's objectives.

Government Orders

That brings me to an important point. I just mentioned it briefly, and my colleague talked about it too. The problem is that we currently have a government that knows how to talk but takes far too long to walk the walk. Drawing things out like this could strain the trust between indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada. My colleague shared some examples of that.

I want to share a quote from Chantal Hébert:

By taking important but essentially symbolic steps that capture the attention of Canadian voters but ultimately do nothing to fundamentally change the reality that indigenous peoples face, the Trudeau government is risking creating an even wider divide between the dashed expectations of the first nations and the public's openness towards them.

We have a responsibility to do things right in a reasonable amount of time. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made its recommendations more than three years ago. The government has introduced a bill at the end of this Parliament. Trust between the Canadian government and the first nations is fragile, and we plan to work seriously and diligently to maintain that trust.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am a little perplexed by the member's comments at the end of his speech. He indicated that movement has not been substantive with respect to indigenous issues. I note that in the past three years, \$16.8 billion has been invested in different programs and initiatives with respect to indigenous peoples, which has resulted in more than 250,000 people benefiting from 157 school projects, more than 450,000 people benefiting from 490 water projects and more than 200,000 approved requests under Jordan's principle. I note that the opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, voted against virtually every one of these initiatives to advance reconciliation.

It is a little rich when the member opposite suggests that movement has been slow. It has been slow, in part, because support from the opposition has been very slow. I would like some indication from the member as to whether he is willing to send this to committee today, where there could be a more robust discussion of the issues he identified.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, who is doing important work.

However, he shares a fault with his boss, the Prime Minister: whenever something goes wrong, he blames everyone else. We can see this happening with the indigenous file. I had a chance to go into communities like Pakuashipi, where residents have major concerns about health and access to clean drinking water. Our colleagues are constantly challenging the government on these issues.

I have two things to say to my colleague. The first is about the money that is being invested, and the second is about the way it is being invested. Our Conservative government established a principle of transparency, because it is important for members of indigenous communities to know where federal money is going and how it is being shared among communities. Sadly, and this is another example of what I was saying, this government says one thing and does

another. It advocates transparency, but it hid the way federal funds are transferred to communities. That shows a lack of transparency.

It is the government that decides when to table bills. We have no say over that. However, it is tabling this bill at the eleventh hour. We are ready to put in the work, but we do not want to mess this up, because the relationship between first nations and the Canadian government is too important.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member talked about the Liberals doing things that are mainly and mostly symbolic. I would agree. This needs to be backed with funding and a real commitment that demonstrates a sense of urgency.

I have to go back to the Harper government. It cut over \$60 million for indigenous organizations. John Duncan, from Vancouver Island, was the then aboriginal affairs minister. When he was put in that position in 2012, he said the Conservatives would change the funding model for aboriginal organizations and tribal councils, focusing on the areas that matched the Harper government's priorities. They were basically dictating the priorities of indigenous people instead of allowing them to define their own priorities.

I received a message from a councillor from the Tseshah Nation, which I read this morning. In it he said that we need to send funding directly to communities. He said that he respects the work of some organizations but that the communities know what is best for their nations' languages. I have to agree with the councillor and indigenous organizations.

If the Conservatives were in government, would they retreat back to the Harper way of doing business and dictate to first nations how they should be doing business?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I want to come back to something that I witnessed here in the House of Commons. I was here when prime minister Harper issued a heartfelt apology to residential school survivors on behalf of the Canadian government. At the time, that was really something, because it initiated the broader reconciliation process, which is a long and difficult road given the harm that has been done and its lasting effects.

I am very proud of Prime Minister Harper and Minister Duncan for beginning the process of transferring the responsibility for education to first nations. That is a critical issue and it also affects what we are talking about today. That work is under way, and I am very proud of that.

I hope that the bill that we are examining today will help strengthen the pride that indigenous peoples have in their culture and their languages.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my friend from Surrey Centre.

I am deeply honoured to speak this afternoon in support of Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act. I want to start by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the traditional unceded lands of the Algonquin people.

Our language is at the core of who we are as a people, as a community and as a nation.

[*Translation*]

Before I speak to the important aspects of the bill, I would like to explain to the House the major challenges that I face as a first-generation immigrant to Canada.

Every day, I struggle to make sure that my two daughters understand and speak their mother tongue, Tamil, at home.

[*English*]

For me, the ability to be part of this community is at my core. The ability to understand this language allows me to understand this community. I want my two children to be able to have the opportunity and the right to understand the language and be connected to the people. Likewise, all families want their language to be spoken and understood, be it English, French, Finnish or Tamil. It is who we are as a people.

However, these languages are not at risk of extinction, nor are the speakers and keepers of these languages dying. Most indigenous language speakers do not have the privilege and protection that is available to other languages in Canada. Sadly, the legacy for indigenous people in Canada is that every one of the 90 languages spoken here prior to colonization is at threat of being lost. According to UNESCO, 75% of these languages are in danger of becoming extinct. Imagine the languages, dialects and voices of many communities lost forever. I cannot fathom it. We cannot fathom it, and we cannot understand it.

This happened because successive governments undertook the process of colonization that Madam Justice McLachlin has called “cultural genocide”. This meant that the government took children from their homes and their communities and put them in residential schools. The children were forbidden from speaking their languages and practising their spirituality and were often abused for practising who they were.

Some communities were forcibly moved from one geographical location to another. Some children from indigenous homes were taken and placed in foster homes or put up for adoption through the sixties scoop. We have a modern-day version of the sixties scoop, whereby children are taken by child welfare agencies and put in foster care.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report outlined many experiences of residential school survivors, and I want to share two such stories.

One is from William Herney, who spoke Mi'kmaq with his brother at residential school. He said:

And she says, “What are you two boys doing?” “Nothing, Sister.” “Oh, yes, I heard you. You were talking that language, weren't you?” “Yes, Sister.” “Come here,” she said. I went over. She took a stick. She leaned me over to the bathtub, the bathtub, grabbed me by the neck, and I don't know how many whacks she gave me over my bum, and I was crying like I don't know what. Then, she took a piece of

Government Orders

soap, and she washed my mouth in it. I can still even taste that lye soap. All my life I tasted that taste. And she said, “You don't talk that language here. That's a no, no, no, you don't, you understand?” Looks at me straight in the eye. She said, “Do you understand that?” And I said, “Yes, Sister, I understand.”

Rose Dorothy Charlie, who was at an Anglican school in Carcross, said:

They took my language. They took it right out of my mouth. I never spoke it again. My mother asked me why, why you could hear me, she's, like, “I could teach you.” I said, “No.” And she said, “Why?” I said, “I'm tired of getting hit in the mouth, tired of it. I'm just tired of it, that's all.” Then I tried it, I went to Yukon College, I tried it, and then my own auntie laugh at me because I didn't say...the words right, she laughed at me, so I quit. “No more,” I said. Then people bothered me, and say, “How come you don't speak your language?” And I said, “You wouldn't want to know why.” So, I never speak, speak it again.

The depth of the loss of indigenous languages cannot be quantified. The eternal links to language, and by extension culture, have been broken. Generations of indigenous people in Canada have been shamed into losing their language and culture because of the policies and practices of successive Canadian governments and many institutions.

A patchwork of programs and initiatives exist to support the preservation, protection and revitalization of indigenous languages.

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

Not all languages face the same risk of extinction. Some have better odds of survival than others, but it is all relative. We need to do more to protect, preserve and revitalize all indigenous languages.

We cannot change the past. The past is done. However, we can and must change the course of the future.

[*English*]

In this moment in time, the 42nd Parliament has made enormous strides in advancing equality, human rights and indigenous rights. In 2015, our government committed to implementing all 94 calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Calls to action 13, 14 and 15 require the entrenchment of legislation and a framework that will ensure the protection, preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages.

Our government adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and this past year, this House adopted Bill C-262 to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with UNDRIP. UNDRIP requires state parties to take effective measures to support indigenous languages.

In 1981, section 35 of the Canadian Constitution enshrined a full box of rights to first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Such rights include the right to language.

Our Prime Minister affirmed that Canada would move forward on a relationship that nation to nation, Inuit to Crown and government to government, all based on the recognition of the rights framework. Bill C-91 does this, and this year, as we mark the United Nations Year of Indigenous Languages, we bring this bill forward to change the trajectory of indigenous languages and, once and for all, commit to ensuring the long-term protection, preservation and revitalization of these languages.

Government Orders

Permit me to outline some major features of Bill C-91. This bill was codeveloped with the national indigenous organizations, including the AFN, ITK and the MNC. This bill offers a distinction-based approach to languages. That is, it recognizes that not all languages are in need of the same level of protection. It respects the principle of self-determination. It envisions a national framework and commission that will monitor and report on the progress made.

Let me offer one additional reason for the urgency in passing this legislation. Three weeks ago, I had the opportunity to visit Prince George, British Columbia. I met with members of the Lheidli T'enneh first nation. There were five fluent speakers of Lheidli T'enneh with the dialect of Dakelh. I met the chief and several members of council, none of whom spoke the language, but all were striving to preserve the language itself. The loss of this language is imminent if a concerted effort is not made to preserve it.

Last week, elder Mary Gouchie, one of the native speakers, died. In marking her passing, the MP for Cariboo—Prince George said this of elder Mary Gouchie:

Mary understood that our words connect us to our past. Our words and our music are two of the foundations of the human experience. Without them, we have no past. Without them, we have no future, and without them, we have no awareness of who we might be.

In closing, I want to conclude by recognizing the keepers and teachers of all indigenous languages like elder Mary Gouchie. Notwithstanding that so many indigenous languages are endangered in Canada, the mere fact that so many of these languages still exist is due to the brave unsung heroes who have worked so hard to protect and preserve these languages.

Let us do right by them. Let us do right by future generations, and let us just do this.

• (1245)

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's speech. He sort of verifies why I believe this is a significant piece of legislation and why it is important. He may not remember that there are many languages in the world that have disappeared. This is happening all over the world. The United Nations, which was referred to, in a misguided way developed one language that it wanted us all to speak. Some of my colleagues may not remember that, and I am glad it disappeared.

However, the point of understanding is that we need to work with indigenous peoples, and this has to take time. It has to be done right. It cannot be rushed through, saying that tomorrow it will be at committee and we want a report and recommendations in weeks. That does not work. This has to take time. That is why I am objecting to doing this, this late in the mandate. We cannot.

This is important for the culture of indigenous people. They have a number of orders for sweetgrass and a number of orders for sage. This is being lost. This takes time. We cannot do it this quickly. It is too late in the mandate to get this done right.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I note that there are 13 weeks, as the member opposite said, that the House will sit. If this logic were to be followed through, we might as well rise today and wait until the election in October.

The fact is that, as parliamentarians, we have an obligation. We actually have the opportunity right now in the remaining weeks of this mandate to work hard, to work together and to work collaboratively on something that is so fundamental to this country, so fundamental to so many language speakers. I think it would be a failure on our part if we were to give up right now and say that we do not have enough time. I do believe we have enough time, and I believe that we collectively can get this done.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the member say in his remarks that this legislation was codeveloped with ITK, of all people. I want to share with the member a quote from Natan Obed, the president of ITK. He said:

Despite being characterized as a reconciliation and co-development initiative, the Government of Canada engaged Inuit in bad faith throughout this legislative initiative....

ITK wanted nothing more than to truly co-develop a bill that we could champion with other indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada.... In no way was this bill co-developed with Inuit.

If the president of ITK obviously feels very strongly that this was not a codeveloped initiative, I am wondering on what basis the member is saying that this is codeveloped. Is it not in keeping with the spirit of reconciliation that, if indigenous peoples are saying that this was not genuine codevelopment, the government would not seek to override that claim and claim that it was codeveloped when the Inuit clearly do not feel that way?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, we are in new territory. In fact, codevelopment has taken place over the last couple of years with the three national indigenous organizations. Codevelopment does not mean co-drafting. A lot of work went into, for example, developing the 12 principles that were developed together with the Government of Canada and the three national indigenous organizations, which formed the basis of this bill. During this time, all three national organizations were supportive.

With respect to ITK, I have seen the comments from ITK, and once this matter goes to committee, greater clarity will be sought, and that will be incorporated into the final bill when it comes back for third reading.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, and especially for giving part of it in French.

The Bloc Québécois agrees with the principle of the bill and will definitely vote for it at second reading.

In my riding, members of the Manawan Atikamekw community speak Atikamekw. However, there is not enough funding at present to teach Atikamekw or French at the primary and secondary levels.

Could my colleague tell us if the bill provides for adequate funding for the teaching of these languages?

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, the bill itself does not allocate funding at this point. However, it is the framework that would ensure that indigenous communities across Canada, based on their need and on their ability to determine what are the priorities for them and what mode and method of teaching and preserving and revitalization is important, will be able to secure funding through the government.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages.

I come from the land of the Coast Salish people, namely the Kwantlen, Katzie and Tsawwassen first nations.

For me language is like one's mother. It nourishes, heals, embraces and caresses us. For this country, language has been one of its defining legacies, both good and bad. When it comes to French and English, the protection of these languages is part of our Constitution, and debates on how to protect them, particularly where either speaker is in a minority, have been robust. For French and English language rights, we have become a beacon, an example and a standard for others to use and see.

However, our history is not so great when it comes to the indigenous languages of this nation. This country took young children from their parents, incarcerated them in prison-like environments, took away their names and re-named them, punished them for speaking in the language of their peoples, and stole their identities from them.

This was done in full sight of the governments of the day and with the blessings of both church and state. However, this was a much more sinister plan, one designed and concocted to eliminate and exterminate a people, a culture, a society that was rich, humane and in harmony with the land.

Civilizations and societies, however great, do this from time to time. They commit to actions that they see as right and justified, and do heinous crimes because they usually fail to see how their actions will affect the people they are created for. Sometimes it is deliberate, and sometimes it is out of ignorance, but at no time is it acceptable.

However, Canada, and to some degree the world, has come a long way from the days of forced assimilation and residential schools to, now, truth and reconciliation, and recognizing indigenous languages as a right.

This bill will put into place actions 13, 14 and 15 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and put the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into effect. It will require the federal government to fund indigenous languages and create an office of the commissioner of indigenous languages. This is very important, as currently only 20% of indigenous people can converse in their language, and in B.C. that number is even less, with only one in 27 being able to converse in an indigenous language.

If one doubts the value and power of language, then just look to how it affects youth suicide rates. With those who spoke their indigenous language, the rates were one-sixth of those who did not. Those with no ability to speak their language had a rate of suicide

Government Orders

that was six times higher. Today all 90 indigenous languages are in danger of extinction.

This is only the beginning. Languages help people understand the richness of their culture and the history of their peoples, and see the world through a different and more colourful lens. It helps people appreciate their ancestry, history and lineage. While this country has had its fair share of shortfalls and misdeeds when it comes to language, culture and people, it has also learned from them and created some of the greatest policies on diversity and human rights, both of which have shaped me and who I am.

In 1978, this country adopted a policy of multiculturalism, which for me was going to be one of the most defining pieces of legislation, along with the charter, that would allow me to grow up and be the person I am today. Let me tell the House why.

When I was in kindergarten in 1980, I was a child of an immigrant. I was brown, had long hair, which was tied in a bun on the top of my head, and I looked nothing like other people in my class. All I wanted to do was look like everyone else. I wanted to be Canadian. Little did I know that, under multiculturalism, being Canadian was exactly what I was and how I should be.

I was lucky enough to have a teacher who knew this legislation, the timing and appropriateness of it. She decided to share this with me and my family. She called my parents, brought them over and, for me, at first, it was a dreadful moment. I thought this was when I was going to be put into ESL, English as a second language, that dreadful place from where one never got out. However, it was different. She spoke to my parents and said, "It seems you are teaching him Punjabi at home, and I want you to know that this is going to be an asset and a gift, something you should cherish and even do more of. Let me take care of the English at school, and I will make sure he does not lag behind."

• (1255)

It stuck with me. My white Caucasian teacher was telling me to learn the language of my parents. She also said to make sure that I learned to read and write it, because it would be an asset in the future. I had no idea, because at that time, everyone was under pressure to change their names to make them more anglicized and to learn English and forget about their ancestral languages. However, it stuck with me.

In grade seven, I registered in an evening Punjabi school at the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver, and I learned to read and write the language. In grade eight, I fell in love with the language and started listening to British Punjabi bhangra and hip hop, and from there, there was no stopping. I loved reading newspapers, history and sometimes literature and listening to Punjabi poetry. It helped me understand what my parents went through, what my aunts and uncles appreciated and listened to and how flavours of foods really tasted. Today it gives me great honour when people tell me my Punjabi is great and ask when I came to Canada. I say I was born and raised in Canada. It is the reason I speak this language and can read and write it.

Government Orders

Fast-track to 35 years later. I serve in a government led by a Prime Minister who himself was brought up in a home with a similar language upbringing. I read at one point that his father made a rule in the household that if they were on the main floor, they were to speak French with their friends and parents. If they were upstairs in their bedrooms or downstairs in the rec room, they could speak English with their friends, but on the main floor they were to speak French. That is why the Prime Minister is fully bilingual and cherishes that right. It was very encouraging for me to read that it was not only my parents who had those rules at home. Other people across this country also shared those same rules.

I sometimes feel like a failure when it comes to my home, because I probably breach a lot of those rules. I speak English to my kids when I should be teaching them other languages at the same time. For that, I am sorry. However, I have given them the gift of learning Punjabi at evening school and at day school as well.

I hope this act will give our indigenous children the same right, the same sense of pride and belonging and the same tools to preserve their languages, joke in their languages and dialects and sing in their beautiful rhythms. I hope the House quickly ratifies this legislation so that never again will our indigenous people have to fight for their right to preserve their languages. May they always be able to cherish and speak their languages, and may Canada become a beacon for indigenous languages around the world.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would ask my colleague, can you tell us how this act fits into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, and what role would an agreement with our provincial counterparts play in implementing this act?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member that she is to address the Chair and not the individual member. She used the word “you”.

The hon. member for Surrey Centre.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, it would fit into call to action 13 in that indigenous rights include indigenous language rights. It would incorporate that call to action item to incorporate language rights.

Call to action 14 called upon the federal government to enact an indigenous languages act and to incorporate the principle that indigenous languages are a “fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.” Call to action 15 called upon the federal government “to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner.” That is the third part of the act. I hope that helps the member for Brampton South.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the story of the first-hand experience regarding Punjabi, which is in its own right a very beautiful language and one that I personally admire greatly.

When I look at the proposed legislation, I see a positive and somewhat historic day here in the House. We are debating legislation that addresses, as has been pointed out, a couple of calls to action

from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is something our Prime Minister has spoken a great deal about, virtually since day one.

It has taken a while to work with the stakeholders across our country. In particular, there is the leadership role the indigenous people of Canada have played in ensuring that there is a better sense of education on the importance of indigenous languages.

I wonder if my colleague would provide his thoughts regarding the strong representation from indigenous leaders who assisted the government in making sure that we were able to achieve what we have today, because without that type of support and advocacy, we would not be where we are today on this very important issue.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, after being elected in 2015, one of the first things we saw was a great interaction and dialogue commence between the indigenous people of this country and this government. It was a genuine, sincere dialogue, where both parties sat and shared, as if they were one family, to figure things out. It was deep-rooted, not just a patchwork or Band-Aid solution, and sought to create solutions for the next century and heal wounds that had been inflicted for a long time. I felt that sincerity, and it was not just on our side. I heard that from the indigenous leadership, especially from British Columbia, who felt that they were being listened to. They felt that this was a government that spoke with action and not just words.

The feedback I have had has not been from just the leadership but has also come from my riding of Surrey Centre, which is home to one of the largest urban indigenous populations. People genuinely came and said that they were so happy to hear that we actually listened and actually care.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Today I rise to speak to Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act. It is a bill that would, among other things, establish the office of the commissioner of indigenous languages, an office that would have the purpose of strengthening and supporting indigenous languages across this country.

Indigenous languages and cultures are numerous and diverse across Canada, and they form part of our great multicultural mosaic that certainly exists throughout this country.

UNESCO has launched a website devoted entirely to the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The website's home-page reads:

Languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person's unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory.

Government Orders

Data from the 2016 census shows that over 70 indigenous languages are spoken throughout this country. It is probably more like over 90. They represent about 260,000 people in this country. These languages reflect unique and rich indigenous cultural heritages, which should be valued by all members of Canadian society. However, under its horrific and brutal system of residential schools, the Canadian government pursued a policy through which the teaching and passing on of indigenous languages from one generation to the next was stamped out. Community knowledge of indigenous languages was severely harmed as a result of this shameful policy.

Back in 2008, on behalf of the Government of Canada, former prime minister Stephen Harper apologized to the former students of residential schools and acknowledged the terrible harms inflicted on the indigenous people of Canada through this system. At the time, he stated that the government recognized that the consequences of the Indian residential school policy were profoundly negative and that the policy had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

Our previous Conservative government recognized the damage residential schools inflicted on indigenous communities and on indigenous culture and heritage. The effects on indigenous languages were devastating, as we now know, but our former Conservative government chose to work toward a better future, alongside the indigenous peoples of Canada, by launching the Truth and Reconciliation Commission back in 2008.

There is much work that certainly needs to be done to support the strengthening and revitalization of indigenous languages, and Conservatives remain committed to supporting the work of indigenous communities to protect and reclaim indigenous languages. The protection of indigenous languages is valuable to all Canadians, as we all know, as part of our shared Canadian heritage.

Conservatives recognize the inherent value that comes from the preservation of rich and diverse indigenous languages and cultures. However, the Liberal government seems to have introduced the legislation as if it was an afterthought. The Prime Minister promised legislation back in 2016. That was almost two and a half years ago. Now, with only 12 or 13 weeks left in the current parliamentary session, he has decided to table it. He sat on this promise for over two and a half years. During all that time, no such legislation was introduced. Unfortunately, this is a common tactic of the Liberal government, which promises much yet fails to deliver.

Time and time again, the Liberals have failed in their commitments to indigenous communities across this country by constantly adding to their list of broken promises.

● (1305)

Last February, the Prime Minister made a promise in the House of Commons to pursue a new legal framework that would give greater recognition to indigenous rights. He said, “We need to get to a place where indigenous peoples in Canada are in control of their own destinies and making their own decisions about their futures.”

However, not even a year after making the promise while standing on the floor in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister himself, standing before the Assembly of First Nations, had to apologize for

his Liberal government's utter failure to meet its duty to consult with first nations over the Trans Mountain expansion project.

As we all know, right now the current Liberal government has no plans at all to move forward with any legislation before the next election to implement the legal framework the Prime Minister promised to indigenous communities just last year. These broken promises to indigenous peoples are not only irresponsible, but very harmful as well.

Speaking on the failure of the Liberal government to introduce its promised legal framework before the next election, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, formerly of Saskatchewan but now director of the University of British Columbia's Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, stated, “Promising people transformative change and failing is not only disappointing, it's also inhumane. It is a kind of pain and trauma that just gets compounded.”

Unfortunately, the current Liberal government has a long record of making promises to indigenous communities across this country, only to break those promises as soon as they are made.

I am going to share some interesting and encouraging facts on indigenous languages from the province of Saskatchewan, the city of Saskatoon, and my riding of Saskatoon—Grasswood.

Before I became a member of Parliament, I served for nine and a half years as a trustee on the Saskatoon board of education. At that time, we certainly celebrated indigenous language around our board table. I was proud to be involved in the expansion of the indigenous language training program in Saskatoon—Grasswood. In my riding, many students are fortunate to participate in indigenous language instruction. I will name a few schools.

I will start with Confederation Park Community School, which offers language instruction in Cree. About 280 students are involved, from pre-kindergarten all the way up to grade 8. These students benefit from the Nêhiyâwiwin Cree language and cultural program.

Westmount Community School provides a Métis cultural program that includes Michif language instruction for students from pre-kindergarten all the way up to grade 8.

The Charles Red Hawk Elementary School also offers Cree language instruction from pre-kindergarten all the way up to grade 4.

Mount Royal Collegiate, Princess Alexandra High School and even King George elementary school all provide Cree language instruction.

The Saskatoon public schools offer instruction in three indigenous languages: Cree, Michif and Dakota. Dakota language and cultural lessons are offered at the Chief Whitecap and Charles Red Hawk schools, and I should mention that Chief Whitecap is a major participant with the Saskatoon board of education on a new education formula.

St. Frances Cree Bilingual School in my riding of Saskatoon—Grasswood offers Cree education to 440 students from pre-kindergarten to grade 5, and to another 150 students in grades 6 to 8. Because of the growing demand for Cree bilingual education, St. Frances Cree Bilingual School is now serving students at two locations.

Government Orders

At the Oskayak High School in a neighbouring riding, Cree language instruction is offered to grades 9 to 12, where approximately 70 students are receiving Cree language instruction.

The Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools offer core Cree language to some 348 students, from pre-kindergarten all the way up to grade 8, at St. Mary's Wellness and Education Centre.

In conclusion, the Conservatives will support this bill going forward to second reading. We stand committed to reviewing Bill C-91 in committee to ensure that the current Liberal government once again lives up to the promises it has made to all indigenous peoples of Canada.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am always pleased to ask my colleague from Saskatoon—Grasswood a question.

I know him well as I work with him on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[English]

I do not doubt the member's commitment to Canada's indigenous peoples, but I am a bit confused.

I listened to the member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis earlier, criticizing our government around the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but I am not really sure that members opposite are committed to implementing those recommendations.

Would the member clarify his personal commitment to those recommendations, and also the commitment of the Conservative Party?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member across the way for his involvement on our indigenous affairs committee. He is certainly a valuable member.

As I said in my speech, it was our Conservative Party that launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008, and it was former prime minister Stephen Harper who took the first step on residential school abuse.

Conservative members stand fully behind all indigenous peoples, and that was evident in the House of Commons back in 2008. I remember that day, because I was a news broadcaster in the city of Saskatoon. That was one of the greatest days in the history of this country.

• (1315)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the truth and reconciliation calls to action is for the creation of an indigenous languages commissioner, and it is important that this happen.

If the Conservatives were to form government in the future, would they make sure they protect this office and leave it intact?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, I should add that the office of the commissioner will cost \$30 million. It will be interesting to see who will be the commissioner. I would imagine the current

government would want to establish one before we take over as the official government in 2019, and we all know that is going to happen.

It will be interesting to watch this file, because the office of the commissioner will have a big say. Will the Liberals leave that to us in October, or will they jump the queue and do it before they leave this session of the House of Commons?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member basically talked about virtue signalling and is accusing this government of doing that. He then went on to talk about how it was the former prime minister and the former Conservative government that brought in the truth and reconciliation study. When the results came out from that study, the prime minister at the time, Stephen Harper, basically said it was not even on his radar to do anything about it.

How can the member justify his comments today? In particular, how can he use an example from the truth and reconciliation report to somehow defend Conservative policy?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Speaker, it is because of former prime minister Stephen Harper that we are here today celebrating. He was the one who made the apology in 2008. It is one of the most famous days in Canadian history. The Liberals had a chance before the Conservatives took over, and they did nothing. It was the Conservative government, led by former prime minister Stephen Harper, that started the ball rolling in 2008.

That was a bit of a history lesson. It was the Conservatives who started the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008, and that is why we are here today.

Where are we on Bill S-3, gender inequity and most of all, the child welfare legislation? We are still waiting today for those three bills.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the member for Kingston and the Islands to stand up if he wishes to ask further questions or has further comments, and allow others who have the floor to give their responses without being interrupted.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to speak in the House. This is the first time I am giving a speech in this new chamber. I did of course get to ask some questions yesterday, and perhaps there will be more questions today if we can find anything to ask about. I am not sure if there is anything in the news worth asking. We will see in a few minutes, I guess.

I am proud to represent the Stó:lō communities in the Fraser Valley, in my riding of Chilliwack—Hope. Stó:lō is a Halkomelem word. I hope I have said that right. It means the people of the river. The Halkomelem language is under threat, as is every indigenous language in British Columbia. All B.C. members of Parliament received some information from a group called the First Peoples' Cultural Council. It reminded us of a few things. I want to quote from that brief to B.C. members of Parliament:

Government Orders

Our languages are at risk because of the number of speakers who have shifted to speaking English since the time of colonization. This language shift was not by choice, but due to forced assimilation through residential schools and the resulting interrupted intergenerational language transmission. Except for Cree and Anishnau-bemowin which both have larger numbers of speakers elsewhere in Canada, the other 32 languages spoken in British Columbia have fewer than 1,000 speakers each, with many having fewer than 100 speakers each.

The brief goes on to say that the diversity of first nations languages in B.C. is not well recognized, because there are 34 different first nations languages and at least 93 different dialects of those languages. That is what we are talking about when we talk about indigenous languages.

Just in my home province alone, nearly 100 different dialects are at risk of disappearing forever if we do not work with indigenous communities to preserve them. The Stó:lō communities in my riding have taken action on their own to preserve that language. They are offering language training to children who go to their child care services. They are teaching them not only about their traditional ways but also the traditional language. There are also post-secondary education opportunities, again first nations-led initiatives, to protect their language.

As we know and as the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo said earlier today, when indigenous children and youth learn the language of their elders and the language that they perhaps never heard at home, the pride they feel, the connection to their culture, and the change in the health outcomes that come about as a result of that are astounding. Therefore, we need to do everything we can to promote the maintenance, preservation and teaching of indigenous languages for the next generation, because if children growing up in these communities are able to learn the language of their forebears, we will see that the results are so much better for them in terms of health, mental health and cultural outcomes.

As we have said, we support the bill. We have some concerns we would like to have addressed at committee, because any time we are talking about a section 35 right, adding aboriginal language rights to section 35, we know it will be tested. Section 35 is tested in the courts all the time. There are questions about how to apply it in the Canadian context.

Therefore, it will be interesting to see how the government presents the bill in terms of what its interpretation is as to how we can integrate aboriginal language rights with section 35 rights, which is something that is already subject to testing by the courts quite often.

I also want to talk about something my colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood, said earlier. Part of the residential schools apology was an acknowledgement not only of that dark chapter, but specifically of the harm that was intended to indigenous languages through the residential schools policy.

● (1320)

This was not a by-product of residential schools. One of the goals of that system was to eradicate and eliminate first nations and indigenous languages. That is why part of the apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper on June 11, 2008, said:

First nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools...the government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian

residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

That is why we will find that any British Columbia MPs who engage in this debate will talk about the fact that these languages are at risk and that in many communities there have been just a handful of elders who are still able to speak the language. The percentage of young people who speak their indigenous language is very low compared with the elders. We have seen that through the Statistics Canada information from 2016. Even though the numbers are there, the percentages are quite low, so we need to do our job as parliamentarians.

I am hopeful that the bill would actually help to reverse that trend. I say I am hopeful because I have not been very impressed, quite frankly, with how the government's rhetoric has lined up with its actions on the ground for indigenous Canadians.

The Liberals get an A when it comes to rhetoric talking about indigenous issues. The Prime Minister has said many times there is no relationship more important to him than the relationship with Canada's indigenous peoples, but again and again, we see that the rhetoric does not match the reality.

We have a disturbing case even today where we are learning more details about someone that all British Columbians were proud of being given a key role in the government. Even though we were on a different side of the aisle, we have great respect for the now Minister of Veterans Affairs, the former attorney general of Canada, the first indigenous woman to hold that post, as she was a decorated and respected leader in the aboriginal communities in British Columbia and a former regional chief. To see what the Prime Minister has done to that minister is criminal, and it might actually be criminal from what we have learned today.

For having the audacity to point out that the rhetoric of the government on indigenous issues was not meeting the reality, she has been punted out of that key cabinet spot. She used to sit right beside the Prime Minister. Now she could not be farther away in the House of Commons and still be in the cabinet. She spoke truth to power. She said for too long there have been lofty words that do not meet the realities of first nations and indigenous peoples. For that, and perhaps as we are learning today, perhaps because she refused to bend to the will of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office to interfere in a criminal investigation, perhaps that is another reason why she was punted down to the end of the line and fired as attorney general.

We are hopeful that this piece of legislation will actually do what it says it will do, that the government will actually follow through on its promise to indigenous Canadians, because far too often, the rhetoric has been lofty. It has been soaring, but the changes and the improvements in the lives of indigenous Canadians have simply not been there. The Liberals have failed time and time again. Indigenous Canadians have paid for the Prime Minister's mistakes and it is time that this was put to an end. It is time that the shameful treatment of the Minister of Veterans Affairs came to light and that the Prime Minister apologize for what he has done to her and for how he has broken his promise time and time again to indigenous Canadians.

Government Orders

• (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have mentioned before, today is a very special day. Before us, we are debating a piece of legislation that deals, in part, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. This is something that has been long overdue. We have a Prime Minister who is very much committed to that new relationship with indigenous peoples.

We look at the content of the legislation and we recognize the true value and impact it is going to have on, for example, many of my constituents in Winnipeg North. I think of Children of the Earth High School. I think of many of the advocates like Sharon Redsky and Cindy Woodhouse. These individuals and so many others in all regions of the country see this legislation as good legislation.

I wonder if my colleague would recognize the value of the legislation. Does he agree that it would be nice to see the legislation sent to committee, where the many different stakeholders could come before the committee and further comment on the legislation?

• (1330)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, I said at the beginning of my speech that we support the bill and we will be supporting its being sent to committee. However, the bill was tabled in the House on Tuesday morning. It has not yet been 48 hours since we have had access to the bill. We have yet to have people from our communities weigh in on the contents of the bill. While we support it, we believe it is reasonable to discuss the bill here in the House, to continue to have the debate and to talk about the experiences of our communities.

It has been tabled. It has existed for 48 hours. It was promised in 2016 and we just got it in 2019, so the member will forgive us if we do not see that this was a real priority for the government. However, we intend to send it to committee when the vote comes up for second reading.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear that the Conservative members will be supporting the bill. I note that 2019, by the way, is the International Year of Indigenous Languages, so it is important in this context to discuss this issue.

Several items were identified by my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. He pointed out that the government neglected in the bill to incorporate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as part of the bill. The government also neglected to acknowledge the impacts of the sixties scoop and there are other flaws within the bill.

Therefore, when this matter is sent to committee, I wonder whether the Conservatives will work with my colleague on the amendments that are required to make the bill reflect the intent behind it so that it truly acknowledges the indigenous communities, and then to acknowledge their rights as they have been stated and enshrined under the UN declaration.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, of course our members on the Canadian heritage committee will be looking at the testimony that is presented by witnesses. We always work with our colleagues on all

sides of the House to determine ways that we can improve legislation. Therefore, we will very carefully examine any reasonable proposals to amend the bill to make it stronger and more reflective of what the experts say it needs. It would not be doing our jobs as parliamentarians to commit to supporting something that we have not yet seen, and before a single witness has been heard.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Chilliwack—Hope was being pressured about getting the bill through the House quickly, and I want to reflect on some of the consultation that I did in the riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap. I toured an indigenous immersion school. The school is having to develop its own books and curriculum and all of its program, but it does not have the funding to do that. That is going to be a big piece of this bill and why we want to take a bit of time to look at it and the costs that could be involved.

I want to have a comment from the member on why we want to really look at the bill.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for North Okanagan—Shuswap for his excellent work representing his communities and for bringing this forward.

All of us are going home at the end of this week to spend a week in our constituencies, and this is a great opportunity for members who represent indigenous communities to engage with them on this very important file, as I know the member has done and I know all of us will want to do. We will take the time necessary to review the legislation and do it the right way.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

Chi-meegwetch, which means “thank you very much”. I start my remarks in Algonquin, cognizant that I speak today in the House of Commons, which is located on unceded Algonquin territory and also cognizant of this occasion.

Today, I rise to speak in support of Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act. This legislation is the first of its kind in Canadian history. It begins to turn the page on 400 years of colonialism in this country and systematic efforts by successive governments to sever the ties of indigenous people to their mother tongues.

I will start with a preliminary comment, which is that all of us fortunate enough to be elected into this place come here with a sense of purpose or an objective in mind. For me, given my background in human rights and constitutional law, I came here wanting to work on issues that relate to fighting for and promoting equality and inclusion. I had in mind certain policy goals that I wanted to pursue. However, I quickly realized that sometimes in this place, we seek out an issue and sometimes an issue seeks us out. I will explain.

Government Orders

In January, 2017, I was asked by the Prime Minister to serve as the parliamentary secretary to the then minister of heritage. I was then asked by the minister to assist her in the co-development of Canada's first-ever indigenous languages act. I will admit to everyone in this chamber that at first I was very puzzled by this request. I am not a linguist nor am I an expert in anything related to indigenous persons. However, in retrospect, that one request actually changed the direction of my parliamentary career. Why? It is because it simply opened my eyes.

On arrival here, because of my legal background, I fancied myself a pretty knowledgeable fellow about most human rights issues. However, the reality was that I actually knew very little about the plight of indigenous persons on this land. Tasked by the minister to engage with indigenous leaders, elders, teachers and experts right across the country about what they would like to see in the new legislation, I actually learned a great deal. Most of all, I learned about how little I actually knew and had been taught about indigenous persons, their histories, traditions, languages, and most importantly, their trauma. I learned about the size, scope and extent of the residential school system, its pernicious impact on indigenous people in Canada and the lasting trauma it created.

Like many in this chamber, I am a parent. Together with my wife, and like many parents in this diverse country, I try to inculcate a sense of culture and tradition in our own little kids, Zakir and Nitin. As a south Asian household, we made efforts to connect our two little boys to the Indian subcontinent by teaching them some language skills, which in our case is Hindi. While the results have not always been perfect, and I will readily admit that the kids still prefer subtitles when they watch Bollywood films, it has not been for a lack of effort on our part.

Our experience is not any different from countless parents of all different backgrounds around this country, such as Greek, Italian, Arab, Somali, Tibetan, Ukrainian and Polish parents. All parents in this country strive to do much the same in this multicultural nation. However, there is one glaring exception to that list, and that is the experience of indigenous parents and their children in this country, because for indigenous people on this land, their efforts for 150 years to impart their language, and through it their culture, to their children were actively obstructed by the federal state.

The Government of Canada made it a policy to remove their children from their homes and put them in schools, sometimes hundreds of kilometres away, where those kids were forced to assimilate. If they dared speak Algonquin, Cree, Ojibwa, Dene or Inuktitut, they were beaten. That is the horrible legacy of the residential school system in this country. It is a system that was constructed to literally "take the Indian out of the child".

That is where this legislation comes in. The proposed indigenous languages act has, as its express goal, the objective of supporting, promoting and revitalizing indigenous languages in this country. It is an effort to start the long journey toward restoring the vitality of indigenous languages on this land and reversing the ugly legacy of colonialism.

The teaching of language by any parent in this chamber, by settlers or indigenous persons, is always motivated by the same rationale, that in providing children with language, we connect them

to who they are, to their culture. We make them knowledgeable of who they are and where they come from, knowing that in doing so we build up their self-esteem and confidence, and empower them for success. It is so intuitive that we take it for granted that by teaching a child about their culture, they will inevitably do better in terms of their education, economically, and even their health.

However, in my time spent working as the parliamentary secretary to the minister of heritage on the development of this very bill, I also came across empirical evidence. It was so startling that it has stayed with me for well over two years.

● (1335)

We have heard many times in the House about the crisis of mental health and in particular the grave concerns about youth suicide in Canada, particularly indigenous youth suicide.

One study put all of this into very sharp focus. Conducted in British Columbia, the analysts determined that indigenous youth in that province with a conversational knowledge of their indigenous language had a suicide rate of 13 per 100,000, a number well below the provincial average, which includes non-indigenous youth.

However, when the researchers removed indigenous language knowledge from the analysis, the youth suicide rate jumped sixfold, to 96 per 100,000, a number exponentially higher than the provincial average. This amply demonstrates that language knowledge not only connects indigenous youth to their culture but can actually help save lives.

For parliamentarians, there can be no stronger impetus than this for getting on with the critical work of passing this bill into law, yet there are other imperatives that inform this proposed legislation.

For one thing, there are the sentiments expressed to me by my constituents and by people I heard from right across the country. People in Parkdale—High Park told me they want reconciliation not to be simply a symbolic term, but rather one that materializes in concrete legislative action.

As well, there is the sheer weight of the statistics. Some 90 different indigenous languages are spoken in this country, and shockingly, not a single one of them is considered safe by UNESCO. Fully three-quarters of them are critically endangered. In addition, there was a near 50% drop between 1996 and 2011 in the number of indigenous persons in this country who reported knowledge of an indigenous mother tongue. This clearly illustrates the threat to the survival of many languages posed by an aging population of fluent elders.

I can also speak directly to what I heard when I was given the opportunity as parliamentary secretary to engage with indigenous communities across the country. From Halifax to Victoria to the Northwest Territories, what I heard was very similar. It was the sense of rupture, the sense of disconnection from one's culture experienced by so many indigenous persons victimized by the residential school system.

Government Orders

I recall very vividly a meeting in Saskatchewan during which an indigenous man, who may have been about 50 years old, told the group about being forcibly taken from his family and his community at the age of five, and how he was prohibited from speaking his mother tongue. When I asked him what success would look like a few years after legislation came into force, he said to me simply, “Success would be being able to enter the sweat lodge and actually understand the words being spoken by the elders.”

Make no mistake, it is indigenous persons that are the focus of this law. Much discussion has taken place in Canada and in this chamber about raising the awareness of indigenous languages among settler populations in this country through the passage of this bill. While that would be commendable, it remains a secondary, corollary aspect of this proposed legislation. The goal of this bill is not, for example, the promotion of Ojibwa fluency among non-indigenous folks in my riding or in any other riding in this country; the goal of this legislation is and has to be restoring language fluency and capacity among indigenous people in Canada so that indigenous people, by reclaiming their language, can reclaim their culture and overcome that sense of rupture I spoke about, the rupture caused by the official policy of assimilation that characterized the residential school system for 150 years.

This bill also relates to the TRC's calls to action, in particular calls 13, 14 and 15, which call for, among other things, an acknowledgement “that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.” That is precisely what proposed section 6 of this bill does.

The focus of this bill is also on fulfilling the promise of UNDRIP, a document we as a government have committed to implementing. The UN declaration speaks to the right of self-determination of indigenous peoples, which includes “the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages [and] oral traditions”. That statement is entrenched in the preamble to this proposed legislation.

This is precisely why we took the step of co-developing this proposed legislation with indigenous leaders and national indigenous organizations. The patriarchal days of the federal government telling indigenous people what is best for them are thankfully gone. It is indigenous people who know what is best for indigenous communities, and in this International Year of Indigenous Languages, it is high time we as parliamentarians all started listening to them.

I will conclude where I began. The protection and promotion of indigenous languages is not something that I ever contemplated working on, but it is an issue that found me. I am tremendously grateful for that, because on this journey I have learned that while there are many social justice causes worthy of pursuit in this country, all of them pale in comparison to the obligation we have as parliamentarians to redress the historical injustices perpetuated against indigenous persons on this land over the last 400 years of colonialism. The indigenous languages act is one small but very significant step on the path to reconciliation, and it deserves all of our support.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the parliamentary secretary, as I do with all hon. members who rise to speak here.

There seems to be great consensus on the spirit of the legislation. We want to move forward and recognize this, but this has to be done correctly. We cannot botch this because we know there are 60 or so indigenous languages to be promoted and protected. That is why we are here in the House of Commons. We will send this bill to parliamentary committee to take a serious look at it. We need to take our time and deal with this properly.

I will speak to this bill later because, with an indigenous community in my riding, I have some things to say. There are more than 100 MPs here with indigenous communities in their ridings and they will have some things to say.

Would the parliamentary secretary agree to allow all those who want to speak to this bill to do so?

Everyone agrees that this is a non-partisan issue, but we must address it properly.

● (1345)

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the intervention and comments made by my colleague opposite. I have two things to say in response.

First of all, we drafted this bill in collaboration with indigenous communities. In other words, we have already consulted them. We reviewed this bill very carefully with several indigenous communities from across Canada, including Inuit, Métis and first nations.

Second, our priority is not to simply introduce this bill, but rather we want to make sure it receives royal assent. We have already fallen too far behind when it comes to indigenous peoples. After 400 years of colonialism, we need to get this done as soon as possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to especially thank the parliamentary secretary for highlighting the importance of languages in saving lives.

I can testify that I heard from Timmy Masso from the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation. He is 15. He is a language speaker. He was encouraged to learn his language when his brother, Hjalmer Wenstob, was sick. He was in a health crisis. It was language and prayers that helped to heal Hjalmer. It was not just about preventing suicide, but for health reasons.

Timmy is a great leader in our community. He wants to ensure that our language gets the important investment that it needs, not just for elders but for youth. In fact, one of our elders who is a native language holder and speaker, Levi Martin, sent a note today saying, “In our culture, first nation people do not have to be certified or have a permit to be who they are. Our people who are recognized and do a good job of teaching should be paid the same rate as other teachers. Some of our people teach teachers, so they are like professors and should be paid as such.”

Government Orders

My question is for the member. Will the government deliver much-needed urgent funding? Every day we are losing speakers who are the holders of language that is saving lives. Will the member ensure that the necessary investments go to the communities so that the communities can ensure the money goes to the right resources, so that language is passed on to the next generation?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I appreciate this intervention. It is critically important. We heard that over and over again in the consultations—that what we need is supports in terms of resources and what we need is stable, long-term, predictable funding.

I have a few things to say in response. First, we have set out a funding model in this legislation that could allow for five-year agreements, as opposed to one year, which is usually the norm. Second, in terms of the good faith we have already shown, through the aboriginal languages initiative and other money that was dedicated two years ago, \$89.9 million was provided for a three-year spend, just as an interim gesture of good faith to demonstrate to indigenous communities around the country that we believe in support through resources.

The third response is that in this legislation, for what I understand to be the first time ever, we have included a duty on the minister responsible to actively consult with indigenous leaders about the funding. The funding is not a questionable issue and the funding is going to follow. Because consultation is a requirement, indigenous leaders are going to speak to the government about how much funding is required.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what a privilege it is to speak in support of this legislation. I anticipate all members on all sides of this House will eventually support it. I am encouraged by the words that have been spoken already today regarding how important it is that this legislation passes. It is just going to be a question of time. I ask colleagues from all sides of the chamber to recognize the value of the legislation. We have seen legislation pass rather quickly in the past. In fact, if the political will is there, legislation can be passed within hours. It is just an issue of the political desire for that to be the case with this legislation.

It is an important piece of legislation and it is consistent with what the Prime Minister has talked about since day one. When we talk about the importance of establishing a relationship with indigenous people across Canada, this is one of the things we can do to send a very strong and positive message.

The first individuals I would like to acknowledge and thank are the indigenous leaders, who communicated within the department and with different stakeholders to ensure we better understood how very important language is for indigenous people. I attribute the strong leadership from indigenous people for ultimately causing us to bring forward the legislation.

When the reconciliation report came out, the Prime Minister, or the leader of the Liberal Party at the time, indicated support for the many calls to action within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report. When we think of truth and reconciliation, we have to think about the calls to action, which is what we are addressing today. The credit goes to the individuals who made presentations for

the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, individuals like Senator Sinclair and many others, for the fine work they did in ensuring we had these calls to action in the first place.

I have a copy of the 94 calls to action, and number 13 states:

We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.

Call to action number 14 states:

We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:

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

● (1350)

Call to action number 15 states:

We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal-languages initiatives.

That comes right from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the calls to action. Today, we have heard a good number of people speak about the importance of reconciliation. We understand and we appreciate just how important language is to the very fabric of our heritage. It is not too late.

This legislation, I would argue, is very timely. We heard the Prime Minister, not that long ago, make a commitment to indigenous people to establish that relationship, and we have seen actions by different departments to fulfill that. There have been other calls to action that have been fulfilled. Today, the minister of heritage has brought forward a piece of legislation, after doing the work that is necessary in working with indigenous leaders and many other stakeholders, and presented what I believe is historic legislation here in the House of Commons.

I ask that members across the way recognize it, as we have recognized important legislation in the past. When we have recognized that, we are seeing fit to ensure that it passes through. That is my call to my colleagues across the way.

It was just yesterday that we passed a bill on to a committee after one and a half hours of debate. Given that it was a private member's piece of legislation, it is totally different, but we have seen government legislation also pass in one day. If the political will and the desire and recognition are there, I would ask, if not this type of legislation, then what other kind of legislation merits the type of support that is being provided here?

Statements by Members

At the opening of this session, we had some historical things take place. At the opening of this beautiful chamber, we had a smudging ceremony. The member for Winnipeg Centre, my colleague and friend, said his entire speech in an indigenous language. Earlier today, another member of Parliament spoke his entire speech in an indigenous language. That in itself is new because, for the first time in these last couple of weeks, we have actually been able to have interpretation services. If someone is speaking in an indigenous language here on the floor of the House of Commons in Ottawa, we can actually understand what that person said because it was being interpreted. We recognize that members of Parliament, on all sides of this House, value the importance of indigenous languages.

In Winnipeg North we have great diversity of indigenous languages that are spoken. I am not that good in terms of my pronunciation, but some examples are Anishinaabe, Dene, Oji-Cree and Michif. A diversity of indigenous languages can be found in Winnipeg North. The constituents who I represent come from all over the province of Manitoba and have lived on reserves throughout. My riding has high schools like Children of the Earth and many others that would welcome the opportunity to see this legislation put into place. Our educational system is so critically important in terms of participation.

Our minister and the Government of Canada are playing their role by bringing forward the legislation. We are calling upon the other stakeholders, such as the provinces, school boards and municipalities. Most important is for us to work with the strong leadership within the indigenous community. I look to people like Sharon Redsky and Cindy Woodhouse, two outstanding individuals who I have got to know and often take advice from. They both live in Winnipeg North.

We can all, I believe, contribute to reconciliation today by recognizing the value and importance of what it is that we are hoping to accomplish.

● (1355)

If we understand and appreciate just how important this issue is to our indigenous people, I suggest we pass it. Let us get it to committee, where we can hear other stakeholders' concerns and opinions.

The Speaker: There will be five minutes for questions and comments when the House next takes up this topic.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

SINGLE TAX RETURN IN QUEBEC

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not only are the Liberals refusing to let Quebec have a single tax return, but they are belittling us as well. They are telling us they do not think we could handle it all by ourselves.

The Minister of Infrastructure, a Quebecker, actually suggested that Quebec should not be allowed to collect tax and that everything should be centralized in Ottawa. We saw how well that worked with the Phoenix system. The Minister of National Revenue, also a

Quebecker, even brought up the idea of forcing Quebec to give up its tax return to the federal government. The Prime Minister, another Quebecker, went as far as to say that allowing a single tax return would be pandering to Quebec's childish behaviour. The Liberals are calling Quebec's requests childish.

We need to realize that the Liberals gave the game away with their arrogant answers about the single tax return for Quebec. They figure that trampling on Quebec boosts their image in the rest of Canada, and apparently that is the only thing that matters.

* * *

● (1400)

[*English*]

ERIC HOAKEN

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, February 3, the legal community lost one of its most respected and celebrated lawyers, Eric Russell Hoaken. Eric's greatest love was undoubtedly his four children, Greta, Miles, Thea and Celia. His love for them was only rivalled by the adoration he had for his wife, Lisa.

Beyond family, he loved the law and the legal community, and be assured, the legal community certainly loved him back. His dedication, piercing wit and keen intelligence earned Eric much acclaim as a litigation star, yet Eric was always striving to have an even greater impact, and he devoted much energy to mentoring others. He served on the board of directors of both The Advocates' Society and the International Academy of Trial Lawyers.

Eric's infectious spirit left a profound mark on all those who had the privilege of knowing him. His integrity and professionalism exemplified the highest traditions not only of the bar but of humanity itself.

* * *

CHILDREN'S FITNESS

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was proud to announce my private member's bill, the new children's fitness tax credit. In 2006, I chaired the panel that recommended the children's fitness tax credit, and when I joined the Conservative government in 2011, 1.4 million families received the credit. In 2014, the credit became refundable for low-income families, and 1.8 million families were claiming it.

The initiative encourages active kids while making it more affordable for parents. Studies indicate that, from the time the credit was implemented, participation rates increased in sports and other activities.

Shockingly, the credit was eliminated by the present government in 2017. Today, I ask all members to support the bill and help make Canada the best place in the world for a child to grow up. I encourage members to support active and healthy kids. For more information, one can go to healthykidshealthycanada.ca.

*Statements by Members***MARGARET WALSH**

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was with a heavy heart that I heard of the passing of Margaret Walsh in December, in her 96th year. She was a selfless person with an overwhelming desire to serve, and she played such a big part in so many lives in my community.

After teaching for many years, including in a one-room school house in Lonsdale, where I live, she became the first female reeve of Tyendinaga township and the first female warden of Hastings County, serving 20 years on council.

Margaret Walsh was also a close friend of mine, and she was my personal mentor from my time on council in Tyendinaga township and in our multi-decade fight against the Richmond landfill, alongside other community activists. During those days of activism, Chief Maracle of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte remembers fondly that he referred to her as the “rebel reeve” of Ontario, and she would just laugh. She had such an impish laugh. She was a remarkable, passionate fighter, and she will be missed.

* * *

OLDEST FIRST NATIONS NEWSPAPER

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that the Nuu-chah-nulth territory in my riding is home to Canada's oldest first nations newspaper, Ha-Shilth-Sa, which celebrated its 45th anniversary on January 24.

The driving force behind this outstanding publication was the great Nuu-chah-nulth leader, the late George Watts and was brought to life by the late Bob Soderlund, Dave Wiwchar, Debora Steel and so many others over the past four and a half decades.

Ha-Shilth-Sa has maintained the highest standards of journalism throughout its distinguished history while staying true to its mandate as a unifying force among the 14 Nuu-chah-nulth nations.

I urge all those who want to understand the day-to-day issues faced by the Nuu-chah-nulth people, while celebrating their many individual and collective achievements, to make a habit of visiting Hashilthsa.ca. They will not regret it.

* * *

● (1405)

RAY WALSH

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with great pride to honour the life and legacy of Ray Walsh. Mr. Walsh was a long-time musician known for his significant contribution to music in Newfoundland and Labrador. Sadly, Ray passed away on January 27 at the age of 75.

Hailing from Bay de Verde, Ray moved to Marystown to teach and joined the Marystown Band in 1961 before becoming a star on CBC's *Saturday Night Jamboree* and *All Around the Circle* from 1964 until 1975.

Famous for his work on the piano accordion and a schoolteacher by trade, he was awarded the lifetime achievement award from the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival in 2013 for his

contributions to the cultural fabric of our province through his talent and passion for music.

On behalf of all the residents of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity and the entire province, I offer my sincere condolences to his family and friends. I thank him for the music. May he rest in peace.

* * *

CANADIAN PULSE FARMERS

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a farmer that cherishes the magnificent variety of top-quality food produced by Canadian farmers and ranchers, I am pleased today to recognize the contribution of Canadian lentils, peas, beans and chickpeas, otherwise known as pulses.

Pulses benefit Canadian farms and farmers in a number of ways. The crop makes its own fertilizer by producing nitrogen. It has very efficient water use, and pulses generally have a slightly different growing season from most crops, allowing farmers to diversify their production and workload.

For all Canadians we also know that pulses are one of many great sources of protein, fibre and other key nutrients like iron, folate and potassium.

As we celebrate the international day of pulses on February 10, we need to remind the government of the important role that all Canadian farmers, including pulse farmers, play in providing Canadians with a healthy, inexpensive and plentiful supply of top-quality foods.

* * *

[Translation]

AUGUSTE CHOQUETTE

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many great men and women have had the privilege of working in this place and serving their constituents and their country.

Today I want to pay tribute to one of those people, my friend Auguste Choquette. Son and grandson of politicians, Mr. Choquette was born into politics. He had a brilliant career as a lawyer and proudly represented the people of Lotbinière from 1963 to 1968 alongside Lester B. Pearson, with whom he had the privilege of voting to adopt the maple leaf as our national flag. He was very proud of that.

August Choquette left politics in 1968, but politics never left him. His was very involved in his community, always busy even at age 86. He was always quick to share stories, advice and insight with those fortunate enough to cross paths with him. He was exceptionally generous, clear-sighted, famously eloquent, honourable and quick-witted.

Auguste Choquette passed away on December 21, at Maison Michel-Sarrazin, in Quebec City. True to form, in lieu of funeral services he asked that people make donations to the Michel-Sarrazin hospice centre where he lived out his days in good hands.

I would like to extend my condolences to his family and friends and invite my colleagues to make a donation to Maison Michel-Sarrazin.

Statements by Members

[English]

CANADIAN JUNIOR CURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, B.C.'s Team Tardi brought home a third national gold title at the 2019 Canadian Junior Curling Championships, making it their third title in a row and the first team to ever do so.

Team Tardi consists of skip Tyler Tardi, third Sterling Middleton, second Matthew Hall and lead Alex Horvath. The coach is Tyler's father Paul. The young Lower Mainland curlers are a Langley-based team.

On Sunday, the gold-medal round was held at the Art Hauser Centre in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, where Tardi and his team triumphed over JT Ryan's Manitoba team by the score of 7-5.

The team will be representing Canada at the 2019 World Junior Curling Championships in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, from February 16 to 23. Once again, I invite my colleagues to join me in congratulating Team Tardi in another remarkable and record-setting win, and wish them the best of luck at the World Juniors.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the residents of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River cannot afford the Liberal carbon tax.

A farmer just 25 kilometres northeast of Meadow Lake is asking how much the carbon tax is going to increase his operating costs. Northern forest workers also have concerns about what the carbon tax is going to mean for their jobs. Families trying to make their household budgets last to the end of the month are concerned about the impact the carbon tax will have on their monthly grocery and electricity bills.

The Liberals carbon tax, let us be honest, is not a serious plan to cut emissions. It is simply a tax grab that will cost northerners hundreds, if not thousands of dollars a year.

When will the Prime Minister realize the damage he has done to northern Saskatchewan?

* * *

• (1410)

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Arnold Hawkins, who celebrated his 108th birthday on January 30.

Born in 1911, Arnold has lived his entire life near the water in Beaver Harbour, New Brunswick, and lives in the home that he built in the 1930s.

Not only is Arnold a great role model and father, he was also a hard-working fisherman for more than 40 years. Arnold fished mostly for haddock because he believed the water by Beaver Harbour had the best-tasting haddock. Arnold has seen a lot of changes over the years and can recall the first time the roads in Beaver Harbour were paved.

I would like to share my best wishes to my oldest constituent in New Brunswick Southwest and my best wishes to his family: his five children, 14 grandchildren and 25 great-grandchildren.

I wish Arnold a happy 108th birthday.

* * *

200TH ANNIVERSARY OF PROVINCE HOUSE

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year Province House, home to Nova Scotia's legislature, turns 200 years old. I quote:

It stands, and will stand, I hope, to the latest posterity, a proud record of the Public Spirit, at this period of our History: And as I do consider this magnificent work equally honorable and useful to the Province, I recommend it to your continued protection.

Those are the words of Lord Dalhousie, governor of Nova Scotia, at the opening of Province House 200 years ago.

More than the symmetry of its Palladian architecture, its locally quarried sandstone or the fine quality of its ornamental plasterwork, Province House has been an esteemed home to history for two centuries. It is where Joseph Howe fought for freedom of the press. It is where Nova Scotia peacefully established the first responsible government in the British Empire. It is where we joined Confederation in 1867.

It is where future generations of Nova Scotians, again in the words of Lord Dalhousie, will continue in "this magnificent work".

* * *

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, life is expensive enough. The Prime Minister's policies are making it worse and Canadians are paying for his mistakes.

The Prime Minister broke his own ethics law by accepting a lavish vacation and left taxpayers with the bill. Even with his NAFTA rollover, the Prime Minister could not get U.S. tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum removed, a hit to Canadian businesses and consumers. The Prime Minister will not stop illegal border crossers. That bill keeps on climbing, and so too do Canadians' taxes, just to pay for Liberal mistakes.

The Prime Minister's never-ending deficits will mean tax hikes after the election, if he gets another chance. Because of him the wealthiest pay less while the middle class pay more and he thinks low-income Canadians pay none. He is wrong. The Prime Minister has never had to worry about money. That is why he does not worry about Canadians' money.

Our leader understands the struggles families face, because he has faced them himself. He has a plan to control spending, balance the budget and lower taxes so that Canadians can get ahead, not just get by.

This year, Canadians can stop paying for Liberal mistakes and choose Conservative leadership to get ahead.

* * *

SYRIAN ENTREPRENEURS

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from Peace by Chocolate in Antigonish to Aleppo Savon in Calgary, Syrian refugees are making a difference by opening businesses and creating jobs for Canadians. I would like to recognize a Syrian newcomer business in my riding of Scarborough Centre: Aleppo Kebab.

Zakaria Al Mokdad was a restaurant owner in Syria before fleeing the civil war with his family and coming to Canada. He spent a year improving his English before working at Paramount Fine Foods, a restaurant chain founded by another successful immigrant entrepreneur, Mohamad Fakih. Two weeks ago, Zakaria opened Aleppo Kebab, offering delicious Syrian food to the people of Scarborough and he is paying it forward, offering jobs to other newcomers to Canada. The customer favourite is the Aleppo kebab, with its unique blend of Syrian spices. It is my favourite, too.

These Syrian newcomer success stories are proof of what we all know: immigration matters.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

PAUL DEWAR

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am profoundly sad as I rise today to pay tribute to our colleague and friend Paul Dewar, who passed away yesterday.

Paul was a courageous man who was determined to build a better world for everyone. Paul was a strong, compassionate voice on topics like nuclear disarmament, human rights, peace and justice.

[English]

Paul dedicated his life to public service as a teacher, union leader and parliamentarian. Even in his last year, while battling cancer, he still poured his spirit into his legacy initiative to empower young Canadians, Youth Action Now.

We love Julia, Nathaniel and Jordan. Our entire New Democrat family grieves with them.

Let us heed Paul's final message to us:

...may we be bound together by joyous celebration of life.
We are best when we love and when we are loved.
Shine on like diamonds in the magic of this place.

* * *

PAUL DEWAR

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Paul Dewar was a public servant, a parliamentarian, a community advocate, a teacher, a father and a husband.

I have fond memories of attending events with him in our shared city of Ottawa and him giving me the occasional ride home when my

Statements by Members

car would not start. I also remember his kindness to people, those he did know and those who were just strangers. We lost Paul yesterday, a tragic loss to his family and to the entire city.

On behalf of Conservatives, I offer his family our condolences. On behalf of my community, I offer him our thanks.

I share with everyone his words from just yesterday:

In the stoic stillness of my journey,
I have found my way to peace.

May he rest in peace.

* * *

PAUL DEWAR

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too rise today in great sadness after the passing of our good friend Paul Dewar, who was taken from us far too soon.

Paul was a true parliamentarian. He was principled. He stood up for human rights and for those who had no voice. Even after his tragic diagnosis, he launched Youth Action Now to encourage engagement among young people. From his mother Marion, Paul inherited an absolute love of our city and its people. His graciousness, sincerity and compassion made it easy to reach across party lines to work together for a better city and a better world.

Today, Ottawa has lost one of its great citizens. Our hearts go out in sympathy to his family and to the many, many people whose lives he touched. From his final words, we draw inspiration. He said, "Let's embrace each other in these days of cynicism and doubt."

Smile and play...
Laugh and dance...
Give and share...

We will miss Paul.

The Speaker: I join all hon. members in mourning the loss of Paul Dewar. He was a good man and he leaves behind a legacy of devoted service to his country and his community.

[Translation]

Paul leaves behind his family and loved ones, but also the many Canadians who saw him as a generous and compassionate man.

[English]

I had the pleasure of playing hockey with Paul, as many of us did, numerous times, and I can say that by MP hockey standards, he was a very good player. He was a gentleman on and off the ice, and I understand he was also a wonderful hockey dad.

The New Democratic Party has placed books of condolence in both lobbies and members are invited to inscribe their messages for Paul's family.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

There have been discussions among representatives of all the parties in the House, and I understand that there is unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence in memory of our former colleague and friend, Paul Dewar.

I invite members to rise and observe a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence observed]

* * *

• (1420)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: Before we proceed to oral questions, I want to make a statement on what I have observed in recent days.

As members know, question period is an opportunity to hold the government accountable for its administrative policies and for the conduct of ministers in their official capacities.

[English]

I have listened carefully and patiently, perhaps too patiently, to questions put forward this week, some of which clearly fell outside the scope of permissible questions, since they had little to do with the administrative responsibility of the government. In addition, some of these questions were couched in language that amounted to a personal attack. This is also not permitted. I would caution members now, before we begin, that to maintain the dignity of this House, I will not allow such questions or such personal attacks. I will interrupt any member who asks a question that raises a matter that does not properly deal with public policy.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie will come to order.

[Translation]

The President: There are other ways to ask questions so they fall within the administrative responsibility of the government. I am confident that members know how to formulate legitimate questions. If they cannot, I will give the floor to another member.

[English]

I am sure that all hon. members want to have a question period in which issues are dealt with with seriousness, rigour, and yes, intensity. It also needs to be respectful. I hope this will be the case today in going forward.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The President: Order. The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton will also come to order.

[Translation]

Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[Translation]***JUSTICE**

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Globe and Mail has published very troubling allegations about interference from the Prime Minister's Office and his staff in a criminal case.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that neither he nor any member of his staff had communications with the former attorney general about the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point have I been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

As the Attorney General of Canada, I am the government's senior legal advisor. I provide legal advice to the government and must act in the public interest. I take these responsibilities very seriously.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. We have heard the Prime Minister's very carefully scripted legalistic answer.

However, the question is: Did anyone in the Prime Minister's Office, at any time, communicate with anyone in the former attorney general's office on the matter of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, yes or no?

• (1425)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, earlier today, these allegations are false.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. The question was whether or not anyone in the Prime Minister's Office, at any time, had communications with anyone in the former attorney general's office on the subject matter of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. This is a yes or no answer. Which is it?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat once again, as the Prime Minister has said, earlier today, these allegations in The Globe and Mail are false.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, he cannot answer a simple yes or no question.

I will ask him a slightly different question. According to the lobbyists registry, SNC-Lavalin lobbied the government dozens of times. In those meetings with senior officials, did the subject of its criminal prosecution ever come up, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was not privy to those conversations. As the Prime Minister has said, earlier today, these allegations are false.

Oral Questions

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister cannot answer these questions, I will answer part of that for him. At least 14 times, according to the lobbyists registry, meetings with SNC-Lavalin touched on the subjects of “justice” and “law enforcement”.

In those meetings where “justice” and “law enforcement” were brought up, were subject matters dealing with the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin ever touched upon, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister outlined today, he has not given directives to either my predecessor or myself on this matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is still very troubling because when we look at the chain of events, we see that SNC-Lavalin illegally donated nearly \$110,000 to the Liberal Party and its associations in 2006.

Today, SNC-Lavalin needs help because it is in trouble. Therefore, the machinery was set in motion. SNC-Lavalin and the government have held more than 50 meetings in the past two years. Why? It is because SNC-Lavalin would like the Liberals to drop the fraud and corruption charges against the corporation. The minister of justice was fired and everyone was wondering why.

Was she fired because, in the end, a crony is a crony?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, those allegations are false. Neither the Prime Minister nor his office put my predecessor or me under pressure or gave any directives.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let's talk about his predecessor. As we know, the simplest explanation is often the best one.

SNC-Lavalin and the Liberal Party have very close ties, so close that illegal donations have been made. SNC-Lavalin needs help, and the Prime Minister's Office seems keen to lend the company a hand. The PMO put pressure on the minister of justice to overlook accusations of fraud and corruption against the company. She refused and got sacked.

Now we see why, in her farewell letter, she said, “It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence.”

Who in the Prime Minister's Office put—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister stated today, he has not given directives to my predecessor, nor did he pressure her. For my part, as Attorney General of Canada, I can assure the House that I have received neither pressure nor direction from either the Prime Minister's Office or the Prime Minister himself.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were confused and shocked when the first indigenous justice minister was summarily fired without explanation. In her letter to Canadians, she warned that an attorney general must “speak truth to power” and “It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference.”

In the bombshell report from The Globe and Mail, we now understand truly what she meant, because when the now former justice minister refused to drop the fraud and corruption trial against SNC-Lavalin, she was fired.

Again, did anyone in the Prime Minister's Office communicate with the former justice minister about this case, yes or no?

• (1430)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, neither the Prime Minister nor his office put my predecessor or myself under pressure nor gave any directives. These allegations contained in The Globe and Mail are false.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can see what the Liberals are doing. A carefully crafted denial that is not a denial at all. The same company found guilty of corruption and fraud was also caught illegally donating more than \$100,000 to those same Liberals. SNC-Lavalin was rewarded. When it faced corruption and fraud charges, the Liberals leaned on their own justice minister not to go to trial but to get a plea deal.

Do Liberals seriously expect Canadians to believe that all of these illegal and troubling events implicating the Prime Minister's Office itself and the former justice minister are all somehow just a coincidence?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point have I been directed or pressured by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision in this or any other matter. As the Attorney General of Canada, I am the chief legal officer of the Crown and have the responsibility to give legal advice to the government in the public interest. I take these responsibilities very seriously—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I am having difficulty hearing the answers. I would appreciate members' co-operation.

The hon. leader of the opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he might not have been “directed to”, but he was certainly promoted based on his willingness to go along with the PMO on this.

[Translation]

Let me try this again.

Oral Questions

SNC-Lavalin met with the Prime Minister's Office at least 14 times on the subjects of justice and law enforcement. Some of the meetings were with the PMO principal secretary.

Did the subject of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin come up during the meetings at the Prime Minister's Office, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, he did not give any directives to my predecessor. For my part, I can assure the House that I have received neither pressure nor direction from either the Prime Minister or Prime Minister's Office regarding any decisions on this matter. As the Attorney General of Canada, I take my responsibilities very seriously.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new Attorney General is trying to hide behind the Prime Minister's carefully scripted legal response this morning, but the question is quite simple. It is direct about dealings on the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

I will ask the attorney general again. Was he ever contacted by anyone in the Prime Minister's Office about this case before he was promoted to the position of attorney general?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I have received neither pressure nor direction from either the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office with respect to the decision that could be made in this particular file.

As a Quebec member of Parliament who reads the newspapers, I did know about this case, but it does not transfer into my role as Attorney General.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question was not about the Prime Minister's carefully-vetted answer this morning. The question was about himself. Yes, he may have been aware of this case, but the question was very specific.

Was he ever contacted by anyone in the PMO about the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin before he was named to his new post of Attorney General? Did those conversations happen, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the former attorney general can shed some light on this issue. It is quite clear that we are seeing the beginnings of a cover-up here. The former attorney general prided herself on speaking truth to power. She spoke truth to power behind closed doors and the Prime Minister fired her.

Will she now speak truth to power in front of all Canadians and confirm whether or not she received any communication from the Prime Minister's Office regarding the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, yes or no?

• (1435)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, neither my predecessor nor myself have received directives with respect to the dealing of this particular case.

As the Attorney General of Canada, I take my responsibilities to give advice in the public interest to the government very seriously. I will continue to do so.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question was for the former attorney general. It is clear that the Prime Minister has fired her, and now he is silencing her.

Why will he not allow her to answer the question as to whether or not she received any communications between the Prime Minister's Office and her own regarding the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin? Did those conversations happen, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister dealt with this matter very clearly earlier today. He stated that neither he nor anyone in his office pressured my predecessor or myself to come to any particular decision in this matter.

As the Prime Minister stated earlier today, the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail article are false.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence. As such, it has always been my view that the Attorney General of Canada must be non-partisan, more transparent in the principles that are the basis of decisions and, in this respect, always willing to speak truth to power. Those are the words and principles of the former attorney general.

Why did the Prime Minister fire her for refusing to break them?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, neither he nor anyone in his office directed my predecessor or myself to come to any particular result in this case.

As the Attorney General of Canada, I am the chief law officer of the Crown and I provide legal service to the government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest. I take this responsibility very seriously.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I met a young mother in Cat Lake this week who wept as she told me that her 12-year-old was so disfigured from rashes and impetigo that she had quit school, she hid under a blanket and she would not let her own mother see her face. Last week, the minister offered to send up some light switch covers. That does not cut it in a country as rich as Canada.

I am asking the minister if he will stand in the House and commit today to a full independent medical team to go into Cat Lake to assess every child living in those mould-infested shacks, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all share the member's concerns. Today we are in direct connect with the leadership of Cat Lake on all the challenges it is facing. We have heard very clearly from the community the serious concerns around health, safety and the quality of housing. Another meeting is taking place with the community leadership and partners, as we speak, to advance immediate action and long-term planning. We will continue to work directly with the community to address these issues.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, well, I am thankful that another minister had to stand up for the minister who is missing in action. I will tell members what the chief just wrote today—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I know the hon. member realizes that we cannot call attention to the presence or absence of a member, so I would ask him to carry on without that kind of reference.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I said that the minister had not done his job. I have a letter from the chief, who wrote, "Your department was given ample time and information." They have received nothing but unrelenting barriers, outright refusals from the representatives and roadblocks.

Therefore, I would like to ask the minister to stop hiding beneath the desk, stand up, show some leadership and go to Cat Lake. Hell, I will take him there myself.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said, we are working directly with the community of Cat Lake. The minister is in contact with the chief and another meeting is taking place today with senior officials.

We are accelerating work on needed repairs. We are accelerating the construction currently under way on new homes. We are establishing a task force with the community leadership and the Windigo tribal council. We continue to work diligently with Cat Lake to solve these issues.

* * *

•(1440)

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today The Globe and Mail reported that the former minister of justice was pressured by officials in the PMO to politically intervene in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. Was the former minister of justice fired by the Prime Minister because she refused to do his dirty work? Did she pay the price for his mistakes?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, no direction was given to my predecessor. No direction has been given to myself in regard to this decision.

As the Attorney General of Canada, I am the chief legal officer of the Crown. I take my responsibility to give advice, in the public interest, to the government very seriously.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, The Globe and Mail article raises serious allegations

against the PMO about trying to politically intervene in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, thereby interfering with the independence of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

We all know what happened next. The Prime Minister fired the former attorney general, because, as she said, she "spoke truth to power".

Did the Prime Minister fire the former attorney general because she refused to do his dirty work, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, no such direction was given to my predecessor. No such direction has been given to me.

Once again, as the Attorney General of Canada and the chief legal officer of the Crown, I provide legal advice to the government based on the public interest. I take these responsibilities very seriously.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada's notes are looking a little worn. We know that he did not receive any directives. He has repeated that 20 times.

Did the Prime Minister put pressure on the former attorney general of Canada to ask the director of public prosecutions to drop criminal proceedings? That seems fishy. Did the Prime Minister make her pay for his mistakes?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, there was no pressure on my predecessor and there were no directives. The same goes for me. I was not pressured and did not receive any directives from the Prime Minister or his office.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that from the day the Liberals took office, from the Prime Minister down, the proclaimed ethical standards and the "go-beyond-the-letter-of-the-law" ministerial mandate letters were simply window dressing, empty words. Every violation exposed by the Ethics Commissioner was sloughed off with, "The PM is working with the commissioner."

Today's revelations of alleged corruption in the highest office in Canada, attempted interference in criminal justice and punishment of a minister who resisted demand answers and accountability now.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, the allegations contained in the article are false.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this evening, a Liberal motion to improve employment insurance sickness benefits will be moved in the House. It looks like the Liberals have finally seen the light and realized that 15 weeks to heal is not enough.

I am very proud to have stood up with my NDP colleagues and hammered home the message that 15 weeks is not enough.

My question is simple. Will the Liberals support their Liberal colleague and increase the 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members of the House for being sensitive to the major struggles all too often faced by our families.

I also want to thank all members of the House for understanding that we have taken meaningful steps since 2016. We made the five EI special benefits that were already in place when we took office more flexible and more generous. We also introduced two other benefits, namely the caregiving benefits and the parental sharing benefit, which will be rolled out in the coming weeks.

We know there is still a lot of work to do, and we are raring to go.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the response I got from the Prime Minister on my call for urgent action on first nations was met with platitudes. The federal government is ignoring communities like Garden Hill that do not even have running water, but the crisis continues.

Today in Mathias Colomb, over 500 students cannot go to school because it is shut down because of mould contamination: mould contaminated housing, schools, and no running water. When is the federal government, the Prime Minister, going to stop the empty words about reconciliation and relationships and urgently work with first nations to deal with the serious crisis they are facing right now?

• (1445)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all children deserve a safe and healthy environment to learn in. Work is currently under way to remediate mould at the school, and it is anticipated that it will be complete by the end of the week. We will be following this work as it progresses, and I look forward to working with the hon. member as we go forward.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Franco-Ontarians are proud of their language and culture. It is inconceivable that, even today, 50 years after the implementation of

the Official Languages Act, we still have to fight to uphold our language rights.

In November, Doug Ford's Conservative government launched a direct attack on Ontario's Francophonie by eliminating the independent Office of the French Language Services Commissioner and cancelling funding for the French-language university.

Can the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie tell us here in the House how the government is helping Franco-Ontarians so that they can continue to assert their language rights?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Ottawa—Vanier for her excellent work, her very good question and everything she does for Franco-Ontarians.

We, on this side of the House, believe in the Canadian francophonie and particularly in the importance of bilingualism in Canada. We know that we still need to protect Canada's francophones and always will. We need to protect our linguistic minorities.

We also know that Franco-Ontarians have the right to their university, and we are going to do everything in our power to make that a reality.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are shocking allegations that the Prime Minister appears to have fired his attorney general for refusing to politically interfere in an ongoing criminal prosecution. Did her refusal to favour the Prime Minister's friends cost her her job? Canadians deserve clear answers to these serious allegations. Did the Prime Minister fire his attorney general because she spoke truth to power?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, no such direction was given to my predecessor. I can say that no such direction has been given to me to come to any particular conclusion in this matter.

As Attorney General for Canada, I am the chief legal officer of the Crown. I provide legal services to the government, with a responsibility to act in the public interest. I take these responsibilities very seriously.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a carefully scripted response, but at the same time, pressure can come in many forms outside of merely direction. The evidence is mounting, and the Prime Minister's responses are not adding up. Actions speak louder than words, and Canadians deserve the truth.

Oral Questions

The former attorney general spoke truth to power, but maybe the Prime Minister cannot handle the truth. Did the Prime Minister fire the former attorney general for defending the independence of Canada's judiciary?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, no direction was given to my predecessor in regard to this decision. I can say that no such direction has been given to me, nor has there been any pressure from the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office.

As Attorney General for Canada, I will continue to give legal advice to the government as its chief legal officer, based solely on the public interest.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want the facts and the truth from those directly affected by the scandal the Globe and Mail exposed today.

With all due respect to the Minister of Justice, he is not the one in the hot seat here. The current Attorney General is not in the hot seat, but the person who just lost that job is.

Will the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Canada's former attorney general, rise and tell Canadians if she was or was not pressured by the Prime Minister's Office? Was she pressured, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, neither he nor his office exerted any pressure or issued any directives in this matter.

As Attorney General for Canada, I am the government's chief legal officer. I take my responsibilities very seriously.

● (1450)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing personal in what I am about to say. With all due respect to the Minister of Justice, he is not the one being implicated in all this, but rather the person he replaced. He has been appointed Attorney General. Congratulations. I am very happy for him, but Canadians want to know what his predecessor was subjected to by the Prime Minister's Office.

Let me say it again. My question is for the individual implicated in the scandal that all Canadians care about. Can the former attorney general tell us whether the Prime Minister's Office approached her about the scandal exposed in today's Globe and Mail?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his congratulations.

As the Prime Minister said earlier today, there was no pressure, there were no directives, not from him or from his office on this matter.

* * *

[English]

PHARMACARE

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the most heart-wrenching and impactful experiences I have had as

an MP was door-knocking in Parksville and meeting an elderly woman living on a fixed income. She told us that she had to choose between eating, paying rent and buying medicine, telling us she had no choice but to live in pain.

This should not and does not have to happen in a country like ours. We need a universal pharmacare program for her and so that nobody else has to make these choices. How can the Liberal government drag its feet when people are unnecessarily living in pain?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to something as important as pharmacare, we certainly want to get it right, and we need a plan. That is why we have moved forward with the implementation of an advisory council on the implementation of a national pharmacare program. For this advisory council, we appointed a stellar group of experts in the field. They have had a national conversation with Canadians and also with experts in provinces and territories. I look forward to receiving their report in the spring of this year.

* * *

TRANSPORT

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport finally heard the NDP's call. He acknowledged a 79% service gap in Saskatchewan's intercity public transportation and agrees with us that the situation is urgent and more important than partisan politics. However, offering \$10 million to the Saskatchewan Party government is not a solution if it is not willing to share the cost to tackle the crisis.

Why was this minister's funding conditional, when the Saskatchewan Party has made it clear that offering reliable transit to people is not its priority?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand how important bus transportation is to remote, rural and indigenous communities. That is why the second we learned about Greyhound's decision to withdraw from western Canada, the minister began working with private partners and the provinces. We have come to the table with funding for the provinces, but if the premiers of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are not willing to sit down, then they are leaving their own residents out in the cold.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister fired his former attorney general for speaking truth to power. Now he is banning her from speaking at all.

Oral Questions

There would be no good reason for anyone in the PMO to be talking with anyone in the attorney general's office about the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. Will the Prime Minister allow his former attorney general to speak and answer: Did anyone in his office speak to anyone in her office about that prosecution?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said earlier today, no such direction was given, no such pressure was made with respect to my predecessor. Certainly I can say from direct experience that I have received neither pressure nor direction from the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question was not about pressure or direction. The question was whether or not the subject of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin came up in any conversations between staff members of the PMO and the attorney general's office. There would be no good reason for such conversations to occur, because prosecutions of that nature have nothing to do with the political office of the Prime Minister. Why can the minister not just rise today and tell us, yes or no: Was the matter ever discussed between the PMO and the attorney general's office?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said earlier today, the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail article are false.

• (1455)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he said “no” earlier today, so we know he is able to answer at least one yes or no question. I want him to answer this one. According to the lobbyists registry, SNC-Lavalin met with the Prime Minister's Office on 14 different occasions to discuss justice and law enforcement. This is a construction company, by the way.

In any of those meetings, was the subject of the criminal prosecution of that company ever discussed, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I think is clear, I was not privy to those discussions. As the Prime Minister has said, earlier today, directions were not given either to my predecessor or myself with regard to any decision in this matter.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all people deserve to live with dignity, feel safe, and have their rights respected, regardless of their identity.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to defending the fundamental human rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit and intersex community in Canada and around the world.

[English]

Could the Minister of International Development tell the House what tangible steps she is taking on this critical issue outside of Canada?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, globally, LGBTQ communities

continue to face discrimination and injustice because of who they are. To help address this discrimination, our government has announced a new initiative of \$30 million over five years, followed by \$10 million per year ongoing, to advance human rights and improve socio-economic outcomes for LGBTQ2 people in developing countries.

[Translation]

Our government continues to take concrete action to advance human rights, including LGBTQ2 rights, in Canada and around the world.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the way the Prime Minister has treated the former attorney general is criminal, perhaps literally. Is the Prime Minister proud of the fact that he has now joined the list of international leaders who have fired their attorneys general for failing to follow their political orders?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at no point have I been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister or the Prime Minister's Office to make any decision on this or any other matter.

As the Attorney General of Canada, I am the chief legal officer of the Crown. I have the responsibility to give legal advice to the government based on the public interest. I take this responsibility very seriously.

The Speaker: I do remind members to be judicious with their choice of words.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

* * *

[Translation]

YOUTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada still does not have a youth policy; in fact, it seems the file has fallen through the cracks. Consultations were launched one year ago and an 80-page report was tabled. Nothing has happened since.

There is no longer anyone in charge of the youth file in the Prime Minister's Office. The budget for Privy Council's Youth Secretariat was cut by 33% between 2016 and 2019. This looks like a first class funeral.

Will the Prime Minister and Minister of Youth keep his promise and implement a youth policy, or have the efforts of his Youth Council been in vain?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth) and to the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course there is someone in charge of the youth file, and that is the Prime Minister of Canada.

We are very proud of the outstanding and extraordinary work of our Youth Council. It has been working on the implementation of Canada's very first youth policy for two years.

I will have some good news to share with my honourable colleague and the House in the weeks and months to come.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND REFUGEES

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Atlantic Canada's economic success depends on our ability to attract and retain skilled workers, and workers stay when their families put down roots. These new Canadians not only help good businesses grow and succeed but also enrich the cultural fabric of our region.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship update the House on the Atlantic immigration pilot and its progress in addressing labour shortages and growing the economy in our region?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my Atlantic colleagues and the member for St. John's East know well that to overcome our demographic challenges and grow our economy, immigration is essential. Immigration expands economic opportunities for all Atlantic Canadians. Since its launch, the Atlantic immigration pilot has matched 1,700 employers with over 1,800 newcomers and their families who are putting their skills to work to grow local businesses.

While the Conservatives are busy Scheer-mongering, our government is busy accepting newcomers who are growing Atlantic Canada—

• (1500)

The Speaker: I remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that it is improper in the House to use names for MPs, and that was inappropriate.

The hon. member for Durham.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister talks about the rule of law, but he does not walk the talk. His office pressured the justice minister to let a company off the hook. His ambassador to China interfered in an extradition. The Prime Minister himself charged Admiral Norman before the RCMP did.

The political interference of the Prime Minister and his office knows no bounds. Admiral Norman deserves a fair trial. Will the government commit today to immediately releasing all the court-mandated documents, including those on phones and devices, so that he can have a fair trial?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the prosecution in question is being handled by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. The counsel for the Attorney General of Canada is fulfilling all of its obligations with respect to third party records applications.

Oral Questions

It is improper for me to comment further on this issue as the matter is before the courts.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as you know, we are going to pay \$13.8 billion for the Trans Mountain project, the Americans' old pipeline that no one else wanted to buy. You also know that the \$19-billion deficit has largely gone toward dirty oil and goodies for oil companies in western Canada.

Like us, Mr. Speaker, you think it is time for the federal government to work as hard for Quebec as it does for the oil sands, with all due respect to my colleagues.

When is the Minister of Finance going to start working for Quebecers and stop handing out goodies to oil companies?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned a deficit.

We promised Canadians that we would make key investments in our infrastructure, because Stephen Harper's Conservative government left us with a massive deficit of investment and vision, especially with regard to infrastructure, science and reducing inequality in Canada.

That is why Quebec has seen phenomenal growth over the past three years, as well as lower inequality. We have a lot to be proud of.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can shout from rooftops all over the world that he is a champion of climate action, but that does not make it true.

The truth is that the big oil sands polluters have the government—and the official opposition, as well—in their pockets. My question is the following.

Does the Minister of the Environment think that investing \$19 billion of public money in dirty oil is a good way to combat climate change?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that our government is taking the threat posed by climate change extraordinarily seriously because we know it is the fight of our times.

In particular, we have made the largest investment in public transit in the history of our country. By 2030, 90% of our electricity is going to be generated by renewable resources. In fact, we are putting 50 commitments and more forward to combat climate change and we are putting a price on pollution. It is going to bring emissions down and put more money in the pockets of middle-class families.

Business of the House

It is disappointing that the opposition cannot be as honest as the member for Beauce and admit that their plan is to do nothing.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

The Government of Quebec just tabled a bill requiring permanent residents in Quebec to learn French and Quebec values.

Could the committee chair assure us that his committee will not do anything to thwart the Quebec legislation? I am asking him that because we know him. He thinks it is shameful to have a requirement to learn French.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that immigration plays a key role in the economies of Quebec, Canada and all communities across the country.

The Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec have been working together for decades under the Canada-Quebec agreement, and we intend to continue with that important collaboration.

It is too early to comment on the content of the bill, but we look forward to examining it and will work with the Government of Quebec on this issue.

• (1505)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, my question was for the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Why did he not answer it?

The Speaker: The committee chair did not rise right away. I saw someone else rising to answer the question and the committee chair returned to his own seat. It was too late.

[English]

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration is rising on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to retract my use of the word that implicated the leader of the Conservative Party earlier and insert instead “fearmongering”, because that is exactly what he is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to rise and apologize unconditionally.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, I do and I retract my use of the word, but the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

Just to be clear, “unconditionally” does not mean including the word “but”. There are no “buts”. That is enough.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, it is a convention in this place that in question period, when the opposition asks a question of the government through a minister of the Crown, the minister should seek to answer it. Throughout question period, we directed numerous questions to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and repeatedly the Attorney General answered instead, and not on her behalf.

This convention is important because as the Prime Minister once said, “sunlight is the best disinfectant”. In order to get the answers required in Parliament on behalf of the public we represent, we need the government to be accountable. Ministerial accountability does not end when a member is no longer the minister of a particular office. The questions we asked were pertinent to the time period when the member who is now Minister of Veterans Affairs was the Attorney General.

I seek some clarification from you regarding the government's obligation to be accountable to Canadians.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his point of order. I refer him to Bosc and Gagnon's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, at page 509, which says:

Furthermore, there are precedents indicating that a question should not...address a Minister's former portfolio or any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities

Now I believe the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope has the usual Thursday question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the opposition House leader, I would like to ask the government House leader what the business before the House will be for the remainder of this week and the week after we return home to work in our constituencies.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue with the second reading debate of Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act. We hope to see that referred to committee by the end of the day so that the committee can do its important work. We understand that we have a lot of support, but we do need to consider amendments.

Tomorrow we will start debate at report stage and third reading stage of Bill C-85, the Canada-Israel free trade agreement.

[Translation]

Next week we will be working with our constituents in our ridings.

Government Orders

I would like to note that Tuesday, February 19 will be an allotted day.

On Wednesday, we will begin consideration at report stage and third reading of Bill C-77, on the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: There are five minutes remaining in questions and comments following the speech of the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

• (1510)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the words of my colleague's speech. He talked not only about the importance of the indigenous language bill but also about the broader government agenda regarding indigenous issues.

Today, of course, we learned some very disturbing facts regarding the former justice minister and Attorney General of Canada. In a speech on October 30, she noted that even someone in an important position like hers could be marginalized.

Could my colleague align the Liberals' firing of someone who felt marginalized at the cabinet table with the Liberals' veneer that they care about indigenous issues and that no relationship is more important than the one with indigenous peoples?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we should be focusing on what we are accomplishing with the introduction of Bill C-91.

As I pointed out, it is historic legislation. Indigenous leaders from all regions of our country, as well as non-indigenous people, recognize the critical importance of a language heritage. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission came up with a call to action, and this legislation deals with three of the calls that I am aware of. I see this as a positive.

I would not want to take anything away from the value or significance of this legislation. I do believe that at the end of the day, for the residents of Winnipeg North and beyond, this Parliament as a whole can come together to recognize the value of this legislation and allow it to go committee. We can then hear from the different stakeholders who want to voice their thoughts, expressing concerns they might have or how they would support the legislation or would suggest ways we can improve upon it.

This is a good piece of legislation. It has been a long time coming. I look forward to it ultimately going to committee so that we can get it that much closer to receiving royal assent.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in reading through the piece of legislation, we see an omission that I wonder if my friend would agree needs to be corrected.

The preamble talks about the history of discrimination against indigenous peoples in Canada and about forced relocation and residential schools. It omits a serious part for many indigenous people, which was noted as the “sixties scoop”. Many people and many families are still feeling the effects of it. Many tens of thousands of indigenous peoples were swept up in that particular version or iteration of racist policy coming from the government.

I have a simple question for my friend. There are many aspects of this bill that I will get into in my speech in a moment, but this omission of this one categorically terrible part of Canadian history clearly needs to be addressed and admitted to. It seems like a very small thing to some, but to those families that were directly impacted, and have been impacted in generations that followed, it is more than a small thing. It is a very serious thing.

Would my colleague agree with me that it needs to be included in this legislation?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think we will find that the minister responsible for the legislation has indicated fairly clearly that he is also anxious to see it go to committee. In fact, he is open to seeing different potential amendments. The government is very much open to anything that could be done to give further strength to the legislation.

We have to recognize that the legislation we have before us is an accumulation of a great deal of consultation with the strong leadership within indigenous peoples in the different regions of the country. I suspect there is always opportunity for us to improve the legislation.

That is one of the reasons I am asking members on all sides of this House to recognize the value, the principle of what is within this legislation. Going to committee in a timely fashion will potentially give the bill a greater likelihood of being amended in the way the member across the aisle is suggesting. I suspect we would also be receiving feedback directly from indigenous leaders on that particular point as well.

• (1515)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to Bill C-91.

We are in the last stages of this Parliament. It may seem like the election is far off in October of this year, but legislation being introduced right now is on the clock, as we say. It is not unusual for even government bills to take more than a year to pass.

Government Orders

This legislation on indigenous languages was promised by the Liberal government three years ago. It was promised to be introduced last year. It was introduced just this week, and it is going to take a certain determined effort and a willingness, maybe a newfound willingness, on the part of the government to negotiate and make accommodations. While the bill is a good first step towards protecting indigenous languages in Canada, there are some significant and real opportunities the government missed in designing it.

The Prime Minister talks often, certainly more than any previous one, of the need for reconciliation in this country. I would say it is an inconsistent message on the ground, because many of the indigenous people I represent in northwestern British Columbia have heard the words but not seen actions that have taken us along that way.

For many years since coming to office, I have argued for support for indigenous languages and for the proper, stable funding of language programs. Much as we worry about the rare and beautiful species around the world that are becoming extinct or endangered, we are watching ancient and profound languages disappearing before our very eyes, within our lifetime, here in Canada. I have heard ministers talk about this as a crisis many times, yet we do not treat it like a crisis.

Let me start with the good, because it is important to try to give credit where it is due. While the bill is late and has yet to specify funding, the fact that we are now speaking about indigenous languages is something important and needs to be sustained.

We have a piece of legislation that is not necessarily very large but could potentially have a profound impact. It would perhaps allow for stable funding. The reason that is important, as anyone who has tried to acquire a second or third language would know, is that taking a week's course is insufficient. Taking a week's course once a year or every few years is not going to be enough.

What gives a person the capacity to speak with the range required to truly understand and incorporate a language is sustained effort over time, having instruction, and having materials there from the earliest stages of life right through. Learning to express oneself in one's own language in a proper way requires that kind of sustained effort.

While we see statutory funding made available in this legislation, there is no amount indicated. All the legislation points to in clause 7 is that consultations will be undertaken with indigenous groups to establish funding. One has to wonder what the government has been doing over the last three years.

The Liberals have talked about consultation a lot, and we would have assumed that there was a figure attached to this. We have a budget coming in a short while, but Canadians familiar with politics would know that budgets that are introduced in an election year are sometimes worth the paper they are written on, but not always.

The government has grown an addiction to what is called back-loaded funding. It announces a large number. Housing or transportation would be good examples where the number is large but it happens in the eighth, ninth or 10th year of the program. If anyone can predict what the government is going to look like, much

less the budget, 10 years from now, I sure would like to talk to that person about the stock market and Vegas.

It cannot be done. These are promises that cannot be committed to. While statutory funding is outlined in the bill, no figure is given by the government even though we have asked several times.

It is frustrating, because that is not treating a thing like a crisis. When the Liberals say they want to consult after being in power for more than three and a half years, indigenous groups and leaders and maternal language speakers will ask what exactly the Liberals have been doing and why it has taken so long.

I need to talk about home a bit, because this is how I can relate to this type of legislation.

• (1520)

In the northwest of British Columbia are some of the most ancient and vibrant indigenous cultures: the Tahltan and Taku River Tlingit in the north, up to the now Yukon border; the Haida and Haida Gwaii down the Tsimshian coast to Bella Coola and Bella Bella, the Nuxalk, all the way up through the interior to the Carrier Sekani, Wet'suwet'en, the Haisla, Tsimshian, Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan and others.

These languages are something to behold. When I am attending and observing a traditional ceremony in the feast hall, from naming ceremonies and weddings to funerals, smoke feasts and headstone feasts, I am reminded that central to any culture, and in particular indigenous culture, is the ability of a community or a nation to speak its own language to itself in those important moments in life: the passing on of an elder, the naming of young people or a chief acquiring her or his name. It is the ability to tell the stories and the ability to describe the meanings behind the words and locations.

I think of the court case that is often referred to in this place. The case of Delgamuukw and Gisday'wa took place at the Supreme Court of Canada, just a few blocks from here, when two chiefs of the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en, appeared before court day after day to establish an important thing in our law and precedents, that oral tradition and oral evidence counted as evidence.

One of the great corruptions of colonial empires was to dismiss any legal authority of indigenous peoples in order to acquire the land, *terra nullius*, to say that there was nobody here and that anything that had existed in law here, in some cases for thousands upon thousands of years, was somehow done away with.

At the Supreme Court, the challenge was for the Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan chiefs to be able to describe in their languages, in Wet'suwet'en and in Gitksan, the place names and histories and stories of their nations. By doing it consistently and over and over again under brutal cross-examination by the Crown, that case was successful. Because they were speakers of their traditional languages in their original form, they were able to establish in front of the highest court in the land their territorial rights and the ability to have some influence over what happens in their homes. That is the most basic concept of human rights we have.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, this is where I struggle with the current government, and I think many indigenous peoples do as well. If we look to the Wet'suwet'en and what is going on right now on their territory and the Unist'ot'en territories, there is a challenge and debate, with conflict from time to time, over a proposed pipeline. One of the things we are trying to establish with the government is that very ability to have some say over the land. We have called upon the Prime Minister and the government just to be involved in what is happening in the Wet'suwet'en territory. From the Prime Minister's Office on down to the indigenous affairs minister, we have been told it is not our business.

On the one hand, Liberals claim reconciliation as a priority. The Prime Minister often says there is no more important relationship than that with indigenous peoples. When there is a moment of conflict, we are able to engage the municipality; we are able to engage the police and we are able to engage with the company and the provincial government, but we cannot engage with the federal government under acts that exist that were created in this place.

The government suddenly wants to wash its hands of any implication and say it believes in reconciliation, except when we need reconciliation, when we need to reconcile things like the Indian Act and the hereditary governance system of the Wet'suwet'en. This would be an important thing to the government if it cared about reconciliation. Let us reconcile.

My family heritage is Irish. I was the first in my family to be born here after they immigrated, back in the 1950s. When I look through the Irish history, particularly the colonial history of Great Britain in Ireland, one of the tactics used by the colonial power was to extinguish language, to extinguish stories and history and where people come from, because if we cannot tell our stories, we do not know who we are. It is an attempt to erase a people. To truly subjugate them requires the colonial power, in this case, to try to remove their history and language.

● (1525)

We saw it in Ireland over centuries, and the British picked up that model and applied it when they were the colonial power in this country, to eliminate the language, stories and history. The settlers could pretend that there were no people here. There was no land taken because it was not in possession of anybody, as they were nomadic people without laws, traditions, language or culture.

Through the residential schools and the sixties scoop, which is not mentioned in the bill, and other oppressive tactics designed in parliaments, in this place, explicitly by successive prime ministers, they tried to extinguish indigenous people entirely and subsume them into the colonial melting pot. We can only imagine the courage and energy required from those indigenous elders to insist, even though it was against the law of the day, on speaking their language.

I was recently at a funeral where an elder was relaying stories of what it was like for him to go to school and the beatings he took any time he spoke Gitksan. If the teacher, the nun in this case, heard the Gitksan language spoken at any time, in excitement, in sorrow, in explanation to another student, he would be beaten.

This was a story my grandmother was able to tell from her Irish past. If she spoke Celtic in front of the British nuns, she was beaten

as well. Therefore, across oceans and across time, we are able to see the influences. Now my family speaks hardly any Celtic at all, and I wonder what that robs me of as a son of the Irish, that I am unable to access my history, culture and traditions because of decisions made by the mother of parliaments in London.

Much like it is with species, once extinct there is no going back. When I look around at the indigenous communities I represent, I know the effort that has been put in, first when it was illegal, but even now that it is no longer forbidden. It is very difficult to ensure that indigenous languages are being practised.

In some of our communities, we can count on one hand the number of fluent speakers left, and fluency is critical in this. I urge the government to please understand, when designing the spending and ensured programming for the bill, that just knowing a few words, phrases, expressions and counting to 10 is a good start, but fluency is what is required.

As anybody who has attempted to learn another language knows, if one is not fluent in that language and cannot understand the depth and breadth of the language, then one does not understand its people. If that is true for native speakers of that language, they cannot understand themselves, and while that was a government design in the past, we cannot skim the surface of this effort. We have to be able to do it properly.

I will tell the story of being at a Haida feast, which was incredible. It was the chief's naming feast. It was a big deal. A friend of mine, Guujaaw, was getting his name, and it was a long feast. It was done in proper Haida style, with lots of food, song, gifts, performances and speeches. When I was there, I got to be an observer. That is hard for a politician, but I was not there to speak at all. I was just there to bear witness, because that is how a feast is held up, by those who bear witness.

At the very end of the speech, it was gift-giving time. It is a beautiful tradition of many indigenous peoples, and certainly the Haida, to offer gifts to those who have come and witnessed what has happened in the feast hall.

As the gifts were being passed out and there were so many it was taking a long time, one of the young Haida got up in the middle of the hall and said, "We'd like to sing a couple of songs. Does anyone want to come up while we're gifting? It's our tradition to sing songs."

One by one, these young Haida were coming out of the crowd. By the end, there must have been 30 or 40 young Haida, singing song after song for an hour or more. I marvelled at this, knowing some of the history of the Haida, of the smallpox blankets and the almost extinction of their culture entirely. I was watching a renaissance, a rebirth of the language, particularly among the young people.

Government Orders

● (1530)

I was sitting beside one of the Haida elders and I said, “There’s a lot of wealth here.” There were a lot of gifts being given, and the Haida, and this chief in particular, my friend, was able to describe his wealth and stature to the community, but the real wealth was happening in the middle of the floor. Their young people are able to speak with each other and their elders in Haida. It is so inspiring as someone who represents the Crown, who represents not just our present but our history. I know that people who previously held my office held the implicit racist views that indigenous people were less than and that their languages were barbaric. Those words were said in Parliament time and again. How barbaric are they was the debate of the day 100 years ago.

We watched the determination of the Haida, the Tsimshian, the Gitksan, the Wet’suwet’en and on down the line, maintain their understanding of language, without support, and in fact, with aggression from the federal government.

We are here in Parliament. It means “to speak”. We hold and guard jealously our ability to speak in the two official languages. It is against the rules in this place to ever criticize or suggest someone speak in either English or French. We are free to express ourselves as well as we can. That is the rule of the House. We have a whole stack of books protecting that right to speak in Parliament, to express ourselves. If the bill can help move the country forward just a little to say one has the right to protect these languages, to express oneself in indigenous languages, then we will be doing a good thing.

My friend from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has spent his life facing challenges, political and personal, and a state determined to ignore him. His generosity and determination has stayed true to this cause, to allowing Parliament to hear speeches in indigenous languages and to seeing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples brought into law in Canada.

That part of the bill needs to move out of the preamble and into the substance of the act. If we believe in section 35 rights, if we believe in the UN declaration, and that should inform our law-making, then let it form our law-making. Allow it to express itself fully, because if Canada ever seeks to be the nation it is promising to be, then we certainly must do these types of things, and more, and do them together.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his very passionate speech today, and of course his long-term commitment to advancing indigenous rights.

I want to respond to a couple of his comments. First, he had a number of very important suggestions, which we hope will be debated and discussed in committee, including the addition of the sixties scoop and other incidents over the generations, such as forced displacement and so on. We look forward to having that discussion in committee and being able to accommodate as many suggestions as we can to improve the bill.

There is an organization in his community called First Peoples' Cultural Council in B.C. Since coming into office, I believe the

funding has tripled from our government, from \$1 million in 2016 to \$6.2 billion or million, over two years in 2018-19. I believe that is still not enough, but it is the type of commitment the government has toward properly funding indigenous languages.

I know our ALI program has been very important. The \$89 million over three years is all part of a broader commitment. It is essential that we get this legislation through in order for dollars to flow in the long term.

What kind of direct impact do you think this will have on communities in your constituency, and how can the practices there be expanded across the country?

● (1535)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the parliamentary secretary he is to address the question to the Chair. I would ask him to keep his preambles a bit shorter to allow for the questions within the timelines that we have.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, it might have been a slip of the tongue, but my friend said, “\$6.1 billion”. I will accept that first figure over the million that he had mentioned and I will take that back to the various groups.

The only point that I would make is that sometimes there is a tendency within Ottawa to say that Ottawa knows best. The programs are very top-down. The region that I know, the northwest of British Columbia, and I would say many other regions in coastal British Columbia and the Interior, without any funding at all, with an aggressive and oppositional government for many years, they have been able to create vibrant, beautiful language programs. We should pick up on the successes that exist and allow for maximum flexibility on the ground because there cannot be a cookie-cutter approach.

I would also note, and I am sure he has heard the concerns from Inuit, that aspects of the bill are not yet meeting the northern needs. Again, a language program that might work in Nunavut is not going to work well in Montreal or Prince Rupert. I would suggest that, when the government is looking to design these programs, it take direction from the communities whose very livelihoods are on the line and whose very cultures and histories are at stake.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was listening with great interest to my colleague's speech. When he was speaking about his Irish heritage, it made me think of my own Scottish heritage and the Highland clearances and the elimination of the Gaelic language. When the Scots were forced out of the land, they then came to Canada and became colonizers themselves so it was a system that was perpetuated.

I also appreciated the member's comments about Bill C-262, which the current Liberal government voted in favour of. I very much agree with the member that we need to see a mention of that UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples not just in the preamble but in the legislation itself.

Government Orders

I think of my riding, Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, which is home to the Coast Salish peoples and the beautiful Halkomelem language that they speak, which I have witnessed at ceremonies within their territories, and how beautiful it is to see children speaking that language. I wonder if the member can talk about how different languages very much inform our world views, as they allow different ways and different perspectives, and how important it is to promote that so that we have different ways of viewing what is essentially the same thing.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I have rarely talked much about my own heritage and history in this place. I begin to think that the importance of being able to talk about these issues from our own experience and history is the most important thing we can do for Canadians. There are so many Canadians who will say that the bill seems interesting but does not impact them, not realizing that the tactics used by previous governments to oppress and suppress language and culture and history hold the entire country back.

If we look back into almost all of our histories, when there has been a colonial power and there has been a successful attempt at oppression, language has been one of the key factors. The devious minds that came up with these protocols and practices and laws understood how vital languages were when they tried to oppress a people.

Therefore, if we are going to say anything about reconciliation, if we are going to say anything about improving as a country, understanding and identifying, as did our predecessors in a negative way, the importance of language, is the imperative of this bill now and how important it is to get it right for people in his communities and right across the country who are impacted by this. I would argue that, by extension, that is all Canadians.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure last spring of watching a very special ceremony in which our “fightingest” ship, HMCS *Haida*, was named the honorary flagship of the Canadian navy. There were two hereditary chiefs of the Haida Nation, Lonnie Young and Frank Collison, who joined us and they spoke the language, and now the flag of the Haida Nation flies over that ship in Hamilton.

I wonder if my friend from Skeena—Bulkley Valley can comment on whether the Haida peoples, and other nations that he deals with in much larger numbers than we have in my area, are getting a sense of entering into the full broad spectrum of Canadian life.

• (1540)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I would quibble with that last turn of phrase, “the full broad spectrum of Canadian life”.

I do not want to rain on his parade at all, but that is actually a good example of consultations being inadequate. The Haida people in this case were not properly consulted beforehand, before using the name. There was some repair being done at the ceremony he was able to watch at the end. However, it is a good example of intentions sometimes going wrong, where the government says it is going to do this thing and they will be happy with it, but does not ask how to do it properly beforehand.

What is amazing to me is that indigenous communities, in watching our good intention efforts sometimes go sideways, have the ability to forgive, adapt and make it work. A good example of how

not to do this wrong is to make sure that before the funding is designed and before the program is designed, the consultation and the money is directed, from the beginning, by indigenous peoples rather than by Ottawa.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, in 2016, the Prime Minister stood up and said that we were going to have an official languages act to deal with aboriginal peoples. Here we are, three years later, and we do not have it. Parliament will shut down for the summer soon.

Why does the member think it took the government so long? Why did it just start this yesterday?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I do not know. The promise was in 2016. We would have liked to see it much earlier, of course.

As many of my colleagues know, in the passage of bills, especially important ones, they have to go through the committee properly and hear from people. There is an element in this legislation that is a big question, which is the funding. I think those are fair questions to ask: How much is it, over how long and how is it secured?

Sometimes the government is caught betwixt and between. It wants to do consultation. Sometimes the consultation take longer than it imagines. There is the promise of an introduction of a bill, and as with this bill, which was supposed to be introduced last year, it is now being introduced this year. We can quibble about it, but it cannot be lethal to the bill.

On the timing itself, we have to do our best to improve what is here and see its passage. Elections come and mandates disappear, and people have gotten too accustomed to promises not being delivered upon. Let us help the government deliver on this one a little better than what they have done to this point.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Labrador.

First of all, I want to say *mahsi cho*.

Today is a great day. It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act. This legislation supports a revitalization of indigenous languages, which have deteriorated over the years because of the racist and discriminatory policies of successive governments.

Three languages were spoken in my home when I grew up: English; the language of the Dene, the Dehcho Dene; and the language of the Métis, Métis French, Michif. It all kind of came to an end when I started school, because during that era, we were not allowed to speak anything except English. If we were caught or reported for speaking anything but English, we were strapped with an 18-inch, three-inch wide rubber strap.

Government Orders

There was no defence. We were guilty. It did not matter if we did it or not. A lot of my colleagues would sometimes falsely report their fellow students. They wanted to see them get strapped. There was no way to get away from it. If the principal came out, grabbed us and brought us to the front of the class, and we fought back, he would hit us wherever he could. However, if we let him, he would just strap us on the hands. Usually it was four straps per hand. The only time we could get him to stop was if he drew blood. A lot of my colleagues would take a piece of their hair and put it on their hands to see if they could get their hands to bleed so that after the first strap, they would not be hit anymore.

Why did this happen? Why did we have to go through this? It is because past policies were designed to strip away indigenous identity and discourage the use of traditional languages.

This bill is intended to support and promote the use of indigenous languages. It recognizes that languages are fundamental to the identities, cultures, spiritual beliefs, relationships to the land, world views and self-determination of indigenous peoples.

Throughout the government-led engagement sessions on this legislation, which I think took a total of two years, it was stated that language was integral to who one is as a person, to who we are as a people and to individual and collective pride and strength.

Indigenous youth across Canada need to be exposed to their histories through language and must be supported in their efforts to learn their languages and have pride in their cultures. If they park their languages to survive, they also park a big part of their culture, which is something I have learned from my experience.

Acknowledging the importance of indigenous languages in Canada will allow for healthier indigenous people and communities and a healthier country as a whole.

There have been many studies done on the use of indigenous languages and their role, or lack of a role, in the issue of suicide. Many studies have shown that indigenous communities in which a majority of members report conversational knowledge of an indigenous language also experience low to absent youth suicide rates. By contrast, in those communities in which fewer than half the members report knowledge of the language, suicide rates are up to six times higher.

The Assembly of First Nations' report on its national engagement sessions regarding this act states:

Language learning and identity reunification can be sources of healing. Schooling—residential schools, day schools, public schools, technical schools—were sources of disrupting Indigenous language use as a natural process. These institutions made us ashamed to speak our languages and parents were made to believe that their languages would harm their children and keep them from succeeding. Language revitalization can be used to help mitigate other issues such as addictions; people with a strong sense of language have better physical and mental health.

Past studies and reports have acknowledged the importance of youth and intergenerational learning to the revitalization of indigenous languages.

• (1545)

The 2005 report “Towards a New Beginning” by the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures calls for funding for immersion programs for children and youth. The task force report

reminded indigenous communities to be more mindful of children and youth by stating:

Go home to your communities and do not forget the youth. They sometimes get forgotten and shouldn't be. They're important and they're the next generation. We need to ask the youth what they need and want, and get them involved and get them excited about this.

I have heard chiefs in my riding talk about encouraging people to talk to youth and talk to their children, to say one word or one sentence in their indigenous language, because it does not cost anything.

In the report, elders urge educational institutions to encourage youth to take leadership roles in language preservation. It is important to recognize that youth need access to sufficient financial support to assist in their language journeys so they can learn, use and promote their languages.

Through this bill, the Government of Canada has committed to supporting the efforts of indigenous people to reclaim, revitalize, preserve and maintain their languages in a variety of ways, including by implementing measures that would facilitate the allocation of funding.

A recent report published by the First Peoples' Cultural Council, entitled “Indigenous Languages Recognition, Preservation and Revitalization”, stated:

Youth energy is a driving force for language revitalization. It needs to be encouraged.

Young people need to be encouraged to take control over their languages, as they are the future of this country and will be responsible for the future of indigenous languages.

In 2016, Canada officially adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which proclaims:

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

The declaration also asserts:

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

The bill recognizes the urgent need to support the efforts of indigenous people to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and also strengthen their languages. Indigenous youth and all peoples in Canada need to be supported in their efforts to reclaim their languages. Indigenous communities have been working diligently to revitalize and reclaim their first nations, Inuit and Métis languages, and it is important to acknowledge their work. The role of elders and language keepers is also very important to the languages of indigenous people in Canada, and their efforts should not be overlooked.

This legislation must be implemented with urgency to provide the necessary support for indigenous people before the language keepers are gone. I urge all hon. members to respect and honour the energy and perseverance of indigenous youth by acting swiftly to adopt this legislation.

Government Orders

I will conclude by reminding members that this bill is long overdue. We must continue to recognize the importance of indigenous language revitalization and the invaluable effects it has on indigenous youth, indigenous communities and Canadians. We have to hurry, because many of our indigenous languages depend on it.

• (1550)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member and I are from the same end of the country, and it has been very, very cold up there. I had a friend in Yellowknife the other day who said it was -56°C. Where I was it was -41°C, so he said that it was warm where I was from. Either way, that is enough about the weather.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what his brother, the premier, thinks about this particular bill.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Madam Speaker, since I come from a colder part of Canada, for sure I have to be a lot tougher than he is in Alberta, where they get spoiled with warm weather.

I cannot speak for the Premier of the Northwest Territories. I am going to assume that he is very excited that we are looking at coming forward with a strategy. We announced money in 2016 and 2017 for the Government of Northwest Territories to put toward aboriginal languages. It was well received and is being well utilized, but of course, it is not enough and has not been enough for many years.

We advocated for funding for the north during the time the Conservatives were in power, and it was not something we could obtain. We need money for language development, money for materials, money for instructors and money to train them. I am very happy that this is coming forward, and I look forward to the results.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, speaking of the north, I am wondering if my friend can address the concerns that have been raised by the ITK regarding the way the bill was consulted on prior to its introduction. With respect to the bill itself, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami are not happy. I do not know if that position has changed from the comments I read from its leadership yesterday. There is no denial of support from other indigenous groups around the country, but certainly when it comes to the Inuit, they are not happy with the status quo.

I am wondering, as a resident northerner, if the member has some answers for the Inuit, who are looking for something a lot more hopeful than what they have seen here so far. This one group represents 60,000 Inuit. I am not talking about a small organization. This is something serious and substantial. It is feeling quite upset about the legislation as crafted, according to its public comments.

• (1555)

Mr. Michael McLeod: Madam Speaker, the Northwest Territories is in a different position than the rest of Canada. In the Northwest Territories, we have recognized 11 official languages, nine of which are indigenous. We recognize the Inuit languages as official languages.

I think we are going to see a lot of discussion on this issue. Committees will be looking at it and making recommendations. I think the concerns of the ITK will certainly be considered. However, it is important that each indigenous government be involved. I look

forward to the indigenous governments in my riding leading the discussion and developing the strategies that are going to be needed. There is nobody who can tell an indigenous government how to save its language except itself.

We also need the commission to be in place to provide oversight. We as members of Parliament, we as the government, have to make sure that we are in a situation to provide the resources, such as funding resources, materials and the other requirements, the indigenous governments may need.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to stand today and speak on the ancestral lands of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people. I know that if Algonquin Elder Commanda were here today, as she was on the day when she opened our new chamber, she, too, would be happy to speak to a bill that speaks to preserving the languages of Canada's indigenous people. Many indigenous people across Canada are happy to see it.

In my own language, the language of my ancestors, the Inuit language, Inuktitut, I say *nakurmiik* or “thank you” for allowing me the opportunity to serve in this place and to speak to the bill today, and to speak in strong support of it.

Bill C-91, the indigenous languages act, is aimed at supporting indigenous people all across our country and for doing what they have been trying to do for a long time in the absence of government, which is continuing to carry forward the language and culture they had been accustomed to and were born into.

In particular, it is appropriate that we are providing this language bill in Canada at this time, simply because it is the year of languages for the United Nations. If we go back in time and look to see when people started advocating for the bill, it was in 1995.

In 1995, Canada was moving in that direction. UNESCO had found that many languages within the world were disappearing. Canada, like other nations around the world, was called upon to preserve language and to preserve the language of indigenous people in particular.

Over that period of time, very little attention was being paid to what was happening. In fact, no action was taken whatsoever.

Also in 1995, the royal commission called upon Canada to begin working, right away, with indigenous people across the country; to start revitalizing language; to start establishing a foundation on which we could support indigenous efforts that were already taking place to preserve language within the country. However, no action was taken.

Government Orders

A colleague across the House asked why it took so long to get where we were. It is a question best asked to that side. In 2005, there was an indigenous-led task force on aboriginal languages. It recommended, very clearly, to the Conservative government of the day that it include initiatives to do just that. It would include legislation, such as what we have brought forward today, that recognized the Constitutional status of indigenous languages in the country, that would be funded, that official languages would also have a national council to coordinate their efforts and that a full strategy be designed, whose only goal was to ensure that indigenous language was revitalized and carried on in the country.

It is 25 years since the time those things happened. Nevertheless, we are here today. We are here because we have listened to what indigenous people have said to us. They have said quite clearly that the Government of Canada needs to do more to preserve indigenous languages in our country.

• (1600)

Over the last two years, in particular, we worked very hard with indigenous groups, first nations, Inuit and Métis, to ensure we would get this right, that we would bring to the House of Commons the very first bill to preserve indigenous languages in Canada and do those things that they had asked. I am very proud today to be part of a government that is acting and doing just that.

I think my colleague from the Northwest Territories probably said it best when he talked about why the languages of indigenous peoples had disappeared over the years.

I come from a region of the country where we are very proud of our indigenous and northern roots. In Labrador, we have two very distinct indigenous languages, Inuktitut and Innu-aimun. A lot of work has been done on preserving those languages, by communities, by the people who live there, by the elders, by generations of people. Over the last couple of years, we have been able to help them by investing in the tools they need, by investing in preserving the language within their schools and after school programs and by helping them prepare the products they need to continue to teach and carry on in that way. It is very difficult.

The area I come from, while I grew up not knowing the language of my ancestors, many others grew up in communities where people continued to speak the language on a very small scale. However, there are huge generational gaps between those who speak it as their mother tongue and those who are just starting to learn the language again. The gap is under 14 and over 65. That is basically where we see the language gap in most of the indigenous languages in my region. In other parts of the country, people do not even have that. Even that has disappeared. Therefore, so many people out there are really starting with the basics.

They lost their language as a result of assimilation and the residential schools, which we have talked about and have heard about in that unfortunate chapter of history that affected so many indigenous people. They lost their language because they were never permitted to speak it, as my colleague from the Northwest Territories said. That opportunity was removed from them, and not throughout just one or two decades but throughout many decades of our history.

Canada will never allow that to happen again. That is why we support bills like Bill C-91 before us today to ensure it does not happen again.

When we look back, we know that three times over the past 25 years the issue has come to the attention of government at certain points in time without action. The last call was through truth and reconciliation. When the prime minister of the day made his commitment on behalf of the government and to all Canadians that we would honour the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this was one of the very things he committed to do.

I am really pleased that we are able to bring this legislation forward. I am also pleased that in so many regions in the country, many people still speak their mother tongue, like the people of Nunavut. Of over 33,000 people in that territory, most still speak their mother tongue, their language of Inuktitut. They are an example for all of us to live up to. However, we also know it will take early intervention and support to make this happen.

Today, as I conclude my comments, I want to thank all of those who had a hand in making this happen. I want to thank all indigenous people in Canada for not giving up and having the resilience to carry on. I want to acknowledge that this is certainly a great step forward in what has been a long journey for indigenous people.

• (1605)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-91 will be a historic move toward healing and rebuilding of our indigenous identities and pride across Canada. We as a nation made a mistake in our actions on residential schools and the forcing of young aboriginal youth to speak only English. We now can make right what we made wrong.

There are 13 weeks left in this session. Do you commit to working co-operatively with the opposition parties to get this done?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member is very well aware that he is to address the questions to the Chair.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Madam Speaker, I certainly commit to work with all people in the House of Commons to do what is right for Canadians and to see this legislation pass. I always believe that through committee, there are opportunities to strengthen legislation to ensure we are capturing the voices of all those who are concerned. I have confidence in members at the committee to do just that.

I look forward to the day when we can stand in the House of Commons and proudly vote for the legislation.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was going through the language included in the bill. The reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is mentioned three times, twice in the preamble and then once in the actual legislation. However, in clause 6 of the bill, under the heading of “Rights Related to Indigenous Languages”, there is a reference made to section 35 of our Constitution, but there is no reference given to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Government Orders

I know the Liberal government voted in favour of Bill C-262, which seeks to bring all Canadian law into harmony with that document. Therefore, I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could provide some explanation as to whether that has been an oversight or if there is in fact going to be further amendments to the bill to bring it into harmony with the document of the United Nations.

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Madam Speaker, I am getting some help from my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary for Languages, but I have been reassured and I am happy to assure the member that in clause 5 of the bill, in the last paragraph, it certainly speaks to the United Nations declaration. It says that the act will help “advance the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as it relates to Indigenous languages.” Therein lies our commitment.

• (1610)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we stated a number of times in the House, this is an important bill to finish our debate in the House at second reading and have it go to committee. I want to note that it just came here on Tuesday and today is our first day of debate.

More important, when I listened to the parliamentary secretary's speech, I heard her talk about pride in what her government was doing on the indigenous file. Does that pride include what we have learned about today, where someone from British Columbia, a well respected leader and the first indigenous woman to become Attorney General of Canada, was unceremoniously thrown under the bus by the Prime Minister? What does she have to say about how that shows her government's respect to be nothing more than a veneer?

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Madam Speaker, I never thought I would get the opportunity to stand in the House and compliment my colleague, my friend and a fantastic indigenous leader in the country. She represents western Canada very well, but also represents indigenous people at the cabinet table in a way we have not seen in a long time.

Out of all the indigenous people I have come to know and respect in my life, this individual, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, for Canada today, stands tallest among them all. No position at the table of the Government of Canada stands for the citizens of the country that is either higher or lower with respect to our contribution. The ability to sit at the table and to have that say is fundamentally important, and I applaud her for her work.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today in this place and add my voice to the discussion around Bill C-91.

The House may not be aware that today is End It Movement Day. It is a movement to end modern-day slavery in our country and around the world. The people who participate wear a red X on their hand. Many may not know that within Canada, human trafficking probably happens within 10 blocks of where they live if they live in the city and within 10 miles of where they live if they live in the country.

Modern-day slavery has many faces in Canada, but the vast majority of cases, about 50% of them, involve indigenous women and girls. That is why I am wearing a red X on my hand today.

Bill C-91 is about respect and about protecting indigenous languages here in Canada. Many bills have been brought up about this issue, and the government has spoken in length about it as well.

Back in December 2016, the government said it was seized with this issue and would table some legislation. Now, at the eleventh hour of this Parliament, the government has tabled a bill, and here we are, discussing it today.

I find it frustrating to see the government's approach to supporting something. Supply management is a good example. It says all the time that it supports supply management, but it has very narrowly cast that support. The support is purely for the two words, “supply management”. It is the same in this case as well. The government says it supports indigenous languages, but that is really just the two words, “indigenous languages”.

Many times when we support something, the actual thing that needs to be supported needs the entire surrounding infrastructure or the surrounding society to support it. Only supporting the end result does not necessarily help the actual goal we are trying to achieve.

Let us use the case of supply management as an example. It is really great for the government to say it supports supply management, but when it takes milk and dairy products and animal proteins out of the food guide, it is not supporting supply management whatsoever.

A couple of people who work in my office are coffee connoisseurs. They always ask me why I put cream in my coffee. They think I am ruining the coffee by doing so. I tell them I support supply management, so I put cream in my coffee. Supporting supply management means actually supporting supply management and targeting the actual issue.

We are seeing that again with this indigenous language bill. It says we are going to support indigenous language and we are going to have an ombudsman and all of these things, but if we do not support communities and do not support the culture of these languages, they will become dead languages.

I know a bit about dead languages. I know a bit of Latin. It is a language that is used all the time, but it is not a spoken language. There are records of languages that have been brought back. I understand Hebrew is one of those languages that has been brought back from being a dead language to a language that is now alive and well.

I failed to mention at the beginning of my comments that I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton West.

This is a great bill. I am sure that we will take the language, codify it and keep a record of it. Many organizations around this country are working on translating the Bible into all indigenous languages.

The House may be aware that both the German language and the English language were codified when the Bible was translated into those languages. There is a language known as High German. It was not really a language spoken by anybody, but it was the language that the Bible would have been translated into for a big swath of the world that spoke Germanic languages. It codified the whole language into a common language.

Government Orders

We are seeing work being done on that around the country. The funding that will be coming through this legislation will probably support many of those initiatives. I support that idea.

• (1615)

The point I am trying to make is that we would like these languages to be living languages, not dead languages, and in order to do that, we need to support communities. What does supporting communities look like? For one thing, we have a rich heritage in this country around the fur trade. Canada was built on the fur trade. I always say Canada was built on a number of things, such as the fur trade, the railway and other things, but the fur trade for indigenous peoples was a major part of the economy. It is a shame that today we do not champion the fur trade in this country.

Representatives of the fur trade association were in my office the other day, and they told me that fur will not even be on the winter Olympics uniforms. I do not know if anyone saw that Canada Goose recently came out with a new lineup of jackets designed by an Inuit designer. They are amazing jackets. They have nice fur on the hood. I am sure there are more fur products on the inside as well, though I could not see. The fur trade is what made these communities sustainable. Their languages were able to survive with or without government funding, and the Inuit are a prime example of that. Most of them still have their languages because it is a vibrant community.

Where I am from, many of the Woodland Cree people still speak the language, and their communities are thriving. Why are they thriving? It is because the economy is thriving. No doubt a generation has lost the language due to the residential schools, but when communities come together and operate well, the language continues to thrive, so we see that bills like Bill C-69 do nothing. We say we want to support languages and indigenous communities, but then the government introduces a bill like Bill C-69, which hamstring all of the northern Alberta communities that rely on the economy that pipelines, the oil patch and resource development bring to northern Alberta. The government says it supports indigenous languages, but it supports them in a very narrow way. We need to ensure these communities have a good economy; then the language will flourish.

Another area that is frustrating to me is the language around firearms that the Liberals in particular use all the time. They seem to be very suspicious of people who own and use firearms on a regular basis. It is our indigenous communities that use, own and work with firearms on a regular basis. The language and laws coming from the Liberal government, particularly Bill C-71, are onerous to all first nation communities for sure. Firearms are a big part of their culture. Firearms are a way of life for them, so to say we are going to support their languages and culture and then make it more onerous to own a firearm is not supportive of the culture whatsoever.

Lots of people say we already have languages and ask me why I think it is so important. We all have a world view, a narrative, a place that we belong in the world, and being part of a culture that has identifiable languages and creeds and those kinds of things gives us our sense of belonging in the world. A language does that to a large degree. Studies bear out the idea that when people feel they are tied to a language, a people, a land and a culture, they are much more successful in nation building and culture building.

For all of those reasons, I support this bill, but I find it ironic that we are here at the eleventh hour debating a bill to support indigenous languages.

• (1620)

Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the things that the creation of the commissioner is intended to do is give the commissioner the opportunity to work with indigenous groups within regions. In every region, there are going to be unique needs vis-à-vis language and the rehabilitation of language and the opportunity to make sure the language is in first nations schools, whether it is in northern Alberta or, in my case, in northern Ontario.

How does the member see the commissioner's job as it relates to bringing back the Cree language, in particular for young people? That is the challenge. Now that there is satellite TV and the things that young people have, it has changed young people in communities, no matter where they are in Canada. I want to get a sense from the member as to how he sees the commissioner's role in the area that he represents.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, we were just talking about this at committee as well. One of the groups I am very proud of in northern Alberta is the Kitaskinaw Tribal Council, which has an education authority that runs six schools up there. Language education is part of that program. They teach the Alberta curriculum from their perspective.

I know in Alberta there already has been a lot of overlap between the education systems on reserve and the provincial system. The Kitaskinaw Tribal Council was built to bridge those jurisdictional issues, and it is already doing that to a large part. I am sure the commissioner's office will be working hand in glove with Kitaskinaw.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, who is also a member of the indigenous affairs committee, for the great work he does and for his commitment. He talked about language being just one component of what is going to be necessary in moving forward with reconciliation. It was also very interesting that he brought up something that is important not just to rural areas but also to many indigenous communities in the country, which is the use of firearms and the trade in sealskin products.

To what degree does he think the policies of the current government around firearms are inconsistent with what is important for the communities he represents?

• (1625)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I did address that in my speech. I have seen a little in the media about the first nations in Quebec being annoyed with the legislation that is coming in there, and the fact that the federal government seems to be working hand in glove with the Quebec government on the long-gun registry there.

Government Orders

It just seems tone deaf to me. The government says it is our most important relationship, but then does not support the fur trade in an adequate manner and tries to make restrictive firearms laws all across the country. Those things are incongruent. If we want to support our first nations communities, we need to ensure they are able to live their lifestyle the way they need to.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the bill is really about preserving and revitalizing indigenous languages in the country. I want to make sure we are maintaining that focus, because we have been everywhere from the food guide to firearms under this debate.

Does the member opposite not agree that a large part of reconciliation with indigenous people in our country is ensuring that we revitalize indigenous languages and give them the full support of the laws of the country to preserve their language for themselves and generations to come?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I said I was supportive of the bill. The point I am trying to make is that in this place, things get very siloed. We say we support indigenous languages and come out with a bill that supports that idea, but we must take a little broader view of it. The Liberals say they support indigenous languages, yet they are failing to understand a lot of the indigenous culture.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, The Environment; the hon. member for Bow River, Justice; the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay, Transport.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Edmonton West.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages. We, of course, support the bill and support sending it to the heritage committee after it gets through the House.

I want to thank all the speakers today. There were a lot of well-thought-out comments on the bill.

We believe that the bill before us is both pragmatic and reasonable. My colleague from Bow River said that “the Government of Canada was part of the destruction of indigenous languages and we need to be part of the solution.” Hopefully, Bill C-91 will be a step toward that.

The Right Hon. Stephen Harper said in his June 11 residential school apology that:

First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools...

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact.

That is very true.

The legislation before us was first promised in 2016, so I have to ask, as has been asked by previous speakers, why the delay? Why is

it so late in this session that it is finally introduced? We have just 13 more sitting weeks before we break for the summer and the election. Although, I am sure that there will be hopes otherwise, there appears to be very little chance that the bill will actually become law before the House rises.

Over a year ago, the government seemed to place a higher priority on other bills instead of this one, and I will give the example of Bill C-24, which was called the Seinfeld bill about nothing. What was Bill C-24? Basically it was to codify the name change from Public Works to Public Services and Procurement, and also to change the accounting within the appropriations on how we pay the old ministers of state. That is it.

I have to ask, if no relationship is more important to the government, why was a bill codifying a name change of a ministry more important than bringing this bill forward? This issue encapsulates the lie about the government's claim of no relationship being more important.

I will talk about the issue of safe drinking water on reserves. The government has promised to eliminate the drinking advisories by 2021, which is fantastic and we support that. However, government members stand time and time again in the House and say how far they have come, and that they have take so many off, but they never mention the fact that for every two they have taken off since coming to power, one has been added.

In fact, it was even on its June website that 62 had been lifted but 33 had been added. If we go to the website today, we will see that it has actually taken off that portion of how many water advisories have been added. I have to ask, as the government members stand up again and again touting their success, why have they taken this off the website? What are they are trying to hide?

On the fiscal transparency issue, one of the first things the government did was lift the law for first nations to have fiscal transparency for their members. If we go to the government's departmental plan for Indigenous Services, which is the plan the government has to fill out, publish and table in the House and that the minister herself signs off on, one of its goals states that it is going to reduce the number of first nations complying with the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. Literally, the goal that is stated right in the departmental plan is to reduce the number of first nation bands complying with the transparency act by 23%. Now, I have to give the government points, as it actually succeeded partly on that. The departmental results plans that were just published show it reduced it by 8%.

The Auditor General Michael Ferguson who recently passed away, in his 2018 report, commented about the government splitting Indigenous Services and Northern Affairs. He stated that splitting the department into two different departments could be a step forward toward improving services for first nations, but that we won't know unless there's a way to track outcomes.

Government Orders

•(1630)

This goes back to the departmental plans. The departmental plans tabled in the House show what the government's priorities are, where it will be spending the money and what its planned outcomes and targets are going to be for the money spent and the actions for the year. In Indigenous Services, 50% of the targets set are to be determined.

In his report, the late Michael Ferguson stated that if we want to move forward in serving first nations, we need to see planned outcomes, but the government's response is to table a report where 50% of the goals for Indigenous Services for the year, their targets, their planned outcomes, are left blank. As well, 55% of the dates in their planned outcomes are left to be determined and 61% of the previous year's results are left as not applicable. Here is the government, again, with no relationship more important, stating the goals for Indigenous Services but that the government is not going to say what it did last year for comparison.

Again, I bring my colleagues back to what the late Michael Ferguson said, which was that we are not going to get better services unless we can judge the outcomes.

Remember that 50% did not have any targets at all. When they did set them, 21% of the targets show a decline or no improvement over the previous year. How are we going to move forward and help improve indigenous services when the government, for half of the Department of Indigenous Services, says it will not set a goal, and when it does set a goal, fully 21% show a decline from previous years?

For Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, one-quarter of their departmental plans show no goals for this year and 92% would not state what it was the previous year. Again, we have nothing to compare it with. I am going to give colleagues a couple of examples.

For the percentage of on-reserve, department-funded first nation drinking water systems meeting required standards, there was no improvement over three years. The government is planning to spend, I think, \$1.2 billion in the budget. There was \$400 million in the Liberal slush fund of vote 40, but their own plan shows it will not improve.

For the percentage of on-reserve, department-funded first nation wastewater systems being treated according to guidelines, there was about a 20% decrease from the previous government.

For the percentage of first nations living on reserves and reporting being in excellent health, there is a decline from the previous government.

Here is a great one, the percentage of DPC requests, which are predetermination requests for dental services, that are handled within the required service standards. Remember this is the government that spent \$32,000 on legal bills to fight a first nations teenager from Alberta who needed dental work. The government's goal was to have 95% solved within the predetermined guidelines. Do members know what the government achieved last year? It was zero, not one. The government has time to sue people and time to fight a teenager in court but it cannot even accomplish its own goals.

The percentage of increase of indigenous businesses includes the money that is set aside for government procurements. It has dropped since the previous government.

We have heard from the NDP and others that there is a mould crisis in indigenous housing. In budget 2017, the government set aside \$20 million a year for indigenous northern housing. Do members know what the government set aside for Tesla charging stations for rich millionaires, like the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister? It set aside \$30 million a year. Thus, we are putting more aside for Tesla charging stations than the money to handle the crisis in first nations housing.

Again, I support Bill C-91. It is a great step forward but we have to do what the late Michael Ferguson stated. We have to set up a system where we can actually hold the government to account for its promises to deliver services to the first nations.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for his speech, but the problem is that he spoke of everything but indigenous languages. He talked about departmental structures, drinking water supply and matters currently before the courts.

It seems to me that those are all direct consequences of measures the previous government took to chip away at indigenous culture.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, my answer is absolutely not, and what a ridiculous question.

The issue we are discussing today is Bill C-91, but it does tie in to all the failures of the government. It has stated repeatedly that no relationship is more important than its relationship with first nations, but we have seen, time and time again, that it has tabled documents in this Parliament that contradict everything it says.

The Liberal government lives, breathes and eats hypocrisy. This is another example. I just hope it will take Bill C-91 seriously and work with the people on this side of the House to send it to committee and actually accomplish something for first nations for a change, instead of just standing here making empty promises and empty announcements.

Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I understand the member is from the urban centre of Edmonton. There are many aboriginal people who live in Edmonton.

Government Orders

One of the things that interests me the most about this bill and the work that needs to be done is the education in the public school system and the private school system, not on reserve but in the city of Edmonton, and how we would manage to do that under a bill like this. As we well know, a good majority of first nations kids live off reserve. If we are going to make an effort to help young people get the opportunity to learn their own language, we are also going to have to do it in public schools in places like Edmonton.

I wonder if the member has an idea of where he sees this going and if we are going to succeed in bringing these languages back, not just on first nation reserves but in the cities right across Canada.

• (1640)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, that is a fantastic question and I thank the member opposite for that. I hope some of the ideas and suggestions on how we can do that will come out in committee.

In Edmonton there is a lady who is a trustee on the Catholic School Board, Debbie Engel. If Debbie is watching, I am giving her a shout-out. She has helped start a fantastic program through the Catholic school system, where they introduced a mentoring program for first nations students to keep young indigenous people in school. They have also tried to get funding for programs that will actually teach indigenous languages.

The member has an excellent suggestion. I hope we will reach out to the various public and private school systems throughout the country, and invite them in as witnesses so they can testify and give information on how we can make Bill C-91 a success.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for what was really quite a scathing summary in terms of the ability of the government to execute, in the indigenous services department, on its many priorities.

Looking at Bill C-91, could the member make further comments in terms of how we need to carefully monitor what is happening in order to make sure that what the government says it is going to do will be accomplished?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, there is great will in the House. I have heard it today and I started my speech by thanking a lot of the passionate speakers.

For Bill C-91, there is a great will in the House to get this done, to get it passed fast, to get it to committee fast, and hopefully, against all odds, to have it be made into law before the House breaks.

With this issue on first nations, as with everything else, we need to hold the government, at the time, responsible. It is not necessarily the people sitting in the House today, but the government at large, the bureaucrats, the deputy ministers. We have to hold them responsible for the will of the House, and I do see strong will in this House to make Bill C-91 succeed. We have to make sure we are holding them accountable to make sure the will of the House happens in Canada.

Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this legislation. It is probably one of the only opportunities I will ever get to talk about far-reaching legislation, if it moves in the right direction, that will be very historic for a riding like mine.

As members know, I represent 42 first nations in my riding. A majority of those first nations live in isolated communities. There are three distinct cultural groups, but there are also dialects within these communities that are not necessarily reported by all.

I represent a large population of Ojibway, Cree and what we call Oji-Cree. Within these groups, there are subgroups. This is what I found out very early on in my political career, in the late 1980s, early 1990s, when I travelled up north to visit the communities. I used to bring an interpreter with me when I was talking to the elders. They would speak in their own language because they felt more comfortable. Sometimes I brought an interpreter who would tell me that the community we were going to was hard to understand, even though it was 100 miles away from the previous community I was at, because of its unique isolation and the fact that its language had evolved over hundreds if not thousands of years.

Therefore, Bill C-91 is absolutely critical for a riding and a region like mine if we are to build the kind of society, a diverse and culturally-appropriate world, for indigenous children and their parents.

If we go to northern Ontario, we will find that in a lot of the communities the older people and the elders still speak their language. However, there is a struggle in the communities for the children to continue to learn their language. As I said in one of the questions I asked, modern technology, like TV and satellite, has brought the English language into their home and more young people are speaking that language versus their own.

I would like to also acknowledge the efforts of members who brought forward changes to have indigenous languages translated in the House. That is absolutely important to all of us.

I will spend my time today talking about the role of the commissioner, which is extremely important. That person will have the obligation under the act to ensure that as we move forward, the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages is one of the paths going forward.

Language falls under the branch of education. We know that a high quality, culturally-appropriate education is one of the elements in further developing a modern relationship with indigenous peoples across Canada. Yes, to foster a learning environment, children must have access to clean water, safe and affordable housing, social infrastructure and health services. Creating and maintaining this type of environment is key to providing a supportive space for children and youth. I think we are all committed in this place to ensuring that happens.

Within the Kenora riding, which I have represented since 1988, then took a break and came back, we have many examples of language revitalization efforts. The Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre in Sioux Lookout is an example of that. I would ask my colleagues who will be looking at the bill in committee to think about the role of this resource centre and others across the country in bringing these languages back into existence and full use. Therefore, I want to speak directly about what the resource centre does.

Government Orders

•(1645)

Not only does the resource centre provide educational opportunities and services for indigenous children and youth for 21 first nations communities, but it also publishes educational materials, children's books and instructional resources in a variety of indigenous languages, including titles such as "Ariel's Moccasins", published in Oji-Cree and "Signs of Spring", published in Ojibway.

We cannot bring a bill like this into the House of Commons without understanding the process of how we teach young people. Just like we teach English, French or any other language across the country, we need resources, like books that cannot be bought anywhere else in the world but have to be built one book at a time in Canada. This resource centre has been delivering that job and the opportunity to bring books to young people all across those 21 first nations. It gets many calls from across the country to look at how to translate into the individual languages of the communities across the nation and put them into books, so we can start at kindergarten age, at grade one, and on it goes. Therefore, the resources are available in their language in order to be successful.

I have visited the resource centre many times and can attest to the true passion it has for working with indigenous languages.

The other example I want to bring to the attention of the House is Kiizhik School. It is located in the city of Kenora. It opened its doors in 2015, with 15 students. It has continued to grow exponentially ever since. As the first school of its kind in Ontario, it works to close the educational gap for indigenous students in the area by implementing curriculums that include indigenous heritage as a subject of study, rather than a framework for education.

I have had the opportunity to visit the school. This is the example I was referring my colleague from Edmonton to, about a school in an urban centre that has the opportunity to have young people, whether they live on reserve nearby in first nations communities or in the city of Kenora, to learn and be educated in their own language. That is unique and is obviously another form of education. Like French immersion, this is an Ojibway immersion school. The kids are starting off in kindergarten, and the school is getting bigger every year.

The school provides access to traditional languages and elements of indigenous culture that public schools are currently unable to provide. By teaching Ojibway, using an Anishinaabe sound chart, holding vibrant powwows, interacting with the Anishinaabe community and integrating the Ontario mainstream curriculum, students are going past surface learning and truly learning about the culture of who the Anishinaabe people are.

Education is crucial to the revitalization of indigenous languages, and the work being done by organizations like Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre and the Kiizhik Education Corporation are leading the way.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued its final report in 2015, the government committed to implementing all 94 calls to action. Through Bill C-91, the government is pleased to be delivering on a number of the calls to action related to indigenous languages.

Call to action 15 calls upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with aboriginal groups, an aboriginal languages commissioner. It goes on to specify that the commissioner should help promote aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of aboriginal languages initiatives.

I have been to every school in every first nation in my riding, and this is one of the main topics of discussion with all the teachers and school boards in those communities. They would like more resources, more language teachers, more opportunity to teach in their language. This gives us the opportunity to go down that path to see this can happen for our young people, now and in the future.

•(1650)

Canada has never before had a national indigenous language commissioner. The indigenous language act, and all that it would establish, including a commissioner of indigenous languages, is a significant step forward in Canada's efforts toward reconciliation with indigenous peoples. The importance of this undertaking cannot be overstated.

I have talked about the new commissioner today because it represents a path. As we all know, it is going to take a number of years, not just weeks or days, to put forward the kind of process that will make a difference. This is true even with respect to languages like Ojibway or Cree, which are not disappearing anytime soon. They are very vibrant, strong languages with a lot of speakers. Nevertheless, a lot of young children are not speaking these languages because of where they happen to live.

The government spent the summer engaging with indigenous peoples at the community level through direct workout-type sessions with first nation, Inuit and Métis peoples across Canada. I am very interested in the way the commissioner will work with the Métis people, as there is large group of Métis in my region. I am looking forward to seeing how that process will work. Generally speaking, in my area, and I think in yours as well, Madam Speaker, Métis people go to public school and separate school and they do not necessarily live in first nation communities. We must have an understanding about how the education process will work for them.

Many indigenous peoples who were engaged by Canadian Heritage felt that the role of an indigenous languages commissioner should be to support local and regional indigenous institutions and not duplicate existing resources. I look to my colleagues who will be working on this legislation to remind themselves that not one size fits all. What we do in northern Ontario and how our education system functions is not the same as for the Cree in northern Quebec, a place in which I have travelled extensively. I understand that its system is set up in a particular way. I like the idea that we are here to support local initiatives. We will find ways to make things happen.

Government Orders

That is why the commissioner and his or her work is absolutely critical to the success of this legislation, as well as to the success of building up indigenous languages, which we all think are important to our culture and our Canadian society. Going forward, it will make a difference in our relationship with indigenous people. They will feel very much at home in their own land when they are able to take courses and speak their own language in school. The first time they take science in Oji-Cree, I would like to be in the room. That will be an interesting story to tell, of a book about science that is written in an indigenous language.

The commissioner will acknowledge that indigenous languages are best reclaimed, revitalized, maintained and strengthened by indigenous people, and will create a framework for a flexible, sustainable approach to funding Indigenous languages.

I wanted to ensure that I had the chance to speak to this, as this is the most important legislation we in the House will pass this term. This will have far-reaching implications for society long after we are gone, and young people are given the opportunity to speak their language.

I suggest very strongly for the House and its members that we move the legislation very quickly and that we find ways to work together. I think we all agree, in principle, that this is important legislation. Some say it is historic. For me, as a member of Parliament who represents a riding in which 40% of constituents are indigenous, the bill is one of the main reasons I came here.

I look forward to working with all colleagues. I am not on the aboriginal affairs committee, but I know it will do a very good job of reviewing this to ensure we get it right, so young people can learn in their own language and so we can provide the kinds of materials and resources, like books, that reflect their own culture. That is a very important part.

• (1655)

That is what I wanted to say. I am thankful for the opportunity to say a few words today.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been a real pleasure for me to listen to the very impressive and interesting speech by my colleague based on his experience, his constituents and his riding. That is exactly what we are here for. We are here to represent our people.

I think more than half the members of Parliament have indigenous communities in their ridings. In my case, my riding is a suburb of Quebec City. The Huron-Wendat Nation has been established there for thousands and thousands of years, but especially since 1697. I want to share my experiences and those of the indigenous people who live in my riding, but unfortunately, there are only 60 days to go in this legislature.

This piece of legislation is very important. We want it to succeed. On the other hand, we want to let all the people who want to speak to it speak. I put my name on the list, but unfortunately, I will not have a speech today.

Does the member agree that each member who would like to make a speech on the issue should have the occasion to do so?

Hon. Robert Nault: Madam Speaker, if it means not getting this legislation through the House, I would disagree with the member. However, if he wants to sit for 24 hours a day so everyone gets to speak, I am quite prepared to do that. If people really want to speak that badly, let us stay and keep it going until everyone gets to speak. However, I do not think we should ever use the excuse that everyone wants to talk, and therefore, this legislation will not make it through the House. Yes, of course I would have liked to have seen this legislation last year or the year before, but we all know how processes work in this place.

This being almost my 20th year now, I have seen practically all I need to see about how the place operates, or sometimes does not operate. This is an opportunity for us to work together on behalf of Canadians in a non-partisan way.

When I was the minister of indigenous affairs, I became frustrated with the partisan politics played between the parties, to the detriment of first nations people. This might be the time we can change that channel, do the right thing, and make sure we get this bill through before we go to the polls and people decide—

• (1700)

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

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his compassionate speech, which shows the importance he places on the recognition of indigenous languages.

What bothers me, however, is that, although 84% of Inuit people in the 51 communities that make up Inuit Nunangat say that they can speak Inuktitut, the bill makes no mention of the 11 proposals made by that community.

If this is so important for reconciliation and culture, particularly since Inuktitut is officially recognized in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and northern Labrador, why is there no mention of it in the bill?

Why is the government ignoring these 11 proposals, which were presented to the federal government a long time ago?

That makes it look like the government is once again imposing colonialism on Inuit people.

[*English*]

Hon. Robert Nault: Madam Speaker, I do not want to show my age, but I was the minister when Nunavut was created and we signed the self-government agreement, so I have a very good understanding of the importance of language and Inuktitut and the people in the region of Nunavut.

I want to remind the member that we have not forgotten about the people of the north, because the Northwest Territories' funding went from \$1.9 million to \$5.9 million this year for all nine of their indigenous languages. We increased funding in Nunavut from \$1.5 million to \$5.1 million annually for Inuktitut.

Government Orders

We are not forgetting about the importance of the languages in the north. I do not think the bill is intended to have a precise explanation of each language in it. It is intended to be a process and a framework to allow the Inuit and their languages to flourish in the north and to put in place the resources locally and regionally to make sure that can happen.

I leave it up to the aboriginal affairs committee to have a look at this to make sure that we did not make a mistake as it relates to the Inuit in the north, because they are a very large part of our mosaic, and we want them to be equally proud of their language and have it as robust as ever.

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am from Calgary, and I am aware that in that city, on September 22, 1877, we came together and we became treaty people, with the settlers as well as the Blackfoot, the Stoney-Nakoda and the Sarcee people. I am proud to say that we share the land with them today. We build community with them today in the spirit of reconciliation and moving forward.

The hon. member mentioned in his speech the approach we are taking in implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and moving forward on historic investments in first nations education and the national housing strategy, which has components completely carved out for indigenous people.

I was struck by the words of Chief Perry Bellegarde when he said that language fully embraces the spirit of indigenous peoples. Language means everything to allow that identity to emerge. I wonder if the member could speak to the role of the commissioner and how that is going to work on the ground in places like his community.

● (1705)

Hon. Robert Nault: Mr. Speaker, because we have not, over decades, had a robust system to make sure that first nation languages are alive, vibrant and thriving, there is a lot of work that will have to go on in first nation communities and schools and in the cities and small towns where a lot of indigenous people live, whether they be status or whether they be Métis or Inuit. We want reconciliation to be alive no matter where people live. One of the things that has always been a stumbling block for us is jurisdiction. The issue has been that the feds were in charge of indigenous people and the provinces and communities had nothing to do with it. This is an opportunity for us to do just that with education and with language, because we can do that almost anywhere.

I want to thank my colleague and National Chief Perry Bellegarde and others for the fine work they have done.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question relates to the Inuit, who are not necessarily very happy with this Liberal piece of legislation. Their concern is that it does not address the particular concerns of their language, Inuktitut. Fundamentally it does not address the fact that the Inuktitut language is so strong a language, so robust, for reasons that have to do with demographics and geographical isolation and so on, that its concerns are very different from those of any other indigenous language in the country.

I recognize the member's willingness, in his response to a previous question, to address the concerns of the Inuit. Frankly, I do not know

how this can be achieved, given the small number of days remaining in the House before the end of this session. Of course, the bill has to go through the Senate as well. I wonder if he could address how, in practice, we could deal with some of these practical issues that are not likely to be resolved in just a moment.

Hon. Robert Nault: Mr. Speaker, a comment I have been making over the last few minutes is that I feel that part of the commissioner's job is to identify problems, mediate conflicts and help find solutions. Under this legislation, the commissioner of indigenous languages would be empowered to provide those kinds of services and would have the ability to find ways to make things work at a local and regional level. If the commissioner had those tools, I think we could find solutions to some of the problems of the Inuit up north that they think are not reflected in this bill. The commissioner's ability to do his or her job would be far-reaching and would include the opportunity to find solutions to some of the issues being presented by the Inuit themselves.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in the House and speak for the first time in our new chamber. It is an honour to get up and speak to such an important bill, one that will probably have historic meaning as we go through it.

I do not totally support the bill the way it is written. I have concerns with some of the language. However, I very much appreciate the need to bring it before the heritage committee and study it as soon as possible. Indigenous languages are so important to our first nations people. They must be recognized, respected, revitalized and retained. With over 70 dialects, this makes this portion of the bill so important.

I am speaking to this bill today because I feel so strongly about the need to protect our heritages. This bill would create an independent commissioner for indigenous rights, confirm the government's belief that indigenous language is part of section 35 of the charter, and allow the translation of federal services into indigenous languages. What a wonderful thing it is. It has been too long.

Over two years ago, the Liberals promised an indigenous language act. With just 60 days left in this parliamentary session, it is quite unlikely this legislation will become law before the upcoming fall election, unless we all work together in earnest. This is another failed promise by the Liberal government.

This is just another portion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings that the government failed. The Liberals promised much, but failed to deliver. They promised language legislation in December 2016, and we are still not there. They promised child welfare legislation by the end of January. Where is it? It would be difficult for any of the Liberals' indigenous-related legislation priorities to receive royal assent before the next election.

Government Orders

They have botched consultation. There are legislative flaws in Bill S-3, and they have botched consultation on the Trans Mountain expansion project. They cancelled the Enbridge northern gateway project without consulting the bands who had equity agreements. They brought in the tanker ban without consulting the pro-energy first nations groups on the west coast.

The missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry is stuck in bureaucratic red tape. They extended its time, commissioners resigned, and nearly 30 staffers left or quit. There have been three non-compliance orders regarding Human Rights Tribunal rulings on first nations child welfare since the Liberals have been in government. One of the most important issues is studying the First Nations Financial Transparency Act.

That is as far as I am going with my partisan attack against the government. Right now, I want to focus on the tradition and heritage of the aboriginal people.

I was fortunate through my working career to spend my service in aboriginal policing. I got to understand and appreciate the differences in the different groups, such as the Shuswap nations, the Dakelh nations, the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations, the Dene, the Cree and the Slavey. I made many friends over the years and spent a lot of my off time, when I was not working as a police officer, socializing with my aboriginal friends and associates.

My wife Nancy and I loved going to aboriginal gatherings such as at Taylor on the Peace River, the Petitot River gathering in the Northwest Territories and the Paul First Nation in my riding of Yellowhead. In these surroundings, we really get to know and understand the importance of the heritage of our aboriginal people.

● (1710)

I remember when I used to travel Highway 77 from north of Fort Nelson, B.C. into the Northwest Territories, back in the 1980s. It was part of my patrol area. I was the commander of the Fort Nelson detachment at the time. I used to go over there quite often.

I used to stop at what we called traditional native camps along the highway, where the Dene people of the Liard River band would move from their homes on the reserve and move their families onto the land. They would set up temporary shelters and live in their old traditional ways. It was their way of teaching the young ones how it was and how important their heritage was.

Probably the only time they would speak English while they stayed there for the full summer was when I arrived. I have a grasp of the languages but not enough to have a good conversation. They would tell me why they were there. It was so good to see those young children learning about their history, learning how to live off the land and keeping their heritage alive. They focused on speaking their native tongues. It was so good to hear these kids speaking that way. They would not speak English when I was there, unless they were talking to me directly.

I am of Ukrainian descent. Both my grandfathers came over from Ukraine in the late 1800s. They settled as farmers in northeastern Alberta. Both raised large families, who in turn raised families of their own. I am a third-generation descendant. When they came here, one of my grandfathers could speak English, and the other could

only speak Ukrainian. Both of my grandmothers could only speak Ukrainian.

Over the years they learned how to speak English. My parents' generation, the second generation, grew up speaking more and more English in school. In fact, like in the residential schools, they were forbidden to speak Ukrainian while in school. They were punished. They would get the yardstick or maybe the strap. They were encouraged to learn the English language. Sadly, our language slowly got lost as people began to speak more English. This is what we are talking about today in Bill C-91, the loss of indigenous languages.

We have 11 major dialogues in 70-some different forms. That is why this legislation is so important. It is important that we work together to get it passed. We do not have much time. We need to protect those languages, because the people who know how to speak them are getting older. As someone said earlier, the live dictionaries are getting older.

I wish I could speak my native tongue, because like so many people I want to go back and research my heritage. I want to go back to the Ukraine to see where my grandfathers came from, in order to get a better understanding of why I am here today.

I mentioned I spent a lot of time during my working life meeting some very special aboriginal people. We have become friends and acquaintances.

We only have 60 days left, and that is not enough time for me to sit here and tell members about the great aboriginal people I have met over the years, the interesting stories I have about them, and the things they have done that I would like to tell the House about. We just do not have enough time, and 60 days would not be enough. However, I am going to talk about two of them, one of whom I have known for many years, and the other who I just met yesterday.

The first one is a constituent of mine. He was a friend of mine for many years before he was ever a constituent. His name is Harry Rusk. I first met him in the Fort Nelson area of British Columbia during the late 1980s.

● (1715)

Harry was born in 1937 in a little hamlet called Kahntah, a Slavey first nations community located in the northeast corner of British Columbia. Many of us have spoken about having remote Indian communities in our ridings, and this one is remote. Even to this day, there are no roads or railroad tracks into this community. One can fly in or take a canoe or boat and go up the Kahntah River. It is about an hour by air from the community of Fort Nelson. Fortunately, or maybe unfortunately, as our country progressed, an oil company doing exploration put in an airstrip about two miles from the Kahntah reserve. Therefore, we can be flown in now.

Government Orders

Unlike a lot of people we have talked about many times in this chamber who went to residential schools, Harry was not that unlucky, but he was not lucky either. He contracted tuberculosis in this remote little community that lay in the northeast corner of British Columbia. As a young man, he was sent to the Camsell Hospital in Edmonton for treatment. He probably thought that he would never return, because in those days tuberculosis was a very deadly disease, especially for our aboriginal people.

Harry stayed there from 1949 to 1953, and miraculously recovered. However, he watched his brother, mother and father succumb to the disease. The whole family was wiped out, except for Harry.

While at the Camsell Hospital in 1952, something happened to Harry. Harry met Hank Snow, a country and western singer. Hank had come to Edmonton to perform, and someone asked if he would come over and talk to some of the kids and people at the Camsell Hospital. Hank agreed. There were a lot of kids there, about 300, I understand, but Harry was one of the lucky ones and Hank came over and talked to him. They took a liking to each other. As Harry says today, Hank inspired him with some simple words. He said, "Always look up," referring to God and getting religion.

This changed Harry's life. He began to play guitar while in the hospital, and after leaving, as a young man, he joined the Canadian Armed Forces. As he was in the armed forces, he was eventually transferred to Vancouver. While there, he formed several bands and continued to play and learn his music. He had a love for gospel music and the old songs, and eventually went on to play for many years in the Grand Ole Opry. He is in the Country Music Hall of Fame. He received many awards over the years and became an ordained minister, which he is today.

Why am I talking about Harry? In the late 1980s, when I met Harry, I used to do a little moonlighting and flew for a small bush pilot operation. Harry asked me to fly him into Kahntah, which I did. He wanted to visit his roots.

As we went to the Kahntah village, which is very small, with only two or three buildings, Harry spoke to me about how important his heritage was to him. He spoke of the importance of his father, Edward, and his mother, Mary. He wanted to know where he came from and what it was all about. He spoke of the importance of the language he was losing and how he wanted to keep it alive.

● (1720)

That is what is so important about this bill: keeping the aboriginal language alive in Canada.

Yesterday I met Bill Adsit, an original member of the Tahltan Nation, who came from the northwest corner of B.C., the opposite side from where Harry came from. He was moved into a residential school at approximately the age of six, and never really had contact with his family after that. Bill spoke to a group of us yesterday about his harrowing experiences in the residential schools and his rebellious nature as a young man.

He turned his life around. I should say that before he changed his life around, he was put in jail on an outstanding warrant. While he was there, he did some soul-searching. He changed his life around. He joined the Canadian military and then went on to spend over 30

years working for the federal Government of Canada in many different government roles. He went on to get a university degree, and today Bill is part of the reconciliation team working on the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Bill's speech yesterday at the Château was very heartwarming, and he left us with a powerful message of determination to do well. He also spoke so deeply about his heritage.

The message I want to pass on to everyone here today is the determination to do well. We need to get this bill passed to save the aboriginal languages, and we need to pass it as soon as possible. This brings me back to the study.

We need to protect the languages of Canada's aboriginal people. As I travelled throughout most of British Columbia in my working career as a police officer, I visited first nations communities from one end of the province to the other. First nations reconciliation is not new, and respecting their traditions and retaining their language is not a new idea. They have been promoting, recognizing, respecting, revitalizing, and retaining their culture for years. They have been working. In the 70s, I remember different groups working to promote their culture in the neighbouring white communities, but in such a way as to make sure their youth understood the history of these great people.

Many years ago I was stationed in Gold River. The Malahat First Nation was in Gold River. I remember the first time I walked into the band office. There was a group of native ladies working there. They asked if I wanted to share in a birthday cake. I blurted out, without even thinking, "What colour is it? I only eat white cake." I realized what I had said and I turned red. They looked at me with a little shock, and then they all started laughing. Over the years I was stationed there, I spent more and more time in that band office, getting to know those ladies and learning about the Malahat culture.

When I left that community some four years later, they invited me there for a party. During the party, they had a cake. The cake was covered in red icing, the inside was white, and on the top of it was a garlic sausage. We mixed our cultures. We learned cultures together over the years that I was stationed there.

In many communities across Canada, we have places called friendship centres, where the aboriginal people living in urban centres gather and encourage the community to come to visit with them and learn their ways and culture. It is so very important that we recognize that. If members have a friendship centre in their area, they should visit it. The work they do in the urban centres of Canada is amazing.

● (1725)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend opposite expressed a great deal of concern about the timeline. It seemed almost as though he was giving up on the process already. We still have 13 weeks to go in this Parliament, and I believe that if we all work together, we can get this legislation through, along with many other pieces of legislation.

I would ask the member if he would commit to making sure this legislation gets through both the House and the Senate and if he would assist us in making sure his Senate colleagues also work with us on this.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I asked the parliamentary secretary earlier if she was willing to co-operate and work with the opposition parties. After listening to the conversations of my colleagues in the NDP and members across the aisle, I think we are all ready to get going on this. Let us throw partisanship aside and get something done that is very important to aboriginal communities in this country. We have 60 days. We can do it, but let us do it together.

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Yellowhead will have eight and a half minutes remaining in the time for questions and comments when the House next debates the motion.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities should examine the possibility and practicality of extending the maximum number of weeks of Employment Insurance sick benefits for those with long term illnesses; and that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House no later than six months from the adoption of this motion.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the chamber tonight to speak on my private member's motion, Motion No. 201, to extend employment insurance benefits, as extending employment insurance benefits is not only the right thing to do but the smart thing to do.

I will start by expressing my appreciation to all of my colleagues in the House who have already expressed to me their support for the extension of these benefits. We all know someone who has experienced financial hardship when recovering from a debilitating disease. Anyone who knows me knows that I have always been an advocate for this extension. I put it forward in the House many years ago and I am putting it forward again today. I see all too often at home in Cape Breton how diseases can cripple people financially when their EI benefits run out.

Sickness benefits were provided in the Employment Insurance Act in the 1970s by government as a compassionate option for Canadians who have to leave their jobs temporarily due to illness. The financial support is intended to allow individuals to focus on their treatment. Current legislation allows recipients up to a maximum of only 15 weeks. The length of recipients' terms of sick benefits is decided by health care professionals. Many aspects of the EI Act have changed since it was passed. However, the duration period has gone unchanged.

Many of us in the chamber have constituents, friends and family members who have experienced financial hardship as they recovered

Private Members' Business

from serious diseases such as cancer, heart problems or respiratory issues. Like other members, my constituency office in Cape Breton sees this happen all too often. People apply for EI sick benefits and receive the full 15 weeks, but find themselves incapable of going back to work after those 15 weeks.

Think about it. It could be a nurse, teacher, bus driver, fish plant worker, factory worker or construction worker. It does not matter. Let us say a 40-year-old has paid into the system for 20 years and gets prostate or breast cancer or whatever, and it is curable. Most cancers are curable now, but it takes a year. There are no payments after 15 weeks. The person may have to sell the car or remortgage the house. That individual paid into the EI system for 20 years while being a productive citizen and will be going back into the workforce.

These Canadians, through no fault of their own, as I said, have to remortgage their homes to get by financially. They use up all of their savings, if they have any, and continue paying for everything else. We are hearing more and more from medical professionals and the studies they conduct that stress has a serious negative effect on our bodies. It would certainly have a negative impact on a person's effort to recover from a prolonged or serious ailment.

In my hometown of Cape Breton, a local doctor, Dr. Ron MacCormick, an oncologist, attests that it can take at least one year after cancer treatment before a patient starts to regain energy. In fact, most oncologists will say that treatment, surgery, chemotherapy or radiation takes one year. The harsh reality is that cancer and other serious illnesses do not discriminate. Canadians of all ages are attacked by disease. The unfortunate part is that these people still have lots of productive work years left ahead of them, but if we are not giving people proper time to recover, they may even relapse upon returning to work.

Canada is known as one of the most progressive countries in the world. However, it is less known that our country also has one of the shortest periods of sickness protection in the modern world. Many European countries see the benefit in bridging. They find that bridging workers when they suffer from illness is a net benefit to their society. It is an investment. These people do not get lost in the welfare system or the pension system. When we bridge them financially through tough periods of sickness to health, they come back to work and contribute to society.

• (1735)

Increasing the amount of weeks that sick Canadians could receive does not mean they will use all those weeks. It simply gives them the option to use them if they are needed in recovery. We owe this to Canadians.

In fact, The Globe and Mail reported last year that almost four out of every 10 applicants are maxing out these sick benefits and the demand for EI sick benefits hit a 10-year high in 2015.

Private Members' Business

I would put to the House that the spirit and intent back when the Employment Insurance Act sickness benefits provisions were first enacted were to help people through such hard times. Times have changed. There seems to be more people with cancer. The reality is that more people are getting cured. Therefore, we have to change the act accordingly and ensure that these people have the proper transition back to their normal lives.

Our government has made some positive changes to the EI act since 2015, including changing the rules for regular benefits, extending parental leave to 18 months, introducing an option for five weeks of leave for parents adopting children and making compassionate care leave more accessible. However, we need to focus on sick benefits.

Just this past December, at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Mr. Michael Prince, a professor of social policy at the University of Victoria, stated that an extension of the 15 weeks to 26 weeks is a sound investment in Canadians. He said this would be “an investment in early interventions and job retention, so that these people would not be opting [to totally leave the workforce]. They would be continuing to work and making some premium contributions.”

I also appreciate the positive comments from all sides of the House during that committee.

For example, there were positive comments made by the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. She said, “When people are denied by Service Canada, how is that spoken to them? Is there compassion...?”

The member for North Okanagan—Shuswap, at the human resources committee on the same day, asked about the type of assistance we can look at providing for employers who are making those accommodations to try to keep employees who are suffering from disorders.

The member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, at that same committee, said that when it comes to applying for a job, “we have to ensure that people with...disabilities in general, are not turned away.”

It is great to see that we have cross-support for this, because out of the 333 members of Parliament we have, I do not think there is one member's constituency office that does not see people coming in with this happening. Therefore, we all know it is a problem and we should fix it.

There remains a misconception that people who have maximized their EI sick benefits can simply apply for Canada pension plan disability benefits. As many members know, the criteria for this program are very strict and most patients are denied because they are not considered 100% disabled. The small numbers of those who meet the criteria are faced with a three-month long application process. Then there is a long waiting period before they actually receive payment. On top of this harsh criteria for the Canada pension plan disability benefits, not all employers offer a long-term disability program. We have to help these people within that one year. Therefore, on top of the harsh criteria for the Canada pension disability, we have to have something else.

For nearly a decade, one-third of Canadians who claim sick benefits are maxing out their 15 weeks. That averages out to roughly 135,000 people in 2016-17. I believe the consistency in these numbers shows that this program is failing Canadians.

● (1740)

Too many are facing unnecessary financial stress at a time when they should be directing 100% of their energies toward battling their ailments and recovering. We just have to think about the worry and concern a person who finds out they have an ailment like this has. They should not be concerned that they cannot buy groceries, pay the phone bill or drive their kids around. No Canadian should be left trying to figure out where they are going to get the money to pay for all these things. We should be helping them.

There is a need for this legislation. The job of health professionals, associations and organizations is to make people better. Our health system is there to make people better. Our job is to help people financially when they are being treated. Employees and employers are paying into this system. Employees want to get back to work and employers need them back to work. We have to help them get through that.

I would like to finish off with a few points. Like I said, the employment insurance fund is funded by employees and employers. It is their money. A healthy nation is a working, contributing nation. These Canadians have paid into this program their whole working lives. It is our turn to take care of them when they need it most.

Increasing the number of weeks sick Canadians can receive does not mean they will use them all. It simply gives them the option to use them if they need them for their recovery. Who knows? After 20 weeks, they might be good to go back to work part time. Things might be okay, but they should not have to worry when they get to 15 weeks. A lot of times, treatment does not start right when they are diagnosed and not feeling well. It could take five weeks to start treatment.

This motion is not a partisan issue. It is about dignity for sick Canadians. It is about changing this system from a one-size-fits-all approach. It is not only the right thing to do, but it is the smart thing to do. I hope my colleagues in the House will support my motion when it comes before the House.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the spirit of the motion he put forward and the heartfelt speech he gave to the House today.

For a long time, the NDP has advocated for improvements to EI, deep EI reform, including the extension of sick benefits. In fact, we have stood with numerous advocates from coast to coast to coast, calling for an extension of up to 50 weeks for those who are dealing with terminal illnesses and those who need the support.

Private Members' Business

My question is to my colleague across and his government. If they care so deeply about the need to extend these benefits, why not just skip the study, because we already know this is critical, and just move to making the difference for Canadians?

• (1745)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, it is not my first time in the House trying to get this through, and I appreciate the support from the NDP. My first private member's bill came through the House and failed. The Harper government cancelled it because it was a money bill, I guess, and needed a royal recommendation.

If we are going to have unanimous consent, we have to get it to committee. There are new facts around this coming forward now, new numbers, and we need to get more professionals coming to committee. We really need to get a bulletproof case on this, which is why I want to see it at committee. The findings of that committee will come back to the House and we will take it from there.

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the time has come when we should study the full parameters of this idea. Many people in my area of Calgary Centre, as well as some of the organizations there such as Spinal Cord Injury Alberta and the MS Society, have long advocated for a more flexible, more fair and more responsive employment insurance program that looks at sickness, not as how long one takes his or her benefits but how long one takes to recover, and puts that compassionate lens to the intersection of disability and work. With 14% of Canadians having some form of disability, this is something that is imperative.

The member mentioned a study that he was looking at regarding people with disabilities. Does he believe that through a study the motion would be able to look more deeply into that?

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question.

EI has different rules across the country. It depends on the unemployment in various areas. However, sickness benefits are the same across the country. The member mentioned the study, and it shows that this is helping people get through that moment when they need help.

That is also why I want to bring it to committee. There are so many new findings out there about how people recover when they are not under stress. That is part of it. That study shows it. There are also European studies. There has been a lot of stuff done in Europe showing how people get back into the workforce, almost seamlessly. People say, "Oh, were you gone?", and the answer is, yes, they were gone but came right back in.

The numbers have come out, and I think it is 135,000 right now, maximizing the number. Just because it goes for 50 weeks, it does not mean people are going to use those 50 weeks. They might only have to have 35 weeks. The study speaks for itself, and an in-depth study at committee would bring out the numbers.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria who I know has been extraordinarily committed to this cause for some time. I have a constituent, who the House will hear more about later during my remarks, who has been personally affected by this

issue. I had the opportunity to introduce her to my colleague in Halifax last April.

This has become a personal issue for me, because I learned about it from one of my constituents. I am curious. So many years ago, when the member first took up the torch, what was it, or who was it, that caused him to take on this cause and champion it so strongly here in Ottawa?

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, it all started when I became a member of Parliament. I did not even know what private members' bills were. I got up here and found out what they were, that it is when an MP wants to move something forward.

At that time, there was a lady in my office who worked for me for many years, Darlene Morrison. I talked to her about private members' bills. I asked her what was the thing that really struck her the most, the thing that we should be doing more about as a country, as a government. She mentioned the cases that we were getting about people who were sick and falling through the cracks. That is where it started. It started right in my office.

Then, of course, I was meeting these people and having them coming into the office. These were people we see every day, people in the grocery stores, people who are functioning in society, vibrant people, with families, who have everything happening for them. Then, all of a sudden, they are in my office, in tears, because their life is falling apart because they cannot make their payments.

I appreciate the member, and I appreciate his bringing one of his constituents to me. That is where it started. That is why I am going to keep pushing this. I am not going to give up.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I arrived on Parliament Hill just six months ago. I have met many wonderful people here, including two I did not get to work with very often and who were taken from us by a horrible disease. I want to take this opportunity to offer my condolences to the families and friends of Michael Ferguson and Paul Dewar, two great Canadians we lost this week.

In the few interactions I had with Mr. Ferguson, I developed a great deal of respect for his thoroughness and values of justice. His exemplary reports were critical of both the Conservative and the Liberal governments and forced us to keep the course and to remember that we serve each and every Canadian.

I must admit that I did not know Paul Dewar before the photo shoot for the Parliamentarian of the Year awards, for which I was asked to prepare a few words in recognition of this big-hearted man. I will, however, always remember his speech. That evening, Mr. Dewar spoke about collaboration and working together. He asked everyone there to remember when they first got interested in politics and in serving the public.

Private Members' Business

I wanted to be the voice in Ottawa of the proud people living in the riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and also in the beautiful region of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. It is satisfying when every person I meet shares a part of their life with me. When I went door-to-door, many people talked to me about EI sickness benefits. I am pleased today to address their concerns and support their efforts, by debating in the House Motion No. 201, moved by my colleague from Sydney—Victoria, which reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities should examine the possibility and practicality of extending the maximum number of weeks of Employment Insurance sick benefits for those with long term illnesses; and that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House no later than six months from the adoption of this motion.

I also think the subject reflects the wishes of Mr. Dewar, who said that we are stronger together. To borrow his words, is it not time to take off the armour of our political party and work together as people representing citizens to build a better country for everyone?

The reason I am speaking in the House today is that, as the Quebec Conservatives said, 15 weeks of EI benefits for people with chronic illnesses is not enough.

I would like to echo the sentiments of Marie-Hélène Dubé, the founder of the “15 weeks to heal is not enough” movement, who said that partisanship has no place in matters as important as illness. She made that statement during the general council for Quebec Conservatives that was held in Saint-Hyacinthe in May 2018.

On that same weekend, our dynamic Quebec members also expressed their support for Ms. Dubé’s movement. As I learned on the campaign trail, and as everyone has probably realized at some point, it is all too easy to fall into a financial abyss after a serious illness. The financial burden only adds to the anxiety and fear. That does not help the healing process.

It is vital that we do our job as MPs and support our fellow Canadians who are already dealing with the stress of a serious illness. They should not have to worry about whether they will have enough money to make ends meet. I had already approached my Conservative caucus colleagues about this on my own initiative. I am very proud to debate it today in the House, where we seem to be coming to a consensus.

● (1755)

I support the motion because that will give us the opportunity to discuss it in detail in committee. Committee is the appropriate forum in which to closely examine all of the potential impacts of increasing the maximum number of weeks of sickness benefits and to work together to lay the groundwork for a joint proposal in the interests of all Canadians. It is important to look at the costs and benefits of such a proposal. It is also critical to determine what impact it would have on Canadian taxpayers.

Here are a few examples of the details that need to be worked out in committee. First, can we look into the possibility of shortening processing times and doing away with the deductible that is the one-week waiting period? Second, can we ensure that the system pays for itself without increasing employer and employee premiums? Finally, can we analyze regional differences as we do for regular EI benefits?

According to the “Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report”, in 2016-17, the average duration of employment insurance sickness benefits was 9.8 weeks, and 35.7% of claimants exhausted the maximum entitlement of 15 weeks.

What is more, the average duration of EI sickness benefits increased with the age of claimants. As many people have told me, when cancer hits, it is not hard to imagine how more than 15 weeks of benefits may be needed.

First, the awful news comes as a shock to the person and those close to them. Then the person has to wait for surgery when surgery is possible. That may be followed by rounds of radiation and chemotherapy. If the disease is inoperable, treatment may make it operable. Before getting any good news, however, the person may have been unable to work for several months or even a year. I wonder if there is some way to target illnesses or injuries that require more than 15 weeks of benefits.

According to the “Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report”, age is a factor in the number of weeks needed for full recovery. I imagine the type of illness or injury is too. If we want to control costs and act responsibly, might we consider scaling the maximum number of benefit weeks based on categories of injury or illness?

In conclusion, I am sure that, by working together, we can find a solution to help those who need help by increasing the maximum number of weeks of sickness benefits for people with serious illnesses without having a significant impact on the federal budget or hard-working Canadians like the people of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Motion No. 201, which states, in part:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities should examine the possibility and practicality of extending the maximum number of weeks of Employment Insurance sick benefits for those with long term illnesses....

While my colleagues in the NDP and I will ultimately be supporting this motion, I cannot begin to express my disappointment in a Liberal government that is more focused on looking like it is doing things rather than actually doing them. The Liberal Party knows what is needed. The Liberals have had almost four years of a majority government to do this, but instead, have chosen to make Canadians wait longer.

That being said, the idea of extending EI sick benefits is one that is long overdue and one that we as New Democrats support and have advocated for fervently. Since 1971, there has been no change to the amount of EI sick benefits. People across our country are struggling. Inflation has risen 520% since then; the middle class has shrunk since then; wages have deflated since that time, and yet we are still stuck at 15 weeks.

Fifteen weeks is the current maximum number of weeks that Canadians with a long-term illness or an injury are allowed to take to help them cope with their incapacity to work. It is not enough.

When folks are struggling, we should be lifting them up. When people are sick, we should be able to comfort them. The toll that a long-term sickness or injury takes is large enough and we should not be making it harder on Canadians.

I am proud that we in the NDP have taken a strong position on extending these benefits. This is no surprise, because remember: It is our party that has a history for fighting for the well-being of people. We are the ones that brought in health care under Tommy Douglas. We have been committed to improving access and care, a fight we continue today.

Issue after issue, the Liberal government is almost where it needs to be in rhetoric but is not there in action. With pharmacare, the Liberals announced a tepid version preferred by industry rather than true universal pharmacare. On dental care, they are nowhere to be found. On child care, it is the same.

A proper health care system that truly caters to people's needs would include these things, plus increased access to mental health care, greater work protections for the sick, and the list goes on.

Clearly, there is a lot of work left to be done to fulfill Tommy Douglas's dream. Extending EI sick benefits would also be part of that vision.

New Democrats have been at the forefront of this fight. I want to acknowledge the work of my colleague from Port Moody—Coquitlam, who throughout his career has fought to improve the quality of EI sick benefits, proposing multiple pieces of legislation that would have made a real difference in people's lives.

He was inspired by Natalie Thomas, a cancer survivor from his riding, whose story highlighted the changes needed to the EI act. Natalie was recovering from breast cancer surgery and was forced to return to work because her EI sick benefits ran out. Canadians like her should not be forced to go back to work so quickly. They should be focused on getting better, and that is what we need.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain recently told me a story about a constituent of his, Elaine, who donated a kidney to save someone's life. I think we can all agree that what Elaine did was incredible and we should be supporting her. The problem is we did not.

She wrote to my colleague that she would get an EI rate of 55% of her pay. She was the sole breadwinner in the household. Her husband had some severe health issues and was unable to have a full-time job. She also had to take care of her 93-year-old father. This was a severe hardship on her family but the person desperately needed a kidney transplant, and yet, because of the rules, she was

Private Members' Business

forced to go back to work far too early. The recipient was off work for four to six months and only received EI for 15 weeks. She did not have a short-term benefit and she too was forced to go back to work early as she could not afford to stay off work to recover 100%.

A system that forces organ donors and recipients to go back to work while they recover is not a system that is working. We need fundamental change.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

We already heard the story of Marie-Hélène Dubé. Marie-Hélène is a cancer survivor who presented a petition calling on the federal government to increase the number of weeks of EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50.

More than 600,000 Canadians signed that petition, the most of any petition in Canada. Clearly, Canadians want change.

[*English*]

Why are so many Canadians responding to Marie-Hélène Dubé's call for 50 weeks? Currently, almost 40% of Canadians using EI sick benefits are maxing them out. For many Canadians, they have a choice at that point, return to work still injured, or receive an income or leave their jobs to focus on getting better. Neither are acceptable options. The reality is that Canadians tend to need 50 weeks to recover from illness and injury. We are not even covering a third of the needed time, and Canadians deserve better.

Following the 2015 election, many Canadians had hope for sunnier days ahead from the government and the early results were encouraging for some. In 2016, the Minister of Social Development publicly committed to expanding EI sick benefits. It has been two years and there has been nothing.

Instead of working to improve people's lives, the Liberals are proposing another study, another study that in all likelihood will not have time to finish its work before the next election. I know the government likes to talk a good progressive game while accomplishing very little, but even for them this is a little rich. Canadians like Natalie and Marie-Hélène deserve more than another study. They deserve more than 15 weeks.

Private Members' Business

Let us not forget everyone who does not even qualify for these benefits, who the government consistently ignores. I am thinking of young people, the precariously unemployed and underemployed, people in my riding and all across the country who need a bit of help, but the government is not there to give it to them.

When rich American billionaires want pipelines built, the government goes the extra mile. When SNC-Lavalin breaks the law, the government looks like it is there for it. However, when regular Canadians are being forced to return to work either sick or injured or quit their jobs because they are too sick to perform, the government does not even budge an inch. It will propose a study, but it certainly will not do anything to actually improve someone's life.

The hypocrisy and cynicism of this type of politics that privileges style over substance is typical of the government. We see it in the government's attitude toward reconciliation and indigenous peoples. We see it in its attitude toward the environment. We see it in its attitude toward the sick and injured.

The worst part is that the government acknowledges that it will not have time to make any changes to EI. Not even six months ago, the Minister of Social Development admitted that there was not time to make changes to the EI sickness system, given the federal election. The government is open about the fact that it cannot make the changes it needs to make and that this, all of this, is just window dressing.

The motion will pass and the Liberals will pretend it is a win, but it is not. The motion represents four years of the Liberals refusing to fix the problem. It represents almost half a decade of successive Liberal and Conservative governments ignoring the issue.

My colleagues and I will vote in support of the motion, but we do it understanding that this is not the change that Canadians deserve. We do it because we support the principle of extending EI sick benefits. It is a pity that the government's actions show that it does not.

● (1805)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and a privilege to rise to discuss this important private member's motion, brought forward by my colleague, the member for Sydney—Victoria.

The moral measure of any government is how its society treats its most vulnerable people, its children, its elderly, its poor and its sick. In Nova Scotia, we hear constantly about the challenges that face our health care system. As a federal representative, so many of the day-to-day decisions when it comes to health care are driven by the provincial government. It is frustrating to hear people raise everyday concerns. It could be someone just like us, our sister, father or mother. Oftentimes we feel frustration because there is not as much we can do at the federal level to help deliver those day-to-day services we hear so much about in our constituency office.

There are a number of ways the government can support the vulnerable and the sick. One of them is staring us in the face with the motion before us. The motion is very simple. At its core, it recognizes there is a problem that sickness benefits do not extend for a long enough period to provide people with the coverage they need.

By supporting the motion, we will get the information we need to execute on a policy that will provide that coverage and ensure that people have the financial support they need to get through times of extraordinary difficulty.

As the member said during his remarks, this is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

We can all appreciate the importance of employment insurance. It exists for a number of reasons, to help people when they need it most and to help people who need it most. In Atlantic Canada, the predominance of our seasonal industries require that EI is there at certain times of the year for people who find themselves out of work but do not want to leave home. My family benefited significantly from the EI program for parents of critically ill children when our daughter was born with certain health concerns.

Our government made certain changes to expand parental leave, extending it to five weeks and giving more flexibility over 18 months for new parents as well. We extended the compassionate care benefit for up to six months for people who were taking care of loved ones. We reduced waiting periods and made a series of other changes to the important EI program.

However, there remains a critical gap for those people who find they cannot go to work because they have fallen ill. At its core, the problem is this. If one becomes sick, one can claim EI benefits for a period of 15 weeks. Conversely, if one gets fired or laid off, one can claim for a much longer period of time, up to 50 weeks. There is a dissonance between these two periods of time that just does not make sense to me. It is unfathomable to me that in 2019, in Canada of all places, one is better off to get fired than to get cancer.

This is a file I care very deeply about, because one of my constituents came into my office early on in our mandate. Her name is Kathy MacNaughton. She is a sweet person. She is everything we could hope for in a community member. She cares deeply about her family and her community. Kathy and her family were dealt one heck of a blow a few years back when her husband David was diagnosed with esophageal cancer at the young age of 50. David passed away not too long thereafter, and it put her family in an extraordinarily difficult position.

Private Members' Business

There are so many other families like Kathy's that are living this reality every day, and there is something we can do to help them. Kathy made a final promise to her partner before he passed that she would continue to fight until she effected the kind of change that would have helped a family like hers going forward. She met with my predecessor before the last federal election. She has met with me. She has met with local MLAs. She has even engaged in the political policy development process with parties to help us arrive at a policy we can agree on to make this change happen. If every citizen was as engaged as Kathy was, I cannot imagine what a wonderful country this would be.

We know the current policy is insufficient, because 35% of the people who claim EI sickness benefits max them out. I think the number is somewhere in the range of 135,000 people who max out these benefits every year. This is a serious problem. There are 135,000 Canadians who are not receiving the benefits they need because they have become sick.

I note that this year one of the only three recommendations the Canadian Cancer Society has put forward in advance of the next federal budget is to extend EI sickness benefits to 26 weeks. I have met with its representatives in my office. This is something we can and must do.

• (1810)

It is a fabulous opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives. If we invest in people when they fall ill, they will be better able to return to the workforce.

In Kathy's example, her husband was earning about \$6,000 a month before he was diagnosed. That was reduced to a small fraction, less than \$2,000 a month when he qualified for the EI sickness benefits. When he finally did qualify for CPP near the end of his life, they were taking in \$852 a month. Kathy describes herself and her family as one of the lucky ones. She was working and had some sort of insurance, as so many other families do. Imagine families trying to cover the bills for food or for a mortgage on \$852 a month when they were previously taking in \$6,000.

The fact is that we are setting off a spiral for so many families that may lose their homes, maybe choosing between keeping the lights on or having food for their kids. These are very real, practical choices that make a difference in the lives of people like Kathy. I made a commitment to her to work with my colleagues, including the member for Sydney—Victoria, who she had the chance to meet, to ensure that this happened. I will not give up on it until we see this change implemented in the law.

People who fall ill with something like cancer, serious heart disease or other terminal illnesses have better things to worry about. They should worry about spending time with their families and recovering rather than where their next cheque is going to come from. Show me a cancer survivor who is fully recuperated and goes back to work after 15 weeks. It is not realistic. Everyone in the House knows someone, probably loves someone, who has been impacted by cancer. To think that we assume in less than four months people are going to be fully recovered, the system is not fair the way it is today and we need to work to change it together.

The benefits of moving forward with the study the member has proposed are numerous. We should understand the cost of this step before we implement it. We should understand how many people are specifically affected. If there are certain people who are suffering from certain kinds of illnesses that are currently not getting coverage, that is helpful information that would come out in the course of the study.

One of the members of the Conservative Party pointed out that there may be regional difference in terms of what illnesses would impact people and who would qualify for this benefit. It would be helpful to be made aware of that. As I mentioned, there are a number of frustrations that I have as a federal representative when I know how important health is to my constituents. There are policy items that we are removing the chains on, like moving toward implementing a pharmacare system in Canada.

In the last few years, we saw a transfer to the provinces that was the largest in Canada's history, with a specific carve out for mental health and in-home care for seniors. For provinces like mine, that is \$130 million extra for mental health and \$157 million for in-home care for seniors. However, it is so important that we are not just sending money to provinces and telling them to do what they want. It is important to realize we can provide the wraparound supports for families to ensure they do not fall victim to a vicious cycle when they are forced into poverty to cover the costs of their illness.

Every cancer survivor who I have spoken to has told me that it has taken an incredible economic toll on his or her family for little things like gas to the city. I am from northern Nova Scotia and most folks who are diagnosed with cancer are regularly making trips to and from Halifax. Those gas bills add up. For those who are able to afford a hotel room, it is still an issue, because hotel bills add up very quickly. We are thankful to have incredible institutions like The Lodge That Gives in our province. However, it is unreasonable in a community like mine, where the median income is just a shade over \$20,000 a year, to expect people of those means, people who are going to be living on a pittance after their benefits, to afford the cost of travelling to and from the city, to stay in a hotel or wherever they can find a place. Frankly, they are usually not an environment that is best for their recovery.

By supporting the motion, we will have the information we need to confirm the right path forward is to extend EI sickness benefits so people can actually draw on the benefits of the fund they have paid into. In 2019, in Canada, it is not right to be better off to be fired than to get cancer. I will not give up on this until this change is implemented in law.

• (1815)

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion this evening. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on Motion No. 201, which seeks to extend the EI benefits for those experiencing sickness and disability caused by sickness.

Private Members' Business

The motion proposes a valuable examination of a program that many Canadians rely on during very challenging times. As members of the House will know, the employment insurance program was initiated to offer temporary financial assistance to unemployed workers. It helps workers to bridge the financial gap between jobs and ensures that people are able to stand on their own two feet during seasons of transition or change.

One of the special benefits that the EI program provided was the sickness benefit, and it does still provide it. Those who are unable to work due to sickness or injury can turn to EI when their circumstances keep them from working. As it stands now, individuals unable to work because of sickness or injury who would otherwise be available to work could be eligible to receive a maximum of 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits. The purpose of this is to give people time to get better, making sure that they are able to restore their health so that they can go back to work healthy.

It makes sense to have a safety net in place for Canadians who are sick and injured. Even when we have not experienced long-term illness or injury ourselves, chances are we know someone, whether a family member, friend or co-worker, who has. Missing work as a result of situations like this can be taxing and take a personal toll. Beyond that, it can leave individuals in a financial lurch too. I have experienced sickness both in my family and in my circle of friendship.

I was recently reading a Global News report which said that half of all Canadians are \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills. Part of what the motion proposes is to also eliminate the two-week waiting period for those experiencing sickness or injury. I think that is a tremendous measure. When I think of the statistic that half of Canadians are \$200 away from not being able to pay their hydro bill or buy groceries or prescription drugs, that is a very sobering thought.

Illness and injury do not respect anyone. They can happen at any time. When something like that happens, I think we have to have measures in place that people can depend on to get them through that difficult time. We know that if people have to worry about their finances when they are sick, it adds to the sickness and injury. It actually decreases their chance for a speedier recovery. It adds that extra stress, which sometimes the body just cannot handle. This is precisely why EI programs exist: to help lessen the toll on our fellow citizens who are facing tough times.

As policy-makers, it is up to us to make sure that this system serves Canadians the way it was intended to and that it is sustainable for future generations of workers. This means finding exactly the right balance between the needs of employees and employers. It means ensuring responsible government management of the program today and also down the road.

In 2006, the member for Sydney—Victoria introduced Bill C-288, an act to amend the employment insurance act regarding benefits for illness, injury or quarantine. His legislation proposed to extend the maximum period for benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. In 2011, a former member of the House introduced Bill C-291, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act regarding the waiting period and maximum special benefits. This legislation also proposed to extend the maximum duration of employment insurance for sickness to 50

weeks from 15 weeks, as well as to eliminate the requirement of the two-week waiting period prior to receiving sickness benefits.

It was during the more recent iteration, known as Bill C-291, that the Parliamentary Budget Officer took a look at what this new maximum would mean in terms of dollars. The PBO determined that the estimated cost would have been up to \$1.1 billion for the year 2009-10. Broken down, there was about \$200 million for the elimination of the two-week waiting period and around \$900 million for the extension of benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. This figure was a static cost estimate, and so potential behavioural responses to these changes were not factored in.

The PBO's report further noted that if the bill had been implemented in 2009-10, total sickness benefit payments would have been approximately 100% higher than they were at the time. As stated in the report, given the fact that the "Employment Insurance program is financed by the collection of EI premiums from employers and employees...any increase in EI expenditures would require an equivalent increase in EI premium insurance revenues." This would be in order for the program to remain self-funding.

• (1820)

This is, of course, an important consideration for the long-term sustainability of the EI program that we must keep in mind as we proceed with this study.

In the June 2016 report of HUMA entitled "Exploring the Impact of Recent Changes to Employment Insurance and Ways to Improve Access to the Program", recommendation number 7 states:

The Committee recommends that the federal government explore increasing the maximum number of weeks of employment insurance sickness benefits.

While the official opposition wrote a dissenting report to address some important concerns with the contents of the main report, the fact of the matter is that the key idea behind Motion No. 201 has been laid out previously. Several times parliamentarians have seen the need to address this issue in the EI program.

Sickness benefits cost the EI system \$1.6 billion in 2017. We have also seen a trend since 2015 of a greater demand for sickness benefits.

The government noted in its response to the HUMA June 2016 report:

The EI sickness benefit is designed to provide temporary income support for short-term absences from the labour force due to illness, injury or quarantine. While the 15 weeks of benefits appear adequate for the majority of workers, some claimants do exhaust their sickness benefits and stakeholders often request an extension in the case of more serious illnesses. In 2014/2015, on average, claimants of the EI sickness benefit collected 10 weeks of benefits and 34.8% used all of the 15 weeks available to them. The EI sickness benefit complements a range of other supports that are available for workers with longer-term illnesses, including benefits offered through employer-sponsored group insurance plans, private coverage held by individuals and long-term disability benefits available under the Canada Pension Plan and provincial and territorial programs. Improvements to the sickness benefit including potential extension of the maximum duration would require careful consideration of the interactions with other supports, impacts on employers, and would be expected to have a significant cost implication, with resulting premium rate increases.

Private Members' Business

With these realities before us, there is ample reason to take stock of the situation and lay out recommendations for the best path forward. There are many moving parts when it comes to EI sickness benefits that we ought to take note of throughout our work.

I appreciate the work of the member for Sydney—Victoria for facilitating this conversation with this motion. We have certainly seen this issue considered in various forms over the past years, but when we are talking about a program that supports Canadians, it is important for all of us to be engaged in these discussions. I will be supporting this motion because this is a conversation worth having, recognizing that we must be responsible stewards of the EI program to make sure it continues to serve Canadians well now and into the future. Conservatives understand that when individuals are facing challenges like longer-term illness or injury, they need support.

On this side of the House, I know members are always open to exploring ways that government programming puts people first. That is why members of our Conservative caucus have been championing initiatives that focus on government being more compassionate and responsive to the needs of Canadians.

In our 2015 economic action plan, our previous Conservative government extended compassionate care for the care of terminally ill loved ones from six weeks to six months. These benefits, provided through the EI program, help support individuals temporarily away from work to care for a sick family member with a significant risk of death. Our party has always been committed to helping families receive the support they need as they care for loved ones, especially at end of life, and we backed that up with meaningful action.

Now in opposition, Conservatives continue to champion initiatives such as the opportunity for workers with disabilities act, introduced by the member for Carleton, to ensure that disabled Canadians never lose more in benefits and taxation than they gain as a result of work. Unfortunately, a majority of Liberal MPs voted against this bill before it was even studied.

The member for Calgary Shepard has brought forward Bill C-399 to improve access to the disability tax credit to help ensure that all Canadians living with a disability receive the benefits they deserve and are entitled to. I hope all members of this House will support that common-sense initiative as well.

The member for Banff—Airdrie brought forward Motion No. 110 to determine ways for government to be more sensitive to parents who have suffered the loss of an infant child and to improve the level of support for grieving parents. I was pleased to see this motion considered in-depth by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and I look forward to the committee's report.

These are examples that reflect the passion of our official opposition benches for putting people before government. It is why we are open to studying how we can better a key government program in a way that meets Canadians' needs. I hope all members here will agree that the conversation that Motion No. 201 proposes is one worth having.

I know that as opposition members we are always very sensitive about cost implications and further taxation. This could incur another payroll tax, but it could be one that is worth incurring.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Motion No. 201, moved by our friend and colleague from Sydney—Victoria.

[*English*]

As members know, the motion seeks to direct the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to undertake a study with two specific goals in mind: one, to analyze the possibility and practicality of extending the maximum number of weeks of employment insurance sick benefits for those with long-term illnesses; and two, to present its report to the House no later than six months from the adoption of this motion.

[*Translation*]

Many Canadians have to deal with illness. For some, it lasts a week or two, for others it can linger for weeks, months, even years.

Either way, it is very stressful for the sick and their families. Fighting an illness is hard enough without adding the extra stress of financial limitations.

In many cases, the person who is sick has to miss work to get treatment. In some cases, it goes even further and the person is simply unable to work. This leads to a significant drop in income and even a complete loss of income. It is important to improve the employment insurance sick leave benefits program so that the 35% of claimants who run out of benefits before they are able to return to work have the time to recover with greater peace of mind.

I battled cancer myself in 2012, and that fight lasted longer than 15 weeks, so I truly understand that, between the surgeries, chemotherapy or radiation treatments, recovery and doctors appointments, patients may not have the luxury of finding the strength to worry about their finances, let alone hold down a job.

I know what a difference increasing the maximum number of weeks of EI sick benefits can make to people dealing with a long-term illness and to their families. Not only would it help patients focus on getting better, but it would also help relieve some of the psychological stress they must face.

That is why I support the initiative of my colleague, the member for Sydney—Victoria, which calls on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to examine the possibility and practicality of extending the maximum number of weeks of employment insurance sick benefits for those with long term illnesses.

Adjournment Proceedings

We can help Canadians who have to grapple with the financial stress associated with a medical condition they did not ask for. We can also make a difference for their families.

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan will have seven minutes to complete his comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

The time provided for consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, the debate we just heard, about benefits for people with serious illnesses, reminds me that just yesterday, we lost, to cancer, Paul Dewar, the former MP for Ottawa Centre. There have already been some wonderful tributes in this House. I would just add that I had the honour of volunteering on his first election campaign and saw firsthand what a great person he was. He was also a great parliamentarian. If he were here, he would probably encourage me to get on with the adjournment debate.

On that note, I would remind the House that the question that prompted these adjournment proceedings was about the carbon emissions from cannabis production. Growing cannabis indoors, under bright lights, is extremely energy intensive. Academic research has concluded that cannabis production in the United States emits about as much carbon as three million cars.

The first part of my question was to ask the government whether it could provide those kinds of statistics for our country. Of course, we might speculate that indoor heating and lighting might require even more energy in Canada than they do south of the border. On the other hand, electricity in Canada is a bit less carbon intensive, on average. Rather than speculate, it would be nice to see some actual data. I know the government prides itself on evidence-based policy. I am hoping this evening that we will hear some actual numbers on how much carbon is emitted through cannabis production in our country.

Today I noticed that Statistics Canada released its national cannabis survey, which contained a great deal of data about the sector. There was some good information, but there was nothing about the associated carbon emissions. I am hoping the parliamentary secretary will be able to help us out on that.

Beyond quantifying the level of carbon emissions from cannabis production, what we really want is that the government take action to limit and minimize those emissions. One of the strongest arguments in favour of legalizing cannabis is that it gives the opportunity to regulate the sector. I would like to know what actions the

government has taken to try to minimize the carbon emissions from cannabis production through regulation.

I would note that businesses are clamouring to get licences to be allowed to produce cannabis. It strikes me that it should be possible to make those licences conditional upon their committing to produce the cannabis in an environmentally friendly way. Licensing requirements might be one tool. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary will speak to other tools that could be used.

I would just note that through legalization, the government is effectively setting up an entirely new industry of cannabis production, and setting up a new industry is really a golden opportunity to make sure that the industry is structured in a sustainable way. I think it is important for the government to get this right. It is rare that the government has this opportunity to launch a new industry and have so much influence over how it is going to be set up.

I am really keen to hear from the parliamentary secretary what the government has done and is doing to minimize the amount cannabis production adds to Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

• (1835)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his tribute to Paul Dewar, whose loss I also mourn today.

Our government has taken a responsible approach to cannabis that includes legalizing, strictly regulating and restricting access to cannabis in order to get profits out of the hands of criminals and cannabis out of the hands of youth.

As it relates to our climate action, our government is taking leadership at home and abroad. We are taking concrete steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support clean growth and build climate-resilient infrastructure. In addition to being among the first countries to sign and ratify the Paris Agreement, Canada is following through on its Paris commitments by implementing a national plan to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30% below 2005 levels by 2030 and to build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

We have a climate change plan. The pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change is the first climate change plan in Canada's history to include collective and individual commitments by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Our plan has more than 50 concrete measures, including a pan-Canadian approach to pricing carbon pollution and new policies, programs and regulations to reduce emissions in every sector of the economy, build resilience to the impacts of climate change, foster clean technology solutions, and create good jobs that contribute to a strong economy.

A key pillar of the framework is putting a price on carbon pollution. When pollution is not free, people and businesses are motivated to pollute less. Our analysis found that carbon pollution pricing in Canada will reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions by 50 million to 60 million tonnes by 2022. That is equivalent to closing more than 30 coal-fired electricity plants.

Adjournment Proceedings

In the provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick, the federal backstop carbon pricing system will be in place to protect the environment and spur innovation. Any direct proceeds collected will go directly back to people in these provinces. Households will receive a climate action incentive, which will give most families more than they pay under the new system. Funds will also be given to the provinces' schools, hospitals, businesses and indigenous communities to, for example, help them become more energy efficient and reduce emissions, helping Canadians save even more money and improve our local economies.

The framework also contains important additional actions to reduce emissions across all sectors of the economy, including phasing out coal-fired power plants, developing new building codes and regulating methane emissions. We are also protecting and enhancing carbon sequestration in our forests and in our agricultural sectors as well as supporting clean technology and innovation.

We have covered a lot of ground since launching the pan-Canadian framework, and we are just starting to see its results.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for providing what I think was a very good overview of the government's general policies for trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but what I was hoping to do in this evening's adjournment debate was really drill down into what the government is doing or could be doing to minimize the emissions from cannabis production specifically. I am sure it is a small part of total emissions for the country, but it is an area over which the government has quite a bit of influence during this period of legalization.

I appreciate that the government might have been caught off guard by this rather esoteric question when I first asked it back in October, but I would ask the parliamentary secretary, in her final minute, to provide a little more information, if possible, about what specifically the government is doing to address carbon emissions from cannabis production.

• (1840)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, a great deal of effort continues to be devoted to implementing our climate plan and reducing emissions. We have also established robust reporting and oversight mechanisms to track and drive implementation of the pan-Canadian framework, including annual reports to first ministers and Canadians. The second annual synthesis report on the status of the pan-Canadian framework implementation was published in December 2018.

Our government is committed to transparency for Canadians as we continue to take steps toward meeting our Paris Agreement targets.

JUSTICE

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak this evening about a topic that came to light just recently again in my area.

There was a crime being committed in a rural area, and there were a number of local people who happened to find out about it. There were shots fired in the air, not at the perpetrator of the crime, but in the air, which stopped the criminal. Eventually the RCMP showed

up and arrested him. Initially the RCMP thanked the local citizens for helping them capture this person. Of course, days later, the RCMP started saying that they did not want people to be vigilantes and that it was their business to take care of it.

This is an ongoing issue. The RCMP have attempted to establish some crime groups in the area to break up some of these criminal organizations, but they tend to be closer to the major centres of Edmonton or Calgary.

There was a constituent I met the last week I was home working with constituents. He discovered someone breaking in and stealing his vehicle, while using a stolen vehicle. His wife had gone to work, thankfully. He happened to own a plane. He contacted the RCMP and said that he was going to go up and fly around to see where the stolen vehicle had gone. The RCMP said, "Great, let us know." The man followed it and was able to get a licence plate number, with technology. That is how he found out that the vehicle was stolen.

The criminals went to another place and broke into another home, where there was a single person home, a woman. He found out later that they stole her purse and keys, and off they went. She came out chasing them. They could see this from the plane. Again, the criminals almost ran over her. Then they proceeded to another area. By this time, the plane had followed them for two hours. The response from the RCMP was that it was dangerous to chase them. It was very frustrating.

People in rural areas are very angry. That is why there was that incident recently where local people shot guns in the air. That did stop a criminal in the act he was committing.

The RCMP is frustrated. The other part of it, as the RCMP will say, is that people are just going through a revolving door in the justice system. If they are caught, they are charged. The RCMP will tell people to keep their keys or check their vehicles, because on their way out the door, these criminals will just steal another car to get out of there.

The revolving door for these continuous crimes is really a problem in my area in rural Alberta. The public safety committee did a crime task force report on it. It is a real problem in the sense that people lack trust. When people do not have trust, they resort to other means. The last thing we want to see is vigilantism and people taking their own guns out.

Adjournment Proceedings

This is a real problem. We need more of a response from the government in the sense of how people can deal with it through resources for the police or the justice system. We need this type of crime dealt with and dealt with soon, before we have a more serious incident involving a homeowner or vehicle owner in rural Alberta.

• (1845)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Bow River's intervention today, but I would like to remind him there are significant crimes happening across this country that really are more serious than property crimes. There are crimes against people happening every day, as well as crimes against women.

Originally, this question came out of the case of Tanya Campbell-Losier, which took place in Brooks, Alberta. These people continue to endure the pain of this woman's loss. While I think we are making some huge headway on this, it is very important not to forget the people who were involved in these kinds of crimes across the country.

I know people are there for the people of Brooks, Alberta, and I know they want to make sure they know they are comforted and supported, but there really is not any comfort to be found in jurisdictional issues and processes and procedures of criminal law. However, in the context of the discussion in Parliament, it is important to be clear. That is part of our role here.

The offender in that particular case is a provincial offender who was incarcerated in an Alberta provincial prison. When he pleaded guilty to manslaughter and received his sentence last spring, it was pursuant to the exact same Criminal Code provisions that were in place under the Harper government. Nothing had changed. When he was granted day parole in the fall, it was pursuant to the exact same criteria in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that were in place under the Harper government. There had been no changes.

Again, that is obviously cold comfort to Tanya's loved ones. They do not want us pointing partisan fingers. They want us to make the system better.

There is a legitimate question to come to this government: What is this government doing to protect women from intimate partner violence and to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes? Here is the answer. We have introduced Bill C-75, which would strengthen the way the criminal justice system deals with intimate partner violence by allowing for longer sentences, reversing the onus at bail hearings for repeat offenders and broadening the definition to include not just spouses but dating partners and former partners.

We have invested over \$200 million to prevent gender-based violence and to support survivors and to deal with the scourge of violence against women. We are providing safe options to women in abusive relationships by devoting a third of the \$40-billion national housing strategy to projects for women, girls and their families fleeing violence. This also helps maintain 7,000 shelter spaces.

Of course none of that brings Tanya back, but it will help more women from suffering her fate. Once again, my deepest condolences to her family and friends, and the community of Brooks, Alberta, whom I am sure continue to miss her very much.

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary mentioned Bill C-75, and I would agree with part of it. However, many of those offences have been downgraded, almost 60 of them, and when the suggestion is not to take property crimes seriously, that statement of hers will ring loudly for a long time in my riding and create anger. If someone has been a victim of property crime, that is a tragic piece.

When she speaks of Bill C-75, which is a slap on the wrist for many offences on property, people become very angry. This is a challenge. Rural crime is still a challenge and it needs to be resolved.

• (1850)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I agree that crime against property is something that hurts people but so is crime against people. The original question had to do with crime against people and it should not be diverted to property crimes.

This is an important issue. We need to change the justice system to hold guilty parties accountable. There is no doubt about it, and that also includes making sure that victims and their families get the support they need.

We have a correctional system that is world class when it comes to safe and effective rehabilitation. It means giving the police the resources they need to protect our communities.

There are so many factors that need to be taken into account and these are the things that we have been working on very hard for the last three years. I hope that we can come together to advance these objectives so that we have fewer victims of crime, whether it is property crime or crime against a person.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the discussion I am initiating tonight arises from a question I asked the Prime Minister before Christmas, a question about government responses to a series of sulphuric acid spills on the roads in and around Trail, British Columbia.

Teck Resources operates a very large smelter in Trail, one of the largest lead-zinc smelters in the world. One of the by-products of that operation is sulphuric acid, which it sells to the U.S. It has to be transported from the smelter. It is trucked to a nearby rail siding about 16 kilometres away to be put on trains. Until recently, that trucking was done by Westcan Bulk Transport.

On April 10, 2018, about 220 litres of sulphuric acid leaked onto southbound Highway 3B from the intersection of Highways 22 and 3B to the Quirk Siding Reload Centre in Waneta, about 16 kilometres away. Emergency responders were on the scene at 9:30 and cleanup was completed by 2 p.m.

On May 23, about 70 litres of sulphuric acid leaked onto much the same area, but a shorter distance, only about six kilometres. Emergency responders were on the scene at 8 p.m. and had cleaned it up by 11:15.

Adjournment Proceedings

Following this spill, Westcan Bulk Transport was suspended as the transporter and Trimac Transportation took over transporting the acid. According to Westcan Group of Companies, initial findings indicated the cause was a gasket failure on the trailer unit and was unrelated to the release that occurred on April 10.

There was a very minor spill on September 22, where only about one cup of acid leaked at the reload centre and that was not very significant. The other two spills were very significant.

The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia reported it had received about 4,200 claims from drivers whose cars were damaged in the April and May acid spills. Over 400 vehicles were written off, including the regional district's main fire truck, a brand new fire truck worth about \$1 million, and a fire command vehicle. On October 10, ICBC filed a notice of civil claim to recover the amounts paid out and it listed, as part of the negligent parties, the trucking company and drivers, International Raw Materials, Teck Resources and the regional district, the City of Trail and the Province of B.C.

The regional district and the fire department have a number of concerns. They are obviously concerned about being listed in this litigation, and they are obviously concerned about the loss of their trucks. They are concerned about how far away the nearest Transport Canada office is. They have the following questions for Transport Canada: Is Transport Canada investigating these acid spills in Trail? What enforcement actions have they taken in regard to the spills? Why was the first and largest spill not even reported to Transport Canada?

Finally, they have heard that provincial staff that do commercial inspections relating to dangerous goods have been cut back through attrition and that part of this cutback relates to reduced federal funding. They would like to know what the plan is to assist communities that need this level of expertise when transportation of dangerous goods incidents happen in their communities.

• (1855)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member of Parliament for South Okanagan—West Kootenay for raising this important issue and for strongly advocating continuing improvement to our dangerous goods operations.

We remain committed to taking all the appropriate safety actions to enhance public safety during the transport of dangerous goods. I would like to assure the member that Transport Canada has a rigorous and robust dangerous goods regulatory framework and oversight program in place, which includes monitoring the safety of dangerous goods operations.

The department operates the Canadian transport emergency centre. First responders and shippers can contact the centre at any time for expert emergency response advice and technical information to help with handling dangerous goods incidents.

The safe transport of dangerous goods is a shared responsibility among industry, provincial and territorial governments, and the Government of Canada. The provinces and territories work in concert with Transport Canada to enforce the transportation of dangerous goods requirements on the highway. Transport Canada

also conducts regulatory compliance inspections in other modes of transport, including marine and air, and leads in the development of dangerous goods regulations in the transportation sector. Where non-compliance is identified, various enforcement actions can be taken, up to and including prosecution.

Incidents by road involving dangerous goods often fall under provincial jurisdiction. In the case of the events in Trail, the Ministry of Transportation conducted an evaluation of all aspects that fall under its jurisdiction and will share its findings with Transport Canada once that investigation is complete.

In addition, Transport Canada conducted extensive follow-up actions to see if there were any issues with the transport operations of dangerous goods, in particular, sulphuric acid in Trail. The results of that follow-up will be shared with safety partners.

The department met with Westcan Bulk Transport, International Raw Materials, Teck's Trail Operations, the fire department, as well as the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia to discuss the incidents. Further, Westcan Bulk Transport, who was contracted by International Raw Materials to transport the liquid, has since been suspended as a carrier. International Raw Materials has since contracted the company Trimac to carry out delivery of this product.

Transport Canada inspectors conducted a follow-up meeting with the company involved to ensure that all regulations were being followed. This includes verifying driver training, reviewing the required shipping documents and inspecting the damaged tanks.

We will never hesitate to take the necessary actions to ensure the safety of transportation of dangerous goods on our roads.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for her detailed reply. She mentioned the Canadian transport emergency centre, which companies are required to report these incidents to. I have looked into the reasons for when they have to report. It would seem that both these incidents would have qualified, yet it was only notified in the second instance and not in the much larger first instance. I am hoping that gaps like that will be fixed because of these unfortunate and serious events.

I want to reiterate how concerned the people of Trail and the surrounding area are about this. A lot of them have lost their vehicles. Even if they get some money back from the insurance company, many people cannot afford to buy a new vehicle. Some people are driving vehicles that may be unsafe because they do not want to bring them in for inspection in case they are seized for being unsafe and they have to buy a new vehicle. Therefore, it is a serious issue.

As I said, the regional governments want answers to these questions so that they can feel comfortable about the services they are providing. When serious issues like this happen, they want to make sure they are doing the right thing. They are relying on Transport Canada for that.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1900)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to continuing to improve the transportation of dangerous goods for Canadians, and those improvements to an already rigorous and robust transportation of dangerous goods regulatory framework and oversight program are important.

At Transport Canada, the oversight activities include monitoring dangerous goods operations; enforcing compliance with rules, regulations and standards through audits and inspections; taking appropriate enforcement actions as required; and working with our provincial and territorial counterparts.

We take incidents involving dangerous goods seriously, and follow-up actions have been conducted to determine if there were any further issues with the transportation of dangerous goods, in particular sulphuric acid, in Trail, British Columbia.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:01 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, February 7, 2019

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Supplementary Estimates (B), 2018-19	
The Speaker	25361
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Leslie	25361
Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lamoureux	25361
Committees of the House	
Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities	
Mr. May (Cambridge)	25361
Canadian Heritage	
Ms. Dabrusin	25361
Petitions	
Pensions	
Mr. Doherty	25361
Natural Resources	
Mr. Johns	25362
Dementia	
Mr. Bratina	25362
Infant Loss	
Mr. Richards	25362
Eating Disorders	
Mr. Blaikie	25362
Questions Passed as Orders for Return	
Mr. Lamoureux	25362

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Indigenous Languages Act	
Mr. Rodriguez	25363
Bill C-91. Second reading	25363
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25365
Mr. Saganash	25366
Mr. McLeod (Northwest Territories)	25366
Mr. Doherty	25366
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25367
Mr. Eyolfson	25369
Mr. Saganash	25369
Mr. Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	25369
Mr. Anandasangaree	25369
Ms. Gladu	25370

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House	
Justice and Human Rights	
Mr. Lamoureux	25370
Motion	25370
(Motion agreed to)	25370

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Indigenous Languages Act	
Bill C-91. Second reading	25370
Mr. Saganash	25370
Mr. Anandasangaree	25373
Mr. Deltell	25373
Mr. Johns	25373
Mr. Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)	25374
Ms. Gladu	25377
Mr. Johns	25377
Mr. Robillard	25378
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	25378
Mr. Shields	25379
Mr. Anandasangaree	25380
Mr. Johns	25380
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25381
Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	25381
Mr. Anandasangaree	25382
Mr. Johns	25382
Mr. Anandasangaree	25382
Mr. Shields	25384
Mr. Blaikie	25384
Mr. Ste-Marie	25384
Mr. Sarai	25385
Ms. Sidhu (Brampton South)	25386
Mr. Lamoureux	25386
Mr. Waugh	25386
Mr. Amos	25388
Mr. Johns	25388
Mr. Gerretsen	25388
Mr. Strahl	25388
Mr. Lamoureux	25390
Ms. Kwan	25390
Mr. Arnold	25390
Mr. Virani	25390
Mr. Deltell	25392
Mr. Johns	25392
Mr. Lamoureux	25393

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Single Tax Return in Quebec	
Mr. Fortin	25394
Eric Hoaken	
Mr. Ehsassi	25394
Children's Fitness	
Ms. Leitch	25394
Margaret Walsh	
Mr. Bossio	25395
Oldest First Nations Newspaper	
Mr. Johns	25395

Ray Walsh	
Mr. Rogers	25395
Canadian Pulse Farmers	
Mr. Dreeshen	25395
Auguste Choquette	
Mr. Lightbound	25395
Canadian Junior Curling Championships	
Mr. Aldag	25396
Carbon Pricing	
Mr. Waugh	25396
Birthday Congratulations	
Ms. Ludwig	25396
200th Anniversary of Province House	
Mr. Fillmore	25396
Government Priorities	
Mrs. Stubbs	25396
Syrian Entrepreneurs	
Mrs. Zahid	25397
Paul Dewar	
Ms. Laverdière	25397
Paul Dewar	
Mr. Poilievre	25397
Paul Dewar	
Ms. Vandenbeld	25397
The Speaker	25397
Oral Question Period	
The Speaker	25398

ORAL QUESTIONS

Justice	
Mr. Scheer	25398
Mr. Lametti	25398
Mr. Scheer	25398
Mr. Lametti	25398
Mr. Scheer	25398
Mr. Lametti	25398
Mr. Scheer	25398
Mr. Lametti	25398
Mr. Scheer	25399
Mr. Lametti	25399
Mr. Caron	25399
Mr. Lametti	25399
Mr. Caron	25399
Mr. Lametti	25399
Mr. Cullen	25399
Mr. Lametti	25399
Mr. Cullen	25399
Mr. Lametti	25399
Mr. Scheer	25399
Mr. Lametti	25400
Mr. Scheer	25400
Mr. Lametti	25400
Mr. Scheer	25400

Mr. Lametti	25400
Mr. Scheer	25400
Mr. Lametti	25400
Mr. Scheer	25400
Mr. Lametti	25400
Mr. Strahl	25400
Mr. Lametti	25400
Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Angus	25400
Ms. Bennett	25401
Mr. Angus	25401
Mr. Vandal	25401
Justice	
Mr. Cooper	25401
Mr. Lametti	25401
Mr. Cooper	25401
Mr. Lametti	25401
Mr. Paul-Hus	25401
Mr. Lametti	25401
Mr. Kent	25401
Mr. Lametti	25401
Employment Insurance	
Ms. Sansoucy	25402
Mr. Duclos	25402
Indigenous Affairs	
Ms. Ashton	25402
Mr. Vandal	25402
Official Languages	
Mrs. Fortier	25402
Ms. Joly	25402
Justice	
Ms. Alleslev	25402
Mr. Lametti	25402
Ms. Alleslev	25402
Mr. Lametti	25403
Mr. Deltell	25403
Mr. Lametti	25403
Mr. Deltell	25403
Mr. Lametti	25403
Pharmacare	
Mr. Johns	25403
Ms. Petitpas Taylor	25403
Transport	
Ms. Benson	25403
Mr. Beech	25403
Justice	
Mr. Poilievre	25403
Mr. Lametti	25404
Mr. Poilievre	25404
Mr. Lametti	25404
Mr. Poilievre	25404
Mr. Lametti	25404
Human Rights	
Mr. Oliphant	25404

Ms. Bibeau	25404
Justice	
Mr. Strahl	25404
Mr. Lametti	25404
Youth	
Ms. Quach	25404
Mr. Schiefke	25404
Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees	
Mr. Whalen	25405
Mr. DeCoursey	25405
Justice	
Mr. O'Toole	25405
Mr. Lametti	25405
Natural Resources	
Mr. Ste-Marie	25405
Mr. Lightbound	25405
The Environment	
Ms. Pauzé	25405
Mr. Fraser (Central Nova)	25405
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Mr. Beaulieu	25406
Mr. DeCoursey	25406
Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mr. DeCoursey	25406
Mr. Cullen	25406
Business of the House	
Mr. Strahl	25406
Ms. Chagger	25406

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Indigenous Languages Act	
Bill C-91. Second reading	25407
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25407
Mr. Lamoureux	25407
Mr. Cullen	25407
Mr. Cullen	25407
Mr. Anandasangaree	25410
Mr. MacGregor	25410
Mr. Bratina	25411
Mr. Eglinski	25411
Mr. McLeod (Northwest Territories)	25411

Mr. Viersen	25413
Mr. Cullen	25413
Ms. Jones	25413
Mr. Eglinski	25414
Mr. MacGregor	25414
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25415
Mr. Viersen	25415
Mr. Nault	25416
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25416
Ms. Jones	25417
Mr. McCauley	25417
Mr. Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	25418
Mr. Nault	25418
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	25419
Mr. Nault	25419
Mr. Deltell	25421
Ms. Quach	25421
Mr. Hehr	25422
Mr. Reid	25422
Mr. Eglinski	25422
Mr. Anandasangaree	25424

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Employment Insurance	
Mr. Eyking	25425
Motion	25425
Ms. Ashton	25426
Mr. Hehr	25427
Mr. Fraser (Central Nova)	25427
Mr. Martel	25427
Ms. Ashton	25428
Mr. Fraser (Central Nova)	25430
Mr. Falk (Provencher)	25431
Mr. Iacono	25433

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

The Environment	
Mr. Weir	25434
Mrs. McCrimmon	25434
Justice	
Mr. Shields	25435
Mrs. McCrimmon	25436
Transport	
Mr. Cannings	25436
Mrs. McCrimmon	25437

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