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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 22, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)
[English]

INDIAN ACT

The House resumed from October 20, 2023, consideration of the motion that Bill C-38, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was two minutes into speaking to Bill C-38 when my time ended on October 20, 2023. I am delighted to carry on today and will begin by reflecting first on what I said five months ago as I preface my further comments.

I really did appreciate hearing the debate in the House that day. Once again it was apparent that we gain far more from listening to those impacted and finding common ground to bring about positive change where needed. There was true concern about the circumstances that indigenous peoples find themselves in as a result of hardships they have faced through abuse and the intergenerational impact of those abuses from the past. Part of the challenge, I believe, is that while indigenous communities are many and have much in common, they also come from different life experiences themselves, and the same realization exists within all people groups throughout the world and those that call Canada home.

Although the long-awaited piece of legislation before us would provide strides toward reconciliation and the reversal of discrimination and inequalities within the Indian Act, it is only a milestone in a long journey of self-determination for first nations across Canada.

First of all I will deal with a reprimand I received in this place from other members who chided me for saying “our” first nations and “our” indigenous peoples, implying that I was suggesting ownership as a statement of colonialism. It might be some people’s choice to define the use of the word “our” as a weapon used by some in an effort to further hurt and create division, but in my case, nothing could be farther from the truth. Divisive rhetoric causes wounds. In my conversation, the word “our” is recognition of the

desire of our indigenous people to be shareholders, not stakeholders.

In the riding of Yorkton—Melville, diversity is not our strength; unity in the midst of our diversity is our strength. In just the past few weeks, I have participated in and enjoyed two Unity in the Community events hosted by the Métis Nation Saskatchewan and the local communities of Porcupine Plain and Hudson Bay, where Métis, first nation, Filipino, Ukrainian, Norwegian, Portuguese, African, and some I think I am forgetting, many different cultures, came together from those communities and packed the building for an entire day of great food, displays, history, clothing, dancing and singing that intentionally celebrated everyone who calls those communities and the surrounding area home. The relationship-building and reconciliation are intentional there.

Another example is the efforts of the Yorkton Tribal Council as an association of six first nations and the City of Yorkton, which are working together to invest in common goals. Then there is the coming together of the Cote First Nation with the Good Spirit School Division, Kamsack School and Isabella and her family, to model grace in reconciliation through the creation of Ribbon Skirt Day. These are fruitful changes that we create.

As we keep these moments in mind, here is a truncated history lesson about the timeline of 45 years of incremental changes that have gone by since the Indian Act was created and implemented in 1876. In 1982, the Canadian Constitution was patriated, and section 35 of the Constitution recognized and affirmed the aboriginal title and treaty rights. Section 37 of the Constitution was amended, obligating the federal and provincial governments to consult with indigenous peoples on outstanding issues, creating the duty to consult.

In 1985, Bill C-31’s amendment to the Indian Act passed, and it addressed gender-based discrimination pertaining to status women who married a non-status man and involuntarily enfranchised and created categories of status Indian registration under subsections 6(1) and 6(2). Then in 2010, Bill C-3’s amendments to the Indian Act addressed gender discrimination in section 6 of the act in response to *McIvor v. Canada*. Subsection 6(2) was amended, allowing women who regained status to pass down status to their grandchildren.

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In 2017, Bill S-3, an amendment to the Indian Act, addressed further gender-based discrimination in the act. The lineage eligible for registration from a status woman who was enfranchised by marrying a non-Indian man was reinstated in 1985, but it is still shorter than the lineage of a status male who married a non-Indian woman. In 2019, continuation of the coming-into-force of Bill S-3 addressed the removal of the 1951 cut-off, where in order for an individual to pass down status, they must have had a child or adopted a child on or after September 4, 1951, and have a mother who lost entitlement due to a marriage to a non-Indian man.

I hope I am not losing my colleagues.

In 2020, the final report to Parliament on the review of Bill S-3 acknowledged residual inequities, including the impacts of a family history of enfranchisement or entitlement registration. Enter 2023 and the introduction of Bill C-38, which responds to a 2021 case where 16 individual plaintiffs launched a constitutional challenge seeking to end inequities and exclusion faced by families that were enfranchised under earlier versions of the Indian Act. An agreement was reached to put the litigation on hold while working to pursue the legislative solution.

Bill C-38 would amend four key issues in the Act. First, individuals with a family history of enfranchisement would be entitled to registration under the Indian Act and could pass on entitlement to descendants with the same degree as those without family history of enfranchisement. Second, individuals would be allowed to deregister from the Indian register if they chose to do so, via an application for removal, without the repercussions of enfranchisement. Third, an addition would be made to Section 11 of the Indian Act that would allow married women to return to their natal band if they obtained status and were registered to their spouse's band before April 17, 1985, addressing natal band reaffiliation. Finally, outdated and offensive language when referring to "dependent persons" would be addressed and changed.

The amendment, with four parts, is estimated to provide eligibility for registration for approximately 3,500 individuals. The individuals who are eligible and choose to apply for registration would have access to the rights and benefits of registrants under the Indian Act. Unlike with enfranchisement, first nations individuals would have more control over their own identity and ultimately determine themselves which services and benefits they would like to access based on the group they wish to identify with. Once an individual has chosen to deregister, they would no longer have access to any programs, services, settlements and/or benefits associated with the Indian Act. That would be their choice.

While this amendment would be a positive stride towards reconciliation and the reversal of discrimination and inequalities within the Indian Act, it would be, as I said, but a milestone in a journey of self-determination for first nations across Canada. On October 20, 2023, I said that indigenous individuals who want to see a good future for themselves and their families do not want to be stakeholders in Canada; they want to be shareholders. I ended on that day, October 20, 2023, by saying that I look forward to that day with them. I had a lot of good response to that comment.

At that time, I had no idea that three and a half months later, an announcement would be made that provides a clear map to a better

future laid out by first nations for first nations, for reconciliation, forgiveness and healing, and for our shared nation of Canada. On February 8, the hon. leader of Canada's common-sense Conservatives committed to enabling first nations to take back control of their resource revenues from big-government gatekeepers in Ottawa. For hundreds of years, first nations have suffered under a broken system that takes power away from their communities and gives it to Ottawa. The Indian Act hands over all reserve land and money to the federal government. This means that first nations have to go through Ottawa to ask for their tax revenues collected from resource projects on their land.

● (1010)

This outdated system puts power in the hands of bureaucrats, politicians and lobbyists, not first nations. The direct result of this "Ottawa knows best" approach has been poverty, substandard infrastructure and housing, unsafe drinking water, and despair. Conservatives have listened to first nations, and we have announced support for an optional first nations resource charge that enables first nations to take back control of their resources and money. This is a first nations-led solution to a made-in-Ottawa problem.

First nations and the First Nations Tax Commission developed the plan. They brought it to Conservatives, and we accepted. This new optional model will simplify negotiations between resource companies and first nations. The FNRC will not preclude any community from continuing to use other existing arrangements, such as impact benefit agreements. The Conservative leader, in his conversation with them, said, "The First Nations Resource Charge cedes federal tax room so communities will no longer need to send all their revenues to Ottawa and then ask for it back. It will also make resource projects more attractive to First Nations so they are more likely to go ahead." Then he said—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The Sergeant-at-Arms just went out to take care of the noise. We are on top of it.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

● (1015)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, in light of what has been going on, I would like to go back to where I indicated that first nations do not want to be stakeholders; they want to be shareholders. I ended my speech back in October 2023 by saying, "I look forward to that day with them." I received an awful lot of very positive responses to that comment.

At that time, I had no idea that, three and a half months later, an announcement would be made that provides a clear map to a better future, laid out by first nations, for first nations for reconciliation, forgiveness, healing and for our shared nation of Canada.

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On February 8, the hon. leader of Canada's common-sense Conservatives committed to “enabl[ing] First Nations to take back control of their resource revenues from big government gatekeepers in Ottawa.”

The news release reads:

For hundreds of years, First Nations have suffered under a broken colonial system that takes power away from their communities and places it in the hands of politicians in Ottawa.

The Indian Act hands over all reserve land and money to the federal government. This means that First Nations have to go to Ottawa to ask for their tax revenues collected from resource projects on their land.

This outdated system puts power in the hands of bureaucrats, politicians and lobbyists – not First Nations. The direct result of this “Ottawa-knows-best” approach has been poverty, substandard infrastructure and housing, unsafe drinking water and despair.

It goes on to say:

Conservatives have listened to First Nations, and...we are announcing support for an optional First Nations Resource Charge (FNRC) that enables First Nations to take back control of their resources and money.

This is a First Nation-led solution to a made-in-Ottawa problem. First Nations and the First Nations Tax Commission developed the plan, brought it to Conservatives, and we accepted.

This new optional model will simplify negotiations between resource companies and First Nations.

The FNRC will not preclude any community from continuing to use other existing arrangements, such as Impact Benefit Agreements. First Nations can choose the FNRC to replace the financial component in Impact Benefit Agreements or supplement IBAs, as they wish. The FNRC will respect all treaty rights and all constitutional rights—including the duty to consult.

Putting First Nations back in control of their money, and letting them bring home the benefits of their resources, will help get local buy-in for good projects to go ahead.

In other words, more earnings for grassroots first nations communities, not Ottawa gatekeepers. Those earnings will mean paycheques, schools and clean water for people.

The leader of the Conservative Party of Canada said:

The First Nations Resource Charge cedes federal tax room so communities will no longer need to send all their revenues to Ottawa and then ask for it back. It will also make resource projects more attractive to First Nations so they are more likely to go ahead.

I am committed to repealing [the Liberal] radical anti-resource laws to quickly green-light good projects so First Nations and all Canadians bring home more powerful paycheques.

When we talk about axing the tax, building the homes, fixing the budget and stopping the crime, that is a promise to every Canadian who lives in this country and every person who is calling it home. What we are hearing about today is just the tip of the iceberg. We are excited about the opportunity we have here with first nations, and we are especially thrilled they have come up with this situation to solve some of the frustrations they experience. We know they have so much more opportunity now to succeed, just as every other Canadian and every other Canadian organization, group or people has that opportunity.

I am so pleased that we, as common-sense Conservatives, are fighting for real economic reconciliation by supporting first nations to take back control of their money and their lives.

It is my home, members' home and our home. Let us bring it home together.

• (1020)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was born in a country that was a colony of foreign rulers for centuries, and I appreciate that people had to face multi-generational trauma.

I am happy to note that she mentioned the word “unity”, which we should use when we talk about diversity. Her comment about using the word “shareholders” instead of “stakeholders” was interesting. Could she explain whether her reason for using the word “shareholder” is because the resources, and the returns they have generated, can be equitably distributed among indigenous people?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, the difference between stakeholders and shareholders was expressed to me by indigenous people. Often, they feel that they are on the outside looking in with the government, where they are somewhat being “consulted”.

However, it is not about consultation. It is about being part of the process and being included, because they are shareholders in what is happening in Canada as much as anyone else. They have the added pressure, because of past circumstances that they have experienced, in feeling that they are not being given that due attention.

That is why, as a Conservative, it was very exciting for me to hear about the opportunity that our leader had. He was asked to come and meet with them, to hear their plan and their excitement about the potential for their futures and taking responsibility for what is truly theirs.

I am also so thrilled to know that in Canada, we all have the opportunity to succeed. That is our goal, on this side of the floor, for when we become government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, given what we know about it, I would like my colleague to explain why the government is disregarding Amnesty International's final report entitled “No More Stolen Sisters”, which was tabled five years after its initial report. We finally managed to make a bit of progress when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came out in favour of a national inquiry into the disproportionate violence experienced by indigenous women and girls. Can my colleague explain that to me?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I am being general at this point in answering the member's question, but women do face disproportional violence in every segment of our society. This needs to change.

I think what frustrates me the most is that the government is picking and choosing where and how that might take place.

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In other situations, as an example, when a woman who is pregnant faces an attack by a third party and she is injured or the life inside her is injured or killed, the government chose to ignore doing something that we could do. That was to bring in a requirement of recognition of that by the judge who is in the process of sentencing. Therefore, we are not even talking about determining whether there was a crime committed. That has already been determined, yet the government chose not to respond to that opportunity.

There are a number of them that I would like to speak to, but I believe we agree that women in this country and around the world should be protected from violence far more than they are.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, part of this legislation is a clause that justifies past discrimination and violation of human rights. It allows the government to have discriminated with impunity and underscores the sense of colonial entitlement.

Does the member agree with the provision of the legislation that prohibits first nations women from seeking compensation for historic harms? Is it justified that the government denied first nations women access to health care, education or safe housing? I think I know the answer, but I would like to hear it from her.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, obviously, I disagree with that.

Part of the reason I went through a little bit of a historical comment from one year to the other was, for me, just to indicate how incremental government can be in dealing with issues and problems when, really, the whole thing could have been dealt with substantially.

That is why I am excited about what first nations have brought to the Conservative Party and that they have asked us to partner with them, to make sure that a lot of those circumstances from the past are nullified, going forward, for their women and girls and for their nations.

That is why, as I mentioned, I spoke to the history and I am also speaking to the wonderful future that I believe our first nations have here in Canada, with the decisions that they are making and that we are encouraging.

• (1025)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's intervention on this important debate on Bill C-38. Obviously, a number of inequities existed after various governments brought forward legislation. That has, unfortunately, hit upon many of the individuals that this legislation tries to target. I know this particular member has worked very hard with indigenous leaders, community members and individuals in her riding, and probably throughout her region.

Could she comment on some of the positive things she has seen and also remark on some of the other inequities she believes need to be addressed by a future government?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, with my role as the member of Parliament for Yorkton—Melville, this is one of the highlights of my personal experience. It has opened me up to a lot

more relationships with the indigenous communities in my riding and within the province.

I can say that, even for myself, it has taken hard work on both sides to build that relationship up. We cannot really succeed at anything if we do not have that relationship. I had the opportunity when we did our Saskatchewan caucus retreat, which we do every winter and summer, to get together with various groups and individuals who want to meet with us.

I had reached out to Chief O'Soup, who is the chief of the Yorkton Tribal Council, to see if we could come and visit. She said yes, and it did happen. However, she came to me and said, "We have never done this before. We are not sure what we are getting into here." We showed up a little late, because we had another meeting. We sat down, and the first thing we did was have soup and bannock, and we started talking. We found out that our senator had gone to school with one of these individuals. Over that time together, we built a realization that we could then talk about some pretty serious circumstances in our community.

I am thankful for the time to say there are a lot of good things going on, and it is at the initiative of our first nations wanting to work with their communities in reconciliation.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech and I appreciate that she is, especially in her riding, building those relationships.

She said early in her speech, and she has repeated it again, "our first nations", and she said something to justify why she uses that term. I find it a bit disconcerting, because it is certainly not the way I would refer to Kahnawake, the neighbouring reserve to my riding.

Could the member say more on that and why she said that diversity is not a strength?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, thanks for the question, because I know it is out there. I refuse to succumb to weakness and for people to tell me what I am defining with the words I use.

I used to coach teams. I would say "our team". These are "our children", these are "our friends". I refuse to respond to anything that indicates that I do not have anything but the deepest respect and passion for—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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

There are discussions being had on both sides, and I would tend to think that the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton would want to make sure that his colleague can answer the question without further interruption.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

• (1030)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I would hope the individuals on the other side of the floor would also show that respect to me.

I am not for more division in this country, and every time we come up with these ways to say someone is saying this or that, which divides people, it is shameful and it needs to stop. This country is one country full of amazing people who want to be united. That is what I focus on and that is what the people in my riding are focusing on.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, good morning to you and to everyone. I wish all hon. colleagues who are gathered here this morning a happy Friday. Welcome to the folks in the gallery as well.

First, I will be splitting my time with my friend, the hon. member for Sudbury, who I get to sit and work with on two committees in this wonderful House.

With that, I would like to begin speaking to Bill C-38, an act to amend the Indian Act—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There seem to be some conversations going on across the floor again. I would ask members if they want to have conversations to please take them outside while someone else has the floor.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I tried to turn the other cheek, but the member for St. Albert—Edmonton has now repeatedly said things that the Speaker has already said are not allowed in this place. I do not know if he needs to be told again. I would like him to apologize. He said things that are, frankly, very untrue and that the Speaker has already ruled are out of order in this place. He needs to apologize for those statements.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I did not hear what was being said there. I certainly will listen to the recordings to see if we can hear what was being said, but I would just remind members that if they do not have the floor, they should not be trying to participate in the debate until the appropriate time, which is during questions and comments or until it is their turn to speak on the debate itself. If they want to have conversations with other members, they should not be trying to have those conversation across the way while the proceedings are taking place in the House, but they should take them out to the lobby.

I will get back to the House if need be.

The hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, before I begin, it is important to acknowledge that Canada's Parliament is located on the unceded traditional lands of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

It is a pleasure to speak today on this topic, and to join my hon. colleagues in providing important information—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There are still some conversations being had. I would again ask members

Points of Order

to please step outside. It is very problematic for individuals who are trying to make speeches. The House has a bit of an echo in here, so when members are speaking to individuals, they do not particularly recognize that the sound does carry.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I believe the conversation is about the duty of the Chair to ensure that people are not slandered or maligned.

The member was standing right beside my colleague and accused her of being a terrorist because she stands up for human rights. If someone is being accused of being a terrorist in the House, you have an obligation to make sure that the rights and the dignity of the member for Edmonton Strathcona are not deprived by someone as low as that member over there.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind members that I just provided an opportunity for someone to raise a point of order, and other members were interjecting when they had not been recognized. Again, this is about respect in the House.

I want to clarify something for the hon. member who just raised the point of order. Unfortunately, I did not hear what was going on. All I could hear was that there were some conversations, but I did not hear the actual conversation itself. I do not know what words were used. I indicated that I would listen to the tapes to see if we could pick something up, and if need be, I would come back to the House.

I would ask all members to be respectful of each other. I know that sometimes words are being said, and I think members recognize full well what is acceptable and what is not. However, when the House is in progress and someone has the floor, that is not the time for other people to interject, to try to have conversations or to be yelling anything out.

• (1035)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. First of all, I agree that nobody should have been speaking during the member's intervention. I am happy to say I was not one of those people.

With regard to the point of order raised by the member for Timmins—James Bay, he ended it by making a personal aspersion against the member. He said that the previous member, and I am not even sure which member it was, had been speaking in an unparliamentary way. That may or may not be true; I was not here to hear it. However, I do know that one cannot then add "by someone as low as that member".

If it is unparliamentary, it is unparliamentary. We do not have the sort of category where certain members are beneath contempt and can say so freely, as the member has just done, and others are not okay. That is just ridiculous. I would encourage him to reconsider that kind of language.

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to indicate again that I just spoke to that. I indicated that I would listen to the tape. I do want to ask members again to respect each other. We are here as parliamentarians. It is no different from when we are out in the community. We want to make sure that people are respectful toward us and that we are respectful toward them.

I just want to ask members to please be very judicious in the words they use and to be respectful with each other. As I indicated, I will make sure we listen to the tapes and look at Hansard to see if we can discover what was said. If need be, I will come back to the House and ask the member to apologize, if need be.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, my point is that at the end of his intervention, complaining about the unparliamentary behaviour of a previous member, the member for Timmins—James Bay added, gratuitous to the comment, that those are unfit comments from “a member as low as that member”. That, I think, is unparliamentary. I might be wrong, but I think that was an unparliamentary addition to the debate by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind everybody to be judicious in their comments.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is rising. I do not know if he wants to withdraw his comment.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I was not clear because I did not identify the member who accused my colleague of being “a terrorist”, and I think that is a very low comment. He is the member for St. Albert—Edmonton. I just want to make sure that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the hon. member to withdraw that part about “as low as that”. I think we can move forward.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): These types of conversations or words being used against each other are not acceptable. It is not acceptable in the House. It is not acceptable outside of the House.

We need to be respectful to everyone. Again, I want to ask the hon. member to withdraw that part, and then we can move forward. As I indicated, I will listen to the tape. If we can pinpoint what was said, then I will be asking the other hon. member to withdraw his comments as well and to apologize.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, absolutely. I respect this chamber, and that is why I am asking you to make sure that members like him do not come in and harass, insult and threaten someone with the language of calling someone “a terrorist” for doing human rights work. It is absolutely abominable. I expect a standard.

I withdraw saying that he is “low” for doing that, but I am appalled by his behaviour.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As I indicated, I will look at Hansard and will come back to the House, if need be.

INDIAN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that C-38, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today on this topic and to join my colleagues, the topic being Bill C-38. Again, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Sudbury, as I indicated earlier, and I will be providing important information about the Indian Act and about the amendments being proposed in Bill C-38.

My colleagues have described how these amendments were developed through engagement with first nations and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations, which was central to the process. We could not do this without their collaboration and guidance. Now, I would like to share the potential impact of the amendments and some next steps in addressing the historical inequities of the registration and membership provisions of the Indian Act, and ultimately, a full transition away from the act to true self-determination and governance by first nations.

The amendments being proposed today are situated within a broader whole-of-government effort to advance indigenous rights to self-determination and to self-government.

Our government acknowledges that the Indian Act is an extension of our colonial history. These amendments would be an incremental step toward the development of an approach to first nations' citizenship that would be an alternative to the Indian Act. We have heard from many first nations individuals and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations that we need to address a range of issues before a full transition of jurisdiction over citizenship to first nations can occur.

That is what we are working toward today by introducing amendments to address inequities in registration and membership under the Indian Act. What would the impact of these amendments be? Let me begin with the proposal to address the discrimination caused by a family history of enfranchisement. This bill would eliminate the differential treatment of those whose family histories include involuntary or voluntary enfranchisement, resulting in approximately 2,400 newly entitled individuals.

It would also reinstate individuals who collectively were enfranchised as a band prior to 1985, resulting in approximately an additional 1,100 newly entitled individuals. Descendants of enfranchised individuals would be entitled to registration and would be able to exercise their rights and access the associated benefits and services, which include education and non-insured health benefits.

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These amendments would also recognize the acquired rights of all individuals to membership in their natal communities. The amendments would provide a legal mechanism enabling women to re-affiliate with their natal bands, if they wish. This would directly benefit those first nations women and their descendants whose membership in their natal bands was changed without their consent or their say. The result would be that first nations women who married first nations men from a different community, between 1876 and 1985, would have the choice to reconnect to their natal community.

The bill would also return autonomy to first nations by allowing them to deregister or to remove their name from the Indian register if they wish. Individuals would have the legal capacity to exercise agency over their status.

Finally, by eliminating outdated and offensive language about first nations persons with a disability, the amendments strive to align the language of the Indian Act with the last 50 years of development in capacity and guardianship law. The outdated and offensive language in the Indian Act is a lingering affront. Addressing culturally insensitive and offensive language would positively benefit first nations persons with disabilities, and their caregivers, by acknowledging their fundamental humanity and personhood, instead of relegating them as defective in some manner.

These amendments in Bill C-38 are considered necessary incremental changes with an aim to align the Indian Act with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; although, clearly, much work remains. By amending the Indian Act to support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the amendments support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 43, which calls upon federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to fully adopt and to implement the UN declaration as their framework for reconciliation.

The amendments also support the national action plan to address missing and murdered women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people by acknowledging and recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples. Of course, we know that the work is not complete. Reconciling the colonial legacy of Canada's relationship with first nations while constrained to the framework of the Indian Act is fundamentally challenging.

● (1040)

During this round of engagement, we have heard loud and clear that the second-generation cut-off issue continues to impact many individuals, and our next focus must be on this issue. An equal application of the second-generation cut-off has resulted in many grandchildren and great-grandchildren being denied status and membership to a first nations community. There are also remaining issues, such as the scrip taking and cross-border concerns.

Further conversations are needed with first nations partners to listen and learn about what future changes may encompass. To this end, starting in early 2024, we will begin engagement on these initial inequities, with a plan to introduce additional amendments once we have engaged broadly. Changing the Indian Act is a continuous iterative process. We unequivocally respect the need for engagement and input from first nations voices. Any future legislative changes will be the result of ongoing engagement and the codevel-

opment of solutions with first nations partners and other rights holders.

Under section 5 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, the Government of Canada must, in consultation and co-operation with indigenous peoples, take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the declaration. The amendments being introduced today are considered requisite incremental changes that both increase the Indian Act's alignment with the declaration while also laying the groundwork for the Indian Act to be repealed in due course. The changes under discussion today are a necessary step to transition Canada out of the business of Indian registration and toward a future beyond the Indian Act.

By addressing historic wrongs in co-operation with first nations, we will continue to advance reconciliation and support a renewed relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples. We strive toward a relationship based on rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

I encourage members in this most honourable House to join me in supporting Bill C-38 and the steps it proposes to begin to move away from the Indian Act.

● (1045)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are having some excellent discourse in the House today regarding this very important issue. I was certainly very impressed with my colleague from Yorkton—Melville on this side of the House, who spoke of some of her interactions and relationships.

I am hoping that perhaps the hon. member can share some of his interactions and relationship building with first nations groups, which, of course, are so important at this time.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, Bill C-38, from my understanding, is going to receive support from all sides of the House. If I am incorrect, then I am sure it will be pointed out afterward. What is important is that we continue to consult and collaborate with first nations people, make sure that we understand their concerns and the areas where we can move forward judiciously and with diligence to continue the process of reconciliation because we know it is imperative for our government, any government and all peoples in this beautiful country, which we are blessed to call home.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always nice to see the government finally implementing some of the recommendations for reconciliation, which is a major undertaking. Still, I think that it is rather shameful that we are not further along in this process, which I think is necessary. The government keeps saying how first nations have been wanting this and waiting for it.

There are some things that are easy to implement. During its study, the committee recommended that an official apology be made to those who fought to put an end to discrimination in the registration provisions. There are some easy things we could do to show that we have a real desire to do more than simply recognize that we are on unceded territory, which means very little or is purely symbolic in the eyes of most of the first nations people we talk to. It does not do much to improve their lot.

I would like to know whether the government is at least willing to act on the suggestions that are easy to implement, such as issuing an apology, for example. We know that this Prime Minister is very quick to apologize if it means he gets to shed a few tears. Is this something that the government might consider?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, Bill C-38 is very important for us.

[*English*]

I want to say that I am very happy to hear that the pertinent committee for this bill did the requisite work and put forward a number of recommendations. It is obviously fitting that we continue to do the work in line with the recommendations in UNDRIP. Obviously, how quickly we proceed in this process will determine the timeline.

On the recommendations that the committee has brought forward, I am sure, in the spirit of collaboration, that all of those recommendations were looked at by the pertinent individuals and parties who put forward this legislation.

• (1050)

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, *kwe kwe, ullukkut, tansi*, hello and *bonjour*. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that Canada's Parliament is located on the unceded traditional lands of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I am thankful for the opportunity to say a few words today as we debate important amendments to the Indian Act, a relic of our colonial history that needs change.

I would like to begin by providing a historical overview to show why these amendments are so important and why we could not be proposing them today without first taking time to listen to and learn from first nations and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations.

Before European contact, first nations had their own, long-established methods for determining citizenship. While methods varied between nations, the issues of kinship and community ties were at the heart of these processes. Colonial administrations, and then successive Canadian governments, introduced a progression of statutes that drastically changed the meaning and the nature of citizenship within first nations. The goal of these statutes was assimilation, and

through the Indian Act, the process of enfranchisement was introduced.

Through enfranchisement, first nations members lost entitlement to registration and membership in their home communities if they wanted to vote in Canadian elections, own land, serve in the Canadian military, marry a non-first nations person or deny compulsory residential school attendance for their children. This legal process not only extinguished individual rights to registration under the Indian Act but also eliminated the right to access a range of rights and benefits, including the ability to vote in their nations' elections.

Individuals, including men, their wives and minor children, could be enfranchised involuntarily or by application. As I alluded to earlier, many parents sought enfranchisement simply as a means to protect their children from forced attendance at residential schools. Some were involuntarily enfranchised when they earned a degree; became a doctor, lawyer or professional; or resided outside of Canada for more than five years without permission.

The implication of enfranchisement in these circumstances was that first nations heritage and culture was somehow incompatible with notions of modernity and professional achievement.

The evolution of the Indian Act had particular consequences for first nations women. By 1869, the definition of "Indian" was no longer based on first nations' kinship and community but instead on the predominance of male lineage and their community connection. Under the Indian Act, a woman who married an Indian man was automatically transferred from her father's nation to her husband's community. Women who married non-Indian men lost their status and any associated benefits completely.

The result of these policies has been devastating. The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls explains how the policy played a role in limiting women's social and economic independence. We know from the national inquiry that social and economic marginalization was among the root causes of the unspeakable violence that indigenous women and girls endure in this country.

There have been attempts over the years to do better, but these have fallen short. Amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 attempted to remove some of the offensive political, cultural and religious restrictions, but they also gave the provinces jurisdiction over indigenous child welfare. This paved the way for the sixties scoop, a painful process where first nations children were removed from their families and communities instead of being provided with resources and supports.

In 1985, the process of enfranchisement was eliminated from the Indian Act. Individuals who had been enfranchised by application had their entitlement restored, but they still could not pass on entitlement to their grandchildren.

This is why it is so crucial for any amendments to be made in coordination with those who are most affected by them. Today we are on a path toward reconciliation. We are trying to listen, learn and do better. Policy development must reflect the recommendations and perspectives of first nations peoples and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations.

● (1055)

For example, through the collaborative process on Indian registration, band membership and first nation citizenship, first nations partners guided the development of Bill S-3, which received royal assent in 2017, came into force in 2019 and eliminated known sex-based inequities in the registration provisions of the Indian Act. Today, because of these changes, matrilineal and patrilineal lines of ancestry are treated equally in entitlement to registration, all the way back to 1867.

Despite the successful removal of sex-based inequities in registration, the Government of Canada and first nations agree that there are still legacy issues that impact women and issues in registration and membership which remain, and these need to be addressed.

In March, the Minister of Indigenous Services reaffirmed the federal government's commitment to addressing enfranchisement-related inequities in the Indian Act as soon as possible. We have been working with first nations individuals and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations to craft these amendments. We are grateful for their advice and guidance, and we recognize how difficult it can be to share their stories over and over again in a struggle for change that spans decades.

The amendments in the bill before us today are the result of discussions with impacted first nations individuals, first nations representatives, Indian registration administrators and national indigenous organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Native Women's Association of Canada, Métis Nation of Canada and the Manitoba Métis Federation. Some provided formal written feedback on the draft of the legislation, while others participated in conversations about the need for and direction of the amendments.

I will now provide a brief overview of what the amendments include. The amendments being proposed will address discrimination caused by a family history of enfranchisement. They will also address individual deregistration, natal band membership and some of the outdated and offensive language in the Indian Act.

They will ensure that first nation individuals with a family history of enfranchisement will be treated equally to those without. The amendments will also allow those individuals who want to remove their names from the Indian register the opportunity to do so. We know this is important for members of Métis groups or American tribes who wish to pursue this option based on the membership requirements of their respective groups.

We note that those who are deregistered will still legally retain their entitlement to be registered under the Indian Act in the future and subsequently transmit entitlement to their descendants. The proposed amendments would also create a legal mechanism that would ensure that women who lost the right to membership in their

natal first nations, prior to changes made in 1985, have the right to apply to have that membership restored.

Last, we know the Indian Act includes all manner of outdated and offensive language. Today's amendments will focus on the term "mentally incompetent Indians", which would be replaced with the more respectful "dependent person."

We recognize that there is much more work to be done to address the colonial legacies in legislation. Starting early in 2023, we will begin engagement on the additional inequities that still remain in registration, including the second generation cut-off. We will plan to introduce additional amendments once we have engaged broadly.

We are committed to working hand in hand with first nations to accomplish this. We are striving to make changes based on recognition and respect for the right to self-determination. It is a learning process. We are learning how to listen and also how to act with humility.

I reiterate my thanks to the first nations individuals and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations who have devoted their time and energy to this process of change, and to the many individuals that work hard every day to make things better in this country. Their resilience and patience paves the way for a brighter future, and I offer my deepest gratitude to them.

It is my hope that this historical context and overview provides members of Parliament with a sense of why these amendments are needed. I hope all members will join me in supporting this important bill and in continuing to work towards true reconciliation.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1100)

[English]

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, small businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy, and our chambers of commerce do incredible work serving and representing member businesses.

This winter, I had the opportunity to participate in two panels hosted by the Greater Langley Chamber of Commerce and the Cloverdale District Chamber of Commerce. These local leadership panels are wonderful initiatives that connect businesses with representatives from all three levels of government and provides them with the chance to ask questions about government policies and other areas of concern.

I am continuously grateful for the hard work of our chambers of commerce in representing the businesses operating in Cloverdale—Langley City. However, these events would not be possible without the dedication and leadership of Cory and Scott in improving our community.

Statements by Members

I want to thank my co-panellists for joining me in participating in the local leadership panels. I also want to thank the business leaders who attended these panels as well as the organizations and institutions that support our chambers of commerce and make these events possible.

* * *

LESLIE DUBÉ

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Speaker, we honour the life of Saskatoon philanthropist, Les Dubé.

Les and his wife Irene have donated millions of dollars in our community for health care, scholarships, education, research, poverty, homelessness and, most importantly, mental health.

Les built his success from humble beginnings. He was the founding member of the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority and served on multiple boards and committees. He holds the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and the Order of Canada. In 2013, Les was awarded as the outstanding philanthropist of the year for North America.

The Dubés were generous supporters of all four hospital foundations in Saskatoon and established a number of charitable foundations bearing their name.

Les is survived by his wife Irene and three children.

We thank him.

* * *

HOUSING IN ST. JOHN'S

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, more houses are going to get built in St. John's, thanks to the housing accelerator fund.

St. John's is getting over \$10 million, which will add over 4,000 homes in the next 10 years, incentivize rentals, allow for fourplexes, more secondary units and the use city lands for affordable housing, and more.

This is part of the \$4 billion we are investing in housing across this country, and it is getting a large number of housing built. It's a lot more than the six, not the 6,000, not the 600, but the six affordable units that the opposition leader built when he was housing minister.

We are working with municipalities. We are changing how we build homes, and we are getting more units built.

* * *

JUNIOR ALL NATIVE BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, this week saw 85 young basketball teams gather in Terrace, B.C., for the Junior All Native Basketball Tournament, one of the largest youth sporting events in British Columbia.

I had an opportunity on Sunday evening to take in the opening ceremony, and watching hundreds of young athletes enter the gym to the sound of the host Nisga'a Nation's drums was a powerful sight indeed.

It takes a huge amount of energy and work to pull off a tournament this big. I want to recognize the organizing committee, the host nation, the City of Terrace, the sponsors and, of course, the players, coaches, family and friends who made this event so special.

Young people are the future, and the co-operation and unity that I saw at this tournament shows that the future is in very good hands.

I wish the very best of luck to all the players heading to the finals this afternoon.

* * *

HOUSING ACCELERATOR FUND

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am excited to rise here today and talk about the building of more and more affordable housing in my community of Ottawa Centre. Thanks to our government's housing accelerator fund, we are building thousands of new, affordable homes across my riding today.

This historic investment of \$176 million will translate into 4,400 new homes across the city of Ottawa within the next three years. By the end of the decade, it will mean almost 33,000 homes in the area for our neighbours to call home. This comes on top of the \$565 million that the government has already spent in my community of Ottawa Centre since 2015 to build another 2,100 new homes.

We can do more. Provincial governments, such as Ontario's Doug Ford government, can change the planning laws to allow for four units as of right. I encourage all members, especially the Conservatives—

● (1105)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

* * *

CHARLES RUSSELL CLARKE

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week, Russell Clarke, one of our last surviving veterans of the Second World War, died just a few days before his 100th birthday. In 1942, when he was 18 years old, Russell answered the call and joined the Royal Canadian Artillery. He saw the first casualties come back to England on D-Day and later served in the Netherlands until the end of the war.

For the rest of his life, Russell would be an upstanding citizen, a pillar of his community, respected and appreciated by all who knew him. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Everyone who met Russell was struck by his decency, humility and kindness.

What was once a living memory for most of us is now rapidly passing into history. There are not many men like Russell left anymore. Those Canadians who did their part in the fight against Nazi tyranny are one by one leaving us to take their rightful place in eternity, men who spent the prime years of their lives far from home.

I offer my best to Russell's family and to the members of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 10.

Lest we forget.

* * *

TRAGEDY IN BARRHAVEN

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on March 7, the community of Barrhaven woke up to the horrific and gut-wrenching news of six people killed, which included four young children, their mother and a family friend.

The entire community of the city of Ottawa and beyond shared the grief and rallied to support the injured surviving father of these kids, Dhanushka Wickramasinghe, and the family of Gamini Amarakoon.

I would like to acknowledge the work and support of the first responders in Ottawa. I would also like to recognize the Sinhalese Canadian community, the Sri Lanka High Commission in Canada, the Hilda Jayewardenaramaya Buddhist Monastery and the Buddhist Congress of Canada for their hard work in supporting the families of those killed.

May the souls of the deceased rest in peace.

* * *

UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the essential work of the United Nations protects human rights, delivers humanitarian aid, maintains international peace and security, promotes sustainable development, fights climate change and upholds international law. Canada is a founding member of the United Nations and our work with the UN has saved lives through peacekeeping, nuclear non-proliferation and refugee programs.

In a display of sheer ignorance, the Conservative MP for Haldimand—Norfolk not only sponsored but apparently wrote a petition to withdraw Canada from the United Nations. This is not just reckless but a testament to the utter disregard that the Conservatives have for global co-operation and sustainable development goals.

The Conservatives have literally mainstreamed the promotion of harmful extremism and far-right conspiracy theories and this needs to be called out. It is disinformation and it is dangerous. The Conservatives want to isolate Canada, abandon our commitments to the rest of the world and sever our ties with the international community. They peddle a toxic narrative of nationalism and blind self-interest, oblivious to the importance of working together for a better planet.

The Conservative petition has been shared and amplified by extremists, anti-LGBTQ groups and the Proud Boys, a listed terrorist group. The Conservatives are the company they keep—

Statements by Members

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind members, when others have the floor, to please not disturb them.

The hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

* * *

CORNWALL CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to add my congratulations to a good friend, Wes Libbey, who was recently named Cornwall's 2023 Citizen of the Year.

There is a saying around home that we chuckle about. It's that everybody loves a good crier, and there is no one better at that than Wes Libbey.

By “crier”, I mean town crier, which is one of the many roles Wes has held in our community over the years. The list of his community service is extensive and spans over 50 years: Kiwanis, Kinsmen, centennial choir, historical society, the community hospital board and its foundation, a master mason and Shriner, just to name a few.

I have had the privilege of knowing Wes and his wife Carole for over 20 years. They are simply wonderful Canadians. Wes said of his award, “Cornwall was good to us, and we like to give back.”

Wes has certainly given a lot back to Cornwall and SDG over the years, through his leadership and volunteering. I could not be more proud to share his service, his story and his award here with the House.

Congratulations and “hear ye, hear ye” to a good friend.

* * *

• (1110)

PETER RODRIGUES

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am sad to rise today to reflect on the recent passing of former Pickering regional councillor Peter Rodrigues.

Peter was a colleague but, more than that, he was a true friend. I am devastated thinking about the fact that our last time together was, in fact, the final time I would see my friend.

We had some memorable council meetings together, and we knew we were in for an interesting debate when Peter started his intervention with “to make a short story long”. Peter was never at a loss for words and he may have been the catalyst for the implementation of speaking time limits for councillors.

Statements by Members

I was lucky to know Peter outside of politics and what I always remember most about him is his unmatched kindness and generosity. He was always helping someone out or volunteering in his beloved Whitevale community.

Peter lived every moment with such joy. I know he would not want anyone to be sad about his passing, but we have lost a fearless advocate for our community and a dear friend to so many.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, waste, fraud and corruption: That is arrive scam and that is what we get after eight years under the Prime Minister.

There was 60 million taxpayer dollars wasted and stolen, and for what? It was for an app that was not needed, that did not work and that caused chaos at our borders. A scandalous 76% of arrive scam contractors did no work, including a two-person basement company that ran away with 20 million taxpayer dollars for nothing. Now the RCMP has launched multiple criminal investigations.

After overseeing all the waste and all the corruption, the Prime Minister has done nothing whatsoever to get taxpayers their money back. After eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the corruption. Taxpayers deserve a refund and they deserve it now.

* * *

CARBON TAX

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of NDP-Liberal inflationary spending and taxes, Canadians are struggling. The NDP, the Liberals and the Bloc had a chance to listen to their constituents, the 70% of Canadians who oppose the April 1 tax hike and 70% of provincial premiers who have asked the Prime Minister to stop this painful tax increase before it is too late.

However, they failed to hear from the food banks that are expecting to see a million more people use their facilities on top of last year's record highs and the third of food banks that will have to turn hungry Canadians away. They failed to hear from the families who have to make gut-wrenching decisions about buying food, heating their homes and buying other life necessities.

Thanks to the NDP and Bloc, the Liberals are still set to hike the carbon tax by 23% on April 1, driving up the cost of everything. Canadians have lost faith in the government. Only common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax and bring home lower prices for everyone.

* * *

LABOUR

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last Thursday, I joined local Unifor presidents Dave Cassidy and John D'Agnolo to welcome the Prime Minister of Canada to Windsor and to our local union hall.

Well over 100 workers and retirees welcomed the Prime Minister and heard him talk about the new partnership with labour; about de-

livering on our battery plant and 2,500 well-paying jobs; and about delivering policies unions have long sought, such as dental care, child care, pharmacare, 10 days' paid sick leave and a ban on replacement workers.

Unions built the middle class and the fight continues. The Prime Minister said thanks to the salt workers who were out on strike for 192 days; the auto workers who bargained the largest contract in history; the transit workers who defended their right to 10 days' paid sick leave; and the workers at Jamieson and GreenShield fighting for better.

It was a historic day at the union hall and a new partnership with labour. The best is yet to come.

* * *

• (1115)

AVIATION INDUSTRY

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canadians want greedy CEOs and mega corporations to stop profiteering off the backs of unpaid work, yet the federal government continues to ignore this issue.

Over 17,000 Canadians called on the federal government to close loopholes that allow airlines to force flight attendants to work up to 35 hours per month unpaid. Six million people watched as the CEO of Canada's largest airline refused to comment.

Workers are being exploited by billion-dollar companies, and the government is letting it happen. At Air Canada, the CEO earned over \$12 million last year, while flight attendants struggled to pay rent and buy groceries.

Thanks to CUPE components across this country, workers are fighting back with a campaign called "Unpaid Work Won't Fly". The NDP stands with these flight attendants and is calling on the government to protect all workers and stop the exploitation by greedy CEOs.

* * *

[Translation]

VÉRONIQUE ET LES FANTASTIQUES

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, we often talk about the importance of saving, protecting and promoting Quebec songs, but it takes more than words. It takes music and, more importantly, it takes people who put words into action.

Oral Questions

It takes people like Véronique Cloutier and the team at Rouge FM, who decided this week that their flagship show, *Véronique et les Fantastiques*, is going 100% francophone. Only French-language music will play on the airwaves during what Numeris says is the country's number one drive-time radio show. The Rouge FM team is sending a strong signal to their entire audience, their competition, and the entire Quebec population.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I say thank you to Véro and Rouge FM for standing up for francophone singers. I thank them for concretely supporting our creators, but also for sending them the message that Quebec is behind them during these difficult times for the music industry. I thank them for proving that we can create extremely popular and highly diversified radio programming thanks to all the talent we have at home.

I want to thank Véronique and the Fantastiques. They truly are fantastic.

* * *

[English]

CARBON TAX

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, do you know the most common question I get in any community I represent? It is not “what are we going to do about this policy or that policy?” It is “when can we have an election?”

This is because, after eight years, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost. However, last night, the Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition abandoned their constituents and decided to prop up the historically unpopular Liberal Prime Minister in the twilight of his disastrous career.

From groceries and gas to home heating and everything in between, it has all become unaffordable.

What is the solution in the minds of the costly coalition members? It is to ram through a 23% carbon tax hike on April 1. How out of touch can they be?

Nobody I have talked to has said that maybe the solution is sending more money to Ottawa. It is time for a carbon tax election, so we can let Canadians decide if they can afford another carbon tax hike.

Common-sense Conservatives would axe the tax for everyone, on everything, for good.

* * *

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada summer jobs is back, and we are ready to help young people gain the skills and work experience they need to succeed.

Last year, through the Canada summer jobs program, our Liberal government invested over \$285 million in organizations across the country, which created over 74,000 youth jobs. I can tell members first-hand the impact that this program is having in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills; last year, we invested in 57 local organizations and small businesses to create nearly 400 jobs for youth.

I want to recognize a few of these awesome organizations that received funding last year in my riding, including the Boys and Girls Club of Peel, Ivan Franko Homes, the Mississauga Dolphins Cricket Association and Music for Every Child, which do so much great work in the community.

I thank all the recipient organizations and all of those who continue to invest in our youth for our future.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1120)

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, in an act of political cowardice, the NDP and Liberals ignored 70% of Canadians and seven out of 10 premiers last night, showing Canadians they do not care. They have abandoned the people whom they were elected to serve by voting to increase the carbon tax by 23% on April 1. They are forcing families to pay higher prices for gas, groceries and home heating at a time when food banks are shattering records.

After eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. If the carbon tax is so popular, why will he not call a carbon tax election so that Canadians can decide for themselves?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada carbon rebate is possible because we put a price on pollution; that is what is driving down the emissions in Canada. Carbon pricing is working in Canada. It is driving down our emissions, and we are doing that while sending more money back to eight out of 10 Canadian families, with the Canada carbon rebate.

However, the Conservatives want to ruin the rebate. They do not want any money to go back to Canadian families. It is very clear what they work for. It is not Canadians; it is big oil and gas. This is Conservative hypocrisy at its finest.

Oral Questions

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government is flailing, and its climate record is failing. In B.C., the federally mandated carbon tax will raise \$9 billion over three years and credit back only \$3.5 billion. I know that NDP-Liberal math is hard to understand, but that is a \$5.5-billion net cost to British Columbians. Seventy per cent of Canadians and seven out of 10 premiers agree.

When will the Prime Minister finally admit that his carbon tax is just like him, not worth the cost, and let Canadians vote to axe the tax?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I find it shameful that the Conservatives continue to use the affordability crisis and Canadians who are experiencing difficulty financially at home as a wedge against climate policy. There is simply not one economist in Canada who has claimed or suggested that pricing carbon is what is driving inflation. In fact, over the last couple of years, as the price of pollution has gone up, so have the rebates, and inflation has come down. That is a negative relationship.

The Canada carbon rebate is sending more money back to eight out of 10 Canadian families. We are addressing climate change and the affordability crisis.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, what is shameful is that, last year alone, the government paid consultants \$21 billion, and now the RCMP is investigating them all again. Conservatives voted non-confidence and called for a carbon tax election so British Columbians could axe the tax. The NDP leader and his member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay voted to hike the carbon tax and keep the Prime Minister.

Over 200,000 people in B.C. are using the food bank every month. Families are struggling, and the NDP leader and his 12 B.C. members are all hell-bent on hiking the tax. If he is so confident—

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

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I find it incredibly interesting that, while Conservatives pretend to care about Canadians, we are actually working to implement legislation and procedures to bring down prices, such as grocery prices and Internet fees.

While we are working hard for Canadians, do people know what Conservative lobbyists are doing? They are creating fake, secret lobbying companies to lobby the government while hiding from Canadians that they are the same chief advisers. They are lobbying for higher Internet costs. The Conservatives should come clean about whom they are standing up to.

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, Quebecers are disappointed today. They are disappointed that an election was not called to change the government. Why? Because the Bloc Québécois voted to save this Prime Minister's career. The Bloc Québécois is kowtowing to a Prime Minister who has encroached on every aspect of Quebec's jurisdiction, who has doubled the national debt, and who is sending 800,000 Quebecers to food banks every month. Voting for the Bloc Québécois is certainly costly.

What did the Prime Minister promise the leader of the Bloc Québécois to save the Liberal government?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Yes, Madam Speaker, Canadians and Quebecers are having a hard time paying the bills. That is why it is so surprising that the Conservative Party is against the Canada child benefit, which has reduced child poverty in my colleague's riding by 40%. It is against the dental care program, which is helping about 7,000 seniors in my colleague's riding. It is surprising that the Conservatives are being so hypocritical and saying things that do not make sense. They are against the Canada child benefit and dental care for seniors.

• (1125)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals' hypocrisy is that they talk about their big agenda while ignoring what is really going on at food banks, or in the homes of Quebec families who are unable to buy groceries every week because they cannot afford them now that the government's inflationary spending has hiked up the price of everything. That is the Liberals' hypocrisy.

We are wondering why the Bloc Québécois chose to save this Liberal government yesterday instead of voting in favour of our motion to call an election. What kind of deal did the Prime Minister make with the Bloc Québécois?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday, March 20, 7,850 families in my colleague's riding received a Canada child benefit payment. On average, families in his riding receive about \$500 a month. That benefit has reduced poverty for families and parents in his riding by 40%.

In 2024, however, the Conservative leader continues to oppose the Canada child benefit.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, the federal government continues to say no to Quebec. While there were glimmers of hope for collaboration on the immigration file this week, it only lasted four days.

Oral Questions

The minister snuffed out that hope in an interview with *Le Devoir*. He is saying no to requiring French for temporary workers. He is saying no to letting Quebec choose which workers are admitted with the international mobility program and no to fast-tracking asylum seekers. Why is this minister unable to put aside his disdain for more than four days?

[English]

Mr. Paul Chiang (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, post pandemic, we had to increase our immigration levels so businesses would have the workers they needed. Our economy is doing well.

We recognize the need to balance immigration levels with pressure from housing and infrastructure, which has led to stabilizing our immigration levels for 2026. We will continue to work with provinces and territories to plan for sustainable and strategic immigration while building the homes we need.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is unbelievable. It has become an obsession at this point.

Ottawa says no to responsible immigration management, no to the right to opt out of new intrusions in health, no to advance requests for medical assistance in dying, and no to the right to protect state secularism. All of those noes came in the span of just five short weeks in Parliament.

With the support of the NDP, the Liberals are attacking Quebec's ability to make its own choices, while the Conservatives sit back and say nothing. Do the Liberals realize how wrong they are if they think Quebecers will accept this?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always interesting. I have a great deal of respect for my Bloc Québécois colleague, but what the Bloc really wants is to pick a fight.

Canada, our government, is working closely with Quebec on everything from health care to immigration. We have even engaged with Quebec on child care to look at what they are doing, so we can implement it nationally. We know that Quebec is there in terms of its commitment. We will always work with Quebec.

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[English]

NEWS MEDIA INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, corporate greed is rampant at Bell Canada.

The Liberals are pouring money into Bell, with no strings attached. Despite massive profits of over \$2 billion, Bell keeps slashing jobs in journalism, hurting democracy and abandoning workers. Bell's CEO slashed 6,000 jobs in the last eight months and will not even show up to committee to be held accountable to Canadians, who subsidize his profits.

When will the Liberals finally stand up for Canadians, rein in corporate greed and protect journalism jobs in Canada?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I first want to say our thoughts are with all the employees and their families who are affected by this difficult news. It is a competitive industry landscape, and companies must continually invest and adapt.

That being said, let us not forget this company has made over \$2 billion in profits and is now cutting thousands of jobs. Clearly some choices have been made. Our government will stand up to protect workers' rights. We have shown that through various pieces of legislation in this House. We will always do that.

* * *

• (1130)

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, as Canadians observe Ramadan and Easter this month, many are scrambling to put food on the table. Organizations such as Feed Ottawa are working hard to make sure no one is left behind, but it should not be up to them alone. The Conservatives refused to help, voting against a school food program to feed kids, and the Liberals are way too busy protecting the profits of grocery CEOs.

The NDP has been pushing for a national school food program to ensure no child goes hungry. Will the Liberals include it in the upcoming budget?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the idea is not without merit, and I thank the hon. colleague for raising it here today.

I am not going to talk about what may or may not be in the budget, but what we do focus on is the well-being of Canadian families. In recent years, we have seen a massive decline in poverty throughout the country and, in particular, child poverty. When Canadians needed their government there during the pandemic, we were there for them, providing all sorts of relief through emergency programs. The Conservatives were on the side of austerity. That party was not there for Canadians. It continues to be against Canadians in that vein. We will continue to be there for the country.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years under the Liberal-NDP Prime Minister and his carbon tax scam, Calgary food bank usage has skyrocketed 50%. Albertans pay \$2,900 into this scam and only get \$2,000 back. There is a really bad Liberal math joke in there that just does not add up.

Oral Questions

Yesterday this costly coalition voted to hike the carbon tax by 23% on April 1. Why is their obsession with the carbon tax more important than the 70% of Canadians who are telling them to spike the hike so they can feed their families?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that Albertans have \$700 more in their pockets every year because of the Canada carbon rebate, and what is important to note is that forest fires, floods, smoke—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members to please hold off on anything they have to say unless they are being recognized.

The hon. minister has the floor.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Speaker, the truth is that Albertans get \$700 a year more through the Canada carbon rebate. That is one of the highest amounts that anybody in the country gets back.

Albertans want us to fight climate change. That is exactly what we are doing. We have had forest fires. We have had floods, and we have had wildfires. Our residents of Alberta want us to fight climate change. What they do not want is the Conservatives to ruin the rebate.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister from Alberta should be ashamed of himself. He is constantly ramming the Prime Minister's woke ideology down the throats of Albertans, when he should be the voice of Alberta at the cabinet table.

Why does he not stand with the majority of Albertans, who say to axe the tax and scrap this scam, instead of standing with the corrupt Prime Minister? I have a simple question for him: Does he have his job references lined up? I ask because, after the next election, he and this carbon tax scam will be gone.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad to see we have reached such a level of collegiality in the House that somehow the Conservatives think they can threaten my job with what residents of Alberta want, which is for us to fight climate change. Where was that person when there were floods in Calgary and when there were forest fires burning Fort McMurray? Those people think it is a joke. It is not woke. They need to wake up. Climate change is real. Real change is \$700 more in the pockets of Albertans. That is the Canada carbon rebate.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday the NDP-Liberal government voted to increase the carbon tax by 23%, making the cost of gas, groceries and home heating more expensive. In my community, in January alone, the Barrie Food Bank saw over 7,000 individuals in need of food assistance and provided 540 emergency food hampers for individuals experiencing homelessness.

This year, a million more Canadians than last year will be forced to go to food banks, but the Prime Minister plans to quadruple this costly carbon tax anyway.

Why is he ignoring 70% of Canadians and the seven premiers who want to axe the tax?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the affordability crisis Canadians are feeling is real, and we need to have real solutions for it, such as the Canada carbon rebate. It sends more money back to eight out of 10 Canadian families.

Conservatives use the words of food banks, food rescue organizations, food security organizations and poverty experts continually in this House, but none of those experts, economists or charities suggest that ditching our environmental plan and axing the tax would help Canadians. Absolutely none of those organizations say that, so if the Conservatives want to continue to use the words of the food banks, they ought to read their reports.

• (1135)

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the numbers right here from the province of Ontario, where the member opposite and I both live. In the province of Ontario, the average family pays \$1,674 and receives a rebate of \$1,047. That leaves them paying \$627 extra. Those facts just are not accurate.

After eight years, farmers in my community are struggling, and they know that the Prime Minister's carbon tax coalition is not worth the cost. The gas bill of a poultry farmer in my riding is almost \$10,000 a month, with a third of that being the carbon tax. This will only get worse when the Prime Minister increases his carbon tax by 23% on April 1.

If the Prime Minister refuses to axe the tax, why will he not let Canadians decide and call a carbon tax election?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what the Parliamentary Budget Officer said is that he is distressed with the selective use of facts from these reports. What he said very clearly yesterday was that the consensus of economists is that carbon taxes are the least interruptive way to reduce emissions. He added, "It is true that the carbon tax is often seen by many economists as the least disruptive and probably the most cost-effective way of reaching certain levels of carbon emissions." The PBO report deserves better than having the Conservatives use selective numbers to try to peddle their climate change denial narrative.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the NDP-Liberal government voted to increase the carbon tax by 23%, making the cost of groceries, gas and home heating even more expensive. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost, as he will raise the carbon tax to \$2,618 in Saskatchewan.

Why are the Liberals ignoring 70% of Canadians and seven of our best premiers, who want to axe the tax?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again Conservatives stand in this place and talk about affordability measures. Meanwhile, their own chief lobbyist for the leader of the official opposition is also lobbying on behalf of big grocers to not sign our code of conduct.

We are working every day to bring in affordability measures for Canadians. While Conservatives talk a good talk, behind the scenes they are there to help their wealthy, connected insider friends.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, last year alone the Prime Minister paid consultants \$21 billion, and now the RCMP has multiple investigations into these Liberal contracts.

On the carbon tax, I would love nothing more than to watch the member, face to face with the good people of Yorkton—Melville, try to explain to them why they are paying \$525 more in the carbon tax after the rebate this year.

Why do the Liberals continue to ignore 70% of Canadians?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad the member opposite brought up the use of consultants. What happened the day after the eighth leader of the Conservative Party, the current leader of the official opposition, came into power? The very next day, the Conservatives' chief strategist created a secret lobbying company. That lobbying company then produced—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, they are yelling, "It's so secret, you found out about it." It is not part of their plan, certainly—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask members to please hold off on any comments or questions they have until they are recognized.

I will ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to start again.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, the Conservatives heckled, "It's so secret, you found out about it." That is right: To their surprise, Canadians now know exactly what they are doing behind the scenes. They say one thing to Canadians, which is that they are going to stand up for them, but what they actually do is set up secret companies to lobby for higher prices against Canadians' interests.

We cannot trust Conservatives, because they are not in it for Canadians.

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, they cannot help themselves. The federal government is interfering not only in Quebec's affairs, but now it wants to interfere in municipal affairs.

Our cities are afraid that Ottawa is getting ready to interfere in the Canada community-building fund, which is actually the gas tax fund, and that the government is taking advantage of the fact that the fund expired in December to add new conditions. What the cities are calling for is for the fund be renewed without conditions

The municipalities know how things work for them. They know what they need. Will the government listen to our municipalities and not add new conditions to the gas tax fund?

● (1140)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government has been very clear on this issue. Our record is also very clear. Relations between the Government of Canada and the municipal governments are very strong.

[English]

We see that. We see that in different ways throughout the country.

We will continue to engage with municipalities on infrastructure matters and related matters. I am happy to discuss further with the member the specifics of his concern, but we see throughout the country that infrastructure support on a range of matters has been supported in record ways by the government, and that will continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, if the feds want to invest money in housing, that is fine. That is not a problem. The government can put money into housing, but it cannot take money from the gas tax fund and use it for anything other than upgrading our sewers, our water treatment plants and our streets, so that it can force cities to build housing. The government would basically be robbing Peter to pay Paul, and that is a problem.

This is one of the few federal programs that is currently working. Now is not the time to mess with it.

Will the federal government drop the terrible idea of imposing new conditions on the community-building fund?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear the member talk about collaboration and housing. That is exactly what we have seen in recent weeks with the extraordinary \$1.8-billion agreement to support housing projects in Quebec.

In fact, it is the biggest single investment ever made in housing in Quebec in the province's entire history. That is why we are so proud of the result, but we know there is even more work to be done and more success to be achieved over the coming months.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the NDP-Liberal government is about to raise the carbon tax by 23% on gas, groceries and home heating, proving that after eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Per capita GDP is falling, and prices are rising. That means Canadians are getting poorer while life gets more expensive.

Only Conservatives have the courage to face Canadians in a carbon tax election, but if they will not call an election, will they at least listen to seven premiers and 70% of Canadians and axe the tax?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is clear now why the Conservatives and Premier Danielle Smith are on this bumper sticker campaign. It is because Premier Danielle Smith is increasing the price of gas in Alberta by a full 13¢ on April 1 through its provincial tax. They just want to scapegoat the price on pollution for their own decisions.

In this case, I actually agree with Kris Sims, the Alberta director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, who said, “Easy to throw shoes at the [federal] government, but then cranking up your own fuel tax on the same day? Not good”. It is Conservative hypocrisy at its finest.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, Liberals are engaging in an orchestrated disinformation campaign to defend their destructive carbon tax. The report of the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer says plainly, on page 4, “Taking into consideration both fiscal and economic impacts, we estimate that most households will see a net loss”. In response, Liberals have deliberately excluded the PBO's economic impacts to artificially inflate their numbers.

When will the Prime Minister end this blatant deception and finally axe the tax?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is incredible. That member from Edmonton is just here to do Premier Danielle Smith's work so that she can cover up her 13¢-a-litre gas price hike on April 1. It is absolutely atrocious that these Conservatives will stand in the House and allow Premier Danielle Smith, under the guise of “axe the tax” bumper sticker campaigns, to peddle the narrative that gas is expensive because of a price on pollution.

What that 13¢ price hike on April 1 does not include is a rebate, the Canada carbon rebate, which rebates every single dollar of the Canada price on pollution back to consumers. That 13¢ hike does not—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members to please keep the tone down.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin has the floor.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, you will notice that the member did not even try to answer my question. On page 3, the independent PBO states, “We incorporate estimates of the economic impact from the federal fuel charge into our calculation of net cost to provide a more complete picture of the overall impact on households”.

Taking into account that economic impact, the carbon tax clearly makes families in every province worse off. The report says that, in Alberta next year, families will pay almost \$1,000 more than they get back in rebates, at a time when it costs more than ever for even the basics of life. How can any Alberta Liberal or NDP MP support this 23% tax increase?

● (1145)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the PBO and the Auditor General have said very clearly that they are distressed with the selective use of facts from that report. They also said that the economic cost is important to look at because there is a price to climate change. Climate change cost the Canadian economy over \$2 billion last year, and it is likely that it is going to cost more this year because of wildfires adjacent to the member's riding.

It is atrocious that the Conservatives stand in the House and misuse the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report. He said very clearly that the consensus of economists is that carbon taxes are the least interruptive way to reduce emissions and that rebate sends eight out of 10 families more—

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

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, today is the Prime Minister's last opportunity to walk back his April Fool's joke, the carbon tax hike.

Canadians are struggling, but the Bloc Québécois wants to drastically increase the carbon tax, which will drive up the cost of gas by 20¢ a litre and have a massive impact on food prices.

The Bloc Québécois is keeping the Prime Minister in power even though he broke our immigration system, raised taxes and doubled the national debt.

What promise did the Prime Minister make to the Bloc Québécois to keep his government in power?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada carbon rebate is putting more money in the pockets of eight out of 10 families. That is because carbon tax revenue is given back to Canadians.

Big polluters pay more. That is why middle-class and lower-income families get more money. Eight out of 10 families have more money in their pockets thanks to the carbon tax.

What the Conservatives want to do is reward big polluters while taxing, penalizing and punishing families in the middle class and those working hard to join it.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, young people are worried. They will bear the brunt of the climate crisis. They want, or I should say they deserve, more of a say when it comes to tackling the climate emergency. A youth climate corp would do just that, all while creating good-paying jobs.

The Conservatives have no climate plan, no plan to protect young people's future. The United States is already doing this, but because the Liberals are dragging their feet, Canada is being left behind. Will the Liberal government stop letting young people down and create a youth climate corp?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was proud to join the call with my colleague from Victoria, as well as the leader of the Green Party, to meet with youth across the country who are interested in fighting climate change. Notably, no Conservative joined that call with the youth.

However, it is important to recognize that kids across this country are concerned about the impact we are having on our natural environment. We are employing more of them through the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's green jobs program, through Canada summer jobs and through the Minister of Environment and Climate Change's youth advisory committee.

We have got to do more to listen to youth. We have two weeks back home, and I hope everybody will do a school visit.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, Joe Biden has created a clean energy economy with 100,000 new jobs, while the Liberal government continues to stum-

Oral Questions

ble. We are just days away from the shutdown of the mineral exploration tax credit program. We cannot build a 21st century economy without metals, and those metals have to be found.

Is the government going to outsource metal production to China or Congo, with its horrific human rights abuses, or will it support exploration in Canada where we have good wages, indigenous consent and strong environmental standards?

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government and the Canadian population have created 40,000 new jobs in February. As the member mentioned, the mineral exploration tax credit is important to support exploration companies and junior companies. We, as a government, for the first time in 2017, extended the mineral exploration tax credit for five years to provide certainty to the industry.

We are working with the industry right now. We are looking at the budget, which is coming shortly, but we are going to make sure that we support our critical minerals and mining industries, and that we support mineral exploration in this country.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Africa is home to five of the top 10 fastest-growing economies in the world. I am proud of our government's investments to help businesses in my riding and across Canada reach new markets, including Africa. Earlier this year, the Canada-Africa Chamber of Business hosted the second Canada-Africa Business Conference in Kenya.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister International Trade update the House on his recent attendance at the conference, the opportunities for Canadian and African businesses to grow, and what that means for businesses in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre?

● (1150)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada-Africa Business Conference reaffirmed the incredible value of export diversification and growing trade across Africa for Canadian businesses. It was a great success, which I know will help in collaboration and growing our industries.

While in Nairobi, I got to see first-hand why Canada is recognized among the leading aerospace industries in the world. Let us continue to build on this momentum and enhance our trade ties with Africa, as we know this creates good-paying jobs right here and across Africa.

Oral Questions

I thank the member for Winnipeg South Centre for his leadership in helping to grow trade and our economy.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Bloc and NDP shamefully voted to save the Prime Minister from a carbon tax election. Instead, they voted in favour of a 23% tax hike on Canadians just 10 days from now. That is no April Fool's Day joke.

Let us be clear. That vote was not about saving the environment. It was about saving their pensions. After eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, Canadians are struggling more than ever. More Canadians are going to food banks. There are more mental health crises.

Will the Prime Minister stop ignoring 70% of Canadians and seven out of 10 premiers, and axe his tax?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wish we could put a price on the methane coming out of the Conservative Party these days.

Let us talk about hypocrisy. While our government is working hard to implement real solutions on the affordability challenges, Conservatives oppose and obstruct every step of the way.

The Leader of the Opposition, we have found out, is being advised by Jenni Byrne, who also lobbies for Loblaw. The day after he won his leadership campaign, with her help, she set up a shell company to start lobbying for him. What we have learned now is that Jenni Byrne's senior VP—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. for Edmonton Manning.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, on the second anniversary of the NDP-Liberal love affair, this nonsense government chose to vote for a 23% hike on the carbon tax, making the cost of gas, groceries and home heating even more expensive. This will cost the average Albertan an extra \$911 per year.

The Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Why is he still ignoring the 70% of Canadians and the seven premiers who want to spike the hike and axe the tax?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, not only is Jenni Byrne lobbying for Loblaw and advising the Leader of the Opposition, but she is also attending Conservative Party caucus meetings every week. She set up a shell company, and her senior VP is lobbying the very office that she advises. If that is not double-dipping, I am not sure what is.

I think all Canadians deserve some answers here. Let us stop the pretending. Whose corner are the Conservatives actually in?

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, maybe someone will try to answer a question for a change.

Seeding is fast approaching. Farmers are busy preparing equipment, seeders and trucks; purchasing fuel, fertilizer and seed; and arranging families, workers and their financing. Their situation has never been more desperate.

The carbon tax has escalated their fears, and now with a 23% increase coming as of April 1, it has only made their stress greater. With his inflationary spending, the Prime Minister and his NDP-Liberal government are not worth the cost. Will the government spike the hike and axe the tax?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the only party stalling Bill C-234 is their party. They keep putting up speakers.

Speaking of farmers, farmers need to rely on business risk management programs. We are the only party that has increased business risk management programs and their budgets by 25%, while the other side cut their budgets.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years, we know the Liberal-NDP government is just not worth the cost.

Now on April 1, the carbon tax is going up by 23%. We know that the Liberal-NDP carbon tax scam only makes Canadians poorer. We also know that, if they tax the farmer who grows the food, tax the trucker who brings the food to the store and tax the store that sells the food, Canadians cannot afford food. When will the Liberal government see the facts and axe the tax?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when will the member of Parliament, and the climate dinosaurs on that side of the House, wake up to the fact that the planet is burning. He is from northern Alberta. He knows what impact the forest fires had in Fort McMurray. He knows the impact of floods in Calgary.

The Canada carbon rebate is responsible for reducing our emissions by 25%. Albertans in his area get more money than other Albertans because of the rural top-up. What they are trying to peddle to Albertans is shameful. There is a 13¢ gas tax hike from the premier, and they are on us. What a shame.

Oral Questions

• (1155)

*[Translation]***SMALL BUSINESS**

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, we knew that the January deadline for paying back the Canada emergency business account without penalty was threatening the survival of our SMEs. We did everything we could to warn the government. Now it is reaping what it sowed.

The Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy reported that the number of insolvency cases climbed by 129% in January. January 2024 was the worst month on record since the office was established 40 years ago. We are seeing a wave of bankruptcies because of the intransigence of this visionless government. What is it going to do today to stop the bleeding?

[English]

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and to the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the CEBA program supported over 900,000 small businesses through the pandemic, and we estimate that 80% of them have repaid their loans so far.

As we move away from the pandemic, we are taking serious, concrete action to support small businesses, both by providing funding and by cutting costs. We recently finalized an agreement to cut credit card fees by up to 27%, which will save small businesses across Canada \$1 billion.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, let us talk numbers. In 2023, Equifax had already reported a 44% increase in business bankruptcies. Based on the January 2024 data, this year will be even worse.

No one in the House should consider that acceptable. The government has to be flexible with businesses. It needs to talk to them directly and examine files on a case-by-case basis. It cannot continue to be there just for the sake of it and do nothing as companies go bankrupt.

When will it finally open its eyes and take responsibility for preventing bankruptcies?

[English]

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and to the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we move forward from the pandemic, small businesses have nearly three years, until the end of 2026, to repay their CEBA loans, and they have access to interest rates as low as 5%.

Meanwhile we are investing in communities in order to strengthen our economy. Earlier this month we announced \$2.5 million in federal funding to enhance the indigenous women's entrepreneur program and create an indigenous youth entrepreneurship program.

*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, in eight years, this Liberal government has managed to break our immigration system, destroy our economy and double our national debt. Taxes, fuel and food cost more, but what costs the most is voting for the Bloc Québécois. It is not too late to lower taxes. The Bloc Québécois can lower taxes, but it does not want to.

Canadians have suffered enough. What did the Prime Minister promise the Bloc Québécois in exchange for its unconditional support?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, here we go again with the Conservative Party, the party of despair and inaction in the House of Commons.

We are talking about working with Quebeckers and Canadians to make life more affordable, to create jobs, to be part of the 21st-century economy and to support the union system. We are here for action, for Quebeckers and for Canadians. The Conservatives just want to pick fights.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, the people who are in despair are Quebeckers.

After eight years of this Liberal government, the Bloc Québécois is doing everything it can to keep the Prime Minister in power; the same Prime Minister who destroyed our economy so badly that people across Canada are unable to meet their basic needs. What is the point of the Bloc Québécois? It is there only to serve the Prime Minister. While Canadians are struggling to put food on the table, the Bloc Québécois insists on drastically increasing taxes.

Can the Prime Minister disclose the terms of his contract with the Bloc Québécois to keep him in power?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the first thing we did when we came to power was lower taxes for the middle class. The first thing the Conservatives did was vote against that. The second thing we did was bring in the Canada child benefit. The second thing they did was vote against the Canada child benefit.

Now, if my colleague wants to know more for his riding, I invite him to invite me, or to invite other people, to visit three recent housing projects: the Montmagny street project, Les Habitations au Fil du Fleuve and Villa Rose des vents. These projects helped create, in his riding alone, several dozen affordable rental units, when in his entire career as Minister of Housing, the Conservative leader created six affordable housing units.

Oral Questions

• (1200)

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister was ordered by Parliament to turn over the arrive scam receipts and to come up with a plan to get taxpayers their money back. What the Prime Minister tabled this week is nothing more than a whitewash. We still do not have the receipts, and the Liberals do not have a plan to get taxpayers their money back.

Therefore I ask for just a number: How much money did the Liberals award fraudsters and scammers, and when will taxpayers get a refund?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have said before in this place, we take these allegations extremely seriously. We expect all contractors in the procurement process to follow all the rules. For anyone who does not follow those rules, there will be consequences.

The CBSA has already put in place several new measures to improve the procurement process. There have been announcements made as well with the Minister of Procurement to ensure that the procurement process throughout government is transparent and accountable, and that questionable issues like this do not happen again.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in a world where global co-operation and support for the most vulnerable are more critical than ever, the Leader of the Opposition has proposed cuts to what he calls wasteful foreign aid.

Can the minister clarify the impact of these cuts on Canada's security, as well as on our standing as a moral leader globally?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the leader of the official opposition's proposed cuts threaten to undermine our global role in peace, security and stability, as well as undermine the peace, safety and security of Canadians. Cutting programs like demining and helping conflict-affected children risks our global reputation. The proposed cuts would signal a retreat from global leadership at a time when global challenges actually demand that we do more and that we collaborate with other nations.

If he is willing to make these dangerous cuts that threaten the peace and security of Canadians, what else is he going to cut? He is simply not worth the risk.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been five years. When is the government going to list the IRGC as the terrorist organization that it is?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we obviously recognize and condemn the Iranian government as a state sponsor of terrorism. We have implemented several measures to ban members of the IRGC from entering Canada. We have put in place sanctions.

We will take the advice from our national security advisors and officials who make these recommendations. We will do everything to keep Canadians safe.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals said last year that they were working on it. Yesterday the minister changed the story, citing that his agency did not even give him that advice. Today I do not understand that answer, neither will Canadians, so what answer is it, which story?

There is a minister over there who will not condemn the most vile anti-Semitism, and another minister who held hands with a literal terrorist. Is there no courage at all?

I am going to ask one more time: On what day will you list the IRGC as the terrorist organization it is in this country?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member knows full well she needs to address all questions and comments through the Chair and not directly to members.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we condemn and acknowledge that the Iranian government is a state sponsor of terrorism, and we have put in place robust sanctions. We have used the immigration legislation to ban people from visiting Canada.

We will continue to listen to the advice of security services, but make no mistake: We recognize that the IRGC is a state sponsor of terrorism, and we will do everything to keep Canadians safe.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, while the clerical regime brutalizes women in Iran, it exports terror abroad: Russia and Ukraine, Houthis in Yemen, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Iraqi militia.

This week, victims of Hamas atrocities shared their stories. Like the families of PS752 victims, they are calling on the government to list the IRGC as a terror organization.

Oral Questions

It has been five years. On what day will the NDP-Liberals stand up for victims and list the IRGC?

• (1205)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are listening to Canadians and we take this matter very seriously. This is precisely why, as I said in my earlier answers, we have put in place robust sanctions against the IRGC. We have recognized Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. We are using immigration legislation to ensure that there is a ban on entering Canada.

We will continue to listen to the advice of security services, because we will do everything in our power to keep Canadians safe.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians expect their government to take action on climate change and address affordability issues. Putting a price on carbon while sending rebates to Canadians is the most cost-effective way to fight climate change. Affordability is front and centre in this system, which puts more money into the bank accounts of Canadian families.

Can the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change share with the House how the Canada carbon rebate helps Canadians?

Mr. Adam van Koevreden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada carbon rebate is made possible because we put a price on pollution to lower our emissions and fight climate change. Affordability is front and centre in this system, which literally puts more money back into the pockets of eight out of 10 Canadian families.

Conservatives offer no solutions and continue to spread misinformation about climate change to Canadians. They want to cut the Canada carbon rebate payments that are helping Canadians during these challenging times. Instead, they want to help their friends in big industry continue to pollute freely.

It is clear that the Conservatives do not care about fighting climate change. They want to raise emissions in Canada, and they do not care about our children's future. It is a shame.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday I asked the environment minister whether he would commit to doing what it takes to ensure that weather stations on the B.C. coast remain up and running this coming winter. These stations, like the Holland Rock weather station near Prince Rupert provide critical life-saving information for mariners. The Holland Rock station has not been working since early January. In his response, the minister said he will do what he can but that he is not the finance minister.

Will the finance minister ensure that Environment Canada has the resources they need to keep the critical life-saving weather stations up and running all winter?

Mr. Adam van Koevreden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad that my colleague opposite is raising this important issue. It offers me an opportunity to highlight the announcement we made last week for 32 new state-of-the-art radar stations right across this country. They will add to the safety of Canadians and provide more reliable weather information in advance of extreme weather. In the face of climate change, unfortunately these events are likely to happen more and more.

I appreciate the highlight from the hon. member from the NDP. I will work with his office to ensure that the weather station is up and running in due course.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Madam Speaker, the pharmacare deal by the governing coalition makes Canadians again wait for the smoke and mirrors to clear. They have seen a dented dental deal that leaves out the middle class and makes seniors wait until age 87. They have seen numerous carbon tax grabs rake in billions but do little for the environment, and they have seen a child care strategy eliminate 100,000 spaces. Finally, they have seen a cannabis policy that has actually grown a huge black market. Canadians are not fooled by the half-schemes of the Liberal government and its NDP buttress.

The emperor has no clothes. When will he take his walk on the beach?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I remember that not too long ago the member was begging to be a member of the Liberal caucus. That did not really work out for him. He is now auditioning to join the other side. He can. He will find a place over there, where they want to cut child care, dental care and pharmacare.

A few weeks ago, when the government tabled pharmacare legislation, the Leader of the Opposition ran away from reporters at a press conference when they asked him about pharmacare. That party does not care about the middle class and does not care about the vulnerable.

We are going to do all these things that Canadians require in order to ensure success.

Oral Questions

• (1210)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would like to raise an issue with regard to some statements made before question period that concern not only all members of the House but all Canadians. When I read the famous green book, on page 640, I see here that it says, the Premier of P.E.I. notes that a 23% increase in the carbon tax is a “punitive and unfair tax” and calls for it to be removed—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): First of all, no matter what book the hon. member uses, whether it is a book that we have here in the House of Commons or any other book, it is a prop. I would just say that this is actually a point of debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During question period, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement spoke of hypocrisy. According to one article, police are monitoring the line at a Montreal food bank because people were fighting over food. I request unanimous consent to table this TVA Nouvelles article, which shows the Liberal government's hypocrisy.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I am rising at my first opportunity on a point of order related to decorum in this place, and I specifically reference Standing Order 10 and Standing Order 16, arising from the extreme levels of noise, chanting, banging and other things that disrupted decorum during last night's votes.

The first vote was on an opposition motion, and then there were numerous votes related to matters of supply put forward by the President of the Treasury Board. It was impossible to hear the names of the members as they stood to vote. It created confusion, and I am trying to find the exact rule that deals with how we should conduct ourselves while votes are taking place. I do think Standing Order 16 is the most relevant, that “When the Speaker is putting a question, no member shall enter, walk out of or across the House, or make any noise or disturbance.”

I hope the Speaker can provide guidance so that members will know how to conduct themselves while votes are taking place.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the hon. member bringing that forward. I am sure that she will remember that I also did raise this yesterday, because it was very difficult for the table officers to hear what was going on and to hear each other call the members for the votes.

I do want to remind members to please be respectful and to please keep the noise level down, especially when we are having votes. In fact, doing this at all times would be best.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Speaker, on that point of order, we applied most of the votes last night. With the fact that there was some noise in the chamber, the Speaker brought all proceedings into line. This is the Speaker's job. It is not the job of individual members to stand up and chastise everyone in the House. Our Speakers are in control of the proceedings, and we—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would say that when members raise a point of order about decorum in the House they are not chastising members, but I do want to remind members, again, that it is up to every parliamentarian in the House to ensure that they respect the rules of order in the House to ensure that the House can flow properly.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

“Unfair and misguided” is what the Premier of Nova Scotia called this carbon tax hike. I would like to seek unanimous consent to table this document, in which the premier has—

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During question period, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement talked about housing. With the consent of the House, I would like to inform the House of a problem that currently exists in Laval, where one landlord has raised the rent by more than \$500 despite a serious infestation of cockroaches, mould and mice. Some tenants in Laval were surprised to be subject to substantial rent increases, even though the building and individual units have received no attention or maintenance for years. With the kindness and consent of the House, I would like to table the article.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Following question period today, in some of the exchanges regarding the carbon tax and the news that Western University's food bank has seen a 600% increase in its usage and that 40% of all post-secondary students—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I have already indicated that there is no unanimous consent on this point.

Before we continue with the points of order being raised, I would like to ask members, if at all possible, to make sure that we use the time of the House efficiently. If members are seeking unanimous consent, I ask that they do attempt to negotiate that in advance with the House leadership from the different parties. That way we can make sure that we use the time efficiently.

The hon. member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, yesterday, the Premier of Ontario put out a statement that said, “People across Canada are hurting right now from the high cost of living. The federal governments needs to put—

Routine Proceedings

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period, the member for Pickering—Uxbridge was talking about how great Canadians have it because of their government, but I just want to remind her that a 40% increase—

The Speaker: Fortunately, the hon. member is a very credible and capable member and understands that this is a point of debate.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief with my point of order. Up to 50 military families from CFB Gaagetown are using the local food bank every month. Despite that, the carbon tax is—

The Speaker: This is a similar point to what was raised by the hon. member for Thornhill, so I am afraid we are entering into debate.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, during debate today, there were multiple references to my great province of British Columbia. I would ask for unanimous consent to table this letter from the—

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. John Williamson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the New Brunswick premier has written the Prime Minister, calling on him to cancel the carbon tax. I seek unanimous consent to table this—

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, on a more serious matter, the member for Cambridge, in responding to a question from the Bloc Québécois on the status of small businesses, failed to note that business insolvencies are up 41%. Therefore, I ask unanimous consent—

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I will just wait for everyone unintelligent to yell “debate”, but previous to that, I would just like to point out that we heard a definite concern from the member for Milton about Alberta, in addition to—

Some hon. members: Debate.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I have not even said anything—

The Speaker: It is always in everybody's interest, and I say this to all members quite sincerely, if members want to raise a point of order, that they get straight to the point of the point of order they want to bring up. Otherwise, when we hear the premise and the introduction, it is often getting into debate and it forces the Chair to say that it is a matter of debate, as opposed to either seeking unanimous consent or raising a point of order.

The hon. member should either raise a point of order or seek unanimous consent right away.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of Milton mentioned Premier Smith. I also have some comments regarding Premier Smith. They are that she is also encouraging the government to get rid of this 23% carbon—

The Speaker: I will invite the hon. member to please sit down because this is clearly a point of debate.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I just remind members of the House that it costs \$80,000 to run the House for an hour. The Conservatives' filibuster has cost \$20,000 to Canadians—

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby for reminding the House of all of the expenses that are required when we do not take the opportunity to negotiate these things in advance. I do ask members to do this.

I see that the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame is rising to his feet. I do hope that the member will either raise a point of order or get immediately to the request for unanimous consent.

● (1220)

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I think we will have consent for me to table this letter that was written by—

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On page 75 of the most current B.C. budget, it does say that the Province of British Columbia is federally mandated to implement the carbon tax. Therefore, I would like unanimous consent—

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF CANADA

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, in both official languages, information that we received from the Public Service Commission of Canada concerning the 2020 to 2023 annual reports.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 18 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill C-332, an act to amend the Criminal Code, controlling or coercive conduct.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 37th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to the motion adopted on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, regarding “Report 1: ArriveCAN” of the 2024 reports of the Auditor General of Canada. That motion reads: “That the committee report to the House that it calls on the government to prohibit any government employee from simultaneously working as an external contractor.”

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 38th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in relation to a motion adopted on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, regarding “Report 1: ArriveCAN” of the 2024 reports of the Auditor General of Canada. That motion reads: “That the committee invites the President of the Treasury Board, Anita Anand to appear for no less than two hours in relation to the ArriveCAN study, and that this meeting occur within three weeks of this motion being adopted.”

* * *

SPECIAL SERVICE MEDAL FOR DOMESTIC EMERGENCY RELIEF OPERATIONS ACT

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-386, An Act respecting the establishment and award of a Special Service Medal for Domestic Emergency Relief Operations.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise to today and table my new private member's bill, an act respecting the establishment and award of a special service medal for domestic emergency relief operations.

This bill would establish a service medal for Canadian Forces members, RCMP, firefighters and first responders who participate in domestic emergencies, like wildfires and floods. Military personnel, RCMP, firefighters and first responders are on the front lines each and every day. They are our heroes who wake up with the knowledge that when they go to work they may not come home.

Real heroes do not wear capes. They wear arm patches that say “Firefighter”, “RCMP” and “Canadian Armed Forces”. They protect us. They care for us when we need help, and they are the silent sentinels who protect all of us. They put their lives at risk to protect Canada and Canadians both in their normal duties and domestic

emergency relief operations. Their bravery and sacrifice should be recognized and rewarded with the highest honours.

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

* * *

● (1225)

PETITIONS

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition in the House today to expand the food fishery for cod in Newfoundland and Labrador to allow for the retention of codfish every day from July 1 to October 1 of each year.

The petition, signed by 3,945 people and the sponsor of the petition, Mr. Graham Wood of Lewisporte, calls on the Minister of Fisheries to announce the dates and regulations for the food fishery by May 1 every year instead of near the end of June, as has been the NDP-Liberal tradition.

The three-day weekend food fishery presents a safety issue for those who take part. It also puts extra strain on DFO conservation and protection resources, as well as the 103 Search and Rescue Squadron in Gander.

The folks who signed this petition feel that it will lead to less pressure on the codfish resource and that there will be less cod taken because it takes away the rush. Everyone wants to get out on three-day weekends; now people will procrastinate, wait and wait and put it off, which will lead to less fewer being taken.

The FFAW opposed the petition because it thinks it will lead to more fish being taken, but the FFAW has bigger fish to fry. I have its back and will support it in many ways—

The Speaker: I would remind members that, when they present petitions, they should not indicate whether they are for or against or give an opinion. They should just present the petition.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Speaker, I present this petition on behalf of the nearly 4,000 people of Newfoundland and Labrador who signed it in 30 days.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to present a petition from Canadians across the country, including many of my own constituents, who are concerned about the consent and age verification of those depicted in pornographic material.

The petitioners ask for the government to follow recommendation 2 of the 2021 Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics report on MindGeek. This requires that all content-hosting platforms in Canada verify age and consent prior to uploading content on platforms that operate on a commercial basis.

Bill C-270, the stopping Internet sexual exploitation act, would add two offences to the Criminal Code. The first would require age verification and consent prior to distribution; the second would require the removal of that material if consent is withdrawn. As such, the petitioners are calling for the quick passage of Bill C-270, the stopping Internet sexual exploitation act.

• (1230)

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition to the Government of Canada. The petitioners recognize that, although it has been many years since the first use of nuclear weapons demonstrated their awesome powers, we remain under the constant threat of warfare today. This could result in devastation from which the world would never recover.

The petitioners also recognize that the Government of Canada has published statements saying it is committed to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. They recognize that Canada, as a member of the UN Conference on Disarmament and the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament, has an obligation to promote the elimination of nuclear weapons internationally. They recognize that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has been signed by 86 countries and ratified by 66, but not by Canada. Finally, the petitioners recognize that, as a non-nuclear state, Canada is in the best position to comply with the articles of the TPNW and to guide its allies and other nations towards a world free from nuclear weapons.

Therefore, these petitioners call on the Government of Canada to sign and commit to ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and to urge allies and other nations to follow suit.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions this morning. They are both of critical concern to members of my constituency.

I had the honour of hosting 12 community meetings recently in different parts of the riding. There was not a single meeting where the issue of the crisis of access to family doctors was not raised.

I put forward a petition where the petitioners note that, according to Statistics Canada, approximately 4.8 million Canadians do not have a regular doctor. Moreover, 92% of physicians are working in urban centres and just 8% in rural areas. In Victoria and Sidney, B.C., within Saanich—Gulf Islands, average wait times for a walk-in clinic are 92 minutes and 180 minutes, respectively.

The petitioners call on the government to work with the provinces and territories to come to a holistic and fair solution to deal with the family doctor health care provider shortage.

Routine Proceedings

BIRD WELFARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition deals with the critical habitat requirements of a rare and threatened bird, the marbled murrelet. This bird nests in the roots of old-growth forests. That is the only place where it is found, although it spends most of its lifetime out on the open ocean.

The petitioners are calling for the Government of Canada to immediately protect all the critical old-growth habitat that is needed by the marbled murrelets and to recognize that this habitat is also protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, to which Canada is a signatory. This matter is urgent. The number of birds is down to a precious few.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am bringing forward this petition on behalf of my constituents in Ottawa Centre. It recognizes that there is a grave humanitarian crisis taking place in Gaza because of the war. It acknowledges that Canada is recognized for its historic leadership in humanitarian actions in the global community.

It also recognizes the fact that Canada really stepped forward in helping Ukrainians come to Canada on a temporary basis to flee from the war. It is asking for similar action in order to extend the same special immigration measures that were granted to Ukraine nationals to Palestinians and to allow Palestinians in Gaza to apply for the special immigration measure, so that they can come here and work until the war comes to an end in Gaza.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two certified petitions pursuant to Standing Order 36.

The first recognizes long wait times and inconsistent standards of service delivery, which have a significant negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of Canadian Armed Forces veterans, as well as current and former members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The petitioners ask that the Minister of Veterans Affairs commit to remedying the situation, which has been allowed to exist for too long.

• (1235)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition that I have harmonizes with work done at the fisheries and oceans standing committee.

Routine Proceedings

Basically, the undersigned citizens of Canada call on the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to immediately prohibit any transfer of commercial fishing licences and quotas to foreign interests or beneficial owners who are not Canadian.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first is with respect to environmentalists throughout the country, who are calling upon the Government of Canada to move forward immediately with bold emissions caps for the oil and gas sector that are comprehensive in scope and realistic in achieving our targets as set out for 2030.

FOOD SECURITY

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition that I have is a petition from my community, in particular, residents of the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington region, who are calling upon the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to prioritize the national school food program through budget 2024 for implementation in the fall of 2024.

They specifically draw to the attention of the government that Canada is the only G7 country without a national school food program.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the third petition, the majority of the residents are from a riding to the north of mine, Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. These residents are drawing attention to the fact that, at the federal Joyceville Institution, the abattoir has been closed for about two years. They indicate that beef farmers are now waiting six to nine months, and in many cases up to a year, to advance to have their cattle processed at other facilities.

The abattoir located at Joyceville Institution on Highway 15 in Ontario closed in September 2022, and the closure has put even more strain on processing abattoirs, negatively impacting the process of wait times. They also highlight the negative economic impacts as a result of this abattoir closing.

Therefore, they are calling upon the Government of Canada to explore all options to ensure the abattoir located at Joyceville Institution is reopened to address the issues noted above.

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by Canadians.

As it stands, convicted murderers are eligible to apply for parole annually after serving their minimum sentence. The petitioners observe that such frequent parole hearings retraumatize the families of murder victims. The bill that the petitioners are urging Parliament to pass is Bill S-281, known as Brian's bill, named in honour of Brian Ilesic, who was murdered at the University of Alberta. He and three of his colleagues were shot point-blank in the back of the head.

The bill would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act so convicted murderers would only be eligible to apply at the time of their automatic review.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 2265, 2267, 2269, 2272, 2273 and 2278.

[Text]

Question No. 2265—**Mr. Colin Carrie:**

With regard to Health Canada's authorization of COVID-19 vaccines, at the time of approval through the Interim Order Respecting the Importation, Sale and Advertising of Drugs for Use in Relation to COVID-19 in 2021: (a) was there evidence that the vaccines stopped people from transmitting the virus to others and, if (i) affirmative, what is the evidence, (ii) negative, what is the evidence for public messaging suggesting that herd immunity was achievable through mass vaccination; (b) why was the early initiative to track seroconversion of Canadians against SARS-CoV-2 abandoned and the task force for this dissolved; and (c) why was naturally-acquired immunity not considered an appropriate form of immunity against SARS-CoV-2?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in answer to part (a) of the question, at the time of initial authorization of the first COVID-19 vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech, in December 2020, there was no reported evidence on the efficacy of the authorized COVID-19 vaccine to prevent asymptomatic infection, to reduce viral shedding or to prevent transmission. In February and March 2021, preliminary data from the ongoing vaccine trials showed a lower prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in asymptomatic participants in the short term.

In December 2021, in the context of the circulating delta, or B.1.617.2, variant, evidence was emerging that vaccine effectiveness against SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 decreases with time after the primary series and there may be some decrease in protection against severe illness, especially in older individuals. Decreasing protection against infection could contribute to increased transmission, since infected individuals may be a source of infection for others. Therefore, it was determined that a booster dose may provide more durable protection to reduce infection, transmission and, in some populations, severe disease.

All evidence used to inform COVID-19 vaccine recommendations is accessible in the publicly available NACI statements.

Routine Proceedings

In response to part (b) of the question, in April 2020 the Government of Canada set up the COVID-19 immunity task force, or CITF, as a time-limited task force charged in part to determine the extent of SARS-CoV-2 infection and immune response in the Canadian population and specific high-risk subgroups. Over its term, the CITF has mobilized critical science to provide evidence for decisions around management of the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to seroprevalence data on population immunity.

The CITF has continued to monitor the seroprevalence of the Canadian population for the last four years, drawing on serosurveillance studies that measured antibodies due to infection, vaccination and/or a combination of the two. The CITF has maintained an up-to-date, publicly accessible website with trends in seroprevalence over the course of the pandemic and has been providing monthly updates to the Public Health Agency of Canada. The funding and policy authorities for this initiative end on March 31, 2024.

In response to part (c) of the question, naturally acquired immunity alone can protect against infection in the short term, but less is known about the long term. In addition, immunity through prior infection can wane over time and may not provide protection against infection or illness if the strain causing a previous infection is different from the strains currently circulating. Studies have also shown that the level of immune responses due to infection alone can vary significantly between individuals and that reinfection is more likely to happen in people who are unvaccinated compared to those who have been vaccinated.

COVID-19 vaccines provide enhanced protection against symptomatic disease, particularly severe disease. Protection against infection wanes over time for those who are vaccinated as well. However, protection is more sustained against severe COVID-19 illness. COVID-19 vaccines have been updated to target more recent strains and continue to show good immune responses to currently circulating strains. In addition, there are no known safety risks with receiving a vaccine after a recent SARS-CoV-2 infection. Prior infection along with vaccination, known as hybrid immunity, offers greater protection against infection and severe disease than vaccination or prior infection alone, particularly when hybrid immunity is in the context of a recent omicron infection.

Question No. 2267—Ms. Laurel Collins:

With regard to Canada's G20 commitment to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies and the self-review assessment framework released in July 2023: (a) which tax measures were identified as fossil fuel subsidies and found to be (i) efficient, (ii) inefficient; and (b) which non-tax measures were identified as fossil fuel subsidies and found to be (i) efficient, (ii) inefficient?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as part of its effort to fulfill Canada's G20 commitment to phase out or rationalize inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, on July 24, 2023, the Government of Canada released the "Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies Government of Canada Self-Review Assessment Framework" and the "Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies Government of Canada Guidelines". The framework provides a definition of a fossil fuel subsidy and the methodology for assessing efficiency, while the guidelines are meant to avoid the creation of any new inefficient subsidies. The framework and guidelines were jointly developed by Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Department of Finance Canada and apply to all federal departments and agencies.

Consistent with the "Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies Government of Canada Self-Review Assessment Framework", the Government of Canada has phased out or rationalized the following nine tax measures supporting the fossil fuel sector: phase-out of the accelerated capital cost allowance for the oil sands, announced in budget 2007; reduction in the deduction rates for intangible capital expenses in oil sands projects to align with rates in the conventional oil and gas sector, announced in budget 2011; phase-out of the Atlantic investment tax credit for investments in the oil and gas and mining sectors, announced in budget 2012; reduction in the deduction rate for pre-production intangible mine development expenses to align with the rate for the oil and gas sector, announced in budget 2013; phase-out of the accelerated capital cost allowance for mining, announced in budget 2013; allowing the accelerated capital cost allowance for liquefied natural gas facilities to expire as scheduled in 2025, announced in budget 2016; rationalizing the tax treatment of expenses for successful oil and gas exploratory drilling, announced in budget 2017; phase-out tax preference that allows small oil and gas companies to reclassify certain development expenses as more favorably treated exploration expenses, announced in budget 2017; and phase-out of flow-through shares for oil, gas and coal activities, announced in budget 2022.

Of the 129 federal non-tax measures that were assessed, none were determined to be inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.

The Government of Canada has committed to undergoing a voluntary peer review of its assessment of federal inefficient fossil fuel subsidies under the G20 process. As part of the peer review process, Canada will prepare a self-review report, which will include information on federal fossil fuel subsidies and be examined by an international peer review panel. The self-review and peer-review reports will be published once the peer review is complete.

Question No. 2269—Mr. Tom Kmiec:

With regard to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the family-based humanitarian pathway for Sudanese and non-Sudanese nationals due to the ongoing conflict in Sudan, since the December 28, 2023 announcement: (a) how many applications have been (i) received, (ii) accepted, (iii) denied, (iv) pending or under review; (b) what is the breakdown by male and female; (c) what is the breakdown by age range; (d) how many were study permits; (e) how many were open work permits; (f) how many were temporary visitor visas; and (g) how many IMM 5992 statutory declaration forms have been filled out?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Paul Chiang (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, insofar as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, is concerned, Canada continues to advocate for the end of violence in Sudan and remains deeply concerned for the safety of the people in the country.

IRCC has implemented special measures to help those affected by the situation in Sudan. On December 28, 2023, a new, family-based humanitarian pathway was announced for Sudanese and non-Sudanese nationals who resided in Sudan when the conflict began, so they can reunite on a permanent basis with their family in Canada. The pathway will be open to children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents and siblings of a Canadian citizen or permanent resident who agree to support their family members for one year and meet certain financial requirements.

This pathway will be in effect on February 27, 2024. As these measures are not yet in effect, the department has not received any applications for processing and thus is not able to provide any insight on applications.

Question No. 2272—**Mr. Dan Albas:**

With regard to March Madness expenditures where government managers make extra purchases in an attempt to spend their entire budget allotment before the end of the fiscal year: what specific measures, if any, are in place to prevent or discourage such spending ahead of the end of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, broken down by the measure that each department or agency is taking?

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Treasury Board's financial policy instruments apply to departments as defined in section 2 of the Financial Administration Act, or FAA. Organizations in the Government of Canada, such as Crown corporations, that are not defined in section 2 of the FAA are encouraged to adopt these policy instruments to the extent possible.

Under Treasury Board's policy on financial management, the deputy head, as accounting officer for the department, is responsible for ensuring that departments have effective systems of internal control to mitigate risks in the following broad categories: public resources being used prudently and in an economical manner; financial management processes being effective and efficient; and relevant legislation, regulations and financial management policy instruments being complied with.

Deputy heads are also responsible for effective multi-year expenditure plans, through multi-year financial planning, to ensure funds are spent on departmental priorities. Departments must maintain effective due diligence and ongoing monitoring of spending to ensure alignment to their mandates.

Additionally, most departments are able to carry forward a portion of unspent funds from one year to the next. This flexibility acts as a disincentive for the "March madness" spending.

As part of its commitment to openness, transparency and accountability in government procurement, the Government of Canada publicly discloses contracts over \$10,000 on <https://open.canada.ca/en>.

Question No. 2273—**Ms. Melissa Lantsman:**

With regard to government funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA): (a) what are the transaction dates and

amounts of all funding the government provided to UNRWA since January 1, 2023; and (b) what are the scheduled dates and amounts for future transactions of government funding to UNRWA for the remainder of 2024 that will no longer take place due to the government's pause on funding?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following reflects a consolidated response approved on behalf of Global Affairs Canada ministers.

In response to part (a) of the question, since January 1, 2023, Global Affairs Canada has disbursed a total of \$49.9 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in support of essential humanitarian services such as education, health care and food assistance to address urgent needs and provide life-saving support.

The breakdown is as follows: \$1.75 million for an emergency appeal, March 31, 2023; \$25 million for the program budget, May 29, 2023; \$1.25 million for an emergency appeal, July 7, 2023; \$10 million on crisis funding, November 28, 2023; \$10 million on crisis funding, December 27, 2023; and \$1.9 million on the Syria and Lebanon response, May 30, 2023.

In response to part (b) of the question, during the pause, no funding was paid to UNRWA. The next regularly scheduled payment for its core programming activities under the multi-year contribution, \$100 million over four years, is planned for late April or early May.

Following allegations that some UNRWA staff were involved in Hamas's heinous terrorist attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023, the United Nations, or UN, has put in place several significant processes to address the allegations and reinforce its zero tolerance for terror within the UN, including UNRWA. Canada has reviewed the interim report of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, OIOS, on this matter and looks forward to the final report. Canada commends the independent review of UNRWA that is currently under way, led by Catherine Colonna. While these investigative processes continue, UNRWA has undertaken reform efforts and the Secretary-General has taken steps to enhance oversight and accountability within UNRWA. Canada will continue to work closely with the UN, UNRWA and other donor countries to ensure that UNRWA meets its obligations and can continue its life-saving work.

Question No. 2278—**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:**

With regard to audits conducted by the Canada Revenue Agency, broken down by fiscal year from 2015-16 to present: (a) what is the total number of audits conducted on (i) people with disabilities, (ii) First Nations, Inuit, or Métis peoples, (iii) people over the age of 65, (iv) individuals whose net worth is more than \$50 million; (b) what is the total number of audits conducted due to (i) excessive health claims, (ii) excessive health travel claims; (c) what is the total value of those audits; and (d) for each of the audits in (a) and (b), what is the total number of audits that resulted in (i) prosecutions, (ii) convictions?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the above question, what follows is the response from the CRA for the time period of April 1, 2015 to February 5, 2024, that is, the date of the question.

For the purposes of this question, the response is limited to taxpayers who have filed a T1 general income tax and benefit return, and an audit is defined as a compliance action whereby the CRA closely examines the books and records of a taxpayer to confirm whether they are fulfilling their tax obligations, following tax laws correctly and receiving the benefits and refunds to which they are entitled.

Various sources of information may lead the CRA to take compliance actions, including criminal investigations. In initiating a criminal investigation, the CRA will examine various sources of information, including internal referrals within the CRA, including the various audit programs; tips from individuals through the CRA informant leads lines; information received from various law enforcement agencies; and publicly available sources of information, which could include media articles, court decisions, etc.

The decision to accept a file for criminal investigation and possible subsequent prosecution is based on several factors, including the egregious nature of the case, available evidence that a crime has been committed and the likelihood of prosecution. In order for charges to be considered, CRA investigators will gather sufficient evidence to establish that a crime has been committed and that the individual did so with intent, and will then provide that to the Public Prosecution Services of Canada (PPSC). To determine whether an investigation will be conducted or charges will be laid, several factors specific to each case are taken into account, such as jurisprudence and the availability of evidence.

It is important to note that in criminal matters, the PPSC independently reviews the evidence of a case and decides whether or not to prosecute.

In response to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the CRA does not track audits in the manner requested; as such, it is not possible to provide the requested information.

In response to part (c) of the question, the CRA cannot provide the results as requested for parts (a) and (b). However, the CRA does publish its overall audit results on the Government of Canada's webpage, "Better results: The CRA at work for you", found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/campaigns/tax-evasion-no-borders/cracking-down-getting-results.html>. Information from 2014-2015 to 2021-2022 is published on this website.

In response to part (d) of the question, as for parts (a) and (b), the CRA cannot provide the requested numbers, since it does not track criminal investigations, prosecutions or convictions in this manner. However, the CRA does publicize results of prosecutions on the Canada.ca website, at "Enforcement notifications: Compliance actions", found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/news/newsroom/criminal-investigations-actions-charges-convictions.html>. Information currently published on this website covers the time period from March 2019 to the present.

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, furthermore, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 2266, 2268, 2270, 2271 and 2274 to 2277 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately in an electronic format.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 2266—**Mr. Colin Carrie:**

With regard to the government authorization of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines: (a) when did Health Canada (HC), the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), receive documentation from Pfizer acknowledging the presence of SV40 enhancer promoter sequence and SV40 poly(A)tail signal sequence in their vaccine BNT162b2; (b) with respect to the documentation related to (a), (i) how can the documentation be accessed, (ii) when was it received by HC, PHAC and NACI, (iii) was this documentation obtained before or after the BNT162b2 vaccine was authorized; (c) has HC asked Pfizer about the safety of the SV40 enhancer promoter sequence and SV40 poly(A)tail signal sequence in their vaccine, and, if not, why not; (d) if the answer to (c) is affirmative, what are the risk analyses that Pfizer did, if any, regarding these SV40 sequences; (e) what amount of SV40 sequences is considered safe (i) in a single Pfizer mRNA vaccine dose for distinct age groups, (ii) for repeated vaccine injections over time per each age group considered; (f) what were HC's regulatory guidelines surrounding SV40 sequences in a vaccine prior to 2019; (g) what are the current (relevant for the period of 2019-2024) regulatory guidelines surrounding SV40 sequences in a conventional vaccine and in an mRNA vaccine; (h) how does HC know the SV40 fragments are inactive and have no functional role in mRNA vaccines; (i) has HC verified the amount of SV40 enhancer promoter sequence and SV40 poly(A)tail signal sequence in any of the Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccines, including the Pfizer XBB, and, if not, why not; (j) if the answer to (i) is affirmative, what was the outcome of this verification and how was this verification done; (k) what is HC's official position with respect to the increased risk of DNA contaminants getting into human cells, including the cell nucleus, when encapsulated in liposomes, as is the case with the mRNA vaccines; (l) how has HC confirmed with certitude there is no genetic integration (i.e. in vivo transfection into the nucleus of human cells) of DNA plasmid fragments, which may or may not contain SV40 sequences, as found in either mRNA vaccine; (m) does the publicly undisclosed presence of SV40 sequences or any other adulteration (e.g. reverse open reading frames [ORF]) violate the terms and conditions of the Pfizer and Moderna contracts, and, if not, why not; and (n) if the answer to (m) is affirmative, what are the consequences?

(Return tabled)

*Privilege***Question No. 2268—Ms. Laurel Collins:**

With regard to cleantech transactions signed by Export Development Canada (EDC), broken down by fiscal year since 2018-19: (a) what are the details of each transaction, including, the (i) date of signing, (ii) country of transaction, (iii) principal counterpart, (iv) EDC product, (v) industry sector, (vi) financial range; and (b) of the transactions in (a), which transactions were intended to support (i) carbon capture, unitization and storage technologies, (ii) blue hydrogen, (iii) grey hydrogen?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2270—Mr. Tom Kmiec:

With regard to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the temporary special measures for extended family in Gaza due to the Israel-Hamas war, since the December 21, 2023 announcement: (a) how many applications have been (i) received, (ii) accepted, (iii) denied, (iv) pending or under review; (b) what is the breakdown by male and female; (c) what is the breakdown by age range; (d) how many were study permits; (e) how many were open work permits; and (f) how many IMM 5992 statutory declaration forms have been filled out?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2271—Mr. Tony Baldinelli:

With regard to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) transferring refugees to Niagara Falls, Ontario, between February 1, 2023 and February 1, 2024: (a) how many have been transferred to Niagara Falls in total; (b) what is the monthly breakdown of the number of refugees transferred to Niagara Falls; (c) which hotels is the government using to lodge refugees in Niagara Falls; (d) how many hotel rooms are currently being occupied by refugees in Niagara Falls; (e) what is the capacity of each hotel room that is being occupied by refugees in Niagara Falls; (f) how many refugees are staying in each hotel room in Niagara Falls; (g) what is the average length of time IRCC expects (i) an individual refugee, (ii) a refugee family, to be lodged in a Niagara Falls hotel room; (h) for all refugees being lodged in government funded Niagara Falls hotel rooms, without identifying names or other personal information, how many days has each refugee stayed; (i) what is the average cost per night that IRCC pays per refugee for staying in a Niagara Falls room; (j) for the night of February 1, 2024, what was the total cost IRCC paid hoteliers to house refugees located in Niagara Falls; (k) what is the average cost that IRCC pays per refugee who lives in a Niagara Falls hotel room for daily meals and refreshments; (l) for the month of January 2024, what was the total cost IRCC paid hoteliers to feed refugees located in Niagara Falls; (m) what are the countries of origin for refugees who have been accommodated in Niagara Falls; (n) what is the breakdown of refugees transferred to or accommodated in Niagara Falls by each country of origin; (o) how much funding was transferred by the federal government to the municipality of Niagara Falls to deal with the influx of refugees in the city; (p) how much funding has been transferred by the federal government to the Region of Niagara to deal with the influx of refugees in the region; (q) how much funding was transferred by the federal government to local not-for-profit, charitable, and nongovernmental organizations in Niagara Falls to deal with the influx of refugees in the city; (r) what are the names of the specific not-for-profit, charitable, and nongovernmental organizations who have received federal government funding; (s) what is the breakdown of funding for each organization to date; (t) how many more refugees does IRCC currently plan to transfer to or accommodate in Niagara Falls; (u) how many refugees have moved out of government funded hotel rooms in Niagara Falls and into personal accommodations; (v) when does the federal government plan to stop paying for refugee hotel rooms in Niagara Falls; and (w) what are the terms and conditions of the financial agreement that IRCC has with each hotelier located in Niagara Falls that houses refugees and receives federal monies to provide this service?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2274—Mr. Kelly McCauley:

With regard to properties sold by the government since January 1, 2021: what are the details of all properties which have been sold by the government, including, for each, the (i) street address and land location, (ii) city or municipality, (iii) province or territory, (iv) type of property (residential, commercial), (v) description of property, including size of land and square footage of buildings, (vi) date of sale, (vii) price that the property was sold for, (viii) value of the last known municipal property assessment as performed by the province or territory where the property was located in, (ix) buyer?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2275—Mr. Gary Vidal:

With regard to the approximately \$602 million that Indigenous Services Canada spent on medical evacuations in 2022: what is the breakdown of the spending by (i) province or territory, (ii) community, (iii) reason for the evacuation (heart attack, prenatal care, child delivery, cancer treatment, etc.)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2276—Mr. Damien C. Kurek:

With regard to the regional development agencies, since January 1, 2020: what are the details of all contracts awarded to vendors located outside of Canada, broken down by (i) regional development agency, (ii) vendor, (iii) vendor location, including the postal code, the municipality, and the province, (iv) value, (v) description of the goods and services, including the volume, if applicable, (vi) the date the contract was signed, (vii) start and end dates?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2277—Mr. Daniel Blaikie:

With regard to the tax rate paid by corporations to the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA), broken down by fiscal year from 2015-16 to 2022-23: (a) what was the average effective tax rate paid by financial corporations broken down by revenue (i) above \$100 million (ii) above \$500 million, (iii) above \$1 billion in revenue; (b) what was the average tax rate paid by oil and gas corporations, and oil and gas extraction corporations, broken down by revenue (i) above \$10 million, (ii) above \$100 million, (iii) above \$500 million, (iv) above \$1 billion; and (c) what was the average tax rate paid by real-estate corporations broken down by revenue (i) above \$10 million, (ii) above \$100 million, (iii) above \$500 million, (iv) above \$1 billion?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Mr. Speaker, finally, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

● (1240)

PRIVILEGE

WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am rising to respond to questions of privilege. I have some comments, and I appreciate the House's acceptance to allow me to introduce those now to contribute to the previous question of privilege that has been raised here.

This is specifically in response to two questions of privilege raised on March 20. The first matter was raised by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes respecting the 17th report from the Standing Committee on Government Operations, and the second concerns the deliberations on an NDP opposition day motion considered on March 18.

The matter raised by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes concerns a potential breach of privilege concerning witness testimony at a Standing Committee on Government Operations in its study of the ArriveCAN application. As the member notes, the committee unanimously agreed to adopt a motion to present a report to the House outlining the potential breach of privilege concerning Kristian Firth's refusal to answer questions from committee members and his prevarication in answering those questions.

If the Speaker finds that this is a *prima facie* question of privilege, the government supports sending this matter to the procedure and House affairs committee for study. The standard modern practice of dealing with breaches of privilege of the House or of individual members has to be to move a motion to refer a matter to the procedure and House affairs committee. In the case of contempt, the most recent example, which was cited by the member, was to summon the individual to the bar of the House of Commons for reprimand. These are two avenues that have been pursued by the House for the last 100 years. As the chamber that is based on practice and procedure, these are the two most well-characterized ways of dealing with such affronts to privileges of the House and its members. I suggest that there is nothing with the current situation that suggests that we now take a different approach.

I also find it somewhat bizarre that the only precedence that the member used to try to make his case for his proposed motion dates back hundreds of years. I would submit to the House that times have changed since 19th century England, and so have the rules and practices of the House.

On March 21, the member for Beauport—Limoilou intervened on the matter and concluded that a *prima facie* question of privilege be found and that the member had referred to the procedure and House affairs committee. I agree with the member on both points.

The procedure and House affairs committee is the appropriate committee to which this matter should be referred. Page 966 of the third edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, in relation to the specific mandate of the procedure and House affairs committee, states, “The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs deals with...the review[ing] of the Standing Orders, procedure and [House] practice[s] in the House and its committees.” The footnote attached to the quote states, “Should the Speaker find *prima facie* grounds, it is established practice for the House to refer matters of privilege to the Committee for further study. In his ruling of March 9, 2011, Speaker Milliken reminded the House of this practice”.

I would like to refer to the ruling of Speaker Milliken on March 9, 2011, in which he states:

Before I invite the member for Kings—Hants to move his motion, however, the Chair wishes to explain the procedural parameters that govern such motions.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Second Edition, at pages 146 and 147 states:

In cases where the motion is not known in advance, the Speaker may provide assistance to the Member if the terms of the proposed motion are substantially different from the matter originally raised. The Speaker would be reluctant to allow a matter as important as a privilege motion to fail on the ground of improper form. The terms of the motion have generally provided that the matter be referred to committee for study or have been amended to that effect.

Privilege

I hasten to add that the powers of the Speaker in these matters are robust and well known. In 1966, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux, having come to a finding of *prima facie* privilege on a matter, ruled a number of motions out of order. As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, tells us at page 147, footnote 371, in doing so, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux “more than once pointed out that it was Canadian practice to refer such matters to committee for study and suggested that this should be the avenue pursued”.

The Chair is of course aware of exceptions to this practice, but in most if not all of these cases, circumstances were such that a deviation from the normal practice was deemed acceptable, or there was a unanimous desire on the part of the House to proceed in that fashion.

● (1245)

In cases of contempt, a similar approach has been taken and is supported by precedent for the past 100 years. The most recent example is the Speaker's Ruling on June 16, 2021, with respect to the alleged non-compliance with an order of the House. The Speaker ruled in this case:

As a result, in the opinion of the Chair, the failure to comply with the order of the House of June 2, 2021, constitutes a *prima facie* question of privilege.

There is one last point to settle. The Chair has read the wording of the motion suggested by the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent in his written notice. It departs considerably from established practice. The scope of this type of motion is limited, as indicated in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, at page 150, and I quote: “The terms of the motion have generally provided that the matter be referred to committee for study....”

A review of the rare exceptions shows that there was a certain consensus on the procedure to follow and, thus, on the wording of the motion....

There are also precedents that support censure. In short, given that the parameters for such motions are clear and that the practice is well established, the proposed motion should be a motion of censure or to refer the matter to the appropriate committee for study.

Even if it were procedurally admissible or if there was a unanimous consent to have these witnesses appear before the bar to be questioned, it is unlikely to yield a different result. Then, the only recourse for the House to take in the matter would be to censure the individual, as in the situation described in the Speaker's Ruling of June 16, 2021.

The Conservatives are trying to set up a new trend. We think that before proceeding with calling the individuals to the bar, and certainly before we start talking about questioning witnesses at the bar, which has not even been contemplated in more than 200 years, the matter should be referred to PROC so that its members may, firstly, review the evidence and make recommendations on procedures, safeguards and criteria for calling and questioning individuals before the bar.

This is a very serious matter, and we cannot operate on an *ad hoc* basis. We need some clarity on how we should proceed. The House is, therefore, faced with two well-established options in my opinion, to refer the matter to the procedure and House affairs committee or to summon this individual to the bar for censure. That is for the Speaker to choose and the House to decide upon.

Government Orders

• (1250)

BILINGUAL DOCUMENTS IN THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): The second matter relates to the deliberation on the NDP opposition day motion that took place on Monday, March 18. The member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier alleges that his privileges were breached when the government House leader moved an amendment to the motion during the debate and the translation delays prevented members from considering the amendment in French.

I submit that there are two matters to be considered in this case. The first is that the events took place on Monday, March 18 and the member raised the argument two days later. This was not the first opportunity to raise the matter.

Second is the fact that the events of the debate of March 18 simply do not support the allegation raised by the member. The member did not raise his question of privilege at the first opportunity, as required.

Page 145 of the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states:

The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently occurred and must call for the immediate action of the House. Therefore, the Member must satisfy the Speaker that he or she is bringing the matter to the attention of the House as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the situation. When a Member has not fulfilled this important requirement, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is not a prima facie question of privilege.

There was no requirement for the member to have time to marshal sophisticated arguments or to substantiate his allegation. If I were to speculate, the member either did not take the matter seriously or did wait to raise the argument on Wednesday for the simple objective of disrupting proceedings related to the consideration of Bill C-29 on that day.

There is no procedural limitation on when an amendment may be proposed to a motion before the House while it is under consideration. The House was under Government Orders when the amendment was proposed. It is a well-established practice that amendments may be moved in either official language.

Citation 552, subsection (3), of the sixth edition of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms* was addressed this matter. It states, "Every motion that is duly moved and seconded is placed before the House by the Speaker as a question for the decision of the House. All motions must be presented to the Speaker in writing in either of the two official languages."

I will concede that the amendment was moved later in the day, but this was the result of good-faith discussions between members of Parliament that lasted until shortly before the motion was moved, which is why it was moved in one language.

That is how the House of Commons is supposed to work: rigorous debate and discussions to come to consensus.

It is always the practice of the government to provide all parties with information in both official languages. However, in this case, it was not possible to provide a written copy in both official languages in the time provided, which is why the members of the House were provided with simultaneous interpretation of the proceedings of the House in both official languages.

Third, while the House was suspended to the call of the Chair, the table officers circulated to all parties the text of the amendment in French to ensure that members could understand what had been proposed as an amendment and what they were voting on.

Finally, when the House resumed, after the amendment had been made available in both official languages, the Speaker entertained additional points of order on the admissibility of the motion, which would have offered the opportunity for any member to intervene on the amendment in either official language.

When the Speaker put the question to the House on the amendment, it included text of the motion in French, clearly demonstrating that the text was available in both official languages.

The government strongly believes in the importance of both official languages in the Parliament of Canada. To demonstrate this, the House passed amendments to the Official Languages Act in Bill C-13. Bill C-13 would implement a series of proposals that promote the progression toward the equality of status and the use of English and French. Several provisions of the enactment are therefore concrete illustrations of the constitutional principles set out in subsection 16(3) of the charter.

The facts contradict the assertion by the member that he did not have access to the text of the amendment in both official languages, nor did he meet the test that the matter must be raised at the first opportunity. Therefore, I submit that the matter does not constitute a prima facie question of privilege.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his input on two important questions before the Chair, and the Chair will hasten to come back to the House with a decision, at least on one of those issues.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

INDIAN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-38, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand before you to discuss a monumental step forward in our nation's journey toward reconciliation and justice for first nations communities. The proposed legislation, Bill C-38, seeks to amend the Indian Act in response to long-standing concerns voiced by first nations individuals and communities, as well as to address the residual discriminatory impacts highlighted by the *Nicholas v. AGC* litigation.

Government Orders

For too long, the Indian Act has been a source of division and inequality, its outdated provisions casting long shadows over the promise of equity and unity. Bill C-38 represents a pivotal moment in our collective history, a chance to right the wrongs of the past and lay the groundwork for a future where justice and equality are not just ideals but realities.

The proposed changes would be both comprehensive and transformative. First, the bill seeks to eliminate known sex-based membership inequalities from the act. This would be a critical step toward ensuring that all first nations individuals, regardless of gender, have equal rights and opportunities. By addressing these sex-based inequalities, we would not only uphold the principles of justice and fairness, but would also honour the resilience and dignity of those who have fought tirelessly for these changes.

Second, the legislation aims to address inequities caused by the practice of enfranchisement. This historical practice, which stripped first nations individuals of their status and rights, has left deep scars on communities. By rectifying these injustices, we would acknowledge the wrongs of the past and take a significant step toward healing and reconciliation.

Additionally, Bill C-38 would allow for deregistration from the Indian register. This change would recognize the autonomy and agency of first nations individuals, providing them with the freedom to define their own identities and affiliations. It would be a move toward self-determination, empowering individuals to make choices that reflect their personal beliefs and circumstances.

It is essential to emphasize the gravity of enfranchisement. The process unjustly stripped thousands of first nations individuals of their status, severing their ties to their communities and heritage. Although the practice was abolished 35 years ago, the shadows it cast are long and dark, with its harmful legacy still felt today. The scars left by enfranchisement are not merely historical footnotes; they are also lived realities for many, manifesting in lost connections, identities and rights.

In alignment with our commitment to reconciliation, and guided by the wisdom of first nations partners, our government is dedicated to confronting and eliminating these registration inequalities at a systemic level. Bill C-38 is not just a legislative measure; it is a testament to our resolve to address these injustices head on. By targeting these inequities, we are taking a stand against the vestiges of policies designed to assimilate and erase first nations identities.

Moreover, the bill's commitment to eradicating sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act would address a critical aspect of inequality that has persisted for far too long. These discriminatory practices, embedded in the act, have undermined the principle of equality and fairness. By confronting these injustices, Bill C-38 would be setting a precedent for the kind of nation we aspire to be, one where equality is not just a principle but also a practice.

• (1255)

Let us recognize that Bill C-38 represents a step forward in our journey towards reconciliation. It is a journey that requires our collective effort, commitment and compassion. As we move forward, let us do so with the understanding that true reconciliation involves acknowledging the past, rectifying injustices and working towards

a future where the rights and dignity of all first nations peoples are respected and upheld.

Bill C-38 would commit to removing outdated and offensive language found in the Indian Act. Language shapes our perceptions and attitudes, and by eliminating derogatory terms, we foster a more respectful and inclusive dialogue. This change is not just about updating terminology; it is about reshaping the narrative and affirming the dignity of all first nations people.

In our journey toward progress and inclusivity, we encounter a significant obstacle: our legal code, a labyrinth of statutes, some of which date back a long time to a previous era. Among these laws are provisions that no longer reflect our current values, ethics and understanding. Even more concerning, some contain language that is offensive, discriminatory and wholly out of step with today's standards of respect and equality.

The task before us is not merely administrative; it is morally imperative. To rectify the situation, we must undertake a comprehensive review of our legal system. The review should not only identify outdated and offensive provisions but also evaluate the relevance and applicability of laws in the contemporary context. The goal is not to erase history but to ensure that our legal framework is just, equitable and reflective of the society we aspire to be.

The process requires a collaborative effort involving legal experts, historians, ethicists and, importantly, the community at large. Public consultation would ensure that the process is transparent, inclusive and sensitive to the diverse needs and values of our society. Technology can aid in this endeavour, enabling more efficient review and broader engagement. Moreover, this effort presents an opportunity for educational outreach, helping the public understand the evolution of our legal system and the importance of laws that are just, inclusive and respectful. By engaging in this critical work, we affirm our commitment to democracy, justice and the dignity of all individuals.

The bill includes further required consequential amendments to ensure that the act would reflect the values of equality, respect and justice. These changes are not merely administrative; they are a testament to our commitment to addressing historical injustices and building a more equitable society.

Bill C-38 is more than simply legislation; it is a beacon of hope. It signifies a profound shift in our relationship with first nations communities, one rooted in respect, understanding, and partnership. As we move forward, let us do so with open hearts and minds, committed to the principles of reconciliation and equity.

Privilege

Together we can build a future that honours the rich heritage and contributions of first nations peoples, ensuring that our nation's legacy is one of unity, justice, and mutual respect. The path to modernizing our legal system is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is an opportunity to reaffirm our values, to strengthen our democracy and to build a more inclusive society. Together let us embark on this journey with determination and hope.

• (1300)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly remember, as the bill came forward, expressions of disappointment that it did not go farther, that it would bring relatively minor changes in the relationship between indigenous peoples and the Crown, and that much more would need to be done. However, I did not hear anyone suggest that it was not a good step forward, though small.

I wonder whether the hon. member can inform us of the extent to which more substantial changes will be coming in the legislative scheme of this country's racist laws.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I agree with her that much more needs to be done. We are taking a step in the right direction; that is the most important thing. We have the intention and have already shown that we are converting our intention into reality by taking this step.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we understand that the need for reaffiliation and membership is extremely important and that we must move forward.

My question for my colleague is this. Why, after five years and after everything that has happened, did his government not take action and why is its current action so limited?

• (1305)

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, there are many more things that we could have done and should have done, but the important thing is that we are doing them now.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the topic of Bill C-38, the department estimates that around 3,500 individuals would be enfranchised. That ultimately means that any financial costs of integrating them would be put onto Indian bands.

Section 10 bands have the autonomy to determine membership. Therefore an individual would be able to obtain status from the Indian register after Bill C-38's passage. However, that leads to a question I have, which is whether this would complicate the section 10 process that has been well established. Does the member think that this needs to be studied further or that some amendments or some clarity from the government needs to be forthcoming?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, to be very honest and frank, I am not very sure as to the specific nature of the question the member asked, and I do not have the answers for it, but hopefully the government will listen to the question and provide some clarity.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do remember that in 2019 there was a bill called Bill S-3,

which I thought was the government's answer to all of these problems. Is Bill C-38 not an admission on behalf of the government that it did not get Bill S-3 right?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, many times, we may not cover every single thing that we aim to do. Sometimes there may be things that were not covered, but the important thing is that we have recognized it and have come up with the legislation that is before us.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the question of privilege raised on Wednesday, March 20, 2024, by the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes concerning the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which was presented to the House earlier that same day.

[*Translation*]

The subject matter of this report is related to the committee's 14th report, which accused Mr. Kristian Firth and Mr. Darren Anthony of disregarding the rights and privileges of the committee to summon them to appear as witnesses. The House had concurred in that report, which ordered both to appear before the committee, and both have now done so. This new report arises from concerns over the testimony that Mr. Firth furnished to the committee and his refusal to answer members' questions.

[*English*]

Having carefully listened to the members, acquainted myself with the content of the report and consulted the few but clear precedents, the Chair finds the matter to be a prima facie question of privilege.

In his intervention, the parliamentary secretary to the leader of the government raised concerns about the motion that the member has indicated he will move. While it is perhaps true that the suggested remedy is not something we have seen for some time, I am of the view that it is procedurally in order. As with the case cited from June 2021, the motion provides for a call to the bar in order to be reprimanded, and a specific remedy to the offence. Furthermore, once proposed, the motion is subject to the usual rules of debate, and ultimately it is for the House to decide whether it agrees with the motion as proposed.

I would now invite the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes to move his motion.

WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC) moved:

Privilege

That the House, having considered the unanimous views of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, expressed in its 17th Report, find Kristian Firth to be in contempt for his refusal to answer certain questions and for prevaricating in his answers to other questions and, accordingly, order him to attend at the Bar of this House, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions on the third sitting day following the adoption of this Order, for the purposes of (a) receiving an admonishment delivered by the Speaker; (b) providing responses to the questions referred to in the 17th Report; and (c) responding to supplementary questions arising from his responses to the questions referred to in the 17th Report.

● (1310)

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise to speak to this important motion.

I am pleased that members from all parties offered responses in the House following the Speaker's careful ruling that we have this opportunity to remind Canadians of the important work that is done here and the important powers that we have here, which allow us to do the work we have been elected to do for Canadians.

This is borne out of the \$60 million of corruption, fraud and forgery. This was a situation that saw 10,000 Canadians falsely forced into quarantine, and this is what we get after eight years of the Prime Minister and his broken arrive scam. For nearly 18 months, Conservatives have been holding the Prime Minister's government to account for his \$60-million boondoggle.

This app started out with a price tag of \$80,000, and through mismanagement and corruption, the price grew to 750 times its original cost. We have seen two-man basement operations, such as GC Strategies and Dalian, make millions off the taxpayer for an app while doing no IT work. We have seen government officials wine and dine for contracts, and we have seen government officials levelling unbelievable and shocking accusations of wrongdoing at each other before parliamentary committees.

We know that there have been substantiated reports of bid rigging and of fraudulent and forged documents being used for contractors to win government business. There are now 12 investigations into this scandal, including by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

We have seen the institution of Parliament attacked by government officials who have lied to committee and by key players in the scandal lying and refusing orders of parliamentary committees. As is referred to in the reports from the Standing Committee on Government Operations, we know that Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony did not attend when summoned the first time, the second time or the third time. Only under the threat of arrest, using the extraordinary powers of Parliament entrusted to us by Canadians, did they finally attend, but that is what brings us here today.

Using an extraordinary remedy to an extraordinary problem, which is ordering the appearance under threat of arrest, we had Mr. Firth do something that has not given rise to the kind of debate we are having now for about 110 years. It seems that this reminder is more important now than ever. We have seen varying degrees of offence but never anything as egregious as this. This stems from Kristian Firth, the principal of GC Strategies, that two-person firm that was paid nearly \$20 million on the \$60-million boondoggle of the arrive scam. He refused to answer questions and then obstructed the work of Parliament and its committees.

At the government operations committee, I asked whether Mr. Firth had lied to a parliamentary committee before. He refused to answer. I also asked which public office holders Mr. Firth had met outside of government offices. He again refused to answer.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan asked Mr. Firth how many hours he spent sending LinkedIn invitations. Now, this is a key component of GC Strategies' apparent recruitment strategy, if we can believe it, and for what it earned its commissions of up to 30% on nearly \$20 million. Mr. Firth replied and refused to answer.

● (1315)

The hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek asked Mr. Firth to name his contacts in the various departments that provided GC Strategies with its 134 contracts. Again, Mr. Firth refused to answer. One of the reasons that GC Strategies says that it was able to get these 134 contracts from the government was because of the reputation it built.

On its website, there are very detailed referrals and recommendations from the most senior government officials, without names attributed to them. I asked Mr. Firth to name the individuals who allegedly provided these glowing testimonials that appear on the website, and Mr. Firth refused to answer.

His contempt for Parliament goes back not two weeks, but to his first appearance at committee on the arrive scam nearly a year and a half ago, where he lied about knowing the secondary residence of a senior government official, now infamously saying it was a chalet not a cottage. Even at his most recent appearance at committee, if it could bring one to laughter and not tears, he then said that it was a cabin.

He lied about meeting government officials outside of government offices in that first appearance, and he lied about providing hospitality to government officials. He then refused to return to committee to answer further questions, being summoned by the committee. Instead, he decided to hide out.

I will note that, when Mr. Firth first appeared at committee nearly a year and a half ago, and he did not provide some of these answers, he undertook to provide them immediately and said that he would give a return to the committee.

When he appeared at committee most recently, again under threat of arrest by House order, he said, "I promise" when saying that he would deliver the names of those government officials by the next morning at 9:00 a.m. The committee was called to order at 10:00 a.m. the following morning, when the clerk confirmed and the chair reported that again, Mr. Firth had lied to committee. He had broken a promise while under oath.

Privilege

The committee had to threaten Mr. Firth with arrest at the hands of the Sergeant-at-Arms if he continued to refuse, as I said, and it was only that threat that brought him out of hiding. Then he refused to answer straightforward questions that anyone with nothing to hide would, of course, have answered.

These are the kind of people who the Liberal Prime Minister is more than happy to hand over millions of dollars to for an app, but who did no work. These are people who casually make a mockery of Canada's House of Commons, Canada's Parliament and the oath they took, a solemn oath that he took that morning at committee.

There is no question that Parliament is the grand inquest of the nation, and it is to have unfettered right to send for people, papers and documents. This means Parliament has the full authority to summon and compel attendance and testimony in Canada, except his Majesty the King and his royal representatives, and to summon and compel the production of documents.

The courts have clearly acknowledged the powers of the House as the grand inquest of the nation to inquire into any matter that it sees fit. As part of the grand inquest of the nation, parliamentary committees are not restricted in the scope of questions that they can pose to witnesses, and witnesses must answer all questions that are put to them.

This latest episode, this latest report from the Standing Committee on Government Operations, is just the most recent development in a scandal that continues to grow and envelop the government through the many investigations that have taken place and are ongoing by independent officers of Parliament, parliamentary committees and, of course, the national police force.

The Auditor General, in a report that was issued against the government's wishes, every member of the government having voted to block the Auditor General from having investigated GC Strategies and the \$60-million arrive scam, outlined the glaring lack of oversight and accountability in the procurement and contracting development of this failed app.

- (1320)

The Auditor General found that Canada Border Services Agency documentation, financial records and controls were so poor that she was unable to determine the price cost of the ArriveCAN application. Imagine, the Auditor General, a general with an army of auditors, was unable to give precision on the price of a scandal that is approximately \$60 million.

Using the information that was available, the Auditor General estimated the cost as at least \$60 million. She found that the CBSA's disregard for policies, controls and transparency in the contracting process restricted opportunities for competition and undermined value for money. She found that the agency, of course, did not have documentation. Why GC Strategies was selected through a non-competitive process in the first place, she does not know and, so far, neither do Canadians.

The Auditor General even found that Kristian Firth and GC Strategies were able to write their own contract in one case that saw the two-man company awarded a \$25-million contract.

The officials at IT firms working on arrive scam were playing fast and loose with the security and privacy of Canadians' private information, biometric health information. In one of the original contracts, the government waived the requirement for workers to have the requisite top secret security clearance. GC Strategies did not meet the requirements for another contract, and the government did not see a problem with that.

The Auditor General was unable to find evidence of valid security clearances for multiple workers on the app. It is no wonder Canadians were concerned from the very beginning. It is no wonder that the Privacy Commissioner has launched his own investigation into the app for a second time, the first being related, of course, to the 10,000 Canadians falsely being sent into quarantine under threat of jail.

That raises questions as to what exactly government officials were doing when all of this was going down. They were too busy being wined and dined by contractors, and even being treated to special whisky tastings. They were more than happy to dole out millions of dollars in contracts their hand-picked favourites, like GC Strategies, were looking for. They did not care one bit about the value for money that Canadians were getting for their hard-earned tax dollars.

Now, they are scapegoating some and they are protecting others. They are lying. They are misleading parliamentary committees, right alongside GC Strategies own Kristian Firth. The government has been trying to cover it up the entire way.

We have a situation in our country of a true crisis of the cost of living, with record food bank usage, with millions of Canadians lining up at food banks in record numbers, thousands collaborating on best practices to be able to feed their families out of dumpsters and tent cities by the dozen in communities that, just a few short years ago, could not have imagined such a thing.

All the while, the Liberal government has been allowing insiders to benefit to the tune of millions and to become millionaires off the hard-earned tax dollars of single mothers, young families and seniors. What is the value for money that Canadians got for the millions that the Liberal Prime Minister awarded to these undeserving individuals, like GC Strategies? It was some Google searches, some LinkedIn searches and a campaign to corrupt the procurement system and the public servants who oversaw the awarding of contracts. It is rot and corruption, like the country has not seen in decades.

Who was in charge? We have not seen any ministers stand up and take responsibility.

• (1325)

Only after Canada's common-sense Conservatives pounded on the drum for a year and a half about the rot inside the Liberal government has it finally started to take some action, or tried to confuse Canadians into thinking it is taking this seriously. Every member of the Liberal government voted against the Auditor General investigating the \$60-million boondoggle that is arrive scam.

However, in what it described this week as the “first wave” of announcements on fraud in the procurement system, \$5 million in fraudulent contracting was reported to the RCMP by the government. It is the first wave. We ask if it is \$5 million of the \$60 million, but these are new discoveries of fraud now being investigated by the national police force.

The fact that we have seen obstruction from the government and not urgency to address this incredibly serious matter undermines Canadians' confidence in public institutions and creates incredible stress for families who are struggling to get by. We see the laissez-faire attitude of a government that is willing to dole out millions to the elites, while the beating heart and soul of this country, the everyday Canadian, is struggling to make ends meet.

Of course, to add insult to injury, we are just weeks away from a 23% increase to the Liberal carbon tax that will see an increase in the price of gas, groceries and home heating.

The rot and waste in the government goes beyond the \$60-million arrive scam. We know that the system of procurement it is overseeing is broken, and we know that this is just one of a long list of scandals presided over by a Prime Minister twice found guilty for breaking Canada's ethics laws. However, today we are faced with, as a House of representatives of Canadians, the opportunity to send a crystal clear message that, when the grand inquest of the nation, Canada's Parliament, summons a person before a committee or when Canada's Parliament invites someone before a committee, we must get the full truth and nothing but the truth.

As such, we are going to defend Canada's institutions. We are going to restore that confidence that Canadians have, and this motion offers an appropriate remedy for the rules having been broken: an admonishment. For accountability and transparency, it offers answers to the questions that were rightfully put to the individual who will, if this motion passes, be brought before the bar of the House.

I invite all members of the House to support this important motion. I know that we have heard affirmation from members of Canada's official opposition, the common-sense Conservatives. I know that we have heard from members of the third and fourth parties, as well as from the Green Party, that they will be supporting it. I look with hopeful optimism that today, after eight years, the Liberal government will do the right thing and vote in support of restoring Canadians' confidence in its oldest and most sacred institution, the place we serve: the true north, strong and free; our country that we love; Canada.

That is why we are voting to restore that confidence, and I call on all members to do the same.

Privilege

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we agree that there is something downright scandalous about this whole thing. First of all, this is a company that greedily gobbles up all it can without a shred of restraint and, clearly, without a shred of remorse at this stage. When invited to explain himself before a House of Commons committee, Mr. Firth displayed incredible arrogance. The amount of disdain was unbelievable. We know that committees have certain tools they can use to convince or even force uncooperative witnesses to testify, but there are a few who resist, such as the one we are talking about today, Mr. Firth.

I would like to ask my colleague if he believes that committees have enough tools to inspire the authority required to stop this kind of uncooperative witness behaviour. We have seen similar behaviour at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, and we saw it this week at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, when a witness had no interest whatsoever in answering questions about the SNC-Lavalin affair.

Do the committees have enough power? Should we not give them better tools so that we do not have to have a 2024 version of a pillory to make witnesses understand that they have to answer the committee's questions?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the tools we have today allow for a range of steps. The first step, the one that is taken every day that a committee is in session in the House, is that we invite people to come to committee, whether stakeholders or people who are the subject of the report and played a part in government contracting like this.

Then there is the rare occasion where we have individuals who decline. They may have different reasons for declining, but they decline. The committee can insist on that and, of course, issue a summons. It is exceedingly rare and we have to use the power of the full House. All members have to agree to send for those individuals, which was done in this case. The tools are there.

I think the power of committees, the important work that we do, will be reinforced should this motion come to pass, because it sends an incredibly strong message about the seriousness with which all members take this matter and all matters that the House lawfully takes up at committee.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an extraordinary situation. Parliament reflects the will of the people, the will of all Canadians. Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, have the right and the duty to seek the truth. We cannot allow those who disregard, disobey, disrespect, mislead or lie to Parliament or its parliamentary bodies to go scot-free.

Privilege

I would like to ask the member if he is satisfied with the current process, the mechanisms, the rules and regulations in place that we can use to go after Canadian individuals who disrespect Parliament. If he is not satisfied, are there any changes to the current process, tools or rules he would like to propose?

• (1335)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is a question of Parliament and parliamentarians refreshing their comfort in using the tools available to them, this being an important one.

Having individuals swear an oath before they come before committee has the same effect as an individual swearing an oath in a court of law. With respect to perjury, members of the public would have an understanding, even through pop culture, as to what the prospective penalties are for the offence. When we have individuals who are flatly refusing to attend or answer questions, we need to use the tools in our parliamentary tool box today.

This tool is rarely used because it seems like it has been some time since anyone felt like they had greater power than Canada's 338 elected representatives. That is why I think it is so important that we offer the appropriate remedy in this case, and that is to get the answers for Canadians and admonish the individual who flouted the rules.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for bringing this issue forward. It is an important one for the House to debate. Like all Canadians, I have been watching what has been going on in the proceedings of the government operations committee, and I have been extremely disturbed by the lack of information being provided by this individual.

I know the hon. member is involved in several committees, not the least of which is the government operations committee, but, because we are talking obstruction, I want to speak specifically to the obstructive tactics that have been going on in committee by the NDP-Liberal coalition, whether it is filibustering, amendments to motions to water things down or just generally obstructing the ability of the committee to do its work, especially on those committees where they have the majority.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, making sure that the will of Canadians is reflected in the work that we do requires incredible fortitude. This is what we have had to put forward. As the official opposition, we have to be able to withstand the tactics of a government that has found itself, after eight years, mired in scandal. It is quite plain that it is just not worth the corruption to Canadians anymore.

Pressing forward with an issue like this, though it is difficult and might seem uncomfortable to some who might want to send this off to another committee to look at, this has been dealt with at committee. The only thing another committee could do is confirm that there was prevarication, lies and a refusal to answer questions. That is why it is so important that the House is prepared to persevere, stick to it, get these answers and resolve the situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like you to stick to the normal rotation when it

comes to the speaking time of the three other parties after the motion is presented. I would ask you to continue that tradition.

Obviously, the NDP fully supports this motion, particularly when it comes to ordering Mr. Firth to appear before the bar of the House to be reprimanded and, more importantly, to answer the questions raised in the 17th report.

• (1340)

[*English*]

I want to thank the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for his question of privilege, which I thought was solidly grounded in the traditions of the House as he presented it. I thought it was very effective. The reality is that New Democrats intervened at the time to say we believe the conditions were there for a prima facie question of privilege because of the lack of respect for the House. The Speaker's ruling, I think, confirms that, and we are now seized with the debate. It is a motion that allows for the ability of the House to reprimand Mr. Firth, call him to the bar and ensure that Canadians receive answers.

We saw with the ETS scandal under the Conservative government there was \$400 million involved, and now this scandal under the current government involves \$60 million. We need to ensure these things never happen again.

Would my colleague agree with the NDP that this is not the kind of thing that any Canadian should be tolerating?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, of course, it is devastating for all Canadians to see the waste, scandal and mismanagement after eight years of the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister. It is so important that parliamentarians recognize the incredible opportunity we have here right now to support this important motion so that anyone else thinking about engaging in some of kind of corrupt practices, cozying up with insiders, cozying up to people who are not forthright and thinking they are going to take the taxpayer for a ride, needs to understand that is unacceptable.

Canada's Conservatives will restore ethics and accountability to Ottawa, but anyone who comes before a parliamentary committee must tell the truth and give fulsome answers. If they fail to do that, there will be real consequences. Canadians are still going to get answers because Canada's Conservatives will insist on nothing less.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to this debate on this question of privilege and the motion that has been put forward by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. I want to thank him for bringing this forward. I would agree that this is an extremely serious matter.

What we have seen occur at committee is the individuals in question being asked to appear, being summoned to appear, completely ignoring those requests and demands and then, finally, appearing after the threat of arrest was made. This is not conduct that any member of Parliament or any Canadian citizen should expect in order for our democracy to function properly.

The committees that support the work in the House of Commons here, that perhaps a lot of Canadians are not completely familiar with, do very important work to inform the House, bringing forward various different proposals, policies and positions from committee members after having the opportunity to sit down and hear from actual witnesses at the ground level. That is why getting information to committee in a timely, co-operative and, most importantly, truthful manner is of critical importance. When we have people who arbitrarily decide that they do not think they need to tell the truth, or they do not think they need to appear, because they do not feel like it or do not want to, then we have a big problem. It is a problem when we are talking about something as serious as this, in terms of how public money was misused by individuals, perhaps in a fraudulent manner.

I would agree with the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes when he speaks very passionately about the need to get this information and to deal with the individuals in question properly. If we do not ensure that we are doing that, we are basically setting a precedent and opening the door to others who might feel the same way, as though they do not feel obligated to appear before a committee when they are summoned, to tell the truth or to provide information in order for parliamentarians, vis-à-vis their constituents and the Canadian population, to get to the bottom of things.

When we look at the ArriveCAN situation specifically, I would like to point out a few things where I perhaps disagree with my colleague who introduced the motion, namely, the fact that the Government of Canada has been seized with this issue since it was brought forward by CBSA and the officials to the minister. As soon as the minister was made aware of this, he directed the appropriate individuals to conduct audits and to figure out exactly what was going on. To suggest this was not the case would be void of reality of what actually happened.

Once it was discovered that work needed to be done in terms of getting to the bottom of things and figuring out exactly what happened, the minister and his officials proceeded to ensure that this would happen. As we know, as a result, at least three contracts were suspended by CBSA. Those were contracts specifically with GC Strategies, Coradix Technology and Dalian Enterprises. The manner in which that was dealt with was extremely prudent. It was the proper way to conduct this.

I am open to hearing the debate and what people have to say today. My concern about the manner in which the member has brought this forward is how we would conduct this operation, exactly. He wants to call the individuals to the bar. I do not know if that means we dissolve into committee of the whole or something, in order to ask questions.

• (1345)

This, quite frankly, is not something that has been done in over 200 years. We really do not have a practice or a proper procedure for doing this. This is why, when I intervened on the question of privilege earlier today, I specifically talked about the fact that we need to establish how we do this. What does this look like from a practical, implementing perspective?

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I was unfortunate to be one of the participants during the middle of the pandemic when we were in the House. I may have been the only Liberal member who was physically present in the House of Commons when we called another individual to the bar. All we really got out of that was people yelling and shouting and screaming from their seats while the individual stood there and was scolded and chastised.

I assume, and I have faith, that the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes genuinely wants to get to the bottom of this and that this is not about political theatre, as that tended to be. That is why I stress the fact that it is extremely important that we develop how we will go about conducting the manner in which we will call somebody, how questions will be asked and how the House will genuinely function during that time, again, given the fact that this is not something we have done in over 200 years. That does bring concern for me.

I would like to move an amendment to the motion. I have the amendment here, which I will provide to the Clerk after I read it out.

I move:

That the motion be amended by:

(a) deleting the words “, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions on the third sitting day following the adoption of this order,”; and

(b) adding the following:

“provided that, (d) it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study the procedure for questioning Kristian Firth at the Bar of the House and report back to the House with recommendations within 10 sitting days following the adoption of this order; and (e) Kristian Firth attend the Bar of the House no later than three sitting days following concurrence in the report.”.

What I am asking for is that we let the standing committee, very quickly, develop the procedure by which we would entertain the individual and proceed with the individual once they get here, and then also that we add the words to ensure that the appearance occurs within a limited time, three days, as I indicated.

That is my amendment and I will submit that to the Clerk.

• (1350)

The Speaker: The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope this signifies we will have a consensus on the important consideration around the contempt shown by Mr. Firth to the House, through the committee report and through the question of privilege that we are now debating, that the questions Mr. Firth refused to answer will be answered. It appears that we are getting to a consensus around that fact. That is important, because it is fundamental to the process and to ensuring that we get answers for Canadians and accountability from the government. It seems that the issue to work through is the procedure around that.

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We will certainly take into consideration the amendment, but as far as the NDP is concerned, what is absolutely vital is that the admonishment be delivered to Mr. Firth and that we have in place a method to get all of the answers that Canadians are demanding. This is fundamental, because it has gone on now for 20 years. There have been procurement scandals, the ETS scandal under the former Harper government, and now the ArriveCAN scandal under the current government, with \$59.5 million that was clearly mis-spent, \$19.1 million of it connected to GC Strategies.

Would my colleague from Kingston and the Islands agree with the NDP that we need to stop the scandals, whether Conservative or Liberal, and that we need to put in place measures to ensure that this kind of scandal, this kind of misspending, never happens again?

• (1355)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we need to ensure that taxpayers get what they deserve and that they are being treated fairly in terms of money being spent on their behalf. Whenever an issue arises through government like we have seen with ArriveCAN, we need to get to the bottom of it on behalf of taxpayers.

To that end, I am definitely supportive of what the member for New Westminster—Burnaby has indicated. However, I do want to stress that the reason I put forward the amendment is my concern as to what we will actually get out of the process of having the individual here. That is why I stress that rather than having a debate, and everybody perhaps not really knowing the procedure and how we are going to deal this because we have not done it in over 200 years, we lay it out clearly and that it is set up so we have a process in place to do that. That is what my amendment is about.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last time this was done was in 1913, which is certainly not 200 years ago. I would draw the member's attention to John Bourinot, *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, fourth edition, at pages 70 to 74. Page 71 states:

When the witness appears at the bar of the house, each question will be written out and handed to the speaker; who, strictly speaking, should read it to the witness; but on certain occasions a considerable degree of latitude is allowed for the convenience of the house, and questions put directly by members have been supposed to be put through the speaker.

The precision with which this is done has already been laid out, not in ancient texts but in the text of precedents that are relevant to this place. A further committee study, further delay, is not what we need. Of course order and decorum will be maintained; that is the role of the Speaker of the House. Of course, like in all institutions in Canada, Canadians have confidence that the Speaker would do it in just that way, a way where decorum is maintained but that we do get answers and admonishment, and that it is done in very due course.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, it was 111 years. I apologize; I said 200. It does not change the fact that it was certainly before the member or I was born. It was before the two great world wars, and before the *Titanic* sank. It was a long time ago. The situation warrants our at least studying to make sure that the manner in which it is done is acceptable.

Something that unfortunately was not 111 years ago was the last time we called somebody before the bar. I was in the House when the member was in the House, and despite the fact that he has great assurances that the Speaker will do their job, in terms of maintaining decorum, it was Conservatives who were, in my opinion, outright ruthless in the way they treated the President of PHAC when he came before the bar.

We have a precedent from less than two years ago for how Conservatives treat somebody who comes before the bar. I have a lot of respect for the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, but I do not agree with him that decorum just happens. We know for a fact that it did not happen the last time we did this, so it would be very prudent of us to take 10 days to work with his colleagues who sit on the committee, to determine and establish the practice we will use when the individual arrives.

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I feel like I am living in a old-time movie. As a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and having seen a number of questions of privilege before, I know that we cannot predict the outcome of what happens in this committee.

However, an issue this important should be dealt with here, in the House. I want us to discuss it here. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will not have the last word. I fully understand that my colleague opposite is trying to buy time and create an opportunity for the committee to make an amendment, but I think this needs to be resolved here in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, that is not what I am proposing.

What I am proposing in the amendment is not that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs change the wording or anything like that. We can pass that privilege motion with my amendment here. All it says is that, before the individual appears before the bar, we allow PROC to establish the manner in which the individual is questioned, whether we are in committee of the whole or a regular proceeding.

I realize the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes brought forward some suggestions as to how it happened in 1913, and by the way, the *Titanic* sunk in 1912, so I should not have made that reference, but the truth is, I am just talking about letting PROC establish how that individual is treated when they come here. I am by no means suggesting the individual does not come here.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the member for all the work he has done on this file. It is extremely important to make sure all of the work we do in this place continues to have integrity. I know that is a mutual commitment that all parties share, and solutions to this challenge have required a multipartisan approach. Despite all the theatrics in the House, the finger pointing, name-calling and everything else, this has been a very collaborative approach.

I am hoping the member could speak to the collaborative nature of his amendment and what is necessary to get us to a place where the House can continue the work it is doing with integrity.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I genuinely hope we can get answers on behalf of Canadians out of this, not political theatre, not dragging somebody there just for the purpose of showing a nightly clip that shows another individual being brought before the bar in such a manner. We are doing this so we can actually get the answers to the questions that were not provided in committee.

To the point of the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, it is to show Canadians that there is an obligation when people are summoned to committee to come and provide the truth, and if they do not, there is recourse to that.

I do not disagree with the manner in which the member has put it forward. I just want to make sure our objective here is going to be to get to the bottom of this issue and that we have the right tools in place to do it. I genuinely think this is the correct way. It is the way that Canadians would expect us to do it, and it would be the responsible way that would provide the proper due diligence.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I totally disagree with the categorization the member opposite made of when we had the president of PHAC here. I was here, as were other members, and it is untrue that it was not done in a proper format.

Parliament is a place that needs to be respected as an institution. I believe we should be able to get answers. Does the member believe firmly we should get answers in the most direct way possible, or is he creating more process?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, Parliament is also a place where we ensure things are done in a proper manner to ensure that the right answers are received for Canadians. To his point, I absolutely hope we can remove the partisanship from this and work to getting those answers. To his last point, I most definitely want to get the answers to it, but more importantly, Canadians deserve to get the answers to these questions.

* * *

● (1405)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that messages have been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following bills: Bill C-34, an act to amend the Investment Canada Act; Bill C-67, an act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024; Bill C-68, an act

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for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

[Translation]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Terrebonne.

* * *

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WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to defend the Parliament of Canada, since I hope there will come a day when Quebec no longer has to answer to this institution. However, I have a duty to defend the principles that this Parliament embodies, including respect for the democratic institutions and parliamentary democracy in which Quebec currently participates.

We have been dealing with what could be called a new scandal in recent weeks. This is about ArriveCAN, an app that was supposed to cost \$80,000 but may have cost \$60 million. We are not even sure. The Auditor General issued a report on the government's management of the ArriveCAN app. In her words, the management of the ArriveCAN app was the worst she had seen in her career. We are finding out that the ArriveCAN file is just the tip of the iceberg. Every time we turn over a stone, we learn something new.

We found out that there were situations where Canada Border Services Agency staff were attending activities to which some suppliers, like the ones we are talking about today in relation to the question of privilege, were invited. The average management costs were \$1,090 a day, when an equivalent position in the technology sector costs \$675 a day on average. All kinds of shocking details are coming to light bit by bit. Every thread we tug on reveals new information.

The person we are talking about today, Kristian Firth, justified his hourly rate of \$2,600 by saying that he did not just work from nine to five. No, we know that his company does not provide any services, as he told us. It does not provide any products to the government, yet Mr. Firth himself said that he submitted over 1,500 invoices monthly.

He says that the amount jumped suddenly. The contract we are talking about here went from \$2.35 million to \$13.9 million. That is taxpayer money. At the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, of which I am honoured to be a member, the Comptroller General of Canada recently revealed that GC Strategies, the company founded by Mr. Firth, and its predecessor, Coredal Systems Consulting, had obtained nearly \$108 million in contracts since 2011.

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What we also learned in recent days is that some manual searches enable the government and some departments to find other contracts. This suggests that more than \$108 million was paid out. An amount was mentioned, but no one is sure what the correct number is. La Presse indicated that it was \$250 million. Several amounts have been mentioned. It is a big problem when we are unable to find out how much a person who has no respect for the democratic institutions of Quebec and Canada is making. How much money did that person get? The government cannot even tell us.

According to what Kristian Firth told the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, he and his associate were pocketing 21%. If we estimate that those contracts were worth \$108 million, then those two people, Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, received 21% of \$108 million. That is about \$23 million, which is an enormous amount given that no services were provided. If that is not mismanagement of public funds, then what is?

These individuals saw a loophole. Therein lies the problem. They have no respect for taxpayers' money, and they have shown repeatedly in committee that they have no respect for Canadian institutions, which represent Canadians and Quebecers alike. These same individuals were awarded contracts under both the Liberals as well as the Conservatives, when their firm was called Coredal Systems Consulting. In fact, Coredal, which had been founded some 10 years earlier, was bought out by Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony. Initially, Caleb White was part of it as well. However, the firm changed its name to GC Strategies when there was a change of government.

• (1410)

GC Strategies and Coredal Systems Consulting have the same owners, with the exception of Caleb White, who, for reasons unknown, is no longer involved. GC Strategies received the bulk of its contracts from the Canada Border Services Agency in connection with ArriveCAN.

According to the Auditor General's report, many of these contracts were awarded in a non-competitive process. Emails that recently came to light reveal that Public Services and Procurement Canada had raised a red flag. Despite the pandemic, PSPC noted that it was strange to award a contract worth several million dollars over three years when these individuals claimed that the emergency situation justified them getting a contract without a competition. If the situation was really that urgent, why the rush to award a three-year contract? Something does not add up here.

Even though Public Services and Procurement Canada sounded the alarm, the Canada Border Services Agency, at the behest of certain individuals within the agency, ultimately decided to award the contracts with Public Services and Procurement Canada's approval. Now, unfortunately, PSPC has to make sure that this kind of thing does not happen again and that people like Kristian Firth do not wrongfully cash in on public funds.

Another point I would like to raise is that Mr. Firth and Mr. Anthony own a numbered company. That should set off an alarm bell. The fact that they have a numbered company tells us that their business may not necessarily be above board. Mr. Firth and Mr. Anthony met in 2010 or so, when they worked for Veritaaq Technology House. The two left Veritaaq Technology House in about 2010. Are

members aware that, in 2009, the same firm and the same executives pleaded guilty to bid rigging? Any idea who else was involved? It was none other than the Canada Border Services Agency.

These individuals, employed by Veritaaq Technology House when the company was accused of bid rigging, were already working for Veritaaq Technology House when the judge asked that all Veritaaq Technology House employees, including Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, receive training on what constitutes bid rigging. Therefore, they were well aware of what they were doing when they drafted the RFP that enabled GC Strategies to win a multimillion-dollar competitive contract for ArriveCAN. Both individuals knew full well what they were doing.

Thanks to the Auditor General's work, we know that these two individuals took part in whiskey tastings, dinners, golf tournaments and dozens of other events attended by Canada Border Services Agency officials, and, let it be noted, not just the two who were suspended.

The pretext of emergency has been raised many times to justify the ArriveCAN affair. During the pandemic, controls were less stringent, and so on. However, the number of non-competitive contracts had risen sharply since 2016, and 2023, which was after the pandemic, saw the highest number since 2016.

Some very serious issues are currently being studied by several committees. It was in this context that the owners of GC Strategies were called to appear before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts heard from the CEO of Dalian, the other company in a very similar situation. Without going into detail, because that is not the subject of today's debate, I would suggest that that individual was also in contempt of Parliament when he refused to answer questions and gave completely contradictory answers from start to finish.

One of my colleagues from the Liberal Party said that she was pleased to see that these people had managed to get all of Parliament on the same wavelength. In other words, she said that we all agree that these individuals woefully lacked respect for the institutions.

• (1415)

Evidently, this question of privilege has been raised in terms of contempt of Parliament. Contempt of Parliament is defined as any act or omission that offends the authority or dignity of Parliament.

The question of privilege raised by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes is quite relevant. Kristian Firth finally agreed to come testify again before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, after several attempts. We were even prepared to have the Sergeant-at-Arms force him to come. He agreed to come back to the committee on March 13.

He made a statement and the committee members asked a series of question about his role in the ArriveCAN app. During his testimony, Mr. Firth refused to answer many of the committee's questions, and several times he claimed to be doing so because an RCMP investigation was under way. I should also point out that the CEO of the other company, Mr. Yeo, said that the RCMP had never contacted him. Again, who is telling the truth? In the same investigation related to bid rigging, the signatures used without consent and all the rest, there is a CEO, Mr. Firth, who refused to answer the committee's questions under the pretext that the RCMP was investigating the matter and another who told us in committee that the RCMP never contacted him. Again, who is telling the truth? There are likely several separate instances of contempt of Parliament, there.

For now, I want to focus on what happened in committee that day. Certain statements in Mr. Firth's testimony were challenged as being misleading or untrue. In fact, he was even asked if he had told the truth. Mr. Firth replied that he had made a mistake with the terms "chalet" and "cottage". Honestly, can we be serious for a minute? Who mixes up terms like "cottage" and "chalet" or whatever? To answer like that with a smile is insulting to the members of the committee, who are trying to find answers to perfectly legitimate questions about where taxpayers' money is going and how it is used.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates pointed out that page 1081 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says the following about duly sworn witnesses—and, yes, Mr. Firth was sworn in at the beginning of the meeting: "...refusal to answer questions or failure to reply truthfully may give rise to a charge of contempt of the House, whether the witness has been sworn in or not." That is what Mr. Firth did; he repeatedly refused to answer questions from committee members.

As a result, and because Mr. Firth refused to answer some questions and the veracity of his answers was in question, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates adopted a motion to raise the question of privilege. Obviously, the Bloc Québécois supported that question of privilege. We were at committee, we asked Mr. Firth questions, and we saw that there was indeed contempt of Parliament. I am therefore pleased about the Speaker's ruling, since we agree with it and we agree with the motion that was moved today.

With regard to the amendment, there are a number of factors to consider. The first, as my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle said, is that, unfortunately, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs often acts in a very partisan way and could cause delays in what needs to happen anyway. It is up to the House of Commons, the Speaker, to decide whether a person who has committed contempt of Parliament should be brought before the bar to answer members' questions and thus submit to the minimum that is

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required of someone who respects democratic institutions, which is to answer the questions of committee members.

Let us not forget that members of Parliament represent the people and the population. We get these kinds of questions every day. Everyone is talking about the ArriveCAN affair these days. It is not just here that this is happening. We are not in a bubble. This is everyone's business. Right now, people are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. Meanwhile, certain individuals and companies are receiving tens of millions of taxpayer dollars, providing no services and, worse still, failing to take responsibility.

• (1420)

They are not taking any responsibility in all this. When they do deign to answer us, they do it with a smile. It is very insulting.

We are still thinking about whether the matter should be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It is important to understand that the House has the power to decide what will happen to these individuals. We first want to ensure that everyone in the House agrees that there was contempt of Parliament and that these individuals, particularly Kristian Firth, but also Darren Anthony and potentially Mr. Yeo, must answer the questions of Quebec and Canadian parliamentarians. We want to ensure that everyone here agrees that they must appear before the bar and hear the Speaker's decision and ruling on their actions, which are absolutely shameful.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She shared a very detailed account of what happened at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. We know a number of committees are looking into this matter.

I also appreciate the fact that my colleague recognizes that there are ways of doing things in Parliament and that proper procedures must be followed. I do not think she would want another incident like what happened in the 43rd Parliament. When a public servant was summoned to the bar here, chaos broke out. People were yelling and screaming. That kind of procedure is not going to get us the answers we need.

My colleague said that the Bloc Québécois is thinking things over. I would like to know what the Bloc Québécois members think matters most in this debate.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that upholding a degree of decorum is important. However, decorum is needed from both sides.

When someone so flagrantly disrespects members in committee and has no respect for democratic institutions, as I said several times in my speech, they must appear at the bar no matter what, because they are in contempt of Parliament.

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If she is worrying at this stage about whether there will be decorum when this person appears at the bar, she is missing the point. Was this person in contempt of Parliament? The answer is yes.

According to the Chair, this individual is in contempt of Parliament and must therefore appear at the bar and answer members' questions. That is what the Bloc Québécois has to say.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are currently witnessing a historic debate in the House of Commons, since it has been over 100 years since someone was called to testify in this way for contempt of Parliament before all parliamentarians.

This is a serious moment, but it is also essential to ensure that the people who testify before committees understand that, when members of this Parliament ask them to appear before a committee and answer members' questions, they must tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

I myself had the opportunity to take part in a few committee meetings on the ArriveCAN issue. Let us not forget that ArriveCAN was supposed to cost \$80,000, but it ended up costing around \$60 million. No one can even say how much the app cost because the companies involved refused to hand over all the information.

It is important that we send a clear message that Parliament and its committees will not tolerate witnesses coming here and telling only part of the truth. I think that is exactly what my colleague's speech was about.

I would like her to expand on the importance of witness appearances so that committees can function properly in the future.

• (1425)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, there are two committees that are conducting a very intense study of the ArriveCAN issue. There is the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which we have talked about at length, and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, of which I am a member. We have been studying this issue for a long time.

It is thanks to the questions that members ask and then relay through the media that the public finds out what happened. It is our work in committee and the responses that we get from witnesses that help us shed light on this story. As we know, it is a wild story. As I said in my speech, certain people disrespected our institutions. They may have stolen taxpayer money, because receiving money and not providing any services in return is called stealing.

The answers we get to our questions are very important for ensuring that democracy continues to work and for building public trust in democratic institutions. That is why a person who purposely refuses to answer questions has to be charged with contempt of Parliament so that this does not happen again. It sends a signal to all witnesses, present and future, that when they appear in committee, they have to answer the questions.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all parties clearly agree that we need answers. We have lived through too many scandals. There was the ETS scandal under the Conservatives. Now we have the ArriveCAN scandal under the

Liberals. It is important that we get all the answers in order to put an end to all these scandals.

The procedure being proposed has not been used in over 110 years. The last time was before we had simultaneous interpretation, before television, and even before microphones were installed in the House. It is important that we establish a solid foundation for this procedure. That way, the House will be able to follow it in the future, too. We all agree on the importance of calling this person, Mr. Firth, to the bar. I believe we are all united in our desire to get answers.

Does the member agree with me that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could actually sit over the next two weeks to put in place recommendations on how to follow this unusual procedure?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, one thing is important. Whether it happened last year or 100 years ago, contempt of Parliament has been committed. In that context, it does not really matter what will happen from a procedural perspective. Does the fact that this procedure has not been followed recently mean that we need to add an additional step when calling that individual to the bar, as my colleague said?

Does this justify referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs? I do not know. What I do know is that contempt of Parliament has been committed and that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs can in fact meet over the next two weeks, even if it has to happen at a time when we are in our ridings to be closer to our constituents.

Perhaps the committee can meet to discuss the matter, but the most important thing to me is this: If the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs examines the issue, will it put partisan concerns aside? Will it place the democratic institutions that represent Quebeckers and Canadians above the interests of individual political parties?

• (1430)

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that the hon. member for Terrebonne will have two minutes to respond to questions and comments when we resume this debate. Since the time provided for debate has expired for today, the House will resume consideration of the privilege motion on Monday, April 8, at 11 a.m.

Pursuant to Standing Order 94, I wish to inform hon. members that private members' business will be suspended on that day.

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, April 8, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

Privilege

[*English*]

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

Let me take an opportunity to wish all members a happy Easter, a happy Passover and the end of Ramadan.

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