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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 3, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 3, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[Translation]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the House of Commons report to Canadians for 2016.

* * *

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2016-17

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2017, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(b) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 20 petitions.

* * *

CANADA-UKRAINE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-31, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Ukraine.

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

* * *

VETERANS' WEEK

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to turn the attention of the House to a solemn and important occasion. Veterans' Week begins tomorrow and will run from November 5 to 11. It is a time when all

Canadians remember and honour the men and women who have defended Canada and those who continue to serve today.

From Vimy Ridge to Juno Beach, from Kapyong, Korea, to the peacekeeping missions of the 70s, 80s, and 90s, to the Balkan War, Afghanistan, and our current efforts in the Middle East, all Canadians owe a debt of gratitude to our veterans. For all they have done and continue to do, we will remember them.

We will also remember the indigenous men and women who have helped define our proud military history for over 200 years. It is estimated that more than 12,000 served in the great conflicts of the 20th century, with at least 500 giving their lives. Indigenous veterans have served with honour and distinction overseas, and their dedication continues in peacekeeping operations in faraway lands. Today more than 1,200 first nation, Inuit, and Métis people serve with the Canadian Armed Forces and represent many diverse cultures from across Canada. All Canadians thank them as they continue to make our country proud through their service at home and abroad.

This year marks a significant milestone in Canada's history, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel and the Battle of the Somme, two major campaigns of the First World War that resulted in tens of thousands of casualties.

Next year will be special too as we mark more significant milestones. It will be the 150th birthday of Canada, the 70th anniversary of the Dieppe raid, and the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele and the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge was an exceptionally important turning point for Canada. As Brigadier-General A.E. Ross said, "in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation". As much as the battle has become symbolic in how it helped forge the nation we have today, we must never forget the cost. More than 10,000 Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded at Vimy Ridge.

The selflessness, service, and sacrifice of Canadian men and women, the diversity and passion of those who have fought for Canada and those who continue to serve today have allowed us to build this nation on the principles of peace, freedom, equality, and democracy.

Routine Proceedings

That is why the government has committed to ensure that Canada's veterans and their families receive the respect, support, care, and economic opportunities they deserve. Veterans Affairs Canada serves nearly 200,000 veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members, RCMP personnel, and survivors.

Over the past year, we have made great strides in improving services to veterans. With the opening of Veterans Affairs Canada offices across the country, we hired 300 new front-line employees and are investing \$5.6 billion in additional financial benefits for veterans and their families.

There is still important work to be done to improve the lives and economic opportunities for veterans, and this government will continue to improve our services. We will ensure that as many veterans as possible receive the support and opportunities necessary to rebuild their lives.

●(1010)

Veterans' Week is not a time for partisanship. Commemorations should transcend party lines as we express our shared gratitude for those who have served and continue to serve.

Through Veterans' Week, Canadians will come together at memorials and cenotaphs to honour those men and women who have served and who continue to serve our country. We remember their exceptional achievements, their sacrifice, and the contribution they have made to Canada's legacy.

Canadians also honour veterans and serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces through school initiatives and through social media using the hashtag #RememberThem.

Canada is a great country, a prosperous country, a free country. Our veterans made it so, and our Canadian Armed Forces ensure that it stays that way.

I urge every member of the House and every single Canadian from coast to coast to coast to join in remembering them and especially to observe the two minutes of silence at 11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month to honour the memory of all those who have served, especially those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Remember them.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today on behalf of our leader and our party and as the official opposition critic for veterans affairs.

Veterans' Week begins on Saturday and will conclude on the 98th anniversary of the armistice of the Great War.

[*Translation*]

The unbreakable bond between Canadians and our veterans will be on full display as millions pay their solemn respects at cenotaphs and memorials across the nation on Remembrance Day.

[*English*]

Almost a century ago, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, the Government of Canada made a firm commitment to honour the accomplishments of all Canada's veterans and military personnel, and they deserve it.

Regardless of the unknown and the grave dangers our soldiers face, regardless of the time or the place they serve, Canadians have always answered the call to stand up for freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Regardless of their political allegiances or philosophical beliefs, Canadians all share a common admiration and deep respect for Canada's veterans. They are the tie that binds the citizens of this great country together.

Remembrance Day is a time to mourn and reflect, but it is also a time to celebrate the proud military traditions of our great country.

●(1015)

[*Translation*]

Our military tradition is remarkable with over 1.7 million Canadians serving in our armed forces during the conflicts of the last century. It speaks to the nature of our country that so many have stood on guard for Canada.

That is our history. Canada is a nation that has always sent its finest men and women to serve where they are needed and in numbers far exceeding what the rest of the world might have expected.

But punching beyond our weight comes at a terrible cost of blood and treasure. During the First and Second World Wars, our country lost more than 116,000 Canadians.

[*English*]

Battles during the first Great War, like Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele, Amiens, and of course, Vimy, took from us so many of our best and our brightest, but our brave and tenacious troops showed the world what Canada was made of.

During the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel, over 90% of the members of the first Newfoundland Regiment were killed. Newfoundland was just a small colony at the time, and an entire generation of Newfoundlanders vanished in a matter of 30 minutes.

During the Second World War, we showed our mettle once again in the Battle of the Atlantic, the invasion of Italy, and the memorable days when our boys landed on Juno Beach.

Let us also recognize the sacrifice of more than 300 in the South African War, the more than 500 soldiers lost during the Korean War, the 159 who gave their lives in Afghanistan, and the approximately 130 Canadians who have died in peacekeeping missions serving across the globe.

[*Translation*]

May we always remember the fallen who went far from home to answer the call of peace. May we think of all the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, all the grieving families, and all the soldiers who have been wounded in body and mind. It is something we do not talk about nearly enough.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

May we remember also men like Roy Victor Shaw, who this past July passed away at the age of 98 in my riding of Barrie—Innisfil. Roy was one of only 10 Canadian veterans left from that fateful day in June of 1944. When the landing craft's ramp lowered that day, the 26-year-old Roy, carrying 50 pounds, began the longest run of his life. Roy was among the first of 3,000 Canadians in the first wave that day to face the deadly coastline fortifications of the occupying German army. The five-mile stretch of beach would eventually see 14,000 Canadians come ashore, but it would be Roy Shaw and others in A and B Company from the Queen's Own Rifles that would face the brunt of the machine guns, concrete emplacements, hill boxes, fields of barbed wire, and mines.

The first wave took heavy casualties on the beaches. It was during this incredibly dangerous moment when Roy and others from B Company went to help a wounded man lying on the beach that he was struck by a bullet in the right shoulder. The injury was serious, and Roy found out later it almost cost him his life. June 6 did cost the life of Gerald A. Crawford, Roy's cousin. He gave his life on D-Day, and he is remembered on page 282 of the Book of Remembrance in the Memorial Chamber.

I had the occasion to speak at Roy's funeral, and I thanked his family for what he did. If it were not for Roy and his 1.7 million comrades over the last century, none of us, the 338 of us who are privileged to sit in the House of Commons, a symbol where democracy and freedom is practised, would be able to do so.

Also, may we be grateful for those who serve with distinction today. I encourage all Canadians this Veterans' Week to find their own way of saying thanks. I encourage young people to reach out to a veteran, learn their story, and share it with their friends. Perhaps they could write a letter to a member of the Canadian Forces posted overseas, or a local base commander. They could spend some time at a local retirement home with those who lived through the experience of wartime.

There are many honourable ways to give thanks to the men and women who have served Canada in a time of war and peace for their service. We owe all our veterans, our service members, and their families an endless debt of gratitude. We are holding the torch high. The Canadian heroes who lie beneath the poppies in Flanders Field can rest in peace.

On the 11th hour, of the 11th day, on the 11th month, we will remember them. Lest we forget.

● (1020)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today as we gather in the House, and on November 11 when we gather across this great country, we must take the time to reflect and remember the sacrifice of those who lost their life protecting our country and our way of life. We must also take the time to remember the families who lost a son, daughter, wife, husband, father or mother, families that will never be whole again. We must also remember those who did come home, but were never the same physically, mentally or emotionally, who witnessed the horrors of war that will haunt them for the remainder of their life. We must remember their families who are living with someone with new physical or mental challenges, a changed person, someone so very

different from the one who left home with the honourable intention to defend and protect our country and our communities.

New Democrats honour the service of the men and women who put their lives on the line for our country. We honour the families who have sacrificed so much. Today in the House, and on November 11, and every day, we need to listen and reflect on the voices of those who have served our country. We need to share our understanding of their message with all Canadians. If we truly listen to those voices, we will hear what an honour it was to serve our country. We will hear their pride in their service to this great nation. We will hear the voices of truly remarkable women and men. However, sadly we will also hear about the struggles many veterans face as they leave the military. If we listen, we will hear about the feelings of abandonment, loss of identity, and frustration with the services that are supposed to support them and their family.

Veterans deserve respect and dignity. Unfortunately, many injured veterans feel they have lost their career and are left without that identity. They feel abandoned by the government that asked them to serve in the first place. We can and must do better for the men and women who put their lives on the line, and for the families who have sacrificed so much. It is our duty as members of Parliament here today to ensure that no veteran falls through the cracks, that no veteran feels abandoned or lost. We must all work together to undo the damage of years of neglect.

As we approach Canada's 150th birthday and celebrate this great nation, we should also reflect on and address our mistakes. What better way to honour the sacred obligation we owe the men and women who put their lives on the line than to ensure that when their years of service come to an end, we guarantee that they and their family are taken care of, appreciated, and integrated smoothly back into civilian life.

In 2017, we will recognize the 100th anniversary of the infamous Battle of Vimy Ridge. It was 100 years ago that Canadian soldiers who were fighting in the First World War experienced unimaginable horrors. Canadians had no idea of the monstrous reality into which they were sending our sons and daughters, and no idea that a few decades later we would be sending another generation to war once again.

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Canada has since asked our men and women to serve in Korea, the Persian Gulf, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. Our soldiers have served in Cold War operations, and have assisted with tragedies and emergencies at home and abroad. Their service and sacrifices should always be remembered and never forgotten. We remember those who fought, the men, women, indigenous people, the injured, and the many who did not make it home. We remember with sorrow the families who welcomed back shattered souls, shattered bodies, or no one at all. We reflect and remember so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past so that we may make wise decisions and pursue the path of peace.

Lest we forget.

●(1025)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to give the hon. member for Terrebonne the floor?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Terrebonne.

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, November 11 is Remembrance Day in Canada. We are pausing in the House today and taking a few moments to honour the memory of soldiers from all over the world who fought for their homelands and their fellow citizens.

We will celebrate values like dedication, courage, loyalty, respect, and integrity, which are central to the dedication they show throughout their military careers. We will commemorate the lives of those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of honour and liberty. Given their heroism, a single day of remembrance hardly seems sufficient. Everyone has a duty to remember, and we here in the House have perhaps an even greater duty, especially given that we regularly make decisions that have the potential to change lives.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish to salute the bravery of fallen soldiers. We would also like to salute the veterans to whom we are forever grateful. As an expression of our deep gratitude, we owe it to them to provide the support, the assistance, and the services they deserve throughout their lives. That is also what it means to remember. The duty to remember does not begin and end on November 11.

I have served as well and I want to thank every man and woman, soldier to soldier, who has served with devotion, selflessness, and altruism. As a veteran and a member of Parliament, I cannot help but think of all those who are deployed around the world today. We all experience difficult moments and make sacrifices in life. Leaving family and friends for battlefields in foreign lands is considerably more difficult.

I want them to know that we stand behind them, that Quebeckers stand behind them. I want them to know that, when they come home to their part of the country, we will be by their side. We will still be there and we will be worthy of their sacrifice. We will be there for the rest of their days.

I thank all soldiers. Lest we forget.

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled, “Development Cooperation for a More Stable, Inclusive and Prosperous World: A Collective Ambition”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE SUPPLY

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find consent for the following motion. I move:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, that all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 15, 2016, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

●(1030)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the chief opposition whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who stayed at the Northwestern Tent & RV Park in Dryden, Ontario, located in the rugged riding of Kenora. The petitioners call on the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time year-round employees will continue to be recognized intact as small businesses.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Kitchener Centre, who are calling upon the House of Commons to establish comprehensive national standards for the armoured car and secure logistics industry.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Business of Supply

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 22 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PREFERENTIAL ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner should be granted the authority to oversee and enforce the directives to Ministers listed in Open and Accountable Government in order to end the current practice of “cash-for-access” by ensuring there is no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians or political parties.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I thank my colleague for seconding the motion, and of course all my colleagues on this side of the House who have been asking very pertinent, very relevant, and very tough questions in regard to this. In terms of what brought us to this point of having to move the motion, it is actually a sad day.

Before I get going, this will probably be my last opportunity to do a speech before we have Remembrance Day. I want to thank all of my colleagues in this place today who spoke so eloquently, so articulately, and so passionately about Veterans' Week. If allowed, I would add a little personal touch to this.

I want to thank my colleague, Yonah Martin in the Senate, who allowed me to sponsor a bill in the previous Parliament to recognize the Korean War Veterans Day. I would just add a personal story to this.

My grandfather, who I grew up with on the family farm, had three brothers. At the time, the policy of the Government of Canada was that one male would be allowed to stay home. Even though it was all voluntary that was the way it was decided. My grandfather Don was the lucky one who did not sign up to go to war. He was chosen to stay home and look after the family farm.

His brothers, Joe, Robert, and James, all served with the Canadian Armed Forces. Robert was killed in the Italian campaign and is buried at Coriano Ridge. James served with 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and was killed in February, a couple of weeks before the Battle at Kapyong in Korea, and is buried in Busan. His oldest brother, Joe landed on D-Day and survived. He was the only one of my grandfather's brothers who survived, or did he? Sadly, around the age of 60, after returning from the horrors of war, he took his own life after having a very tumultuous time.

It is very important that we recognize and honour those who made these sacrifices. I just wanted to get that on the record.

The reason I wanted to talk today about the motion, and am pleased to introduce it, is that the Prime Minister, upon his election, and the new Liberal government that we have here in Ottawa

produced a document called “Open and Accountable Government”. It is a very large document and it contains a lot of words.

However, we do not know what some of these words actually mean. That is why we are using the motion today to get clarification on what the intent actually is. It is truly sad that I have to table a motion, calling on the Prime Minister to follow the rules he has here in his very own “Open and Accountable Government” document. However, here I am, calling on the Prime Minister to do something to make sure that Canadians can be confident in the business of the government, in the business of political activities.

Why is this important? Canadians need to have confidence that the people they send to Ottawa are acting in their best interests. I am not going to go back and do a litany of all of the things that have transpired before this. However, when somebody in the general public asks what someone else does, we laugh and chuckle and say, “I'm a lawyer”, and then the lawyer jokes ensue. If it is “I'm a politician”, then the politician jokes ensue.

It really should not ensue. Political life should be something that we aspire to. Asking for the opportunity to represent our constituents, our country, and to come here to do what is best on behalf of all Canadians is actually a very noble calling.

It is incumbent on each and every one of us in the House to then make sure that the reputations we have as individuals, but also the reputation of the institution, the institution of Parliament, the institution of the Government of Canada, and the federal government, which should be leading by example in all ways, actually maintain that trust and that sacred bond with the people of Canada.

We need to be open and transparent, and accountable for everything that we do, for everything that we say, and for all of the money that we spend. It is a clear principle. There should be no taxation without representation. We should understand how policy decisions are being made, and how influence is conducted here in Ottawa.

I am not going to say that all lobbyists are bad. I am not going to say that all politicians are bad. I am saying that in order to make sure that we are clear and above board, and have the trust of the Canadian public, we must do so in an open and accountable way.

● (1035)

Let us refer to the document that the Prime Minister has. It says, in his message to ministers:

To be worthy of Canadians' trust, we must always act with integrity. This is not merely a matter of adopting the right rules, or of ensuring technical compliance with those rules.

We have seen clearly in the House of Commons that when we ask questions with regard to this “Open and Accountable Government” document, they answer with just technical compliance with the Elections Canada laws, which is already a violation of the Prime Minister's own rules. It continues:

As Ministers, you and your staff must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

Business of Supply

Yet again, I will make the case. Time and again, when questions have been put to the government on this particular matter, on this document, the government's response is that they are hiding behind a lower bar, the bar that has been set with the Canada Elections Act financing, and of course, the bar that we have with the Lobbying Act, the ethics act, and the code of conduct for members of Parliament and ministers, and so on.

This document was meant to be a higher bar. It came in with much fanfare and was touted by the government as being the solution. However, what we are seeing is that it is not actually being utilized. It was all for show and there are no substantive changes that have been made.

I will remind folks of the issues pertaining to the Gomery Commission and so on. As I said, I do not want to dredge up all of that history. I am not here to do that today. However, it painted this institution, it painted politicians, and it painted government with a very negative brush. It is imperative that all of us make sure none of us in the House are painted with that brush again.

The document goes on to say:

You are accountable to Parliament for the exercise of the powers, duties and functions with which you have been entrusted. This requires you to be present in Parliament to answer honestly and accurately about your areas of responsibility, to take corrective action as appropriate to address problems that may arise in your portfolios...and to work with parliamentary colleagues of all political persuasions in a respectful and constructive manner.

That respectful and constructive manner should be that, at the end of the debate on this motion, we have an agreement in the House, absolutely, unequivocally, to pass the motion so that we can work and co-operate together and have the information from each other that we need, in order to govern this country wisely and in good conscience.

A general principle stated in the document is that:

...a public office holder should not participate in a political activity that is, or that may reasonably be seen to be, incompatible with the public office holder's duty, or otherwise be seen to impair his or her ability to discharge his or her public duties in a politically impartial fashion, or would cast doubt on the integrity or impartiality of the office.

Canadians want to know. We have seen several cases where questions have been put in the House with regard to Apotex, for example, where we talked about the activities of the chairman of the board, who is actually actively organizing a fundraising campaign, a cash for access fundraiser, for Liberal cabinet ministers. Meanwhile, Apotex is suing the federal government. It is organizing a fundraiser for the Minister of Finance, the same Minister of Finance who sits on the cabinet litigation committee, deciding what the government strategy is on lawsuits that face the government. Apotex is actually throwing a fundraiser for the Liberal Party of Canada.

It just does not pass.

As the chair of the ethics committee, when we ask the Lobbying Commissioner and we ask the Ethics Commissioner to look into these matters, we do not get a satisfactory answer from them. They tell us, unequivocally, that they are unable to get access to the information that they need. They cannot get the information they need because they do not have the ability to enforce this document.

This is what the motion today is all about. The motion says we have an "Open and Accountable Government" document. It was tabled by the government. It is enforced by the Privy Council Office. Nobody, not the Information Commissioner, the Privacy Commissioner, the Ethics Commissioner, the Lobbying Commissioner, actually has access to cabinet documents.

● (1040)

I am not suggesting that all members of Parliament have access to cabinet confidentiality, but to remove any perceived notions of conflicts of interest or ethical lapses, surely to goodness we can allow our commissioners to review this information to make sure everything is operating above board.

In annex B, Fundraising and Dealing with Lobbyists: Best Practices for Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, it says:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must avoid conflict of interest, the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest.

This is not happening. A lot of questions are being asked. When the Minister of Justice appeared at a private event in Toronto hosted by a law firm at \$1,500 a touch, one had to wonder what is going on. This was not an event where anybody could buy a ticket and go to it; this was a private event. There are more of these examples. One only has to scan the media, and the media are doing a very good job right now of chasing these things down.

We found more than 90 of these cash for access fundraisers, a vast number of them at the \$1,525 maximum ticket price. That is a lot of coin. That is a lot of jingle. We are not talking about \$50 to go to a fundraising dinner. We are not talking \$75. We are talking about people who can shell out \$1,525, without even blinking about it, and have direct access to ministers who are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the Government of Canada.

The document goes on to say:

There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties.

One only has to look at the recent appointment to the Halifax Port Authority, where the individual in question actually donated \$1,525 to the Liberal Party and attended and helped organize an event for a land developer who will actually receive money from the federal government to host the same minister, the Minister of Finance again, who decides where that money will go.

These are interesting questions. Somebody ought to be able to find out and investigate whether this actually passes the ethical bar, because when this document is set up, the Prime Minister's own document, the rules that he is supposed to follow, the rules that his cabinet ministers are supposed to follow are enforced by the Privy Council office. Who does the Privy Council office report to? It reports to the Prime Minister. Is that not convenient? Is that not absolutely convenient. It sounds an awful lot like another government that is deeply admired by the Prime Minister, which might set up something like that and call it accountability.

We need third-party, objective eyes on this. The office of the Ethics Commissioner is an organization that is established as being very credible, very non-partisan, very effective in the work it does.

Business of Supply

The Ethics Commissioner, in several cases when we have talked to her at committee, has said that she gives hard advice and soft advice. She has actually said this in committee. When I asked her about this, she said she gives hard advice based on the act and the code of conduct. This is where she has jurisdiction and where she has authority. She says that she could do more, not for her benefit but for the benefit of everybody in this room, if she had more access and was able to look into actual partisan political fundraising activities to see if there was an ethical breach or an ethical lapse.

She does not have that ability, but she does have the ability to give soft advice, and she says that she looks at all other documents. She looks at the document that the Prime Minister has on the Government of Canada's website, and she would provide soft advice. When I asked her the question in committee if she has recently given any soft advice, her reply was that she has given lots. I wonder why.

Just a couple of the examples I have given today would indicate, in my opinion, that the Ethics Commissioner has probably given advice to Liberal cabinet ministers, maybe even the Prime Minister himself. I do not know. I will trust that she is doing her job, but she has been giving lots of advice to make sure that these ethical lapses do not happen, not for her benefit, but for our benefit, for the benefit of all Canadians so that they can clearly see and understand and trust that nothing fishy is going on.

• (1045)

Right now, we just do not know, but when we put the dots up on the board somebody in grade 6 can connect them. That is how blatant this is. It is so obvious to everyone involved that something is not right.

Before I conclude, I want to highlight one other aspect that has recently come back into the media. That is a WikiLeaks email involving a visit by Hillary Clinton, presidential candidate, back in 2014. Glen McGregor has an article. Joan Bryden has published some articles on this. I wrote to the Ethics Commissioner some time ago and asked her to look into the relationships between Bluesky Strategy Group, Canada 2020, and the fundraising activities that this so-called independent think tank has actually been doing on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Here we have an organization, Canada 2020, which was started by Tim Barber and Susan Smith, who are well-known lobbyists with Bluesky. The president of Canada 2020 is Thomas Pitfield, who is married to none other than Anna Gainey, who is the president of the Liberal Party of Canada. They are having a conference here this week in Ottawa, funded by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

We know through the emails that we've seen that this organization has organized meetings between Hillary Clinton and Justin Trudeau, and the Liberal Party of Canada and Canada 2020 tried to turn a meeting into a fundraiser, against the ethical standards of Hillary Clinton, if you can believe that. They have posted a number of opportunities to win a trip to meet somebody very influential on their website in the Liberal Party. Is that all within the technicalities of the rules? I am not sure, because the Ethics Commissioner is not allowed to go and investigate.

When I wrote my letter to the Ethics Commissioner, it was several pages long. I do not have time right now, although I would have loved to read it into the record. I put these questions to the Ethics Commissioner and the Lobbying Commissioner, and the Lobbying Commissioner at least has the ability, to a certain degree, to look into the lobbyist side of the equation. When the question was put last week at the committee, we found out that the Lobbying Commissioner is looking into this. The Lobbying Commissioner said there is enough information and enough doubt here that we need to have an investigation to make sure that the access to ministers is being properly recorded and everything is above board. The Ethics Commissioner, again, said that she would love nothing more than to look into these matters but she does not have the ability to do so.

What we need to do is seriously consider this motion. We need to take it as being very important because the reputations of this institution, the House of Commons, of political parties, even of Elections Canada, of the Ethics Commissioner, and of politicians in general hinge on this. It is absolutely very important.

We know that Canada 2020 and Bluesky Strategy, a lobbying firm—though I did not realize that think tanks needed lobbying firms—share the same building. They share the same people. They are getting money from the Government of Canada. They are organizing Liberal Party fundraisers. That is hardly what I would bill as an independent think tank. It does not pass the open and accountable government guidelines set out by the Prime Minister, in my opinion and in the opinions of virtually everybody sitting in opposition to the government, I would guess; and I am hopeful not even in the opinions of some of the members of the Liberal Party.

• (1050)

The solution is to shine the light on this. Let us open it up. Let us have the Ethics Commissioner take a look. Let us trust in her judgment, her wisdom, and her office to have all of the information to make a determination as to whether or not this is kosher.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I must say right up front that I am somewhat disappointed in the Conservative Party. The member made reference to the importance of politics, what an honour and privilege it is to be in this beautiful chamber, and what Canadians have entrusted us to do. Unfortunately, at times—and this could be one of those times—members have chosen to paint an ugly picture, which does not necessarily justify what members actually do.

Let me make a very strong suggestion. It is important that we all recognize this from the beginning. The federal rules are some of the strongest in the country, and donations and contributions are made openly and transparently. My question to the member is this. Have there been any changes to any of the election laws or any other laws since the Conservative government was in power just a year ago? Were there any changes in laws, and did the Conservatives not follow those very same rules?

Business of Supply

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, there is the “Open and Accountable Government” document that has been published on the Government of Canada’s website. This is the change that Conservatives are talking about. This is the document, the ethical standards and bar, that the Prime Minister has set for himself and his ministers. I do not know why the parliamentary secretary is asking me a rhetorical question to which he already knows the answer.

If the parliamentary secretary is convinced that the laws in the Canada Elections Act and all of the other legislation that we follow as politicians was sufficient, why is he not asking his own leader what the heck this is for. Why did the Mr. Prime Minister do it? If he did not intend to honour it, it does not mean anything, and we do not have to follow it, what is it all about? Is it just a show? Is it just an opportunity for Liberals to say one thing and do another? Is that what Canadians expect of us? Is that the standard to which politicians want their integrity and honour held? We should mean what we say and say what we mean.

● (1055)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is really important for taxpayers and others watching this to understand is that this is their money. Taxpayers pay virtually all of the rebates on the first \$400 of political donations, 75% of it. Taxpayers foot the bill for people to eat shrimp, drink booze, and receive a number of gifts from events. In fact, businesses that do this write off the expenses to go to them.

What is interesting about this situation with the Liberals is they dined off of telling the electorate they would do something different. It is a fraudulent way to go about doing something. What really compounds it is that Apotex is again involved, which has a history with the Liberal Party. To give a quick example, when Joe Volpe was running for the Liberal leadership, Apotex had children donating to the campaign. In fact, five Apotex executives and their children gave around \$108,000 to his campaign, and the Liberals defended this.

We know that the current situation has ties back to the Liberal Party. When people are sitting on their sofas watching this debate, they should remember that they will be paying for the booze, the crackers, and the gifts that go to CEOs and executives who can afford \$1,500, while they are probably having a hard time paying their heating bills.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure there was a question. I will not doubt the points my colleague has made. I am not aware of the issue with respect to our former colleague Mr. Volpe, but it is very disconcerting. What I think he is getting at is the fact that we as members of Parliament are held to account by the Ethics Commissioner.

I remember receiving a little bag of natural health products a couple of years ago. Members of Parliament get these little things from time to time. There was a letter inside, and that is what the Ethics Commissioner took issue with. There might have been \$30, \$40, \$50 worth of natural health products in the bag, some of which might have been useful and some not. We are talking about a very small sum of money in value for this gift that was given to all parliamentarians in the last Parliament.

However, the letter inside lobbied us and asked us to take a position on legislation or on a government policy. The Ethics

Commissioner found out about it and wrote us all a letter telling us to give it back. We might have been swayed by a handful of vitamins to support legislation or a policy. Yet the same Ethics Commissioner cannot even look into a \$1,525 cash for access event that is exclusive to Liberal Party donors only, where attendees have access to the Prime Minister and to high-level cabinet ministers who make those policy decisions on a daily basis. That is the inequity and that is what this motion today is all about.

Therefore, I thank my colleague for bringing up this question which allows me to raise the spectre of this inequity and gives the Ethics Commissioner an opportunity to do her job and ensure that all of us in the House are protected.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question. When Mr. Harper was the prime minister, did the former Conservative government receive money, or a donation of \$120 or any amount, from people to attend a dinner where cabinet ministers or the prime minister were in attendance, yes or no?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I would not be aware of any because I did not go to any. Therefore, I do not know what the hon. member is trying to articulate.

First, I do know that when events were held by the Conservative Party, members of Parliament attended as members of Parliament. Second, they were all public and wide open to anybody who could buy a ticket and wanted to go. Third, I do remember one time when one of our colleagues, a former minister and former member of Parliament from Winnipeg, Shelly Glover, had her EDA host an event. A number of people, who could have been seen to have been relative to her portfolio when she was a cabinet minister, had purchased tickets and the event was cancelled because it was the right thing to do.

When it comes to these kinds of standards and practices, the Conservative Party’s personal bar on this, even though we do not have it in a document, rises well above anything we see over there.

● (1100)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neebawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe gave an astonishingly cogent speech. It laid out this issue in clear and uncertain terms.

What bothers me about what we see from the government side and the cash for access antics is this. What kind of corrosive effect does it have on the decision-making process in government, and in turn on the trust that people have in government? Not everyone is an elitist who can attend cash for access fundraisers.

Regular citizens deal with their government all the time. Small business people get licences, small companies go through environmental assessment processes, and so on. They expect the decisions to be fair, open and honest. What we now see is a slippery slope toward, and I use this word deliberately, corruption. In many of the dysfunctional countries around the world, especially in some of the poorer parts of the world, people are poor because of corruption, and for no other reason than corruption.

Could my hon. friend comment on the slippery slope we may be on now?

Business of Supply

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my eloquent, articulate, and intelligent friend for the question. The folks across the floor think I am attacking them. I am not. I truly am trying to protect everyone in the House with the motion.

We can look at an organization called GOPAC. The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption was started by former parliamentarian, and a good friend of mine, John Williams, back in Alberta. The association and correlation between corruption and poverty is astonishing. When corruption goes up, so does poverty and despair. It is a direct correlation. That is why conducting ourselves with integrity, being open, accountable and transparent is so vitally important.

My hon. colleague's question is the best one I have had yet today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise to speak inside this wonderful chamber. I truly thank the constituents of Winnipeg North who have allowed me to be here to respond to issues, whether it be this issue or what we witnessed earlier with the special tribute for Remembrance Day, for members both past and present of our Canadian Forces, and for the sacrifices they have made.

I would like to echo the many remarks toward our vets that have been put on the record today and, as a government member, express our best wishes in going forward and encouraging people to participate in Remembrance Day on November 11.

I will be very specific on a few points. When we talk about democracy and, in this case, what the Conservative Party has raised over a number of days, it is important for Canadians not to be deceived by the misinformation of the Conservative Party. Therefore, I will hit on some very specific points that need to be reinforced.

First, the federal rules are some of the strongest in the country, and donations and contributions are made in an open and transparent fashion. In fact, in some provinces, individuals can donate in the tens of thousands of dollars, and others do not have any limits on contributions. In addition, some provinces accept donations from unions, trade associations, and corporations. This is not the case in the federal system. We follow all the rules and the laws around fundraising. We are proud that we have one of the strictest regimes around fundraising for political parties.

Our government spends a tremendous amount of time working hard for Canadians across the country, whether it is meeting with crowds, individuals, or listening to consumer groups, small businesses, and the like. We are engaged so we can deliver for Canadians, and Canadians know that.

Our government has embarked on unprecedented levels of public consultations to ensure we respond to the very real challenges that Canadians face. This is why we did things like raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lowered them for the middle class. Canadians wanted these things.

There is no preferential access to this government. This government is demonstrating the most open and transparent approach, not just in following the rules but in being more engaged with Canadians than any previous government. We are consulting

and we are engaged. The fact is that listening to Canadians is what is allowing us to deliver for Canadians, as we have been doing for the past year and as we will continue to be doing.

For over a year now, the members opposite have been criticizing this government regularly for engaging Canadians too much, for being too open and accessible, for consulting regularly with Canadians and demonstrating the most open and accessible government our country has ever seen. The Conservatives have been critical of that.

We, of course, follow all the rules and ensure we engage with Canadians. We are listening to them in the most positive and respectful way possible. All members of Parliament and all parties fundraise, and we all abide by the exact same rules, rules that were put in place by the previous government. When the rules are followed, no conflicts of interest can exist. We will continue to follow all of the rules.

There are a number of things I would like to share with the House.

● (1105)

Before he became Prime Minister and was the leader of the Liberal Party, the issue of proactive disclosure came up. A number of my colleagues from all parties will recall that particular initiative. The Liberal Party had third-party status and a relatively small caucus. Our leader stood up and asked for the unanimous consent of the House to bring in proactive disclosure. No matter how often he attempted to do it, we could not get unanimous support to make it happen. However, the leader of the Liberal Party did not stop there. He then indicated that if the House were not prepared to go there, the Liberal Party was, and all members of the Liberal caucus were obligated to abide by proactive disclosure. Even at the expense of the party, we went for proactive disclosure. To the credit of the Harper government, the Conservative Party did likewise months after we made that commitment. That party followed the leadership of the Liberal Party. Months afterward and following a Liberal opposition motion, we were able to garner unanimous support for proactive disclosure. New Democrats finally joined with us.

I say this because we do not have to play second fiddle to other parties in the chamber when it comes to public accountability and transparency and making sure that we are doing things right. The leader of the third party at that time clearly demonstrated that, and is clearly demonstrating that as the Prime Minister of Canada now.

No laws have been broken. The Conservatives can try to conspire and make all sorts of accusations, but the bottom line is that Canada has some of the most stringent laws in place to ensure that there is no conflict of interest. Members of the Liberal cabinet and this government are following the laws of our land so that there cannot be any conflict of interest. The members across the way know that. They are just being mischievous and trying to create something that is not there.

Business of Supply

I am a strong democrat who believes in the parliamentary system. I am not going to be intimidated by someone who gives me a \$1,500 donation, a \$1,000 donation, or a \$500 donation. I am accessible to my constituents. I am going to advertise what I do at this point. Every Saturday from 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock, I am at the local McDonald's, meeting with constituents. I have been doing this for over 20 years. What influences me personally is when I hear a good case from my constituents. I take that to my caucus colleagues and to the floor of the House. A good example of that is the reunification of families, because that is an area of huge interest to my constituents. Virtually every other week, whether at the local restaurant or by email or phone calls, my constituents get in touch with me or my office. That influences me personally.

Democracy is an important aspect to who we are individually and who we are as a society. I have had donations in excess of \$1,000 and I could not tell anyone the names of all of those individuals. I might be able to list one or two. Do I appreciate these donations? Absolutely. I also appreciate the individuals who volunteer for my campaign. Some people are not in a position to give a cash donation but are more than happy to donate their labour or their time, and they do that in a multitude of ways. Some will assist me and the Liberal Party by knocking on doors and putting up signs. I do not feel indebted to them. I do not feel like I have to bring up every one of their issues on the floor of the House of Commons, unless, of course, it is an issue that I concur with. These individuals are just as important as those who donate to my campaign.

• (1110)

What are we going to see next? Are the opposition benches going to say that so-and-so volunteered a lot on a member's campaign and that it is a conflict of interest because he is influencing the member? It would be bizarre to think so. I have dinners in riding on many occasions and people often have to pay for them. Sometimes I will have a social activity and get hundreds of constituents attending at \$10 a pop to participate. Other times I will get a \$1,000 donation, and other times I will have a \$100 dinner and they will participate. It is all about democracy.

Whether people are putting up signs, making telephone calls, going door to door, delivering brochures, or donating because they do not have the time to work directly on a campaign, I respect all of it. I do not give them preferential treatment. As for accessibility, come to my local McDonald's any Saturday and I am there. I might miss one or two Saturdays a year, but I like to think that I am accessible. I am no different from many, if not most, of the members in the chamber. I believe we all appreciate it.

Does the Conservative Party not have fundraisers in which they charge money? Of course they do. Even the New Democrats do. If we want to change or improve some of the laws, let us propose a study in committee and have a debate on how we might want to look at making some changes to the election laws to enhance them. That is something all members are entitled to do. It could also be done in private members' bills, but do not try to give the impression that laws have been broken when they have not been. I have seen election laws broken in the past and seen the party across the way violate those laws. The members sitting on the other side of the House should not point and throw stones at a glass house when they have been in violation of election laws.

What we have witnessed here is a government that is truly open and transparent on a wide variety of issues. If the members opposite want to talk about accessibility and the Minister of Finance having dinners, tell me about any other minister of finance who has been as accessible to input on budgetary matters as the current minister has been? Let me save the work for them, because they will not find another minister of finance who has been so aggressive in wanting to hear what Canadians have to say about the budget and the next budget. Even Mr. Flaherty was nowhere near to being as close to the public as this government has been in its consultations. I can assure members of that.

We are not always talking about thousands, but about tens of thousands, and we are talking about many different ways, not just through the Internet. In fact, we have a Minister of Finance and a parliamentary secretary who go into many different regions of our country to listen to what Canadians have to say.

Some hon. members: Sunny ways for a price.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, sunny ways, the members are right. We are for sunny ways.

What we are doing is that we are moving—

• (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There is still six minutes remaining in the hon. member's time and I am sure he will want to use that. It is awfully loud in here. It is very difficult for the Speaker to hear what has been said and I am sure that other hon. members may wish to hear what the hon. parliamentary secretary wishes to say as well. We will carry on.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, for the member who heckled, he is going to put it on his Facebook page. Make sure I am linked to it. I do not know exactly how Facebook works, but I would be happy to be linked.

Let me comment on sunny ways. There is a great deal of merit in recognizing, as the Prime Minister has consistently challenged us to do, that there is always a better way of doing things and that we do not have to settle. We have seen the Minister of Finance take that advice to heart. He has indicated very clearly that he wants to listen to Canadians.

Look at the value and the return we have witnessed from that in the last year. I had someone come to the local McDonald's not that long ago who said to me that this government had achieved more in the first year than the previous Harper government did in the last 10 years. That is not the first time I have heard that particular comment. Where do members think these ideas and suggestions are coming from?

Business of Supply

These suggestions are coming through the consultations by, and the accessibility of, the many ministers who are going out and doing what this Prime Minister has asked them to do, to consult and work with Canadians. It goes beyond that, because members of Parliament are also being asked to do this in an apolitical fashion. We say not only to Liberal members of Parliament but to all members of Parliament that they should do what is ultimately in the best interests of Canadian society, and to get out and listen to what Canadians are saying.

I do it every week. I would like to think that we all want to play a very strong role. We can learn a lot from this, when we take a look at the budget, for example. I have had the good fortune of talking about the economic update and the budget twice this week. In those two documents, there was talk about seniors. If members consult, as we have with seniors, they will find that there is wide support for increasing the guaranteed income supplement, helping tens of thousands of seniors to get out poverty. Canadians want that.

Members will also find that there is wide support for the Canada child benefit, which is going to lift tens of thousands of children out of poverty. Again, Canadians want that. Moreover, members will find that Canadians wanted us to reduce the age of eligibility for OAS from 67 to 65. This is something the out-of-touch Conservatives increased from 65 to 67, when they said no to the OAS and increased the age of retirement. We reversed that because we were listening to what Canadians were saying, not only to the Minister of Finance but to many others as well.

I think we should all be very cognizant of the fact that democracy means that there has to be some form of finances. If other members have ideas on how to deal with it, they should bring those up at one of the committees or have some off-line discussions, but they should not try to give an impression of something that is just not true.

There are no laws being broken on this side of the House in regard to financial matters. To try to suggest otherwise is just wrong. To the member who moved this particular motion and started his speech by saying that sometimes people do not think nicely about us as politicians and so forth, that member and the Conservative have a choice. They are choosing to try to give an impression that is absolutely false.

Nothing has gone wrong on this front. I do not know about other members across the way, but I assure the hon. member that I, as a politician, am not going to be bought off by a \$1,500 donation. I appreciate individuals who donate to my campaigns and to my political party, or to any political party. It is hard for democracy to work if there is no money. People should not kid themselves, because that is only one aspect of democracy.

• (1120)

When members talk about a slippery slope, let me suggest the real slippery slope here is that if they continue to exaggerate something that is just not valid, it will then become a slippery slope in terms of democracy.

I look forward to seeing how the New Democrats are going to be voting on the motion. My recommendation to them is to reflect on the laws, which they have followed, and I will reserve my thoughts more specific to the New Democrats after I have heard their position.

However, I trust they will support democracy, the laws that are here. The fact is, no laws have been broken. Therefore, there can be no conflict.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts on the record. It is always a privilege to stand in this place.

The Deputy Speaker: There is a lot of interest in participating in the questions and comments portion of the debate today, so I would ask all members and those responding to keep their interventions to no more than a minute.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a member in his riding donated close to \$1,500, and lo and behold, ended up on the Prime Minister's delegation to Ukraine. Let us get the facts. It is on Elections Canada's website and on Facebook. They went together.

He said he could not be bought. I wonder if he would table any and all information he has about trying to push for this member to attend a delegation with the Prime Minister to Ukraine. Perhaps he could comment on that and the donations that are on the Elections Canada website in his Winnipeg North riding. Once again, it is pay to play, and it is unacceptable.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate if the member could share with me the name of the individual he is referring to. I might be able to speculate. The member says it is online. I am glad it is online. I do not know the last time I actually looked. I could not tell you the last time I even saw those individuals that donated.

The point is that I appreciate everyone who donates to my campaign. I appreciate all individuals who donate, whether to the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, and even the NDP. I appreciate them all because donations are a part of democracy.

For the member to try to give the impression that I went to bat for someone is just wrong. I did not go to bat for someone to go to Ukraine because someone gave a \$1,500 donation. Number one, I am just not aware of it.

• (1125)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very troubled by the parliamentary secretary's comments on the motion. The issue before this place is the issue of preferential access to ministers of the government. We are not debating the fact that all political candidates, all political parties, and elected officials go out from time to time to meet with constituents and also from time to time attend fundraisers. We are talking about preferential access to ministers of the crown.

Also, the response over and over by the House leader to questions put to her on this matter has been troubling. What she has said over and over is that her government has adopted among the strictest rules in Canada. Therefore, I would like the member to inform us today, which are the jurisdictions that have stricter rules and why they are not following those.

Business of Supply

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am a little disappointed in the lead-up to the question. It somewhat implies that the New Democrats might actually be working with the Conservatives and voting for the motion. I hope that is not the case, because at the end of the day, it is important for us to recognize that no laws have in fact been broken. If no laws have been broken, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, there is no conflict of interest.

At the end of the day, I sure hope that the New Democrats will side with democracy as opposed to playing the politics the Conservatives have chosen to play on this issue.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all I can say is “Wow”.

Since the hon. member likes hanging out at McDonald's, I am sure he has heard about the new Liberal happy meal, where one can order anything at all on the menu and the kids behind will pay for it.

With all due respect to the parliamentary secretary, he is not a minister. Ministers have wide-ranging powers and influence on money and decisions. They influence massive budgets. This is not about hanging out at McDonald's on a Saturday. This is about preferential access to ministers for a price, and in secrecy.

Surely, the Prime Minister must have known this when he wrote in this appendix to his ministers that there should be no preferential access to government, nor appearance of preferential access. Is this document worthless, or is it relevant?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, thank goodness I was not part of the Harper Conservative caucus. I do not know how the Conservatives treated their members. I can assure the House that all Liberal caucus members are treated equally and their input is critical to the decisions being made by the government. I very much appreciate that attitude, whether it comes from the Prime Minister, the cabinet ministers, the parliamentary secretaries, or the chairs of the many standing committees.

All I can really do is assure the member that accessibility, accountability, and transparency are of the highest priority for the government and we will continue to deliver on all three.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague spent a lot of time talking about the importance of democracy and how citizens who want to be engaged in democracy can express themselves through volunteerism or donations. It is really important to empower citizens who want a voice in their government to support the parties they agree with and volunteer in campaigns.

Let me talk about the difference between the previous government and the current government. The previous government would not even allow citizens to attend open rallies. Citizens who came to attend free rallies were sent away. The Conservative prime minister and ministers also held fundraisers. Let us have a discussion about fundraisers. The previous government ended public subsidies. Why did it end public subsidies?

I am asking my colleague to talk about this. Let us have a conversation about fundraising rules, but can we stop maligning Canadians who want to participate in the political process?

● (1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, let me emphasize one aspect of my colleague's question. That is that when we talk about democracy, which we talk a lot about in this chamber, as well we should, we need to recognize there are many different components to it, pillars of our democracy. What is so critically important is not only having those most loved and cherished volunteers but also having finances.

It is important to recognize today, at the very least, and reinforce that no laws have been broken, and therefore, there is no conflict of interest.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad we have a democracy in which we can raise these issues. I am going to ask the hon. member a quick question.

He contends that the government has broken absolutely no rules, that it is following all ethical practices, and that everything is fine. He then says that Conservatives are in error because we are raising concerns about the lack of verification, because this is ultimately an issue of agency. Right now, it is the Privy Council Office, which is accountable to the Prime Minister and his government, that is the arbiter of these rules. It is not a transparent process by which we can say whether those rules are being followed, and ultimately, that group is accountable to the Prime Minister.

If Liberals are doing nothing wrong, what is wrong with giving this to an independent authority at arm's length, such as the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, to examine it and let Canadians know what the truth is?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it was interesting when the mover of the motion talked about the commissioner. He made reference to the fact that there were all these other issues being raised that the commissioner was talking about, trying to give a false impression, trying to give the impression that the Liberal government is doing all of these things that the commissioner is looking at. What the member did not say is that the commissioner likely spends a good percentage of her time dealing with Conservative and NDP issues as well. The office of the commissioner does not serve only the cabinet; it serves everyone.

Just to reinforce what I have always said, at the end of the day, democracy is a great thing.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was listening to the member's comments, it did not seem at all as though he was speaking to the motion today. He was talking about other issues. He talked a bit about the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, but he also talked about volunteers and what they do on the campaign trail. Of course, we know that one of the volunteers hired a limousine service and ended up having to pay it back.

I am wondering where exactly the ethical bar is for Liberals.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, this is a part of it, and it sounds like the NDP are falling into the trap from the Conservatives on this.

Business of Supply

Am I to take from the member that the next time they have an opposition day, it might be against volunteers? If someone happens to be a member of the Liberal caucus, he or she is not allowed to have volunteers because that might give accessibility.

I do not think we should confuse accessibility with money, given the amount of accessibility, transparency, and accountability that this government has demonstrated, which is second to no other government previous to it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seeing the Liberals tripping over themselves to avoid the real question, it makes me wonder if they even read the motion. Allow me to read it:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner should be granted the authority to oversee and enforce the directives to Ministers listed in Open and Accountable Government in order to end the current practice of “cash-for-access” by ensuring there is no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians or political parties.

● (1135)

[*English*]

It is quite easy to understand why people want to make this real, because it is one of the things the government promised.

You might recall, Mr. Speaker, because I am sure you went through it like we did, that the Liberals promised real change. Unfortunately now, in their second year and listening to the answers today, we realize that there is nothing real and there has been no change.

Here is the reality. Yesterday I asked a simple question of the Prime Minister, quoting his own document. I will read it, word for word. The Prime Minister wrote in the mandate letter of every one of his ministers the following:

...you must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality.... This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

Now we have just heard the deputy House leader in his 20-minute speech and his 10-minute Q and A, say about 50 times that they are acting within the law, but that is not what the Prime Minister promised Canadians. The deputy House leader talked about openness, accountability, but he was evading the real issue. Are they respecting what the Prime Minister said was the higher standard that his government would be held to?

Those questions remain wholly unanswered. There are other sections in what the Prime Minister published that are worth repeating, such as, “Ministers and parliamentary secretaries must avoid conflict of interest”, which should go without saying, “the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest”, or favouritism.

He goes on, “Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government.” We are talking about big, rich companies like Apotex, and we know Apotex' sad history of being involved in fundraising for the Liberal Party, 1-800-Joe Volpe.

There should be no preferential access to government or appearance of preferential access accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties.

To listened to the Liberals say today that these are things that anybody can pay \$5 and just walk into. The problem is that it costs \$1,500 and it is being held behind closed doors in an elite law office in downtown Toronto. That is the problem. When I asked the Prime Minister yesterday, when I quoted his own words to him that “you must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality”, and “This is an obligation not fully discharged by simply acting within the law”, I asked a simple, one sentence question: what did he mean by that?

I feel like George Carlin, who used to read the tax act to get laughs. I will read the Prime Minister's answer, which is a masterwork of equivocation and has nothing whatsoever to do with the question I asked him, which was about what he meant by this higher standard. I will read it word for word, because we cannot make this stuff up.

He said, “Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of a government that did not do a good job of living up to Canadians' expectations”. What does that have to do with what he told Canadians? For somebody who said he had a higher standard, he seems to have a lot of trouble explaining it.

He went on, “we know people needed and wanted a government that was more open, transparent,” and this is my favourite part, “and mostly accessible. That is exactly what we have been in terms of pre-budget consultations that the minister has done”. Talk about obfuscation. He is trying to hint that a pay-for-play fundraiser at \$1,500 a head in a private law office in downtown Toronto is actually a consultation.

That is amusing, because for the last budget, for the first time in memory, the government failed to include the opposition parties in its pre-budget consultations. I would dare say that if the Conservatives had ever dared exclude the opposition parties from a pre-budget consultation, they would have been up in arms in the Liberal Party, and they would have had half the press gallery piling on with them.

They got away with it. It was amazing. It was the first time in living memory that a government that says it is open and transparent held private consultations heading into the budget. Maybe it means it. Maybe it actually believes that we can have a consultation in an elite law firm behind closed doors. That is not my definition of consultation, and I suspect that it is also not the definition most Canadians have of consultation.

Let us continue with the Prime Minister's non-answer, shall we?

That is exactly what we have been in terms of pre-budget consultations that the minister has done, in terms of consultations that we have done right across the country, and been roundly criticized for talking too much with Canadians, for listening too much to Canadians.

Business of Supply

What does that have to do with anything we were discussing yesterday? We were discussing his own words, that their obligations are “not fully discharged by simply acting within the law”. They were going to be held to a higher standard.

He skated around it:

We have demonstrated a level of openness and accountability that no government up until ours has ever had, and we are proud of that.

I learned in law school that one of the best ways to win an argument is to make concessions. I will make a concession to the Liberal Party. In terms of PR, in terms of coming up with words the Liberals keep repeating that somehow sink in, they are quite good. It is when we spend a little bit of time peeling away—it is like peeling an onion, because we start to cry when we realize just how vapid it is, how vacuous it is—that we realize that this is all it is. It is sloganeering. It is words for the sake of words. It is totally empty.

That is what the Prime Minister showed when he could not answer in his own words yesterday. What did he mean when he said that it is not enough to obey the law? I just read his answer word for word. As I said, we cannot make this stuff up. That is exactly what the Prime Minister said.

This is what we have been seeing with the Liberal government since it got here.

I know that a lot of young people voted for the Liberals because they promised that they were going to legalize pot once they were elected.

We said that there was one thing they could do right away, which was decriminalize it, because nobody, given the fact that we are heading in that direction, should ever have a criminal record that will affect the rest of their lives for possession of a small amount of pot for personal use.

The Liberals are now in their second year. Do members know what the answer has been from the former chief of police of Toronto? No action. Thousands upon thousands of mostly young Canadians will have criminal records that will hobble them for the rest of their careers in terms of travel, in terms of job opportunities. That is a broken promise that is going to affect lives. Pigheadedly, they still will not say whether they will accept having a full pardon for people who were convicted for that alone.

It is the same sort of thing. On fundraising, they said they were going to do better.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

The Liberals promised that they would be beyond reproach when it comes to political financing. They drafted stricter rules, which I just read. It is not enough to obey the law, they must uphold a higher standard. However, we heard the complete opposite from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. In his speech, he said about 50 times that they were acting according to the letter of the law. That is not what the Prime Minister promised. This ambiguity is a way to dodge the promises they made to Canadians in this area. There are many more promises, however, and I think it is worth going over them.

On electoral reform, they promised that they would listen to Canadians. Ninety per cent of the Canadian experts they heard from said that they wanted a system based on proportional representation.

In an article by H el ene Buzzetti that appeared in *Le Devoir*, the Prime Minister said that he believed it was necessary to reform our electoral system because it had resulted in the Harper government. Now that “Mr. Sunshine” is in power, he thinks that it may no longer be necessary to reform our electoral system. If this system elected him, why on earth would we have to change a thing?

It is mind-boggling that a government has the gall to present itself as an agent of change and then, when elected, starts breaking such important promises.

[*English*]

On climate change, who would have thought it? I was there in Paris at the climate conference almost exactly a year ago. I saw our newly minted Prime Minister throw his arms wide open and say, “Canada is back”, to thundering silence in a room of people scratching their heads thinking they did not know we had ever left. He said that everything was going to be different from now on, different until the day he reappeared to say that now that he thought about it, Stephen Harper's climate change plan was all he had. It is the same plan, the same targets, the same timelines.

It is interesting, because yesterday, out of nowhere, the head of the Treasury Board stood up and said that we have a new target. It is 40% for 2030. Really? Can we see the economy-wide plan, which is precisely what article 4, paragraph 4 of the Paris Agreement says we have to have? Nothing.

I was there in Montreal in 2005 when the former Liberal minister, today the international affairs minister, said he had a plan. The plan was called the one-tonne challenge.

Why did the Liberals at the time have to say that it was up to individual Canadians to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by one tonne? The main poster for the whole thing was someone turning off the lights, as if that could eliminate one tonne per person in Canada. The Liberals were about 40 million tonnes off what they had promised to do, and that corresponded roughly to about a tonne per Canadian. Therefore, it was not the government's fault, the Liberals' fault, that they had done nothing on climate change. It had to be the fault of Canadians. It was extraordinary as an exercise in public relations.

After the Liberals were defeated, and I will never forget, Eddie Goldenberg, Jean Chr etien's former chief of staff, made an interesting admission, the best form of evidence. He admitted that the Liberals had no plan and no intention of respecting Kyoto. They had signed Kyoto “to galvanize public opinion”. What was he saying? It was an exercise in public relations to have signed Kyoto.

Business of Supply

Now, I will never agree with the Conservatives for having made us the only country in the world to withdraw from Kyoto, but I will say that at least the Conservatives were telling Canadians that they did not believe in climate change and that they were going to withdraw from Kyoto. The Liberals, on the other hand, were going to fake it. When they could not do it, because they did not have a plan and did not do it, they were going to say it was the fault of Canadians and that it was up to Canadians to come up with a solution. This time it is the exact same thing.

We will increase our greenhouse gases every year of this first and last mandate of the current Liberal government. The reason we will do that is that they still have no plan. They promised a carbon tax for 2018 knowing full well that the statistics for greenhouse gas production for 2018 will only be published in 2020. It will never be measured at the time of the next election. Does this sound familiar? It is a little bit like our economic update this week. They will let us know in 11 years how we are doing. Really?

Some \$15 billion is taken away from what was promised to municipalities and put into a privatization bank. I heard a lot of words from the Prime Minister during the election campaign. Funny, we actually did a scour of everything that was said, but we cannot find the word “privatization” in there anywhere. The Liberals said they were going to build public infrastructure. They never said they were going to sell public infrastructure.

On health care, it is the same thing. There is a reduction from a 6% escalator to 3%. That will gravely affect the provinces' ability to deliver health care. The Liberals pretend that they are going to dictate to the provinces precisely what areas they are going to concentrate in. However, the government delivers health care in three areas: in penitentiaries, to the Armed Forces, and on first nation reserves. With a track record like that, it should be a little bit more modest before it pretends that it can dictate to the provinces what they are doing right and wrong in health care.

On labour rights, my favourite part, the Liberals have new buddies in the labour movement. They stand there and emote with them. We saw last week some young people turning their backs, with good reason.

We presented anti-scab legislation. My colleague, the member of Parliament for Jonquière, stood up and presented anti-scab legislation, which is the basic underpinning of any real system of negotiation of collective agreements. The Liberals stood up and voted against it. That is the real Liberal track record on labour rights, and we have to debunk that one as well.

• (1145)

Oh, but can they emote. They can emote about human rights and Canada's role in the world. What we see them actually doing is selling thousands of armoured personnel carriers to one of the most gruesome, repressive regimes on the planet earth, Saudi Arabia. We have films of Saudi Arabia using exactly that type of equipment on civilian populations. We know that military equipment that came from Canada is being used against civilians. We know that Raif Badawi's family, his wife and three children, are in Sherbrooke at the same time the same Saudi government is going to recommence torturing that man, because he dares have an opinion on anything. That is Saudi Arabia. That is the best friend of the current

government that claims to be all about human rights around the world.

It is the same government that is negotiating an extradition treaty with China, where there is no rule of law and no independent tribunal and where people are executed and tortured, according to the world's most credible groups, like Democracy Watch and Amnesty International. That is the reality of the Liberals with regard to human rights. Forget about the talking points. Forget about the public relations. That is who they are.

Regarding first nations, there is money missing from the budget, of course, for first nations education. This week, we put forth a motion calling on the Liberals to come up with the \$155 million that was ordered by the courts. There are three compliance orders by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. We are not talking about our opinion versus their opinion. This is the courts ordering them to spend it.

I will never forget the Liberal member of Parliament for Spadina—Fort York standing up here in the House of Commons and attacking us for coming up with that motion to put that money into those health and social services for first nations children, and then he voted for it. Go figure.

Maybe the House leader is actually going to stand up and vote for our motion. That would be a problem in and of itself, because that would mean that this motion is going to be like all the other things they have talked about. It is going to get flushed into this bottomless Liberal pit of broken promises.

With regard to gender equality, it is the same thing. They will get to it. It has only been 25 years since the courts ordered the government to provide real gender equity for women in this country, but the Liberals always have a talking point on that. They will talk about what they did when they named the government last year. That has nothing to do with how women who actually work in the federal government are treated. The Liberals voted with the Conservatives to impose penalties on any union that would defend gender equality in this country. That is the real track record of the Liberals.

Directly related to what we are living this week, with the police surveillance of journalists, is Bill C-51. During the campaign, the Liberal leader swore up and down that it would be a top priority to fix Bill C-51, which is an egregious, unprecedented assault on the individual privacy rights and freedoms of Canadians. So far, the Liberals have done sweet nothing.

Is it the most transparent government in the history of Canada? We asked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness how many journalists are under surveillance by the RCMP or CSIS. He did not answer. In Quebec, there is a royal commission of inquiry, because it has been found out that not only did the Montreal police spy on journalists but the SQ did the same thing. The Quebec government immediately ordered a royal commission of inquiry.

Business of Supply

There is preening, posing, pretending, and no action. However, the Liberals get the title. They say that the Prime Minister is thinking about it, hoping that this will go away like everything else. That is the reality of the Liberals. As for real change, that is malarkey. It is the same old Liberals on fundraising, which is what we are discussing today, and on all these other issues we have talked about.

The Liberals talk about having reduced taxes for some Canadians and having increased them for the one per cent. In fact, the Liberals are taking the money from the one per cent and giving it to the Liberal Party, because every single one of those donations gets a tax return. Whenever Apotex and all those bigwigs stand behind closed doors in an elite law firm, know one thing. It is not just their money; it is taxpayers' money, and that is why the government has to respect its undertaking to be clear with the public.

• (1150)

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are debating today is the question of preferential access. Fundamentally what we have seen the government do is a series of consultations across the country.

We can talk specifically about the Minister of Finance who went across the country doing consultation after consultation and because he could not be everywhere, he also sent out his parliamentary secretary to do more and more consultations. Added to that, he asked members of the House of Commons to go out and consult too, all to be fed back to him. It was also asked and posted on the Internet so people could consult on the Internet. All of these consultations, all of this access, anyone was welcome to come, whatever party they came from, whatever walk of life. They were welcome to come and all of this was free.

My question is simple. How is free preferential?

• (1155)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I got hold of the application form to become a Liberal MP and there is actually a sentence that explains “you must not embarrass easily”. That is why they can get otherwise honourable people like the member of Parliament for Pierrefonds—Dollard to stand in the House of Commons and pretend he does not understand that \$1,500 to meet a minister behind the closed doors of an elite law firm in downtown Toronto is not a free public consultation.

What part of \$1,500 does the member of Parliament for Pierrefonds—Dollard not understand? Because that is not free and that is not a consultation. It is pay for play. It is privileged access. It is what the Prime Minister promised to put an end to.

To be fair, the one time the Conservatives got wind of something that involved Shelly Glover, who was then in charge of CBC and other things to do with heritage, the minute they found out, the Conservative Prime Minister Harper required her to pay it back immediately. That is their track record, so stop saying the Conservatives are worse than Liberals are. The Liberals are a lot worse than they ever were.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member hit all the points that needed to be hit with respect of the pay for play.

I want to turn back to his recitation of Mr. Sherman, whose net worth is over \$4 billion, by the way, and his participation in Liberal fundraisers, both before the election and after the election. At the same time, the Liberals are embarking on a consultation with the provinces on health care reform, which no doubt involves the pharmaceutical industry. Does the hon. member have any thoughts on that connection?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about the fact that we have never completed medicare. When Tommy Douglas' model of free universal public medical care was brought in nationally in the 1960s, everyone knew, and Tommy Douglas said it at the time, that we had to complete it with pharmacare.

Two things are worrying us about that. One is the privileged access we are starting to see of some drug companies, which are not going to be fighting for the lowest price. We should disabuse ourselves of that notion. However, the other thing is trade deals like the trans-Pacific partnership. Things like the TPP and CETA will increase the intellectual property rights of drug companies and they also give these companies the ability to sue national governments.

Eli Lilly has a pending \$500 million lawsuit against the Government of Canada even though Eli Lilly has now lost twice in the Supreme Court of Canada. This is the problem with these trade deals. The Liberals and the Conservatives are of one mind. They see nothing wrong with that type of ability for a multinational corporation to sue the Government of Canada. I want us to maintain our governmental sovereignty to determine all issues dealing with environment and health in our country.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one theme that ran through the member's comments was that he was looking for substance. On the matter of labour, we had substance to offer the hon. member when this government took steps to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 and when the Prime Minister became the first sitting prime minister to meet with the Canadian Labour Congress. With respect to gender, we were all very proud to see the Prime Minister appoint the first fifty-fifty gender parity cabinet in the history of this country. When it comes to youth, we have invested in our youth so they are prepared to fight for jobs. With respect to access, last year, there were over 250,000 exchanges with Canadians and 5,200 submissions were received. This year over 140,000 submissions have been received thus far.

If fundraising were the only way in which the Minister of Finance was accessible, the hon. member for Outremont may have a point, but it is not the only way. He is accessible to all Canadians, especially those who do not contribute a single penny.

Business of Supply

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the member is once again making the same Liberal mistake of confusing private \$1,500 access with public consultation. He is far too intelligent to make that mistake on his own. Somebody put that talking point into his head.

With regard to gender parity in cabinet, it is a good thing. At the same, it was quickly realized, after those appointments a year ago, that the majority of the women were actually going to be making less than the men in cabinet. How is that possible? It is because the women have been given roles that are paid less. In other words, the superior roles with respect to the classic functions in the House were given to men, and the others were given a different level. Now, the Liberals have changed that again, superficially, by topping up the salary, but it did not change the nature of the role.

With regard to gender equity in real terms, there is a report of the House that has been adopted. It has been over 20 years that women have been waiting for real gender equity in the Canadian government. The Liberals have postponed it yet again. It is all talk, no action; all veneer, no substance; all talking point, nothing real; real change, malarkey; nothing real, no change.

● (1200)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the important things to note is the connection with Apotex. It has a history.

Apotex and its executives, and the children of its executives, 11 and 14 year olds, were donating tens of thousands of dollars to Liberal candidates and their leadership campaign. It was defended because it was “legal”.

The issue with this Apotex connection, again, is the mere fact that the money going to Liberal coffers before an election writ is called can be used indiscriminately by the Liberal Party to do whatever it wants. That is funded by taxpayers. How is that fair?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, of course it is not fair.

I remember the Apotex scandal, involving Joe Volpe. I remember one wag who had put something on the Internet, and it was about an 11 year old saying that he found \$5,000 on a park bench, and decided to give it to Joe Volpe instead of using it to help pay for his education. It was transparent, what had actually happened. Everybody in Canada knew it and understood it.

It is also transparent to every person listening to this debate today that the Prime Minister of Canada talks a good game when it comes to ethics, talks a good game when it comes to holding his ministers and his parliamentary secretaries to a higher standard, and the minute we ask him to actually do something about that, it is like all the rest. It tumbles like a house of cards and we realize it is all talking points.

It is all about preening. It is all about posing. There is nothing real for Canadians. That is what is happening with the government.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to chide the member a little and suggest that maybe I should ask for unanimous consent to give him unlimited time. I was enjoying his excellent speech and presentation so much.

The leader of the NDP mentioned a number of things that the Liberal government had failed to do when it came to their broken promises. Well-connected Liberal insiders seem to getting on the

agenda, and some of the promises that have been kept are obviously paying big dividends for those who have \$1,500 a head.

Does the member for Outremont think that maybe the reason we are not moving ahead on some of the issues is because some of the folks in those organizations just do not have quite the right lobbyists yet, are not well enough connected to Canada 2020, and have not bought their shares in their marijuana companies yet in order to capitalize on the policies that are going to be coming?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, that is interesting and it is consistent with what we have been talking about today.

For example, the Liberals swore up and down during the election campaign that they would lower the tax rate on small and medium-sized businesses down to 9%, a promise they quickly broke. Now it is interesting when we look at the names of the companies involved. Corporations are not supposed to be giving; it is individuals. However, if it is all individuals of the same corporation, people start to get the general picture of what is involved.

Small and medium-sized businesses do not have that access. They do not have \$1,500 to come into one of these meetings and ask why the Liberals do not respect their promise. That is why Canadians expect a government to do what it promised to do when it was a political party running in an election.

We in the NDP had promised to do something that had never been tried before in the history of Canadian politics, to tell Canadians what we would do once elected, and then once elected, actually do it. It has never been tried up until this date. In 2019, we are going to propose it again.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I have seen through some body language of members that they are somewhat concerned that the usual pattern of each party taking its turn during the portion of the debate for questions and comments has been somewhat different. As Chair occupants, we recognize that the time for questions and comments is often the most valuable time for an exchange between members. In accordance with the procedures and practices, we will do our best to ensure that time is generally afforded to the members of the parties who are not associated with the member who has just spoken but not to the exclusion of that party, as we saw in this last 10-minute round.

That is the way we will do it. We will also be attentive to members who are particularly present during the day and paying attention to the debate to ensure that as many members as possible can participate during questions and comments.

The final point is that when we start the time for questions and comments, we will take note of the number of members who are rising to judge how we accord and allocate time for members. For example, if only one or two members stand up in a five-minute period for questions and comments, we will certainly allow more time for those members accordingly, and of course the opposite will be true as well.

Business of Supply

We are eager to hear the comments and/or suggestions of the members in this respect and we will do our best to abide by our procedures and practices to ensure that all hon. members have the opportunity to participate in this important part of the debate each and every day.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

• (1205)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise in this place and join the debate today. I am proud to be splitting my time with the member for Foothills.

I would like to talk a bit about money and preferential access.

In C.E.S Franks's book, *The Parliament of Canada*, written in the mid-1980s, he talked about the issue of members of Parliament. Originally members of Parliament in England oftentimes were served a notice akin to jury duty. They would be expected to represent their area and to go to Parliament. Back then Parliament was quite new, and this was often considered a burden by many people because it would take them away from home and would often require them to resolve tough issues. As an institution, Parliament was still quite young. Oftentimes even Speakers were threatened with violence. It is documented that many MPs would leave England when they found out they were appointed to represent their area.

It was not until later when the institution of Parliament began to strengthen and the individual roles of members of Parliament began to become stronger that preferential access was seen. Members of Parliament would count on patrons, usually quite wealthy people, to fund their campaigns, with the expectation of a quid pro quo in return.

Obviously, over the years our country has grown in its own institutions, as has Great Britain. I am proud to be a Canadian. I am proud of the rules that we have right now, but as the Prime Minister always likes to say, “better is always possible”.

I am going to address some of the issues with respect to the government's position right now when it comes to enforcing its “Open and Accountable Government” document. I hope all sides of the House will welcome my contribution, because one of the key tenets of democracy is that members of Parliament can speak up, even if what they say may be uncomfortable.

I have spent a lot of time exploring ways that pertain to conflict of interest, particularly how we can ensure that Canadians can have trust in our institutions, which sometimes means that we give our institutions more teeth in a parliamentary sense.

First, let us discuss where there is a problem, using some real world examples. The Prime Minister in his earlier years as the MP for Papineau, and before his election as leader of the Liberal Party, engaged in paid public speaking engagements. What is fascinating about that is while an individual cannot be gifted financial benefits from special interest groups, it turns out that the person can take thousands of dollars if they give a paid speech. In the case of the Prime Minister, it turns out that he was paid thousands of dollars by unions to give speeches, and surprise, surprise, one of the first things

he did after taking power, as mentioned by a member earlier, was to repeal union financial disclosure. Ironically, the very law that would have revealed exactly who was getting paid by unions to give paid speeches was repealed by a politician who was paid by unions to give speeches. That is one of the reasons why at the federal level we treat donations from unions and corporations the way we do. However, keep in mind that taking money for a paid speech is potentially a loophole, which the Ethics and Conflict Commissioner is powerless to take action on. That is why today's motion is so important.

Let us not forget that on a year-for-year basis, it has been reported that consultant lobbying has increased 142% under the present Liberal government. That is, in a word, a remarkable increase in lobbying. Let us not forget that it was the Liberals' own national campaign co-chair who was forced to step down after advising others on how to lobby the Liberal government on the energy east pipeline.

On top of that we have a number of Liberal ministers and senior staff members who must work around ethical screens because of ethics-related concerns. By the way, those screens are overseen by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. She is already working with the government on making sure that it fulfills its commitments in those capacities.

• (1210)

Lobbying and ethics-related concerns with the Liberal government are frequently raised, and yet we have not even dealt with the cash for access Liberal fundraisers as of yet, in which extremely wealthy, well-connected insiders are paying as much as \$1,500 each to have private, one-on-one access with key Liberal ministers.

Keep in mind that we hear about these things not because the ever-transparent Liberal government tells us about them. No, it is typically journalists who blow the whistle on these kinds of clandestine behaviours. Meanwhile, the Liberals simply shrug and tell us that it is okay because the Wynne Liberals have done even worse provincially, and it is okay to do what they are doing or because of the time-honoured Liberal comment that they are not breaking any rules. Of course, they are always silent on the fact that it is just not right.

Some will say that that is how fundraising works when there are no political public subsidies. I disagree. Yes, ministers are a draw for fundraising purposes. It is common for everyday Canadians to pay \$50 or \$100 to attend an event and it is a practice, let us be frank, that has gone on for decades. However, secretly sending out invitations to only elite insiders, boasting about special access for a \$1,500 ticket, is different. That is something new and something the Liberals are increasingly doing.

Not long ago, I discovered that some Liberal ministers were using a paid limousine service, despite indicating in response to an Order Paper question that they were not. On further investigation, it turned out that one of those Liberal ministers involved was using a limousine that was connected to—wait for it—a Liberal. The point is that this demonstrates that Liberal ministers are not afraid to send taxpayer-provided benefits back to their Liberal supporters.

Business of Supply

What happens when someone is paying \$1,500 for direct access to a minister? We do not know. However, we do know that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner currently needs more power to find out. Ironically, this is something that the Prime Minister has stated in the past he supports. Who knows? Maybe the Liberals will surprise this place and vote in favour of the motion. That has not been uncommon of late.

Before I close, I want to share one further point. Recently, on the finance committee, I had an opportunity to ask the finance minister what value he placed on the input of the finance committee, which, again, is dominated by a Liberal majority. I asked because the committee had recently been travelling right across this great country, hearing the priorities of Canadians for the 2017 budget. To my great surprise, the finance minister replied that he placed no more value on the reports of this parliamentary committee than he did of any other stakeholder.

Again, this is the very same finance minister who was exposed recently as having attended a \$1,500-a-plate private, direct access to the minister Liberal fundraiser. What the finance minister is basically saying is that he values equally the input of these \$1,500 stakeholders level and a parliamentary committee. Just let that sink in. All of us here are elected to represent thousands of Canadians and he places no greater value on a parliamentary committee, made up of the people's representatives, than he does on an individual stakeholder. No wonder well-heeled Liberal insiders are lining up to pay \$1,500 per ticket for these direct access Liberal fundraisers.

In summary, this motion is a complete necessity when we have this particular Liberal government in power. Let us be honest: we have watched how the Liberal government has responded in question period when this subject has been raised by both the Conservative and NDP opposition parties, and it just shrugs its shoulders and does not even pretend to care about these highly questionable optics.

I should add that we all know that partisan politics is always at a premium when it comes to the fundraising practices of political parties. For this reason alone, I suggest that all members ask themselves the question: is better always possible? It is, if we get some agreement. We have had that agreement in the last few votes on opposition motions, and I hope we will get it today.

•(1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will likely do this a little more today, because as I listen to the debate, I want to make sure that people are very clear on the fact that no laws have been broken in relation to this financial issue. In fact, earlier today I indicated the last time we saw laws being violated was under the Conservative government. That is when election laws were being broken. We even saw some members of the Conservative Party go to jail as a result.

Could the member tell us, specifically, when was the last time an election law was broken?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I heard the member stand in this place today and, unlike his usual boisterous self, when he really seems to enjoy what he is doing, he was louder than usual. He seemed quite alarmed. I got the sense that this whole notion has

made him very defensive. I note that he asked neither about my speech nor the motion. I think the member is trying to deflect.

I will ask him again. It is an issue of agency. If no rules are being broken by his government, and he does not like the fact that we are alleging there could be some stepping outside of what is legal or ethical, is it right for the Prime Minister's Privy Council Office to be put in charge of adjudicating whether or not those rules are being followed?

I suggest that just as ministers' ethical screens are administered by the Ethics Commissioner, so should the preferential pay-to-play fundraisers be as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

There are two very important points that the Liberal Party seems to be ignoring. The first is perception. Ultimately, whether they like it or not, ministers are held to a higher standard than ordinary MPs. The perception of a conflict of interest can undermine the public's confidence in cabinet.

The second is the distinction between the law and the rules imposed by the Prime Minister. All of the mandate letters that the Prime Minister sent to his ministers indicate that the standards ministers are expected to uphold are higher than simply acting within the law, unlike what we have been hearing from the Liberal Party. I think that today's motion will help to resolve that issue.

I would like the member to talk about the fact that the Liberal Party seems to have difficulty understanding that just acting within the law is not enough for a minister of the crown.

•(1220)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister's own document says:

[*Translation*]

“This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.”

[*English*]

The Prime Minister's own document says that it is not sufficient to act within the rules, but that it has to be seen as acting further than that. That brings in an ethical element.

The Liberal Party member opposite seemed very defensive. As a matter of fact, those backbench MPs do not know, and in fact none of us do. So the best thing the government could do is to follow the advice of the NDP, and of course the Conservatives, and give these things to an independent process that could look at, investigate, and rule on these things in a way that is fair, impartial and, for the most part, respectful of this institution.

I appreciate the member's question. I just hope that we see Liberal members deciding that better is always possible as well.

Business of Supply

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to this. I would like to invite the finance minister, the trade minister, the minister of innovation, and the Minister of Natural Resources to come on down and play *The Price Is Right*, because it seems as if they will sell their integrity and whatever it takes to get ahead as long as the price is right. That seems to be the game that the Liberal Party is playing with this. Who knows what the showcase showdown will be at the end of this show? I am sure that those who are spending \$1,500 to attend these exclusive events will be the ones who will enjoy the benefits of the showcase showdown. However, the message I would like to leave for those who have paid the \$1,500 to get these exclusive opportunities to shake hands with and wag the ear of the ministers is that they have overbid. A smarter bid of one dollar would have been a better investment, also of their time.

I want to go back to what the Prime Minister said after he was elected a year ago. I quote from annex B, which states:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must avoid conflict of interest, the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest.

The Prime Minister himself clearly stated to the ministers and parliamentary secretaries that there should be no preferential access to government or appearance of preferential access accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians or political parties.

A lot of the questions we are getting from across the floor are asking whether any laws were broken. The election laws were not broken, but what was broken was a very profound promise by the Prime Minister to do things differently.

He states in that quote, “must avoid conflict of interest” or “the appearance of conflict of interest”.

It is quite obvious that these statements are not worth the paper they are written on. We are back to the age-old Liberal mantra that they are entitled to their entitlements no matter what the cost. Again, if the price is right, they will be there to try to grant whatever it is those people are asking for. I would like to talk about some of those who have done so already, and we are barely just over a year into their mandate.

The Minister of Natural Resources attended an event on August 29 in Edmonton at the offices of MacPherson Leslie and Tyerman. This is the minister for natural resources, mining, oil and gas, forestry, and nuclear energy. The expertise of this law firm with which he had a private meeting just happens to be mining and resource permits and regulations. Not only was this a meeting with this law firm, but it was a private party, and the only people who were allowed to attend were people who paid the \$1,500 fee to join the Liberal Laurier Club, which is an exclusive fundraising arm of the Liberal Party. Therefore, to say that this was an open consultation with the energy sector or stakeholders in the mining or oil and gas sector, I think, is quite disingenuous. This was an event exclusively for members of the Liberal Laurier fundraising club, who have paid a \$1,500 membership fee, to get an opportunity to speak with the Minister of Natural Resources.

I could tell members right now that, of the 100,000 Albertan energy workers who are out of work, not one has had the opportunity to speak to the Minister of Natural Resources. They are the ones who need that \$1,500 to pay their mortgage because they are out of work, and yet a very exclusive, elite group of lawyers in downtown Edmonton has the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Natural Resources. I am certain that mining and resource development permits were a hot topic at that meeting. I am sure there are thousands of Alberta energy workers right now who would love to have an opportunity to sit down with the minister of natural resources and talk about some of the things that they on the ground feel the minister would be able to implement, such as policies and regulations that would help them get back to work, rather than spending his time meeting with lawyers in downtown Edmonton. However, the unemployed energy workers simply do not have the \$1,500 or probably the connections to have that opportunity to meet personally with the Minister of Natural Resources.

He is obviously not alone. On April 7, the Minister of Justice attended a Liberal fundraiser hosted by a prominent Bay Street law firm at \$500 a ticket. Why would the Minister of Justice be meeting exclusively with a law firm in downtown Toronto?

● (1225)

Let us keep going.

The Minister of Justice attended another event, this time for only \$1,000 a ticket—she had a discount—on April 28. This was a meeting in Vancouver and included Gordon and Catherine McCauley. Gordon just happens to be CEO of Viable Healthworks and director of Centre for Drug Research and Development. I am sure they were talking about anything other than marijuana laws or decriminalizing marijuana. I am sure those were not topics at that event.

The Minister of International Trade will be attending a Liberal Party of Canada event that advertises a wonderful evening with the Minister of International Trade, in Toronto. When I go to that website and click on it to get a password to attend, I cannot get that password. This is supposed to be open. If I want an opportunity to talk to the Minister of International Trade about what happened with CETA or what is going on with the trans-Pacific partnership, which farmers and ranchers in southern Alberta are very eager to see proceed, unfortunately, I do not have access to what is supposed to be an open and transparent process to meet with government members of Parliament, ministers.

The finance minister recently had an event in Halifax, on October 13. The ticket price for that event was \$1,500. Again, that was pretty exclusive company. Fifteen business executives, including land developers, bankers, and mortgage brokers, each paid \$1,500 to have an opportunity to meet with the finance minister. I am sure they were not talking about downtown Halifax developments or the Halifax Port Authority. I am sure it was just to get some consultation on the upcoming budget, which will be much better than we heard in the update, hopefully.

Again, I would love to carry on.

Business of Supply

I am going to add the innovation minister. He was the top guest at a Vancouver event, where the ticket price was \$1,500. He also must have had a tough time, as he is taking a discount. His next one is at a private residence where the tickets are only \$400.

The Prime Minister himself is not free from these either. He has attended 17 of these, some of them with a ticket price as high as \$1,525.

The Liberals have 89 of these events planned over the next few months. Despite the rhetoric we are hearing in question period or here today about not breaking any laws and trying to be open and transparent, despite the reaction they are getting from Canadian taxpayers that this is wrong, they do not care. They are plugging right along with continuing to host these things. It is an absolute affront to this House and to Canadian taxpayers, a slap in the face, saying they don't care what people think about the optics of these types of fundraisers, and they are going to go right ahead and do them anyway.

The finance minister talked quite a bit that this was going to be consultation, that this was a chance to speak to Canadians about the budget process, but the federal lobbying commissioner, Karen Shepherd, is now investigating these pay for access fundraisers; the Ethics Commissioner has called these fundraisers unsavoury; and even former Liberal minister Sheila Copps has asked the Prime Minister to ban these elite fundraisers, saying that during the Chrétien years, when she was minister, "You go and you get an envelope, 'I need this, I want this, I want this'".

It is quite clear that this has nothing to do with consultations. This is about what they can do for people and how much it is going to cost.

If he talked about consulting with Canadians, there are other ways to do it. We have a break week next week. I am going to be in my riding of Foothills. I have four round tables planned during that week, throughout the riding. I am going to be consulting with hundreds of Foothills residents about what they think is important as we go through the budget process, and certainly they are going to be focusing on Alberta jobs.

I am renting rooms at the Legion, at a local hotel, and at a local restaurant. Do members know how much I am charging people to attend? I am charging zero, absolutely zero. That is how consultation with Canadians should be done. It should not be done at \$1,500 a head.

They are talking to the wealthy, the entitled, the elite. They are not talking to average hard-working Canadians, the ones they should really be paying attention to because those are the ones who really matter, with what is going on and the decisions that the Liberal government is making.

•(1230)

In conclusion, I am certainly hearing from my constituents, in disbelief, that this is utterly the kind of attitude of entitlement to their entitlements. It is the same old Liberal Party.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it bears repeating. We have some of the strongest laws

in the country in regard to this issue. In other jurisdictions, donations can be made from corporations and unions, and the sky is the limit. It is important for us to recognize that no laws have been broken and that the previous Conservative Harper government abided by the very same laws.

Would the member not acknowledge that the last time one of these laws was broken was when the Conservatives held power? When Stephen Harper was the prime minister was the last time one of these laws was broken. We even had members go to jail from the Conservative Party. Would he not, at the very least, acknowledge that what I just said is true? If it is not true, then maybe the member could tell me of a specific case where a law has been broken.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member is trying to change the subject. Certainly we had one case with former minister Glover. The event was cancelled and the money was paid back immediately, which is much different from what we are getting from the government.

As I said in my speech, the Liberals have been caught doing these things, and whether or not it actually breaks the rules, the Liberals put the rules in place. The Prime Minister said to "avoid conflict of interest, the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest". Those are his own words, yet the Liberals are doing it anyway, regardless of what Canadians think.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to recognize that these cash and pay for say events are not open to members of the general public, because as the member has noted, individuals would have to sign in on a website.

Second, many Canadians cannot afford the types of donations that are necessary. It is important to note that, because the exclusivity is very central to the event, and it eliminates many people who are not able to come up with that money.

Ironically, for Canadians who are watching this debate, why it matters to them is that, if they cannot afford that \$1,500, people who do go to the Liberal fundraiser event will be subsidized by Canadians' money. At tax time, these executives and CEOs will actually get a cheque from the government, part of which is our money, to go to the event to get booze, food, treats, and party elements. They will get all of those things, and they will likely go in one of their executive cars or one of their different company cars, and they will write that off as a business-related expense.

These things are real and happening. If Canadians cannot afford them, it is sad, because they are also paying for them.

For the hon. member, I ask how that is fair to Canadians. When they do not have the money right now to do something like this, somebody else gets preferential treatment and gets exposure to that member, and everything has a price. That is why they are charging \$1,500, not \$5.

Business of Supply

•(1235)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is exactly right; it is not fair. If individuals are not members of the Liberal Laurier club, which costs \$1,500 a year, a very exclusive elite group, then they are not getting the access these other people are getting, which is not fair to Canadians.

As I said, the Liberals are paying attention to a very small percentage of very wealthy, very influential, very elite Canadians, but they are not paying any attention to the 99% of other Canadians who simply cannot afford these types of cash for access events.

This is not what government is supposed to be. We are elected to this House to be the voice of our constituents. We are not elected to this House to be the voice of the wealthy, the elite, and the influential. It is just not right.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the member said about corruption. My question is simple for the hon. member. This is how it starts, but where could it possibly go from here?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I do not think this is where it starts. This is just where it picked up again from Chrétien, the ad scam, and those kinds of things. This is just the same old, same old. Certainly, this is what we found out now. Who knows what will happen in the future? That is why the government should be doing something about this now.

The Liberals talked about real change. This is not real change. This is the same old Liberal Party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

[*English*]

I welcome this opportunity to rise in the House to discuss this motion.

The motion, at its heart, speaks to issues of integrity and accountability. I think we can all agree that engagement with Canadians is a key part of the democratic process. The unfortunate reality is that under the previous government, Canadians were not engaged, their concerns were not heard, and that is why Canadians chose a new government to represent them.

In short, as much as my opposition colleagues would like us all to believe, fundraising is not a dirty word. Fundraising is one component of every party's engagement in outreach work. I am proud to say that Canadians have a government that is not only following the rules, but believes in hearing the concerns of all Canadians from all walks of life and making their concerns a major priority.

All parties fundraise. It is a way citizens can express their views in a free and fair democracy. That said, we need to ensure we preserve the level playing field that is the foundation of our democratic culture.

Fundraising and election spending need to be regulated, and they are. The federal fundraising rules are some of the strictest in the

country, and donations and contributions are made open and transparent. For instance, in some provinces, individuals can donate in the tens of thousands of dollars, and others do not have any limits on contributions whatsoever. Additionally, it is important to note that some provinces accept donations from unions, trade associations, and corporations. This is not the case in the federal system

While members on that side of the House are trying to create a narrative that our government is not being open and transparent, I can say with full confidence that this is not the case here. Canadians know that, federally, we have some of the strictest rules governing political fundraising, and our members follow these rules in every case. Canadians have trust in our system, because they know we have measures in place to ensure our public institutions operate in a transparent fashion and that decision makers are held to account for their actions.

One of the central pillars of our integrity regime is the Conflict of Interest Act. It is important that members of the House understand how the extremely rigorous regime set out by the statute works.

First, the act has broad coverage. When it talks about public office-holders, the net is cast widely to include ministers, parliamentary secretaries, Governor in Council appointees, and even exempt staff. Compliance with the Conflict of Interest Act is not something that is taken lightly. It is not a suggestion. It is a term and condition of appointment for all public office-holders.

At its core, the act requires public office-holders to avoid conflict between private interests and their official duties. This means that ministers, staffers, and others may not take part in any decision making that could further their own private interests or that of their friends or relatives.

We all know that this is not a universal principle embraced around the world. There are countries where people seek high office as a means to obtain wealth and prosperity. Fortunately, in Canada, we view things differently. Public service is exactly that: serving the public and not oneself.

•(1240)

[*Translation*]

The rules are some of the strictest in the country regarding donations, and contributions must be made openly and transparently. Some provinces allow individuals to make donations of tens of thousands of dollars, while others have no limits on donations, and some of them also allow donations from unions, business associations and corporations. None of that is permitted under the federal regime, which requires donations of more than \$200 to be reported online. That being said, there is no question that the current government is obeying the rules and the laws on political fundraising campaigns in Canada.

I will now turn to a few concrete examples of activities and practices that are not permitted under our current regime. Federal public office holders are not permitted to participate in making decisions that will affect the value of their children's business or would increase the value of their own stock portfolios. They may not issue a permit that would increase the value of their property holdings. They are not permitted to accept extravagant gifts, either.

Business of Supply

The definition of these gifts includes a wide variety of items. It can include a gift bag from a business, a low-interest mortgage or anything in between. The law also contains provisions concerning the post-employment period. For example, federal public office holders cannot resign and immediately use the confidential information to which they had access for their own purposes. They cannot suddenly resign and join the other side in a transaction or negotiation with the government.

[*English*]

Overseeing this regime is the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. She interprets and administers the act. This includes providing public office-holders with confidential advice, investigating and reporting on alleged breaches, and levying penalties for public office-holders who have failed to report as required. It is tough.

I know that everyone in the House can agree that the current commissioner is doing an admirable job and has earned our collective respect and appreciation. When I say it is a tough job, I mean it. Things are rarely entirely black and white. Context matters and perception matters. That is why there are mechanisms to ensure public reporting and mechanisms to allow ministers, staffers, and others covered by the act to check in with the commissioner when questions arise.

Canadians expect governments and ministers to act to the highest ethical standards. That is exactly what every minister of this government has done, and continues to do. The commissioner is the authoritative source for interpreting the act. She has issued a number of guidelines and information notices to assist public office-holders, which are available on her website. In short, when in doubt, she is the font of wisdom.

[*Translation*]

Another pillar of the federal ethics regime is the Lobbying Act. This act is based on the principle that it is legitimate and necessary for the government to communicate with interest groups. Canadians have the right to know who is involved in paid lobbying for the purpose of influencing the government's decisions.

Under the act, all paid lobbyists are required to register with the Lobbying Commissioner before they can communicate with ministers, exempt staff, government officers and parliamentarians. That includes consultants working for law firms and lobbying companies, as well as employees of corporations, unions, industrial associations and interest groups.

Lobbyists are required to enter information about their clients, their lobbying activities and the departments and officers with whom they meet in a public data bank. They also have to make public the details of any meetings or telephone calls with government decision-makers, which includes ministers, exempt staff and even senior public servants. Any member of the public may consult the data bank online to obtain that information.

In addition, all lobbyists must respect the lobbyists' code of conduct issued by the Commissioner of Lobbying. Like the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Commissioner of Lobbying is an independent officer who reports directly to Parliament, not the government. Under their code of conduct, lobbyists must act

honestly and with integrity, and they must not do anything that places a designated public office holder in a conflict of interest.

The Ethics Commissioner has the power to investigate any alleged breaches of both the Lobbying Act and the lobbyists' code of conduct. The commissioner must also report all violations to Parliament. If the commissioner believes that a violation has occurred, he can also refer the matter to the RCMP for criminal investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution.

The Lobbying Act ensures that senior government officials cannot leave their position and immediately begin lobbying their former government colleagues. It is prohibited for ministers, exempt staff, and senior officials to be a paid lobbyist of the federal government for a period of five years after they leave their position.

● (1245)

[*English*]

Taken together, the Conflict of Interest Act and the Lobbying Act represent one of the most rigorous statutory transparency and ethics regimes in the world. I am proud that our government has set the bar so high. Providing open and accountable government for Canadians is all about that.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting listening to the debate today and have been hearing members on the other side trying to defend against this. They have been saying that they are following all the steps of the law.

I would like to quote from the Prime Minister's letter to the ministers. It states:

To be worthy of Canadians' trust, we must always act with integrity. This is not merely a matter of adopting the right rules, or of ensuring technical compliance with those rules. As Ministers, you and your staff must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny.

This is the part that really matters, "This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law".

Further on in that "Open and Accountable Government" document, another statement states, "Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must avoid conflict of interest, the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest."

How can these pay-for-play events not be perceived as potential conflicts of interest?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, the way it works is that people donate to parties. The government follows the rules, not just to the letter but in spirit. Every member of the House has to follow the rules. There are so many mechanisms that ensure this. We need only ask Mr. Del Mastro and we will find out how the system actually works.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I find troubling is the Liberal members keep speaking about the letter of the law and appear to not even want to mention the mandate letter the Prime Minister sent to all his ministers.

Business of Supply

They have said that they are obeying the letter of the law. If we turn to Duff Conacher, who has brought a number of cases before the courts on the interpretation of lobbyists law, he is not of the same view. I would like to take the opinion of independent lawyers. He says that the law says it is illegal to do anything that puts a politician or a government official in even the appearance of a conflict of interest, which raises the question of how well our commissioner is upholding these rules.

The PM mandate letter is very clear that the ministers must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality beyond what is specified in law to avoid a conflict of interest, or a potential conflict of interest, or even the appearance of an influence affecting a minister's decisions.

I would ask the member to speak to the Prime Minister's mandate letter and whether he thinks the ministers should be ignoring the mandate letters that were given to them, or if he thinks it is sage advice that should be followed.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's mandate letter is a very good letter. I think our ministers are following it to the letter, to the spirit, to the intent, and are doing a very good job of it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear from the opposition benches, asking us why we keep referring to the law. My colleague made reference to the Conservatives breaking the law. The last time an election law was broken, there were two political parties. The NDP was also required to return money.

I wonder if my colleague would like to comment on why it is important to follow the laws, which is something our government actually does.

• (1250)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, we are a country of laws, first and foremost. It is either a country of men or a country of laws. This is a country of laws. We follow the rules. We make the rules as fair as humanly possible. We do our very best to stick with that.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I arrived here today to speak to the opposition motion on fundraising and federal cabinet ministers. Canadian politics is governed by some of the strictest political financial regulations found anywhere in our country and across North America, and the Liberal Party of Canada fully complies with all of the rules and regulations.

Last year, we saw one of the longest federal elections in Canadian history. It was one that was entirely funded by donations from individual Canadians. Why? Because Canadian political parties are not-for-profit organizations that rely solely on donations and fundraising events in order to keep the lights on, their volunteers fed, and Canadians engaged in the process. That is what we are doing. We are engaging Canadians, strengthening our democracy, and we are doing it in an open, collaborative, and transparent way.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister has been very clear from day one. Real change is needed in how we do things. This means that the government must operate in an open and transparent manner, and that all government institutions must work openly. Basically, we need to make all government affairs transparent by default.

That is one of the central points of the 2016 fall economic statement presented by the Minister of Finance this past Tuesday. Whether it is about strengthening the integrity of our statistics system, making the decisions of the Board of Internal Economy more transparent, or making the government simpler and easier to follow and understand, the government is taking real action for Canadians.

[English]

This summer I had the opportunity and privilege of being in my riding for most of the summer. I had a series of town halls, and several ministers visited the riding. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship came and did a town hall. The Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard also did some sessions. The Minister of National Revenue came to visit students at the university and met with several stakeholders. The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development came to my riding to speak with several stakeholders, staff, and members of the public. Also, the Minister of Finance was in my riding this summer for a free barbeque, where he had the opportunity to meet over 400 Canadians from my riding. It was a fantastic event.

We also had the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and the Minister of Democratic Institutions in the area. We had a wonderful summer. It was very busy and engaging, doing town halls and hearing from the people of our community. I am very proud of the work that has been done.

[Translation]

I think we are certainly on the right track. More importantly, Canadians agree. Recent polls show that Canadians have a very high level of trust in the government. That is critically important because we are the stewards of democracy.

Canadians need to know that their elected members are working for them. They need to know that we, the members of the House of Commons are here in Ottawa to give them a voice.

[English]

Provincially, we know that in the British Columbia area there are no established limits on the amount of anonymous contributions a candidate, riding association, or political party can accept. On the other hand, federally, political parties are required to publicly report on a quarterly and annual basis all contributions that are over \$200.

Again, provincially, we know that in Alberta individuals can donate up to \$30,000 to a political party during a campaign. I find that astonishing. Federally, individuals can donate a maximum of \$1,525. With the Americans going to the polls in just a few days, what better time to remind Canadians that in Canada, our political financing rules ban all political donations made on behalf of corporations, unions, and special interest groups.

Business of Supply

Yes, the Liberal Party relies on individual donations from Canadians across this wonderful country, 93,000 donations last year alone, in fact, but the Liberal Party of Canada has taken engaging Canadians one step further. We have blown open the doors to our movement by removing membership fees and allowing all Canadians to register free of charge and participate in the political process, including nominating candidates and selecting party leaders. During my nomination in 2015, an individual came to my headquarters who wanted to become a member of the party, but just did not have the financial means to do so. He felt awful. Now, with the new rules in place, all marginalized groups and all Canadians can be engaged in the process.

Ministers are MPs as well and all MPs need to fund raise. Fundraising is done by every member in the House, including the New Democrats and Conservatives. I find it a little odd that the legislation brought in by the previous Conservative government, practised by the previous Conservative government, which is nearly identical to the “Open and Accountable Government” guide introduced by the Prime Minister, is suddenly no good now that Canadians voted for perhaps a better government.

Let us take a stroll down memory lane, if we could, and refresh the memories of opposition members. Fundraising is not always easy, as the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka recently found out. Although, when he was still a minister, he managed to attract donors to attend The Albany Club in Toronto at a price of \$250 a head.

Hon. Tony Clement: My department, though—

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: In May of last year, the former minister, Chris Alexander, was the main attraction at a \$3,000-a-head reception—

Hon. Tony Clement: Don't start talking about my fundraising when you're—

●(1255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to inform the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka that this is not a debate going back and forth. If he would like to ask questions, he can do that later.

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I will wait for my opportunity.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, in May of last year, former member and minister, Chris Alexander, was the main attraction at a \$3,000-a-head reception and dinner at the \$27-million home of two wealthy Conservative supporters. The donor list for those attending this event was never made public.

To conclude my section on Conservative fundraising, I would like to point out the cocktail party held this past October at the exclusive York Club in Toronto, where numerous senators and Tory backroom operators hosted a meeting with leadership candidates, where the ticket price was \$1,500 a head.

The third party in the House also engages in fundraising for electoral purposes. In fact, the member for Victoria had the fourth-highest spending campaign in all of the 2015 candidates in Canada,

the second highest of anyone elected. It almost reached \$215,000. He did this by accepting the maximum donation of \$1,500 from 23 individuals in 2015 alone. He also accepted \$1,300 in donations from one individual, \$1,000 from 16 individuals, and a further 49 individuals donated between \$500 and \$999.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with all of this, as long as it is done within the rules. The rules are working, as they have in the past. However, our Prime Minister has put another level of oversight over cabinet ministers. The opposition would have people believe that these additional rules are somehow a bad thing. I cannot follow the logic of this argument.

The Ethics Commissioner's office is responsible for administering the Conflict of Interest Act for public office holders, and the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons. Compliance with fundraising activities falls under the purview of Elections Canada and will continue to do so.

I could go on and on for hours about how the Conservatives raised money over their time in power, but let me be clear, in almost all cases they did follow the rules. In our case we have followed the rules in every case and will continue to do so. If the Leader of the Opposition is so upset about the fundraising practices of the government, will she stand up and demand an apology from her caucus mates who were ministers in the last government?

It is telling, I believe, that the Conservatives have used one of their few opposition days to throw stones through their own windows. Our government and our leader have been entrusted by the Canadian public to lead this country with vision and principle, which is exactly what we promised and is exactly what we are doing. Cabinet ministers like all other members of this place must raise funds if they intend to get re-elected. They will continue to do so in complete compliance with all facets of the election financing laws, as we expect from all members of the House.

●(1300)

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to correct the record and draw the distinction between what our ministers did when we were in government, and what the Liberals do.

When we were in government, as the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe must know, we were specifically prevented by our rules from fundraising from individuals who were registered to our departments. If I were the minister of health, as I was, we did not, and I did not, fundraise with pharmaceutical interests, including Barry Sherman, by the way. When I was president of the Treasury Board, anyone who had any dealings with the Treasury Board did not go to my fundraisers.

In the Liberals' case, every person on their list who was registered as a lobbyist is not only invited but actually organizes the fundraisers. Does the hon. member have anything to say about that?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, once again, as we have heard time and time again today, no laws have been broken.

Business of Supply

All members of Parliament are following the laws that have been put in place. We are following all of the information that has been given to us by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I go to the next question and comment, I just want to point out to members that I am up here and I am kind of far away, and members are making it very difficult for me to hear the answers. I am certain members do not want to upset the Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would love it if the hon. member for Victoria were a minister right now.

What the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe and all the Liberals seem to fail to understand is that the Prime Minister wrote mandate letters to all the members of cabinet in which he made it perfectly clear that it was not enough to act within the law.

How many times are we going to be given every example of every politician and every political party that ever participated in fundraising activities? It is one thing to hold a fundraiser, but could my colleague read the motion and perhaps even the mandate letters, which explicitly prohibit the type of behaviour displayed by the Minister of Finance during a closed-door fundraiser?

The Prime Minister asked his ministers to adhere to higher ethical standards, but he did not keep his word. The worst part is hearing this party brush this off as no big deal because everyone does it. As my leader said earlier, as for real change, that is malarkey.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

First of all, Elections Canada is responsible for enforcing the law when it comes to elections. We followed all the laws that have been established. We also complied with all the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's recommendations and advice.

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of my key volunteers and funders in my riding helped with my campaign. He had supported other parties in the past but chose to support the Liberal Party in the last campaign. When I asked him why, he told me that his father came to Canada, was successful in business, and told his children democracy comes at a cost, that there is a price to running the operations of a political party and every party faces costs to operate within their jurisdictions.

Could the hon. member comment on the fact that we operate as not-for-profits, but we do need to generate funds in order to reach our members democratically?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely right. As a part of doing business we need to raise funds. In the 2015 election the Liberal Party received donations from over 93,000 Canadians and the amounts varied from \$5 to \$1,500. The amounts did not really matter as we were pleased to receive all contributions. For the work that we do, we need to receive financing and we support and appreciate all members who have provided money.

Through this government we have been able to engage with thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast on different issues that really matter to them. We have been very successful and Canadians continue to tell us that they are proud of the work that we continue to do.

● (1305)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte.

What we have just heard is basically an excuse for unethical behaviour. The excuse that we have heard all morning from the speeches that members are reading from the PMO is that no laws have been broken. That is the standard the Liberals are setting. Of course, what they are not talking about is the ethical guidelines that the Prime Minister handed out to the public office holders over there, the best practices for ministers and parliamentary secretaries. I want to read from those guidelines, under general principles:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government.

There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties. There should be no singling out, or appearance of singling out, of individuals or organizations as targets of political fundraising because they have official dealings with Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, or their staff or departments.

What the Liberal Party wants us to believe is that when the Minister of Justice holds a fundraiser attended by a bunch of lawyers who pay \$1,500 for the privilege, it is just a coincidence that they are lawyers who are regulated by the Justice Department.

When the Minister of Natural Resources holds a \$1,500 per person fundraiser at a law firm that specializes in natural resource sectors, that is just a coincidence. How are they supposed to know that it was going to be the minister who regulates their department and may decide whether their projects proceed or not? How could they know? What a happy coincidence.

When the Minister of Finance holds dozens of these things across the country, at \$1,500 per person and filled with Bay Street bankers, how are the latter supposed to know that the minister who is responsible for regulating the financial services sector would be there and take that \$1,500?

It is beyond belief that the Liberal Party is justifying this clear cash for access scheme and trying to drag in other members of Parliament who all fundraise. The difference is that when we were in government, our ministers were very clear. We set up the ethical standard so that our ministers were not taking cash from people they regulated, from the people who lobbied their departments. That is the clear differentiation between the Conservative government and the Liberal Party. They do not even try to hide it; they justify it as not being illegal.

Business of Supply

It is the same behaviour we have seen from Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Liberal Party, in which people who are under a cloud of investigation are kept in their posts because they have not been officially charged yet. They have not officially gone to jail yet.

That is the standard the government is emulating. It is not a surprise, because this is the same party that has another member, Jacques Corriveau, who was found guilty on three counts of fraud just this week in the sponsorship scandal. Canadians remember it well, that system of coordinated kick-backs for government contracts. There are still people going to jail because of that Liberal culture of corruption.

We see it continuing. It is the proud legacy that the Liberals have brought forward into this new iteration, which is basically more of the same. This is how they do business. As David Dingwall famously said, "I'm entitled to my entitlements." The Liberal Party of Canada seems to think it is entitled to raise money from the very people who should not be at fundraisers with the people who regulate them, with the ministers who often hold the very future of whether a project proceeds, and whether a regulation changes to the benefit of an industry. That is what we are talking about. It is the cash for that access. We are not talking about eliminating fundraising.

● (1310)

I heard another member say in another speech written by the PMO and read into the record here today that in B.C. one could give \$30,000 and in other jurisdictions \$20,000, as if the amount of the donation were the ethical breach. However, the breach occurs when any amount is given to get access to a minister who has control over files that are important to the minister and the minister's personal interests. That is what this party is doing, and its members are not even hiding it. It is coordinated corruption.

The Liberals have had nearly 90 of these events that we know about, and 20 with high-profile ministers who have been implicated. Now we have the Minister of Natural Resources saying that he was not there, but, of course, the record shows that he was. I would be embarrassed if I were him too. I would be telling people that I do not do anything like that. However, the record shows that he was there at the event with a law firm that lobbies in regard to natural resources.

We have other events taking place with the Minister of International Trade, such as the following event, described as the Liberal Party of Canada and an evening with the hon. Minister of International Trade in Toronto. However, when we go to the web page now, we cannot find out about that event because it is password protected. The Liberals are trying to cover their tracks, but Canadians will not let them get away with it.

The Prime Minister's bureaucrats are deciding whether the Prime Minister is breaking ethical guidelines. That is the system he has conveniently set up so that the Privy Council oversees it. The Privy Council, which is the bureaucracy for the Prime Minister's Office, is the one that oversees whether the Prime Minister is keeping his own ethical guidelines, and, surprise, he is batting 1000%. He is always on the level, and they do not seem to find a problem with it, even though the Lobbying Commissioner and Ethics Commissioner have said it is very unsavoury and believe it is something that should

come under their purview. We agree. Therefore, this is what the motion says today:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner should be granted the authority to oversee and enforce the directives to Ministers listed in Open and Accountable Government in order to end the current practice of "cash-for-access" by ensuring there is no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians or political parties.

That is taken directly from the Prime Minister's directives to his ministers. However, we hear today a defence. It is hard to believe that every one of the Liberal Party members gets up to say that they have not broken the law. The laws have not been broken, but it is about ethics, which is why this decision by ministers to purposely seek out funds from the people they regulate is corruption.

As I said before, the Liberals have held 89 of these fundraisers so far, and have another 10 scheduled for the fall. They all include fundraisers with ministers and parliamentary secretaries, as well as one with the Prime Minister's senior adviser, Gerald Butts.

They are defending the indefensible. They are bringing up the Elections Act, or the fact that members have fundraised. We all fundraise. It is part of the political process in Canada. What is not a part of the political process is using the office that one has been entrusted with by the Prime Minister to act on behalf of all Canadians, to instead act on behalf of people who can afford a \$1,500 donation to bend the ear of the Prime Minister or his ministers.

In the natural resource sector, 100,000 workers have lost their jobs since the current government took office. They cannot afford the entry fee to get face time with the Minister of Natural Resources to ask why he is not doing anything to get them back to work. This is a return to the culture of corruption.

The Liberals should support this motion, support the words of their Prime Minister, and get the Ethics Commission, not their bureaucrats, to evaluate whether or not these clear conflicts of interest violate ethical rules.

● (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated earlier, at the national level we have some of the strongest election financing rules in the country. That has been very evident.

In fact, it is somewhat ironic. I confess, we have been emphasizing the importance of laws here on the government benches, and for good reason. For five years I sat on the opposition benches, and the only parties that broke the law were the Conservatives and the NDP. Both of those parties had to pay because they broke the law.

This government has not broken the law. If one does not break the law, then there is no conflict of interest.

Can the member not agree that those very same laws were in place under Stephen Harper, and maybe explain to the House why the Conservatives broke those laws?

Business of Supply

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know who that hon. member offended to be tasked with having to defend the indefensible here today. It is a tough task and he has been handed the short straw. Again, he does not want to talk about these clear conflicts of interest. We are talking about ministers who are raising cash from people who are registered to lobby their departments. They are raising cash from the people they regulate: the justice minister from lawyers, the finance minister from bankers, the natural resource minister from those who have natural resource interests. That is what is corrupt and unethical in this. It is too bad that it has not taken that long for the member to swallow himself whole by moving from the third party into the third row. We hope that he will see the light of the Prime Minister's own words, embrace them, and vote for this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would particularly like to thank him for also speaking out against the fact that the Liberals seem to be criticizing everyone and saying that it is no big deal, that everyone fundraises, without realizing that ministers are held to a higher standard than ordinary MPs. That is very important, and the Prime Minister himself has acknowledged it in the things he has said and in the mandate letters he wrote to his ministers. Obviously, the ministers' actions show that they do not understand how important this is.

If we want to speak out against all those who have broken the law, we could also talk about Jacques Corriveau. That story finally came to its rightful end this week when Mr. Corriveau was found guilty. What is more, charges are being brought against some people who work in Queen's Park for Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne. That is a scandal that is costing the people of Sudbury since their MPP is affected by all of these allegations.

We can sling mud left and right. However, perhaps, for the benefit of our Liberal colleagues, the hon. member could explain the difference between what is legal and what is ethical.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

[*English*]

I think he has it right. Just this week, the former Liberal organizer Jacques Corriveau was convicted of three counts of fraud. There are people who have been fundraising for the Prime Minister who have now been charged with breaking the law on bribery charges relating to the Sudbury by-election. This is the culture that the members across are defending.

What we are talking about here today is an ethical standard that we heard would be so different. The document that we have quoted from was the foundation for this new ethical standard, so we put it in the motion today. We said that if the Liberal Party is so committed to open and transparent government with these new ethical guidelines, let it endorse the words of its own Prime Minister and vote in favour of the motion. What the Liberals have said today is that they do not want to talk about the words of their own Prime Minister, but about how they are not breaking the letter of the law. They are breaking the spirit of the law, and certainly they are breaking the ethical laws.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we stand in the House regarding a motion that is moved to make a statement to the current government and to the people of Canada, a statement that is firm, strong, and empowers the people of Canada rather than empowering the few who have the money to gain access and influence.

The basic tenets of our democracy and the rule of law determine that we are all equal in our weight and responsibility as citizens and before the laws of this land. Unfortunately, there are practices going on that threaten that principle and seek to undermine the will of the people and replace it with the wants of wealthy insiders. I know my colleagues across the aisle are wondering how this could be, how the party that promised real change could threaten the structure of our democracy so that the Canadian people, who voted for them and placed them in government, are diminished in their position.

It is actually quite easy to do.

Some Liberal insiders with nice offices or homes invite a Liberal minister, who has the time, and they sell tickets to people who want to bend the ear of said minister, so that the Liberal minister will perhaps bend the policies of the country or give his or her support to their thoughts.

Maybe it is not all about policies at all. Maybe the people attending the fundraiser are not actually looking for a change in policy, but to receive an appointment, maybe as a judge, for instance, from the justice minister or an immigration tribunal position from the immigration minister, an appointment to the Senate from the Prime Minister or democratic reform minister, some piece of corporate welfare from the Minister of Innovation, the funding of a project from the infrastructure minister, or finally, a change in fiscal policy from the finance minister.

The question of preferential access comes down to one very clear point: what Canada do we believe in? Do we believe in a Canada where people are seen as equal and therefore treated equally? Or do we believe in a Canada where citizens who are of a certain political party, of a certain income-earning level, or of a certain personal relationship deserve the inside track?

My opinion is this. I believe in a Canada that respects its electors equally and fairly, and provides all of us the ability to influence the policies of government so that government is reflective of the country that voted it into power and not of the donors who sustain the Liberal Party of Canada. I do not think that this is a question of whether one is a Liberal, Conservative, NDP, or any other party supporter. I do not believe there are Liberal voters out there who think the Liberal government should be allowing a few Liberal insiders to influence the conduct of the government.

This is why. It means that some Liberals who have the means or know the right person have more access to government than do others. It is just plain wrong. The country that I believe in, the one I thought I grew up in, is one in which it does not matter where people grew up, what financial means their families have, or who their friends are; their opportunity for success is equal. It is equal for all Canadians.

Business of Supply

I am not so naive as to believe that there are not persons in this country who are disadvantaged, but I am furious and Canadians are furious that those children are often forgotten, and in this case for a \$1,525 cheque. It is disturbing that the fundraising practices of a political party that is in government are determining the priorities of the federal government.

Let me provide a few examples as to why this is so important.

Let us pretend that the justice minister were to travel to, say, Bay Street in Toronto to a ritzy law firm and hold a fundraiser for the Liberal government. Let us pretend the law firm just mentioned were to go out and sell a bunch of tickets for the Liberal Party. Now, let us pretend the justice minister needed to appoint hundreds of judges and there was a backlog. Finally, let us pretend the law firm mentioned has a tonne of lawyers who want to be judges. Is this a scenario that Canadians would be comfortable with? My guess is no. I am not comfortable with it; that is for sure.

The most difficult fact about this pretend situation is that it is not pretend at all. The justice minister did just this. Some lawyers, based on their employment or choice of law firm and the amount of money they would donate to the Liberal Party, were given access to the person they were asking for a job. For some reason, the members of the Liberal Party stand up, day in and day out, defending these practices. It is deplorable.

● (1320)

Let us pretend the finance minister visits Halifax. Let us pretend he has a fundraiser with a land developer. Let us pretend that land developer who raised thousands of dollars for the Liberal Party of Canada wanted to be appointed to the Halifax Port Authority. Now let us pretend the finance minister appointed this person, this developer, to the Halifax Port Authority. Again, Canadians need to ask themselves whether it is wrong to appoint a person to a position they want because they were able to organize and buy tickets to a Liberal fundraiser. Yes, it is wrong. This is not a pretend situation. This is an act against our democratic process that the Liberal Party and the finance minister, quite frankly, have already committed.

Liberals have said today, and will say all day and probably again tomorrow, that they have broken no laws. I know I am young and I am naive, but is it too much to ask that the actual letter of the law for the country should not be the only determining guideline for conduct regarding fundraising affairs? I would say, “no”. The Prime Minister said “no” just one year ago, but unfortunately, does not reflect that now.

The ethical standards for individuals serving in Canada would, hopefully, be easily understood and it would be easy to hold those ministers accountable for potentially exchanging access to government for donations to the Liberal Party.

It turns out it is easy to know what the standards are. They are written by the Liberal government and called “Open and Accountable Government”. Unfortunately, Liberal ministers are not following the statements in these ethical guidelines. It says that public office holders “have an obligation to perform their official duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny. This obligation is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law.”

Obviously, this is no longer a document that bears any relevance to the government.

When I first got to Ottawa last year, someone took me aside and said, “Alex, don’t get Ottawashed”, meaning do not let Ottawa change who you are and what you stand for. It is my belief that the government has either become Ottawashed in this year or maybe, just maybe, its members were Ottawa insiders from the beginning. Either way, it demonstrates how out of touch the Liberal government is with Canadians.

It is my belief that it does not matter where in Canada one is from, whether it is Windsor or Yellowknife, what one’s income level is, or how much government support one has had, we are all equal before the law. This is a representative democracy, meaning all people are represented and all people are equal.

● (1325)

[Translation]

The government should know that all Canadians are equal, whether they live in social housing, Nunavut, or Barrie. Everyone deserves equal access to the government and its ministers. All Canadians deserve to have the opportunity to share their views with the government and to be heard.

[English]

However, this question today is not solely regarding who has access. It is more importantly about who does not have access. What child is forgotten because the minister is so focused on fundraising? What grandmother or senior is left behind because these ministers are focusing on the people at these fundraisers?

I will remind the federal Liberals that their principal secretary and their chief of staff have come from the Ontario Liberal government. That is a government that instituted the Green Energy Act that gave out billions of dollars in contracts. The Ontario auditor general said as much as 92% of these Green Energy Act contracts went to people who donated to the Liberal Party of Ontario. It is incredible.

The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. The Liberals past behaviour was cash for access fundraisers. Their current behaviour is cash for access fundraisers. Their future behaviour will be cash for access fundraisers. However, as the Liberal Party gives access to Liberal insiders, it needs to remember it is excluding the rest of Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 90,000 Canadians have donated to the Liberal Party in the last year. Whether it is \$5 or \$1,500, which is the maximum, we appreciate the donations that we get. It does not mean that there is privileged access given.

What I would like to emphasize is just how this government spends a tremendous amount of time working hard for Canadians across the country. Whether that is meeting with crowds, meeting with individuals, listening to consumer groups, listening to small businesses, and the like, we are engaged so that we can deliver for Canadians, and Canadians know that. We are consulting and we are engaged. The fact of the matter is that listening to Canadians is what allows us to deliver for Canadians.

Business of Supply

No laws have been broken. That is a lot more than what I can say for the Harper government when it was in government.

• (1330)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, I recognize that you are consulting and you are engaged. You are consulting with Liberal insiders and you are engaged in Liberal fundraising. That is the reality. I wish today—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member did not mean the Speaker is engaged. I just wanted to clarify that. The hon. member must speak in the third person.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that so far today we have not been blessed with a single minister coming in and defending his or her practices. I wonder if a single minister will come in later today to defend these practices.

Here is a news flash. If those members have to say they did not break the law, it probably means they are doing something wrong.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for reminding us that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done.

I wonder if the Prime Minister in his thespian experience ever came across the story of Caesar's wife, who Caesar divorced on the grounds only of rumours of opprobrious behaviour by her on the fact that he did not want to be associated with someone under suspicion.

I would ask my colleague whether he believes that if the ministers who accepted these baskets of \$1,500 cheques did nothing wrong, were not vulnerable to the appearance of compromise, it is the appearance of their vulnerability that is unacceptable.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we must always maintain both the letter of the law and the credibility of this institution that we are so honoured to serve in.

Unfortunately, when members of cabinet have meetings with stakeholders who are requesting things from them in return, and those ministers are accepting dollars for the Liberal Party at the same time, the credibility of the institution of government and the credibility of those ministers of the crown are called into question. It is not that their credibility is called into question by some opposition party in the House of Commons, but it gets called into question by Canadians across this country and it hurts their faith in the institution of government altogether.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seniors in my riding are facing challenges in paying their bills and paying for their medications. They are disappointed that they have a government that is having cash to play meetings where people with immense power are able to get the ear of the minister.

I am wondering if you could speak a bit about the people in your riding who would love to have a minister come into an intimate group and hear the concerns of real Canadians who are struggling today.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Once again, I am sure the hon. member did not want the Speaker to speak about that. I just want to remind everyone to speak in the third person when they are asking questions.

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

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, I am sure if you did speak, it would be very eloquent.

In my own riding, and quite frankly in the region I am from, we have an unemployment rate that has gone from 6.1% to 8.9% in the last year. People are out of work. Businesses are closing. We have a waiting list for affordable housing of over 2,000 families. In the last three years that number has risen to 2,800 from 1,900.

These are issues that I want to see the government deal with. Unfortunately, no one in government housing can pay \$1,500 to go to a Liberal fundraiser.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

I am pleased to stand in the House today to speak to this motion, because as a first-time member of Parliament, there are three core values that have animated the conversation on this side of the House about how we can govern better: openness, transparency, and accountability to Canadians. Restoring these key values after 10 years of neglect in this House of Commons remains, and will remain, a foundational part of our mandate.

It is also part of our strong Liberal legacy. It was a Liberal government, under former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, that first implemented the complete ban on all corporate and union donations to political parties federally. Why did we take that step? Hon. members across the way are very interested to hear why. It was because we wanted to assure Canadians that no special interest group would ever be in a position to purchase influence with regard to the work of our elected MPs.

After more than a decade of these rules being in place, we know that they are working. Our rules are among the strongest in North America, if not the world. For example, every campaign donation of more than \$200 must be disclosed on the Elections Canada website four times a year. This means that the public and the media can learn who contributes, how much, and when.

By comparison, in some provinces, like British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland, there are no limits on donations at all, and in Alberta, one can donate up to \$30,000 in an election year. By contrast, our standards are much more rigorous. As we heard earlier today, no union, no business, and no special interest may contribute at all to political parties.

As a April editorial in the *Globe and Mail* affirmed, these are “excellent rules governing donations at the federal level—whose cornerstone principle is that only citizens should be allowed to donate to political parties”.

As the editorial went on to say, with regard to our provincial governments, “Photocopy this legislation. Pass it into law in your province. Problem solved”.

We have created an effective model and a strong precedent, one that speaks to the very best of what political parties are about. They are driven by the passion, the commitment, and the hard work of our volunteers.

Business of Supply

As everyone in this House who has had to campaign door to door will affirm, all politics are local. Engagement is driven by those committed Canadians who know that an accountable government needs them to be part of the conversation. These conversations may touch on a larger vision for the country in terms of our place in a rapidly changing world, but they are more often about how we can make things a little better for those in the middle class and those hoping to join it. I believe we have made our commitment to their concerns clear in this government.

This is the driving spirit of our conversations with Canadians as a party, too, and presumably all parties, if they are to be successful in fundraising. Just look at the facts. Since those rules were first put in place, the number of individuals making political contributions has risen dramatically to encompass a broad sweep of ordinary Canadians. In 2015 alone, a total of 330,456 Canadians donated to our three largest national political parties, and that is up from 115,908 Canadians in 2004.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

We have felt an obligation and a responsibility to have as many Canadians as possible involved in the political process. That has meant reaching out in new ways. We hosted more discussions online with Canadians than any government over the last decade. It has also meant launching more than 80 consultations with Canadians. You do not have to be a member of a political party for any of this and you do not have to pay for special access or influence.

We have done all of this in the hope that more Canadians might be involved in the political process, first and foremost. Again, this is about accountability. The more Canadians we have involved, the better a job we are doing of listening and responding and governing in the interests of all Canadians.

Ordinary Canadians are able to see the changes we continue to make here in Parliament. It is this government that put in place the rules requiring all MPs to disclose expenses online on a quarterly basis. It also made important changes to the Senate and the appointment of Supreme Court judges to once again provide more accountability and transparency.

We also put these changes in place to increase diversity and gender balance, because these reforms also improve transparency and establish this government's activist approach. That is very important. I cannot think of a better example of how we are listening to all Canadians, representing their interests at a fundamental level, than in how we are ensuring that the highest positions in our courts and indeed here in the House are staffed based on merit and achievement first and foremost.

• (1340)

[*English*]

We have, as they say, checked the privilege of the older ways of special access and of currying favour and influence. We have moved boldly and forcefully on these reforms, because we have listened to Canadians and know that this is how to develop real trust and faith that we have their interests at heart. This is about governing with integrity. This is, I contend, the question at the root of this motion.

For those Canadians who attend fundraisers that any member on my side of the House attends, it is more than clear by the way we govern that we are serious in our commitment to openness, transparency, integrity, and making policy decisions by listening to as many Canadians as possible.

We are a year into this government's mandate. I can cite again the numerous consultations and unprecedented efforts we have made to listen to all Canadians, regardless of party affiliation, and to provide the strongest assurances possible that we are governing in all Canadians' best interests and are working with them to help them realize their highest aspirations.

For those in the middle class and those hoping to join it, we have shown by action, not talk, what we are about. In line with the proud history we all share, we will continue to make fundraising and party financing more transparent and accountable by ensuring that the Liberal Party's efforts are, first and foremost, driven by volunteers. Hope and hard work are the only guarantors of access in the Liberal Party, and that is why I stand in opposition to this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

When a minister participates in an event that people pay \$1,500 to attend so they can have access to that minister, how does the minister get to that event? Does he spend his own money, his riding association's, or his party's, or does he use taxpayer money?

For example, if a minister travels from Ottawa to Toronto to attend a fundraising activity, is the plane ticket paid for by taxpayers, does he use the travel points we get, or does the riding association or the Liberal Party cover travel expenses?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

Of course, the minister and all members of Parliament engage in ethical, lawful fundraising. We follow all the rules, which I have said are among the strictest not only in this country but, indeed, around the world. We have elevated the level of transparency and accountability.

I hope my hon. colleague will take up the opportunity to look on the Elections Canada website to see who attends events with members of Parliament who participate in fundraising. There are obligations to publish those at least four times a year. That is why I am very proud, and indeed I think all members on this side are proud, of the way we are governing. We are governing in an open, transparent, and accountable way.

Business of Supply

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague about the importance of volunteers and the fact that Canada's fundraising laws are stricter than in other jurisdictions.

However, if that is why he opposes the motion, I have to wonder whether he actually read the motion. What the motion says is that the Ethics Commissioner should be granted the authority to investigate in connection with the mandate the Prime Minister himself gave to all members of cabinet.

The things we have been hearing since this morning are enough to make us want to tear our hair out. I actually find it irritating now. The Liberals keep saying they followed the law. We are not debating the law. We are debating ethics and the mandate the Prime Minister gave all members of cabinet in their mandate letters.

Does my colleague see the difference? Will he reconsider his vote knowing that all we want is to give the mandate from the Prime Minister real teeth? Will he walk the talk?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

Of course, there is the law, and as we have said on many occasions, the law informs the most rigorous and strict standards in this country and, indeed, sets a high-water mark that other jurisdictions should also follow.

My friend also asks about ethics. We are adhering to the highest ethical standards known in this jurisdiction. I do not know how much more we can add to this conversation other than to say that we are absolutely accessible to those Canadians who contribute and those who do not. Members heard earlier today that the Minister of Finance, for example, has undertaken the most consultative pre-budgetary process in the history of this country. He is on track this year to exceed those standards.

We continue to make ourselves accessible equally to those who do not contribute. When one reflects on that, I think we all understand that a reasonably informed person would come to the conclusion that the government is open, it is transparent, and it is very accountable to all Canadians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to remind the hon. members that shouting across the floor is not parliamentary. I am sure the hon. member who is speaking appreciates the coaching he is being given, but it is really not allowed.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I was somewhat surprised when I read the motion. I sit on the ethics committee. I am vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

The Ethics Commissioner testified before the committee a short while ago. One of the things she mentioned was that these guidelines being referred to have been in place since 2009. In fact, they came to

light after the investigation of a Conservative member and the then Minister of Natural Resources in 2009. Why did the Conservatives not bring this motion forward in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015? I just wonder.

Second, I heard a member on the opposite side say, "If the only thing you have to say is that you did not break the law, you probably did something wrong". I can only imagine how wrong it must have been for the Conservatives when they did break the law. What kind of wrong was that?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I will let the hon. member continue now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Let us talk about our laws, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

The commissioner also mentioned something quite interesting regarding our laws here in Canada. She said:

[*Translation*]

I will conclude by reiterating that, despite any potential for improvement, the act and the members' code have, in large measure, done their job.

Yes, they are doing their job, because in Canada, contributions made to political entities are governed by the Canada Elections Act. That act provides a framework to ensure that the funding of our political system is done transparently and fairly. The Canada Elections Act limits the amount an individual can donate to \$1,525 per registered party per year. Nine jurisdictions in Canada also limit the amount an individual can donate to political entities. The amounts vary from province to province, but the principles of transparency and fairness remain the same.

The federal electoral system governing contributions to political entities serves as a model not only for the provinces and territories, but also for other countries. Canada is a model, an example, for many countries around the world. Not all countries have created regulatory frameworks that are as detailed and rigorous as ours. Once again, our system calls for increased transparency and ensures greater accountability.

In Australia, for example, in the last election, contributions and donations to registered political parties came mostly from large corporations and unions, which, as we know, is not permitted in the Canadian federal system.

Another difference between us and Australia is the upper limit on the amount that can be given to a registered political entity. Australia's regulatory framework sets no limit on the contributions that can be made by an individual, a union, or a corporation. The ceiling on contributions that are not subject to a disclosure requirement, for example, was set at 13,200 Australian dollars for Australia's 2016 election.

In Canada, the threshold at which the disclosure requirement kicks in for an individual who contributes to a political party is \$200. The individual's name and address must be provided. That also goes well beyond the upper limit of \$1,525 that an individual can give to any registered political entity.

Let's look at another example, New Zealand. In that country, there is no ceiling on contributions by individuals. The only ceiling set by law is on contributions from other countries, which is 1,500 New Zealand dollars. In Canada, contributions from other countries are not permitted.

In New Zealand, only contributions in excess of 15,000 New Zealand dollars have to be included in the annual reports of political entities. Once again, these are measures that go well beyond what is permitted in Canada.

In the United Kingdom, as in Australia and New Zealand, there are no limits on contributions made by individuals. In fact, under British regulations, any contribution of less than 500 pounds sterling is not considered a donation and may come from individuals, corporations, unions or even, oddly enough, another political party.

Also in the United Kingdom, disclosure of donors' names is required only for donations that exceed 7,500 pounds sterling in a calendar year. Once again, we see that Canadian limits are well below the limits permitted by the three jurisdictions I have just mentioned today.

Now, we should also look at our neighbours to the south. The United States has a distinctly different approach from ours to regulating its political funding system. The United States Supreme Court's January 2010 decision on *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* is a historic ruling, since it puts the United States on an odd path with regard to funding. It allows businesses to participate financially in political campaigns, with no limits.

True, businesses are prohibited from making contributions directly to political campaigns, but they can spend as much as they want independently on promoting the candidates they support, allowing them full freedom of expression, which is the argument used by the court. That is one of the biggest differences between us and our neighbours to the south.

Here in Canada, our approach is to encourage full participation in the voting system in order to encourage full participation in the political dialogue. One of the objectives of our system is to keep the influence of money in check. That being said, I take comfort in knowing that our regulatory framework is robust and reflects Canadians' values.

We can learn a lot from countries like Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each of those countries, as well as the provinces and territories, have their own system and accountability mechanisms in place.

The Canadian federal system is one that evolved over time and now offers Canadians more transparency while allowing for greater accountability.

• (1350)

Canada is a leader in political financing. Our system has, for example, a limit on large financial contributions, and it also imposes more requirements for disclosures by political entities to the public.

I believe that we should be proud of the evolution of our regulatory framework and the financing system for our political parties.

Business of Supply

In fact, our government spends a lot of time working with Canadians across the country, meeting with them individually or in groups, as well as listening to consumer groups and small and medium-sized businesses. There is no favouritism. The goal is to have the most open and transparent approach. We are working on keeping our promises to Canadians and I believe they realize that.

We promised to hold an unprecedented number of public consultations to ensure that we respond to the real challenges facing Canadians. That is why we adopted such measures as the 1% tax increase for the wealthy, the middle-class tax cut, and the Canada child benefit. Canadians wanted these measures and we adopted them.

For more than a year now, the opposition has been criticizing the fact that our government is trying to be too involved with Canadians, that our government is too open and accessible, that Canadians are consulted too regularly, and that our government has shown itself to be the most open and accessible government that this country has ever known.

There is no doubt that our democracy is better served when everyone has the same opportunity to be heard. All we are doing is following the rules that were already in place. We promised Canadians that we would be open and transparent, and that is what we are doing.

As members can see, our government continues to work with and serve Canadians in a fair, transparent, and responsible manner, while, of course, respecting the laws as they are written. Our laws are some of the strictest in the world, as I just demonstrated by comparing them to those of New Zealand, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

I think that we can be proud of our system, which ensures that only individuals can contribute to a registered political party and sets a low donation limit. If that system needs to be improved, we, the members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, would be pleased to look into different options.

I look forward to questions from my hon. colleagues.

• (1355)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his eloquent speech. However, this is not about members or anything else.

The Conservative government brought this law in after the sponsorship scandal. We are not saying there should be no fundraising. We are saying there should not be direct access to ministers. That has happened in the past. The Liberal Party has plenty of experience with that. There was the sponsorship scandal, and Mr. Corriveau was just charged in connection with that. If you learned nothing from your 10 years in purgatory, what have you learned? We are talking about ethics today, pure and simple.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind members to speak in the third person and address the Chair.

Statements by Members

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix for her question. Her riding is beautiful.

Not only did the Conservatives introduce the rules and laws we are following, but in 2009, they also brought in the guidelines that today's motion is about. At the beginning of my speech, I asked why the Conservatives did not adopt the motion they put to the House today during the six years in which they could have done so.

Seems to me that to ask the question is to answer it.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am an engineer. We have a code of conduct. Conflict of interest is part of that. I understand that. The Prime Minister has clearly instructed his ministers to avoid even the perception of preferential access.

I sit in the House every day, and detailed questions about these cash for access fundraisers are asked of the House leader. Even though she is making six figures, she is reading irrelevant talking points. Canadians deserve openness and transparency from a government that claims to be open and transparent. Would the member agree?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. Since being elected, we have shown tremendous openness and transparency by complying with the law.

The very commissioner they talk about in their motion said this to us: "I will conclude by reiterating that, despite any potential for improvement, the Act and the Members' Code have, in large measure, done their job".

We are complying with the act and the code.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We must stop here. However, the hon. member will have two minutes and 15 seconds left next time he has the floor.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

HOME OWNERSHIP

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on October 17, 2016, the Minister of Finance decided to restrict access to home ownership. He blamed it on the overheated housing markets in Vancouver and Toronto.

In Montreal, the average price of a home is \$360,000, while in Vancouver, it is over \$1 million. The government is proposing a one-size-fits-all solution, even though the markets are completely different.

Going forward, thousands of Quebec families will no longer qualify for a mortgage. Quebec is the only jurisdiction in Canada with a home ownership rate under 70%. Ottawa is regulating a

Canadian problem on the backs of first-time home buyers in Quebec, when it should be doing the exact opposite.

The only solution is to have different rules for different markets. It is time for Ottawa to stop imposing its inappropriate measures and finally let Quebec manage its own affairs.

* * *

[*English*]

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mental health illness does not discriminate by race, gender, or age. It affects all of us in ridings from coast to coast to coast.

My community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges is no exception. Over the last few years alone, our community has grieved at the losses of a young and talented cinematographer from Rigaud, an incredible father from Vaudreuil, and a dedicated father of two from Hudson.

The challenges that mental health issues pose are becoming better understood, as is the realization that it will take all of us working together to meet these challenges.

[*Translation*]

That is why I wish to congratulate the Rotary Club of Hudson and Saint-Lazare on its ongoing efforts to spread this message. I would also like to thank the club and the exceptional group of individuals who organized the Ken Lefrançois memorial gala, which is taking place this Friday, November 4, at the Auberge des Gallant.

It will be an honour for me to be there, not only as the keynote speaker, but also as a former Rotarian.

[*English*]

We are always stronger together.

* * *

ANNATA BROCKMAN

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to pay tribute to one of Edmonton's most beloved, Sister Annata Brockman.

Sister Annata passed away recently after a full life dedicated to the Catholic Church, her community, and to education. A pioneer, she was the very first woman to earn a Master's in Education from the University of Alberta, and for 21 years served as a teacher and a principal with Edmonton Catholic Schools.

As an educator, Sister Annata pushed for equality years before it was topical. She believed that every one of her students had the potential to be great. After retiring, she became a pastoral associate minister at St. Joseph's Basilica, where she once helped with the wedding of another great Edmontonian, Wayne Gretzky.

She greeted children every year on their first day at the school named in her honour. Denis Gauthier, principal of Sister Annata Brockman School, said it best: "For the children and for all of us actually, she was very much the glue that brings us together".

Edmonton has lost one of its most treasured members, but Sister Annata's legacy will live on as an inspiration to us all.

HOUSING

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years, housing prices across British Columbia have continued to rise at staggering rates. This has not only affected housing affordability in Vancouver, but also in the Fraser Valley and my community of Cloverdale—Langley City.

Once the affordable housing alternative within metro Vancouver, the price of a single family home in the Fraser Valley rose 41% last year, averaging \$880,000, while the average price of a townhouse rose 36% over the same period, to \$418,000.

My constituents in Cloverdale—Langley City have been clear that they want meaningful, immediate, and substantive action taken to make it easier for them to afford housing as they work hard to raise their families.

I commend the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development for having started work on a national housing framework. I am proud to be part of a government that is working toward addressing housing affordability not just for members of my community, but for the whole country.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Remembrance Day, which all members will be marking in our ridings next week. I know that on November 11, I will be joining thousands of Canadians in my riding of Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke and across the country to honour the service of our veterans.

Remembrance Day is above all a time to remember those who gave their lives in service to Canada and the sacrifices of the many more who were wounded in service, including those whose injuries may not be so readily visible.

This is also a time to remember the sacrifice of families who lost loved ones and a time to offer our profound thanks to the men and women who serve our country in times of war, conflict, and peace, now and into the future.

Hopefully this Remembrance Day will also be a time for all of us in the House to recognize the covenant that we have with past and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families, and a time for all of us to work to make sure that serving members and veterans get both the respect and the support they have earned through their service.

Lest we forget.

* * *

• (1405)

CANADIAN-MUSLIM VOTE

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from raising voter turnout in the 2015 federal election to raising our country's flag, the Canadian-Muslim Vote has an ambitious goal to mark Canada's 150th birthday. In the months ahead, this national non-profit organization plans to put up a flag in front of 150 mosques across this great nation.

Statements by Members

At the Islamic Foundation of Toronto and at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, recent Friday Jumu'ah prayers were followed by heartfelt renditions of *O Canada* and the raising of our Canadian flag. These two mosques in my riding of Scarborough North are not only places of worship, but also community hubs where Muslims gather as proud Canadians.

[Translation]

In fact, the mosque is an integral part of the multicultural fabric of our society and has been since 1939, when Canada's very first mosque was built in Edmonton, Alberta.

As the 150th anniversary of Confederation approaches, let us join our Muslim brothers and sisters as a—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

* * *

MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I want to take a moment to acknowledge the work of all municipal officials across Canada, but specifically those from my riding, Richmond—Arthabaska.

More than 30 of them came to visit Parliament today to learn more about our magnificent federal institution.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the mayor of Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens, André Henri, who has been involved in municipal government for 25 years, as well as Marc-André Martel, who this year is celebrating 30 years as the mayor of Richmond.

All these men and women work hard, with determination and passion, to serve their constituents, often making many personal, family, and professional sacrifices. Like us, they are working toward the common goal of providing the right environment to enable everyone to reach their full potential.

These men and women deserve our respect. I am sure that my colleagues will join me in thanking them sincerely for their involvement.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 40 years ago, a group of concerned citizens in my riding of Kitchener Centre established a community justice agency named Youth in Conflict with the Law.

[Translation]

The agency established the first bail verification and supervision program in Ontario and was one of several community justice agencies. It was also a pioneer in the area of community mediation, victim-offender reconciliation, community resource centres, and restorative justice.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

In the Waterloo region, the justice agencies joined together with local government, the courts, the police, and social agencies to establish a crime prevention council to enhance our community's safety.

Congratulations to Waterloo region for making our community a model in crime prevention.

* * *

INDIA

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand to mark the 32nd anniversary of the tragic events of November 1984 in New Delhi. These orchestrated and targeted massacres against the Sikh community were an atrocity that resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent lives, and for which justice has not been served.

All these years and numerous inquiries later, those responsible for these brutal massacres have still not been brought to justice. The burning questions surrounding 1984 need to be answered. It is vital that we continue to call on the Indian government to pursue the truth, to pursue justice for those who carry the scars of 1984 and, most importantly, to pursue accountability for the people of India.

Truth and reconciliation have strengthened Canada, and they can be of great benefit to India too. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to openness, justice, human rights, and fairness both at home and abroad—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

* * *

*[Translation]***SAINT-AUGUSTIN-DE-DESMAURES**

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I congratulate the city of Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures, which is in my riding, Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. It was awarded ISO 37120 platinum certification by the World Council on City Data. This is the first international standard for people's quality of life. In receiving this distinction, our city is in the company of cities such as Boston, Barcelona, and Shanghai.

Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures is one of five Canadian cities to have received this certification. For example, in the area of education, more than half of Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures' residents are post-secondary graduates, ranking it among the best cities in the world.

I offer my congratulations to the mayor, Sylvain Juneau, the city council, and all employees of the city of Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures for their engagement, leadership, and efforts to improve its citizens' quality of life.

● (1410)

*[English]***ST. MONICA CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year St. Monica Catholic School is celebrating 100 years of providing superb Catholic education in midtown Toronto. Since its founding in 1916, through the arts, sciences, and humanities, through physical education and music, St. Monica has inspired generation after generation of passionate students to make this world a better place.

I was pleased to join principal Vincent Tanzini, current and past students, parents, and teachers as they celebrated and shared memories. It is evidence that St. Monica holds a special place in the hearts of both past and present students and teachers.

I was pleased to meet with some of their students this past April when they visited Parliament Hill. Today, I celebrate the whole St. Monica's community for offering Don Valley West an educational program based on academic achievement, personal responsibility, and the importance of faith.

I congratulate St. Monica on its centennial anniversary. One hundred years old never looked so good.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Remembrance Day, I think of the sacrifices of those Canadians who fought to protect the world's vulnerable and ensure our rights and freedoms at home.

My own grandfather, Earl Fraser, served as a paratrooper in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion and later as a navigator with the RCAF. My wife's grandparents, Bob and Jackie Burton, both served in the Second World War and Bob became a knight of the French national order for his role in the liberation of France.

[Translation]

This Remembrance Day, I pay tribute to the members of my family and all of the others who served their country from the First World War to today's missions. Canadian soldiers are always there when we need them. Many of them come back with physical and emotional scars, and too many of them never come back at all. This week in particular, we have the privilege of reflecting on how lucky we are to live in a free and democratic Canada.

[English]

We thank our soldiers and veterans. We will always remember.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a Trans Mountain ministerial panel has submitted its report to the Minister of Natural Resources, who will eventually bring to cabinet a recommendation on Kinder Morgan's project by December. However, the minister has said that he will not champion pipelines. He will not champion the energy jobs they create and the families they support.

In my riding, I have heard heartbreaking stories of people selling off engagement rings on Facebook and of some unemployed workers turning to sex work to make ends meet. This pipeline would restore thousands of the jobs lost, good-paying middle-class energy jobs, in Alberta. It would reverse some of the hardships that thousands of Albertans have experienced.

My constituents expect the government to say yes, yes to getting 122,000 unemployed Albertans back to work, yes to taking families out of food banks and back into grocery stores, yes to respect for the roughnecks and office workers who work in the energy sector, and yes to ensuring our continued national prosperity by maximizing the success of our energy sector.

On behalf of my constituents, I am telling the government to say yes to the Trans Mountain pipeline.

* * *

FUTURPRENEUR

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I had the pleasure of joining many colleagues at a reception in honour of Futurpreneur, a truly remarkable Toronto-based non-profit organization dedicated to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship among Canadian youth.

For 20 years, Futurpreneur has provided Canadians aged 18 to 39 with financing, mentoring, and support to help incubate the next generation of aspiring Canadian business owners. With 15 regional offices and over 350 community partners, Futurpreneur has helped young Canadians from coast to coast to coast launch and grow over 7,220 businesses since its inception.

Our government understands that small business is the backbone of our economy, our communities, and our future. In that spirit, I urge all members of the House to join me in congratulating Futurpreneur CEO Julia Deans and her team on their vision—

• (1415)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

* * *

[Translation]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in preparation for the November 11 ceremonies, let us recognize the sacrifices of the soldiers who fought for Canada. They risked their lives to fight for peace, freedom, their fellow Canadians, and democracy.

Remembrance Day gives Canadians the opportunity to thank those who have served and are currently serving our country, and their families. I would especially like to acknowledge the Royal Canadian legions in my riding, those in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Hemmingford, Ormstown, Beauharnois, and Huntingdon. They forge precious ties between families and veterans. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Veterans who are living with post-traumatic stress and who have suffered amputations must have access to quality health care. It is our duty to provide our soldiers with services commensurate with their sacrifices. Our soldiers also need to know that they can count

Statements by Members

on financial support in the event of injury and after they retire. They need to know that their families will be looked after no matter what happens to them.

Let us never forget the hardships that our soldiers had to face to protect our values. Let us never forget their courage. Lest we forget.

* * *

[English]

HUGH CAIRNS

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the bravery of Sergeant Hugh Cairns, who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for the following:

...when a machine-gun opened on his Platoon. Without a moment's hesitation, Sergt. Cairns...single-handed, in face of direct fire, rushed the post, killed the crew...captured the gun. Later, when the line was held up by machine gun fire, he again rushed forward killing 12 of the enemy and capturing 18... Subsequently when the advance was held up by [enemy] guns...although wounded, he led a small party to outflank them, killing many, forcing about 50 to surrender...After consolidation he went with a battle patrol...and forced 60 enemy to surrender. While disarming this party he was severely wounded. Nevertheless he opened fire and inflicted heavy losses. Finally he was rushed by about 20 enemy and collapsed from weakness and loss of blood....He died November 2...

Lest we forget.

* * *

[Translation]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, November 11, Canadians right across the country will gather to remember and honour the men and women who so gallantly defend our country here at home and around the world.

[English]

Canada's veterans have, like current members of the Canadian Armed Forces, always served with unparalleled bravery and distinction. There is an example of the best in all of us: courage in the face of danger, tenacity for building a better Canada, and a better, more peaceful world through actions born of a strong sense of duty, service, and selflessness.

This Veterans' Week, I urge all Canadians to seek out our veterans, seek out our serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces and their families to say thanks. It was their service and sacrifice that gave us the immeasurable gift of this great country.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week the Liberals have had a chance to address the concerns that Canadians face today. Jobs are being lost, the economy is shrinking, and small business owners are wondering each and every day who they might have to lay off next.

However, instead of presenting a plan for jobs, the Minister of Finance just presented a plan of more spending and massive deficits for years to come.

Is the minister not at all concerned about jobs for today? Why is he playing this reckless and dangerous game of massive spending with absolutely nothing to show for it?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should join with Canadians to celebrate some of the success our government has had in attracting global companies like Thomson Reuters to bring 1,500 new head office jobs to Canada, companies like General Electric and Amazon, which are choosing Canada because they believe the work of this government in investing in jobs and growth, and creating more opportunities for the middle class is exactly the right thing to be doing.

* * *

• (1420)

ETHICS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the Liberal problem is that they continue to be completely out of touch with everyday Canadians, Canadians who work hard every day, pay their taxes, and follow the rules. This is something we have known for decades that the Liberals do not seem to be able to do. They do not seem to be able to follow any rules, much less their own.

Therefore, when it comes to cash for access, if the Prime Minister cannot enforce his own rules, will he support our motion today and allow the Ethics Commissioner to do what he refuses to do?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member very well knows that in Canada we have some of the strictest fundraising rules across the country.

If we want to talk about access, let us talk about some of the good work this government is doing. Just today the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet were engaging with over 300 high school students from the national capital region. These students were able to talk about the challenges they faced and to ask some tough questions. The Prime Minister was there to answer them all.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer is becoming very embarrassing for the government House leader.

We are not talking about Elections Canada rules. We are not talking about other jurisdictions. We are not talking about

consultations with high school students. We are talking about the government violating the Prime Minister's own ethical standards.

Again, I ask the government if it will uphold its own standards. We are not talking about Elections Canada. We are not talking about Ontario or any other province. We are talking about the government's rules. If the government will not uphold them, let the Ethics Commissioner do her job and uphold its rules.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has some of the strongest rules when it comes to fundraising across the nation. The member knows that very well.

When it comes to our young people, when it comes to women entrepreneurs, when it comes to under-represented groups, these are concerns this government recognizes Canadians are facing. We were elected to engage with Canadians. We were elected to represent Canadians. We will continue to work with Canadians and for Canadians. That is why we are here every day.

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[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's inability to tell us when we will achieve a zero deficit proves that the government has completely lost control of public finances.

The government seems to be proud that it managed to shrink the deficit, saying that it is not as bad as expected, but it is forgetting one little \$6-billion detail. The government blew through its \$6-billion wiggle room so it could come up with a presentable number. That is hardly something to be proud of, and we are not the only ones saying so.

Rudy Le Cours of *La Presse* called it sleight of hand, and Radio-Canada's Gérald Fillion wrote that “the minister is playing fast and loose with his numbers”—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we came to power, we inherited a sluggish economy.

That is why we made infrastructure investments. That is why we cut taxes for more than nine million middle-class Canadians. That is why we created the Canada child benefit, which is helping nine out of ten families.

Making these investments for the middle class is very important, and that is what we will keep doing.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing the government could think of to help our entrepreneurs, who are the real job creators and wealth creators, are measures that will in fact harm them, such as imposing the Liberal carbon tax, eliminating Conservative tax credits, and making pension plans more expensive, to name a few.

Yesterday, the Minister of Finance went and told the Senate that additional tax credits will be eliminated. Can the government tell us exactly which tax credits for small businesses will be eliminated?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is very important to recognize the importance of investing in the middle class and creating economic growth.

That is exactly what we are doing and what we will continue to do, because that is the priority of Canadians. Our actions reflect that priority.

* * *

• (1425)

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me quote the Minister of Democratic Institutions on which voting system Canada should adopt, “the prime minister has a preference” and “I am arriving at a preference for a specific system”.

What is the preferred Liberal system?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Democratic Institutions is consulting broadly with Canadians. Members from our party, but also members from other parties, have consulted with Canadians throughout the summer. The fact is that we think it is really important to listen to Canadians, to participate actively in town halls across Canada.

Those recommendations have come to a parliamentary committee. We look forward to the work of that committee, and we will not prejudge the work of that committee. Let that committee do its work.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Actually, Mr. Speaker, the minister should have listened to those quotes. It is quite clear that the Liberals have a preference. They admit that but they will not tell Canadians what it is. That is the problem. They continue to claim they are being transparent. Yeah, sure.

Will the minister acknowledge that it is their own statements that are indeed undermining the committee's work?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is that kind of cynicism that creates an environment—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: There is some disorder in the chamber. We need to have order. I need to hear the answer to the question. Hon. members are all anxious to hear the rest of the answer.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board can have a few more seconds if he needs it.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, that parliamentary committee is doing important work, and we should allow that parliamentary committee to do its work.

I would urge the hon. member, and all members, not to prejudge the work of the parliamentary committee. Let that committee do its work.

Oral Questions

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government members have already said twice that they already know what the result is. It is not our cynicism. It is they who are undermining both.

[Translation]

On Tuesday, I asked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness if any other journalists are currently under surveillance by federal authorities. Today, the Prime Minister confirmed that he engaged with the RCMP and CSIS on this matter.

Is the minister now willing to tell Canadians how many journalists are under federal surveillance?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, freedom of the press is a fundamental Canadian value. The reports about transgressions in Quebec are cause for genuine concern, and the provincial government has announced some steps in that regard.

At the federal level, I do not comment on any specific operation, but with respect to sensitive sectors like the media, we can provide the assurance that the sort of thing that is being reported in Quebec is not applicable at the federal level.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting choice of words, “is not applicable”, because if the number were zero, I am sure the minister would have no trouble saying so.

Back in May, when I first called for a full investigation, the same minister claimed that it was an isolated case of police illegally spying on journalists, and that there was no need whatsoever to look any further. However, it is now obvious that it was not an isolated case.

Will the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness order a full public inquiry into police spying on reporters at the federal level, yes or no?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was very clear today, as was the commissioner of the RCMP yesterday. The commissioner's answer was, very clearly and unequivocally, no.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Treasury Board president is a banker, so I am going to ask him about cost-benefit analysis.

This year's \$25 billion deficit was supposed to buy all kinds of jobs for Canadians; instead, we got 6,000 fewer full-time jobs. The government's answer to the problem was to borrow even more.

If we spent \$25 billion to buy a lot of nothing, would we buy even more of it?

Oral Questions

● (1430)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us come back to the assets. What we announced this week, in the fall economic statement, is a plan to invest in Canadians.

After budget 2016, where we made historic investments in Canadian families and in the middle class, what we presented to Canadians was historic investments in infrastructure and historic investments to create the invest in Canada hub to attract investment in Canada, to attract global talent. That is the plan that is working for Canadians, that is what Canadians want, and that is what we are going to deliver.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not working, and neither are the 6,000 people who do not have jobs.

The Liberal Party promised solemnly that its deficit over the term would not exceed \$25 billion. This week's economic statement showed that the number will be \$100 billion, which is four times what it promised, and that presumes it does not spend another cent in its next three budgets.

How could the Liberals have been so wrong, so fast? Is it because they cannot count or because they cannot tell the truth?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, he was part of the government that spent almost \$1 billion on partisan, self-promotional ads. He was actually a star in some of those ads.

So, if he is asking us about how many jobs are being created, I would like him to answer how many jobs were created by those partisan, self-promotional ads?

That is the kind of cynicism that Canadians rejected in the last election.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have failed to create a single full-time job since they took office. This should not be a surprise because less than 1% of the announced infrastructure projects have started construction over this past year.

Now we learn that, instead of building infrastructure, the Liberals have been busy setting up a bank, which is going to cost taxpayers \$15 billion.

When will the Liberals come up with a plan that actually creates jobs instead of pushing Canadians further into debt?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are delivering on our commitment to invest more than \$180 billion in infrastructure to create long-term growth and jobs for the middle class, and to create a low-carbon economy, a green economy, and to improve our social inclusion.

Within the last four months, our government has approved more funding for municipalities than that government did in the past five years combined.

Now 60% of those investments are being—

The Speaker: The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the minister is confused about how many infrastructure projects are actually under construction. This is not a surprise, especially when the minister told the Senate finance committee that he was confused by all the buckets of infrastructure money the Liberals had at their disposal.

The truth is that less than 1% of the announced infrastructure projects are actually under construction.

Why are the Liberals refusing to acknowledge that their plan is not working and they are not getting Canadians back their jobs?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the member opposite will appreciate that the investments we made in budget 2016 are advancing the LRT project in her own city. It is being done right now. We are helping her city do its design work, do its planning work, so that city can be ready to take on the opportunities when we announce other long-term funding to build public transit in every city from coast to coast to coast.

We approved \$11 billion in infrastructure since taking office—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eliminating regional minister positions at Canada Economic Development, now we find out that the government is going to create an infrastructure bank to fund projects of \$100 million or more.

Today, 30 elected officials from my region are here. I must say that there are not too many \$100-million projects in the regions.

The Liberals are taking \$15 billion that was earmarked for them and spending it on a structure that is not designed for them.

What does the minister have to say to these municipal representatives from across Quebec?

● (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me tell the House what the leaders of the municipalities are telling us.

This is from the CEO of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities: “It is a great thing. It is creating a focal point for our country to have a strategic conversation and develop strategic directions about infrastructure generally”.

Here is a quote from Linda Hepner, mayor of Surrey. She says:

The City of Surrey applauds the Federal Government's commitment to providing stable grants funding and also looks forward to the additional opportunities the newly announced—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities appeared before a Senate committee and said, “If you feel confused about the numbers, I understand, Senator. There are so many different infrastructure funds”.

The numbers are pretty straightforward: one year of Liberal government, one year of excessive spending, one year of a spiralling deficit, and only 1% of the construction projects are currently under way.

If the minister cannot count to one, then we have a serious problem.

When will this government get to creating real jobs for all Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we took over the government, we looked at the investments being made by the previous government. I was surprised to learn that, despite announcing \$14 billion, it had invested only \$25 million in the last two years before we took over.

What we have done is we have approved more than 900 projects with a combined investment of \$11 billion from coast to coast to coast, helping the municipalities create jobs and build the necessary infrastructure that communities need.

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's policy on tabling of treaties in Parliament requires the minister to present a report on expected impacts and consultations and to table proposed treaties for 21 days before introducing ratifying legislation. While the government has still failed to release a study of CETA impacts, the minister has tabled a bill to ratify all parts of the agreement, in spite of the fact that Europe has been clear that further changes are necessary.

Why has the minister violated this policy and failed to present a study of CETA impacts in the House?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CETA is clearly in Canada's national interests, and it is time for all members of the House to rise above partisan politics and support it. We supported CETA when we were in opposition. We expect the opposition today to do the same.

I had the honour of introducing implementing legislation for CETA on Monday, and I can assure the House that all parliamentarians will have an opportunity to vote on CETA before it can enter into force.

* * *

[Translation]

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is all over the map.

I would like to remind the Liberals that, in 2014, they voted in favour of my motion to compensate dairy producers. It seems that they are doing a complete 180.

Senior officials are now talking about transition assistance. They say that they do not anticipate significant losses. However, these losses have been estimated at \$150 million. That is significant.

Producers deserve to know the truth. Can we have some clear answers? Will the Liberal government compensate dairy producers, yes or no?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister and I are former dairy producers and fully aware of the sector's needs. It was our party that established supply management, and it is our party that will defend it.

As I said, we are finalizing our transition assistance programs. Our goal is to improve the position of dairy producers, to help modernize the Canadian dairy sector, and to ensure its growth and prosperity.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, almost 100 cash for access events have been scheduled in 2016 by the Liberals.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, the Minister of International Trade, the Minister of Natural Resources, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, to name just about all of them, have been the star attractions at these events.

The Prime Minister either believes in his open and accountability rules or he does not. Today, the Prime Minister can prove he believes in his words by supporting our Conservative motion.

Will the Liberals support our motion and give the Ethics Commissioner the power to investigate these cash for access schemes?

● (1440)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how many times I have to say it, but I will repeat it just in case the hon. member has not heard it before.

Federal politics is subject to some of the strictest political financing legislation and regulations in the country. The government is committed to engaging and consulting with Canadians, and we will do that.

Another prime example today is that there are future entrepreneurs here on Parliament Hill. These are our young entrepreneurs who want to grow their businesses, want to create jobs, want to create the growth that Canadians want.

Oral Questions

We are listening to the challenges Canadians are facing. We were elected to hear them out and to ensure that we can create the conditions for growth that our economy needs. We will continue to make the investments we need to make for Canadians.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberals were elected to keep their promises, and this is another promise that they are not keeping.

So far, in today's debate, we have only heard from Liberal backbenchers defending the Prime Minister's cash for access fundraising scheme, claiming that they have broken no laws. We are not talking about election financing laws. We are talking about the words and expectations of the Prime Minister, when he published the open and accountable government rules.

The Prime Minister seems to do one thing for optics, and does the exact opposite for his Liberal friends. Why will the Prime Minister not enforce his own rules?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member very well knows that all members of Parliament and all parties fundraise, and we all abide by the exact same rules.

I appreciate the member taking a moment to want to talk about Canadians and wanting to talk about what we have delivered on. The government has delivered on lowering taxes for middle-class Canadians. The government has delivered on the Canada child benefit by giving more money to Canadian families that need it the most. The government has made the historic commitment to reform and to modernize the Canada pension plan, something that Canadians have asked for and something that we will deliver on.

We will continue to—

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

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Ontario, political insiders bought access to Kathleen Wynne and her government. Katie Telford and Gerald Butts brought the same cash for access schemes right here to the federal level.

Can the Prime Minister tell Canadians how much money he expects each minister to raise? By the way, how much will it cost me to get a meeting with the finance minister to tell him that big spending is a big problem?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member very well knows, and all Canadians know very well, that the government has embarked on unprecedented levels of public consultations and access to the government.

The government is available and encourages Canadians to be involved and encourages Canadians to have their say. We will continue to consult with Canadians, and we will continue to engage with Canadians because Canadians should have their say. This government is listening and will continue to deliver on our commitments.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice took money from lawyers, the Minister of Finance took money from Bay Street bankers, and the Minister of Natural Resources has taken money from natural resource lobbyists.

In Ontario, Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne demanded that each of her ministers raise up to \$500,000 per year for the party as a condition of remaining in cabinet.

With the former masterminds of Kathleen Wynne's fundraising plan now running this PMO, does the Prime Minister demand similar quotas of his ministers?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the question was just asked. We could at least have some quiet for the first part of the answer, to begin with, but let us have some quiet for all of the answer, because the rules provide we are not to interrupt in this place. We ask the question, and there was not much noise during the question, so let us not have any noise during the answer. The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as the member very well knows, no, he does not.

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[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada infrastructure bank, which will privatize our infrastructure, hopes to attract \$4 from the private sector for every dollar of public spending.

However, pension funds, like private investment funds, foreign funds, and banks, will never invest just to impress the minister. They will want a high return on their investments.

Michael Sabia said that they are chomping at the bit to get returns of 7% to 9%. My question for the minister is so simple that he does not even need an MBA to answer it.

How can a profit be made on infrastructure investments without charging user fees or tolls and without increasing existing fees?

•(1445)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that my colleague asked that question because it gives me an opportunity to remind everyone what we have done for Canadians this week.

In the fall economic statement, we presented Canadians with a plan for economic growth that will help create jobs and improve their standard of living. The important number to remember is the \$180-billion investment in infrastructure. We are investing a historic \$81 billion in infrastructure. Some of those investments will be made through the infrastructure bank. The logical thing to do now is to put Canadians' money to work for Canadians. That is what Canadians expect.

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[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a member of the Liberal Party declared that the Government of Canada has a social covenant with veterans and their families. Then a parliamentary secretary confirmed that “As a government, we will honour this social covenant”. Yet the government is still in court arguing that it does not owe any such covenant.

Will the Prime Minister please clarify if his government believes we have a covenant of moral and social obligation to veterans and their families, or is he comfortable pursuing veterans in court?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important this week that we honour and respect the 2.3 million Canadians who have served in our armed forces. We will continue to do that each and every day as a government.

We have an aggressive mandate to do things better for veterans and their families. We have delivered a great deal in budget 2016, delivering \$5.6 billion in new financial security and resources to veterans and their families. We remain committed to creating a pension option for life for our veterans.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador requested that Canada provide more loan guarantees for the Lower Churchill projects.

Given the vital importance of these projects to Newfoundland and Labrador's financial security, could the hon. Minister of Natural Resources please provide an update on Canada's consideration of those requests?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the costs of the Lower Churchill project were mismanaged by former Conservative governments, putting Newfoundland and Labrador at financial risk.

I am pleased to inform the House that we will guarantee up to an additional \$2.9 billion in debt using commercial terms of a guaranteed fee of a half basis point above the federal rate. Today's decision means we will contribute to our climate change goals and Atlantic Canada's future energy needs.

Oral Questions

ETHICS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Natural Resources was asked by the *Winnipeg Free Press* if he attended any Liberal cash for access fundraising events, he said no. But the facts do not lie. We know that the minister attended an event hosted by MLT, a leading law firm in the natural resources sector, and that the price of admission was a donation of \$1,500 to the Liberal Party of Canada.

Why is the natural resources minister trying to cover up the fact that he has been a part of the Liberal cash for access scheme?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the member very well knows that the federal rules are some of the strongest in the country. He also knows that in some provinces, they accept donations from unions, trade associations, and corporations. That is not the case in the federal system.

The member should really read the rules.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about a lack of federal rules. We are talking about a lack of Liberal ethics.

Few Canadians can afford the \$1,500 price tag to get face time with the minister. The more than 100,000 energy workers who are out of a job cannot afford to pony up \$1,500 to tell the minister he is doing nothing to get them back to work.

The minister attended a fundraiser hosted by a law firm that now lobbies his department. Why did the minister allow himself to be put in such an obvious conflict of interest?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no preferential access to this government. This government is demonstrating the most open and transparent approach, not just by following the rules but by being more engaged with Canadians and listening to them and the challenges they face.

This government is making investments so that Canadian families can succeed. Our investment in the inclusive innovation agenda will get Canadians ready for not just the economy of today but the economy of tomorrow.

● (1450)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2004, the Gomery commission uncovered the truth about the sponsorship scandal. One of the key players in the scandal, Jacques Corriveau, was found guilty as charged.

The government refuses to admit that it is breaking its own ethics rules, but will it at least ensure that taxpayers get the remaining \$600,000 from the Corriveau affair back?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, and as the member knows, all members and all parties raise funds, and they all have to follow the same rules.

There can be no conflict of interest when following the rules, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has a pretty flexible understanding of ethics.

The Prime Minister introduced rules that he refuses to follow. The Minister of Finance holds \$1,500 fundraisers yet portrays himself as the champion of the middle class. He is also refusing to ensure that the millions of dollars Jacques Corriveau pocketed illegally will be returned to Canadians.

Can the government reassure Canadians that it will get their \$600,000 back for them?

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making sure that all government procurement is done in an ethical way that protects the interests of Canadians. We must ensure that all procurements we undertake are done in an accountable and transparent manner, and that is why this government has committed to it, and that is what we will do.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I will remind the member for York—Simcoe that interruptions are not permitted. I would ask him to restrain himself.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today Amnesty International released a troubling report on resource development in northeastern B.C. and the resulting risk of violence against indigenous young women and girls. This report is consistent with what I heard from indigenous leaders directly when I travelled to the Peace River Valley this summer. To make matters worse, there are no federally funded domestic violence shelters on reserve in northeastern B.C.

Did the government consider these impacts when it approved the Site C dam, and what support will the government provide to women who face violence in these areas?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, gender-based violence, whether it is against indigenous women or other Canadian women across the country, is a serious concern of this government.

We also know that safety is the foundation of gender equality, which is why it is such a privilege to work on a federal gender-based violence strategy for Canadian women and girls across this country. I look forward to bringing those results forward in 2017.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are getting reports out of Penticton that all early morning and evening flights by WestJet and Air Canada have been cancelled for the past four days. This comes after a safety audit identified concerns with tree heights around the airport. These cancellations represent two-thirds of all flights in and out of Penticton and are causing serious disruption to the local economy.

Can the Minister of Transport inform my constituents when these concerns will be addressed and when the Penticton airport will resume its normal operations?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on the particulars of the situation that the hon. member has identified, but the safety and security of Canadians is a priority, which is why the minister continues to maintain and improve the safety of the Canadian aviation system with an intelligent risk-based approach.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are fine with saying that they are back at the United Nations, but the Liberals are back as they were before: pandering to despots, dictators, and human rights abusers.

The United Nations today is not the organization it was when democracies made up the majority. The UN today has been described accurately as a broken Remington typewriter in a smart phone world.

Why will the Liberals not take a tiny step towards reform and transparency and tell Canadians how Canada voted on the Human Rights Council candidacies of Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, and Cuba?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question is so outrageously wrong, I cannot be mute about that.

This government, in the last year, has been upfront to fight everywhere for universal human rights, for an inclusive approach, and for peace everywhere.

I cannot believe the question was asked this way. I think my colleague should be ashamed of himself.

●(1455)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is time for Canada to speak truth to the world's worst human rights abusers publicly, not timidly, not in private with cautious lines crafted to win eventual Security Council votes. The minister has an opportunity to deny today that secret votes were traded with rights abusers who seek false legitimacy on the Human Rights Council.

Again, will the minister stop hiding the truth and tell Canadians how Canada voted on the Human Rights Council candidacies of Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, and Cuba?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact as I already said, we seek to maximize membership and to consult with countries that have strong human rights records at home and abroad. Why are we doing so? It is because we are champions fighting for universal human rights at every opportunity, at the United Nations, and on every continent. And with the Prime Minister, let me tell everyone, we are champions for universal human rights everywhere in the world.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while we are on the topic of hiding things, the Minister of Democratic Institutions continues to stonewall reporters and others who have been trying to get the truth out of her for months. We all know that she is hiding something. But yesterday, news reports finally revealed the truth. The minister finally admitted that she and the Prime Minister have a preferred voting system. Canadians have made it clear that they want a referendum on any proposed changes, so will the Liberals finally put aside the Prime Minister's personal preferences and allow all Canadians to have a direct say through a referendum?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the committee has been doing very good work, working together to listen to Canadians and to take the consultations that have been done by members of Parliament across this country and to look for consensus on how they could work together. It will be the consensus of that report, it will be the work of that committee, that this government listens to. Of course, we all have opinions and there are disparate opinions in the House, but it is the work of that committee that we are looking forward to. I encourage the member to continue his work on that committee to find those solutions and to bring that report back to the House.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada and Ukraine share a unique bond. We stood shoulder-to-shoulder with her people during the Maidan revolution of dignity and the subsequent Russian military annexation of Ukraine's territory. During the Prime Minister's state visit to Ukraine last July, the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement was signed by the Minister of International Trade.

Could the minister update the House on how this agreement will strengthen our special relationship and Ukraine's pro-western choice and statehood?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, *dyakuyu*.

Today I was honoured to introduce the bill to implement the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement. This deal is yet another demonstration of Canada's commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and economic growth. This deal will create jobs and

growth for the middle class in Canada and Ukraine. As one of our country's 1.25 million Ukrainian Canadians, I am very proud that Canada's support for Ukraine is unwavering.

Slava Ukraini, Slava Canada.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently we learned that the Minister of Public Safety has asked for a review of the pay that inmates receive while in prison, and their own investigator wants inmates to get more money. More pay for convicted criminals? Is this some sort of joke? Is this the new priority of the Liberal Party of Canada? How much more money are we going to pay criminals while Canadians are paying higher taxes for the Liberal promises that are never kept?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me welcome the member to his new role as critic for public safety.

The objective of our correctional system is in fact public safety, and that includes effective and successful rehabilitation. The Office of the Correctional Investigator believes that rehabilitation can be enhanced with changes to the pay system. He asked us to examine that, and I have invited Commissioner Don Head of the Correctional Service to conduct a review. I am sure that the review would welcome the input from the hon. member.

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● (1500)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has put out a tender for private subcontractors to handle complaints from Canadians regarding violations of the Official Languages Act.

If the Minister of Canadian Heritage had implemented the recommendations of the Commissioner of Official Languages regarding Air Canada, among others, and if she gave his office the budget it needs, we would not be in this mess.

Instead of privatizing the complaints office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, when will the minister assume her responsibilities and solve the ongoing problems of non-compliance with the Official Languages Act?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his important question.

I am proud to be part of a government that values our two official languages and is showing leadership in this area. Of course, all recommendations from the commissioner are always carefully considered and valued greatly.

Oral Questions

As part of my duties, I am currently developing a new official languages plan, not only to ensure compliance with the Official Languages Act and the vitality of official language minority communities, but also to enhance bilingualism across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I continue to meet with many local innovative business leaders as part of the consultation for the creation of the innovation agenda. They raise the various different challenges that they face in growing a business in Canada. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development share with us how the fall economic update tabled this week will address those challenges and help to create jobs for Canadians?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on our plan to strengthen the middle class and improve growth. We heard from Canadians and from growing Canadian businesses about the need to support scaling up and to spur the next generation of globally competitive companies. In welcoming highly skilled workers, researchers, and entrepreneurs at a faster rate, we are providing growing Canadian companies a competitive advantage. We are helping innovative businesses grow and prosper right here in Canada. We are ensuring more Canadian jobs are created.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister claims that closing the Vegreville immigration centre will increase jobs in Alberta, but he is wrong. This edict will immediately kill 280 jobs in town, but that is only the start. Jobs will be lost at the local post office, local school, the town, charities, and more. When all those people are gone, there go the small businesses. This edict is catastrophic. The minister claims he is creating jobs but he is actually killing them, and Alberta will be worse off. Will he do the right thing and stop this closure?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, my office has reached out to the mayor and to the member, and we are certainly helping to facilitate the transition in that all current employees will be guaranteed jobs in Edmonton. As I have said before, there will be a net increase in jobs in Alberta because this move will allow us to pursue our lines of business more effectively, meet rising demands, and provide better immigration services to all Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its economic update, the government did not allocate one red cent to education transfers. This means that it is going ahead with its plan to take \$120 million away from Quebec's students. That \$120 million would make quite a difference to students living on a budget.

I asked the Minister of Youth about this on Monday, but he hid behind the parliamentary secretary to a minister who has nothing to do with this.

Will he stand up today and commit to giving back the \$120 million that he took away from them?

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly we are committed to the students, not just in Quebec but right across Canada.

In the member's own province he would know of the increase that we have made in the student grant program, though Quebec does not take part in that. We transferred \$290 million for that program and we just added an additional \$80 million. The minister responsible for higher education, H el ene David, commented that this is great news as the money will go straight into the pockets of students.

We respect and we are working for the students of Quebec.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Maril ene Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague just said, there is nothing for Quebec in the economic update. What is more, a few moments ago, the Minister of Natural Resources announced an additional \$2.9 billion in loan guarantees—a slap in the face for the whole of Quebec.

I have a question for the minister. Is contempt for Quebec a Canadian value? Are fiascos part of their economic strategy? Is adding insult to injury the Liberals' modus operandi?

● (1505)

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the project was badly mishandled and the results of that have been cost overruns and budget delays, which have put the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador at risk. That is why the Government of Canada is guaranteeing an extension of a loan guarantee for \$2.9 billion with a commercial fee attached. We think this is the right thing to do. We think this is good for Canada.

[Translation]

VETERANS' WEEK

The Speaker: I invite hon. members to rise and observe a moment of silence to mark the beginning of Veterans' Week.

[A moment of silence observed]

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of the delegation of young francophone parliamentarians from the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been here for a number of weeks, trying to work fairly well together, and now we are all getting ready to go home to our constituencies and to take the week with our constituents but also to take that time to honour those men and women who have fallen and have paid the ultimate—

The Speaker: I know that most members want to hear the hon. opposition House leader's question, so I would ask those who are having conversations to take their conversations into the hallways. Any help from the whips would be appreciated.

Order. The hon. opposition House leader.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, with that being said, would the government House leader share the business for the rest of the week, and for the first week after we return?

[Translation]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue to debate the Conservative Party motion.

Tomorrow, we will resume debate on Bill C-26, on the Canada pension plan.

[English]

Next week, as the hon. member said, we will be working hard in our constituencies and attending Remembrance Day ceremonies on Friday to collectively stand in honour of all who have fallen in the service of Canada.

When we return on Monday, November 14, the House will then have the fifth day of second reading debate on Bill C-26, the CPP enhancement bill. On Tuesday, the House will also have the fifth day of second reading debate on Bill C-29, the second budget implementation bill.

On Wednesday, the House will consider Bill C-16, the gender identity bill, at report stage, and hopefully at third reading. On

Privilege

Thursday, the House will debate Bill C-25, the business framework bill, at second reading.

* * *

● (1510)

PRIVILEGE

MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon on a question of privilege on the manner in which the Minister of International Trade has been treating Parliament and due process in relation to the comprehensive economic and trade agreement between Canada and the EU. The flagrant disrespect of Parliament shown by the minister and her government is alarming and unwarranted, but more importantly, the impact of this disrespect has obstructed me in the discharge of my duties as a member of Parliament.

I will, through the course of my remarks, ask the Speaker to agree with my belief that there exists a prima facie case that my privileges as a member of Parliament have been breached, and I will be prepared to move the appropriate motion should the Speaker agree with my intervention.

Before getting to the matter at hand, I would like to remind the House that obstruction in the discharge of parliamentary duties can take many forms, both physical and non-physical. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, tells us, at pages 108 and 109:

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions...there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

I will beg the House's indulgence to provide the proper context of what has happened and give an account of events leading up to this question of privilege. I will start with the facts of the matter at hand.

To begin with, the Government of Canada adopted a policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament in 2008. That policy sets out specific guidelines and timelines on how international treaties will be presented to Parliament for debate and consideration. In section 6.2, "Tabling period for Treaties", the policy states:

b. For treaties that require implementing legislation before the Government can proceed to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession...the Government will:

Observe a waiting period of at least twenty-one sitting days before the introduction of the necessary implementing legislation in Parliament;

On Friday, October 28, the Minister of International Trade put an act to implement the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union and its member states and to provide for certain other measures on the Notice Paper, even before having signed the treaty. The Government of Canada signed CETA two days later, on Sunday, October 30. The Minister of International Trade tabled CETA in the House on Monday, October 31, and not 21 sittings days but about 21 seconds later, she introduced Bill C-30 to implement the provisions of CETA.

Privilege

The Minister of International Trade and the government are aware of this policy and obligation to Parliament. They have respected it as recently as this fall with regard to the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement. On September 19, 2016, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade laid upon the table a copy of the free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine and an explanatory memorandum.

Twenty-eight sitting days later, which was this morning, as it turns out, and in full compliance with the policy, the Minister of International Trade introduced Bill C-31, an act to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine. However, in the case of CETA, the government acted in direct violation of its own policy when it came to the tabling of the treaty and the introduction of the implementing legislation that followed immediately afterward.

Furthermore, the policy statement in the government's policy is as follows:

The Minister of Foreign Affairs will initiate the tabling of all instruments, accompanied by a brief Explanatory Memorandum in the House of Commons following their adoption by signature or otherwise, and prior to Canada's expression of its consent to be bound by ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

This policy provision was followed when the Canada-Ukraine FTA was laid on the table and is something we are used to hearing the minister and her parliamentary secretary announce when they table international treaties, agreements, and other similar documents in the House. The explanatory memorandum is an important piece of this process, so important, in fact, that it has its own provisions in the policy on tabling of treaties in Parliament. Section 6.4 of the policy states:

An Explanatory Memorandum will accompany each treaty that is tabled in the House of Commons.

a. The purpose of the Explanatory Memorandum is to provide the House of Commons with information regarding the content of the Treaty.

The document tabled by the minister on Monday was over 1,700 pages long, so an explanatory memorandum is particularly important in this case. Further, a long list is given of what materials must be included in the explanatory memorandum.

• (1515)

Among other items, the policy states that the explanatory memorandum will cover the following points.

First is subject matter. Second is a national interest summary. Third are policy considerations and how the treaty's obligations and their implementation will be consistent with the government's policies. Fourth are federal-provincial-territorial jurisdictional implications. Fifth are time considerations, with any upcoming dates or events that make the ratification a matter of priority. Sixth is a brief description of how the treaty will be implemented in Canadian law, including a description of the legislative or other authority under which it will fall, and seventh is a description of the consultations undertaken with the House of Commons, self-governing aboriginal governments, other government departments, and non-governmental organizations prior to the conclusion of the treaty, as appropriate.

There may have been 1,700 pages tabled by the Minister of International Trade on Monday, but there was no explanatory memorandum accompanying them, blatantly showing that the

Government of Canada was negligent in fulfilling its obligations under this policy.

The government responded to a question on the Order Paper from the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster in a particularly alarming way. The member for Battlefords—Lloydminster put a question on the Order Paper on May 3, 2016. Among other things, Question No. 193 asked:

With regard to the Minister of International Trade and the Canada-European Union: Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement: (a) when did the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development start drafting an Explanatory Memorandum for tabling with the treaty; (b) what deadline was given to the department in order to draft an Explanatory Memorandum; (c) will the Minister table a copy of the Canada-European Union: Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and Explanatory Memorandum, and, if so, when;

The minister's honesty about violating her own policy is commendable, however alarming. She responded on September 19 by saying:

Mr. Speaker, with regard to parts (a) and (b), Global Affairs Canada, GAC, has not been tasked with drafting an explanatory memorandum for the tabling of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA.

This question was first asked in May and was responded to four and a half months later with a response essentially indicating that the government intends to violate its own policy obligations to Parliament.

The government had time to react. The minister could have realized that Canada was in the process of negotiating a complex and multilayered treaty with 28 countries and that she would have an obligation to fulfill when she tabled the treaty, but she chose not to. Even after she responded to the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster on September 19, she still had another 42 days to instruct her officials to respect Canadians and their duly elected representatives in Parliament, but she chose not to.

Clearly, there was enough time to prepare. Europe is indicating that it is still not on board with CETA, so the timelines that are being presented to us provide more than enough time for the minister and Global Affairs to fulfill this obligation to me as a parliamentarian and to everyone who sits in the House.

On May 5, 1987, at page 5766 of *Debates*, Speaker Fraser stated:

The privileges of a Member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfilment of his or her duties and functions.

Seventeen hundred pages is a lot for any parliamentarian to digest. We need to do a full analysis. We need time to do so, and the time that is normally allocated needs to be respected by the minister for all members in the House so that we can have the full information and analysis necessary to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of this agreement.

Furthermore, the international trade committee is now being asked to pre-study the bill four days after the 1,700-page document and the 131-page bill were tabled. That is unacceptable.

Business of Supply

I am aware that the minister's own policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament is not governed by the Standing Orders of the House, but given the context of what has transpired over the past week, it is undeniably true that my ability, and the ability of all members of Parliament, to properly discharge our functions, to properly study and analyze more than 1,700 pages of text, and to adequately scrutinize government proposals and legislation are being impeded by the Minister of International Trade's deliberate decision to violate her own policy.

She had time to remedy the situation regarding the explanatory memorandum, and she did not. She had time to table the treaty and wait 21 sitting days before introducing the legislation, but she did not.

• (1520)

I think that you, Mr. Speaker, would be the first to agree that all members of Parliament are equal in their privileges in this House of Commons and that no one should be interfered with or disadvantaged in any way in the discharge of their duties as a member of Parliament, especially by other members in this House.

Mr. Speaker, if you find that there was a prima facie breach of my privileges as a member, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is an opposition day, and the member should not be taking time out of the time for debate on the motion they have spent time working on.

I have listened to the member opposite, and I do not believe this matter constitutes a prima facie question of privilege. What the member is referring to is a matter of policy and not a question of parliamentary procedure. As such, this does not constitute a contempt of the House.

I reserve the right to return to the House with a further intervention on the issue.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also ask if I could reserve the right to look at this further and bring some comments back at a later date.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Essex, the hon. government House leader, and the hon. opposition House leader for their interventions on this matter and thank the hon. member for Essex for bringing this to the attention of the House.

I will take these comments under advisement, and as was noted, other members may wish to intervene at a later time on the question as well.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—PREFERENTIAL ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to speak to the opposition day motion today, brought forward by my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe. I want to thank him for his speech this morning and the work that he has done on this file, but I also want to say as I begin, that I will be sharing my time with the member for Lévis—Lotbinière, and he will have some very encouraging words to say on this topic as well.

No Canadian would ever have thought that one year out in the Liberal's new administration the House of Commons would be debating their fundraising practices and lack of ethics, although it may not be a surprise. As we all remember, every minister was given clear instructions in their mandate letters to go as far as guaranteeing that even a perceived conflict of interest should be avoided at all costs.

Our democracy belongs to every Canadian and in that includes access to members of Parliament, parliamentary secretaries, and yes, even ministers of the crown. Nowhere in our Constitution or even in the standing orders does it say there is a \$1,500 entrance fee to be able to talk to those who govern our great country.

As an example of why the issue of special access to ministers should be a concern for all Canadians, we find out that those with deep pockets, vested interests, and the need to bend the ear of a Liberal cabinet minister seem to get special access, that those willing to write a large cheque get to cut the line.

I would like to take this opportunity to let the government know that I, as an elected official representing the good people of Brandon—Souris, have had to wait months and months to get a simple acknowledgement from Liberal ministers regarding a constituent's concern. I wondered what was taking all the time and attention of the ministers, and now I know. They were out soliciting donations rather than ensuring their office was responding to correspondence from members of Parliament.

The motion at hand, which we are discussing today, is more than just dealing with political fundraising. It goes into a much deeper issue of how members of the Liberal government use the power entrusted in them by the electorate and misuse their positions to fill the coffers of the Liberal Party. Watching the Liberals, it is no wonder Canadians distrust politicians. They say one thing, and in this specific case the Prime Minister put it in his mandate letters to his ministers, and then they go out and do the complete opposite.

Now this would not be the first broken promise from the government. It was just a matter of weeks after the Liberals were elected that we found out their plan to create a new tax bracket was in fact not cost neutral with their other changes to tax brackets. Liberal candidates also swore up and down that they would only run an itty-bitty \$10-billion deficit. I only wish that the Liberal government was as good at managing the finances of our country and ensuring that our economy was growing as they are with arranging \$1,500 pay-for-play fundraisers.

According to a recent *Globe and Mail* report, they are well on their way to doing a hundred of these special pay-to-play Liberal fundraisers in 2016 alone.

Business of Supply

This is exactly why Canadians notoriously rank politicians low on the issue of trust. Almost every single day these past few weeks, we have learned of another Liberal fundraising event either being hosted in a Bay Street law office or a corporate boardroom where writing a cheque, hopefully with a couple of zeros attached, would pave the way to an intimate conversation with a minister of the crown.

Now it begs for us to wonder, where did the Liberals get the idea that it is okay to use their ministers to seek donations to pay for the operations of their Liberal headquarters?

To those who are paying close attention to this issue, the answer is easy. We only have to look down the 401 to see Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne's fantastic antics. Her government also got caught up in a lapse of ethical judgment, and now have gone so far as to draft legislation to completely ban these sorts of fundraising events.

Now I am not suggesting that members of Parliament and ministers should completely remove themselves from raising funds for their own individual campaigns. I'm simply suggesting that this Liberal government stops holding high-priced fundraisers in corporate boardrooms and Bay Street law offices, where there is a very perceived conflict of interest. I would suggest that our Liberal ministers start raising funds at spaghetti dinners or barbecues held in the backyards of their own supporters' homes. It is not appropriate whatsoever to be actively seeking large cheques from those who clearly have a vested interest in government dealings.

● (1525)

In my neck of the woods, it is very common for constituents to write small donations to the political party of their choice. In some circumstances, there will be a large gathering where people from all walks and backgrounds gather to raise funds for a local campaign. Our party, the Conservative Party, collects small donations from hundreds of thousands of Canadians annually. These Canadians do not want to land a government contract nor do they hope that their company will receive government largesse. They believe in our party because we stand up for those people who work hard, pay their taxes, and play by the rules. It is these Canadians who are deeply committed to upholding the values and principles of our democracy.

I urge all Liberal members of Parliament to go back to their constituencies this weekend and ask people from their communities if they think it is right that those people writing \$1,500 cheques to the Liberal Party should be able to have preferential access to ministers of the crown. They can ask farmers, who work 12 hours a day, if they think Liberal ministers should be spending so much of their time seeking donations, or they can ask small business owners if Liberal ministers should spend more time thinking of ways to grow the economy than seeking funds from the one percenters.

Perhaps before my colleagues from across the way get on a plane to go home this weekend to ask their constituents for their views, they should maybe stop and chat with Mary Dawson, the Ethics Commissioner, because she said that Canadians should be concerned about the Liberal government's pay-to-play fundraisers. She even said that these sorts of fundraisers are “unsavoury”, and she questioned whether people were getting fair access. After my Liberal colleagues are done chatting with the Ethics Commissioner, they

should speak with the Commissioner of Lobbying, who said that these fundraisers create “real or apparent conflicts of interest”.

This issue is not that complex. In fact, this issue is not even ideological or partisan in nature. It is misusing the offices of power and those offices should be above any political disagreement.

I call upon my Liberal colleagues to stand up against their party brass and do what is right. They should call upon their party leaders to stop these dodgy fundraisers. As elected members of Parliament, we should not be so focused on filling the coffers of political parties. We should be focused on improving the quality of life for Canadians and, in doing so, improve the level of trust in this institution. As I said, our democracy belongs to every single Canadian. I would like to believe that we live in a country where, no matter where we are from or the amount of change we have in our pockets, it will not limit the ability to make our voices heard in the government.

Furthermore, there is no Liberal who can stand here with a straight face and say he or she is not breaking the spirit and intent of the Prime Minister's instructions when he said:

If we want Canadians to trust their government, we need a government that trusts Canadians. It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them. Canadians do not expect us to be perfect—they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

The Prime Minister even went as far as to say:

...you...must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties.... This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

It is abundantly clear that if the Liberal government and its ministers do not immediately end the practice of high-priced pay for access fundraisers, they will continue to be in direct contradiction of their own mandate letters. The defence of standing up every day and saying, “Everything is all right here, move along” is not acceptable. It is not fooling Canadians one bit.

Every day the Liberal ministers continue to organize and collect fundraising cheques in this manner, it only further erodes the confidence of Canadians in our political process. While dubious Liberal fundraising practices brought down a previous administration and caused a judicial commission, it is only in the Liberals' best interests to stop what they are currently doing and admit that it is wrong before the inevitable outcome of a political scandal, again.

● (1530)

While the government will stand up and spend its political capital on defending these practices, I can assure the Liberals it will not pay off in the long run. We have read this story before and we know how it ends. Trust me, a Liberal usually ends up in some form of political purgatory.

I call on all members of the House to vote in favour of the motion. It has been said before that we cannot legislate common sense, but I certainly hope that by shining lights on these sketchy fundraising practices, the government will call off its Liberal party bagmen, fire up the barbecue, and invite their local supporters over to their backyards for a \$5 hamburger. There could be nothing more Canadian than that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member that relates to the actual substance of the motion.

A lot of the debate today does not go to the substance of the motion, it goes to what people feel about pay for play. I do not think any of us like pay for play. Let us talk about the substance. The substance is that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner should be granted the authority to oversee and enforce “Open and Accountable Government” directives, which are not law.

We have a commissioner who is there to enforce laws adopted by Parliament. That is something that was issued by one Prime Minister and could be overwritten in a new document issued by another Prime Minister.

The Conservative Party now has a leadership convention, and I am sure they are going to issue rules for fundraising for leadership contenders. Do the Conservatives agree that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner should have the right to oversee those rules issued to Conservatives running for their own leadership?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I would challenge the premise of the member's question.

Clearly, this is about the Ethics Commissioner's ability to look into this type of leadership, which the Liberals' own Prime Minister has put down in the mandate letters to his ministers and said they cannot even have a perceived problem with fundraising in their areas.

It is an ethics question, not a law question. I challenge the premise of the question based on that. I do not believe that my colleague across the way is listening. Obviously, as I said earlier, and maybe he was not listening, but common sense cannot be legislated. This is a situation where the Liberals are not following their own Prime Minister's rules.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we look at pay to play, and I hear the Liberal member across the floor saying that no one likes pay to play, but they are still doing it.

Let us look at October 13, when a private Liberal fundraiser was held at the home of a developer in Halifax at \$1,500 a person. The Liberal government says it is open and accessible. When I bring that home to people in my riding, when I talk to my friend Mike at the mill, and tell them that for the \$1,500, we are actually giving a tax subsidy of \$650, they say that is an expensive lobster. It is something for them to chew on and they are having a tough time chewing on it.

I think about fairness. We talked about doing things differently. I love to hear members talk about how we need to make sure it is accessible for everybody. Would it not be more accessible if we got rid of the limit of \$1,500, if we got rid of the system we have and went back to a system that was more fair? We could look at per vote subsidies, where every vote counts, where everybody is treated equally. We could get rid of this unfair playing field that we are on right now with this unfair pay to play.

• (1535)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I differ with my colleague on that as well.

We had that situation in Manitoba when I was a member there. It has been eliminated. It has been eliminated here in the House. There is nothing more fair than the type of system we have today, where people can go out and solicit up to \$1,525. There is a tax credit, but everyone knows what it is and that it is available to them. Therefore, they cannot donate more than that. That is a lot of money, in many cases, \$1,525, and it has been indexed over the years. It was not quite that high to start with.

I would say that compared with some other countries in the world, and we have neighbours that are in an election at this time, where there are millions of dollars that can be donated by any one individual, our system is very fair.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard from the Liberals that they are living up to the highest ethical standards and so on.

The member spoke about common sense. To me, common sense would say that if they are living up to the highest ethical standards, why would they not let the Ethics Commissioner take a look at this? What is it the Liberals are hiding?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. The highest ethical standards for the Liberals still may leave something to be desired. It is very clear in the Prime Minister's mandate letters, part of which reads, “Canadians do not expect us to be perfect – they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.”

People have actually been appointed by the government to different areas. This never ever happened under a Conservative government. That is the difference between what happens today and before. Today, they are organizing some of those fundraising events and collecting \$1,500 cheques to have access.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this important debate on the Liberal Party's antiquated culture of political financing.

As everyone knows, the Liberal Party has many new faces who, unfortunately, will find themselves in embarrassing situations just because they are subject to a culture of dodgy fundraising and a clear lack of ethics that ensures that preferential access to ministers of the Liberal government is for sale or lease.

We recognize that all parties and all members of government do political fundraising for their own election campaign and the partisan activities of their party. Personally, I do not have a problem with MPs of any party attending fundraisers as long as they do so in their capacity as the MP for their riding.

There is a problem when a Liberal MP in his capacity as minister invites certain Canadians with specific interests to a partisan fundraiser and charges \$1,500, or any other amount. That is problematic to me, because we are in a grey area.

Business of Supply

This gives rise to a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest, preferential access, or the appearance of preferential access, and I would go so far as to say influence, or the appearance of influence. The role of minister is very important in our parliamentary system. It is incumbent upon these individuals to demonstrate the greatest integrity possible when making future decisions for our country.

It is very important to distinguish between “providing information” and “trying to influence the ministerial direction” or even a minister’s judgment. A good minister must steer clear of outside influences.

Unfortunately, members will have undoubtedly noticed, thanks to the issues that I and the media have raised, that this is not what we have seen in the past year with this string of Liberal Party of Canada fundraisers.

Thus, it is quite reasonable and legitimate to devote one day to shedding light on these shady practices and to ask the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to enforce and oversee the directives established in the document “Open and Accountable Government”. This document was released by the Prime Minister himself to ensure that his directives are followed and not forgotten.

Despite how strict and comprehensive Canada’s political financing legislation is, we still have to examine it even more closely and call upon the services of the commissioner in light of the Liberal approach to fundraising taken thus far.

The specific goal is to ensure that no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, is accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to the Liberal Party. People should not be given privileged access in exchange for donations.

As I have already said in the House, my only reason for mentioning a few situations that have come to light and that already seem suspect is wanting to protect the integrity of cabinet positions. I hope that the members opposite will one day thank me for saving them from the same fate that other members of their party have met in court. What members of the Liberal Party will be sentenced 20 years from now because of this culture? I hope that all of our debates will help to protect them from the most senior members of the party or from themselves.

The problem in the case that was recently made public is that a current minister was the honorary chair of a fundraiser organized by an “interest” group that just so happens to have an interest in that department. What a coincidence.

These sorts of events are generally quite the social affairs. People pay \$1,500 to eat canapés and drink a glass or two of wine and are given privileged access to discuss very specific issues. In this case, there were groups of 20 to 40 people, which translates into \$30,000 to \$60,000 in donations. Did people really spend all of that money just to rub shoulders with the minister? Of course, as a bonus, they also get to listen to the wonderful speech that is given.

Let us be serious. Between 20 and 40 people are being given a specially-prepared opportunity to emphasize the importance of their

vision, their direction, and their projects, which often require public funds.

● (1540)

For me and many others who know the difference, that is called a closed-door discussion. That discussion will influence the direction of policies and programs for the benefit of a minority rather than for all Canadians. That is unacceptable.

It is one of the reasons I urge the members across the aisle who have been appointed as ministers to protect themselves from this dishonest fundraising practice for their own sake and for the sake of Canadians. It is up to them to have, from the outset, the good judgment to refuse this type of activity, however lucrative and appealing it may be for the Liberal Party. The end does not justify the means in fundraising for the Liberal Party.

It is very unfortunate that my colleagues across the aisle are acquiescing in this moribund theatre of bad taste. In all humility, I am saying that with the aim of protecting them, but especially with the greater aim of ensuring that Canadians are not disillusioned once again with our political system because of the Liberal Party.

Sooner or later, this influence peddling will inevitably lead to unhappy consequences such as sanctions. We saw that this week, when we heard the findings of the Charbonneau Commission, as Jacques Corriveau, a former member of the Liberal Party of Canada, was found guilty of illegal political fundraising.

As the old saying goes, cheaters never prosper. Let’s make sure that in the future, the Liberal Party of Canada does not have to repay money it should never have received. As many will have guessed, I am referring to the \$40 million that is taking a long time to get back into the hands of taxpayers.

It would be a great gesture of humility on the part of the Prime Minister if he apologized to the Canadian people for illegal fundraising by the Liberal Party of Canada and if he made sure not only that that culture vanishes but also that the money stolen from taxpayers is returned to them.

In closing, I have absolutely no intention of frightening young children with scarecrows wearing red ties, or with skeletons rising from the coffers of the Liberal Party of Canada, but it is important to me to give all of my Liberal colleagues a friendly warning, a reminder to all those appointed as ministers: they should never forget what a privilege they are being granted to serve our country with integrity for the good of future generations.

I have the following advice for them: for the sake of all Canadians, they should never be forced into making a decision that would go against Canadian principles and values. My esteemed ministerial colleagues can be certain that history will judge them on the decisions they make and on the repercussions those decisions will have for the well-being of the entire Canadian community.

Business of Supply

With regard to these ministerial fundraising events, I wonder whether the ministers opposite are able to sleep well at night. I worry about their getting enough sleep, because it is very important to be able to live with one's conscience regarding the decisions one makes for the entire country. It is also important to be able to look at oneself in the mirror, head held high, and have the feeling of having done one's duty without having been influenced or bothered by a fundraising stratagem that is at odds with one's judgement and conscience.

I thank all my colleagues for their attention, and I hope that my good advice will benefit this new generation of new politicians whose only flaw, in my opinion, is that of having chosen a superficial, seductive party that bases its policies solely on short-term appeal and popularity. That party misuses popular words in speeches designed to please and shows many photos of smiley, happy people. In reality, however, it is deceptive and does not generate truly positive results for our security or economy, and it does nothing to protect or create jobs in Canada.

It must be said that, a year ago, the Prime Minister's document entitled "Open and Accountable Government" got some good press, but it is sad to note that, under this government, many people hear what they want to hear; there are no concrete results, and existing laws are not being obeyed.

I hope that, between now and the next election, many people will choose to jump the Liberal ship before it sinks with what little savings we have left.

• (1545)

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague very carefully. It really frustrates me when the opposition tries to confuse the House and Canadians listening to this debate. Let me be very clear. There is no preferential access to our government. In fact, we are engaging, consulting, and listening to Canadians.

Over the summer, I held 10 town halls on different issues in my riding of Brampton West. I was proud to have ministers and parliamentary secretaries attend these town halls to engage, to take feedback, and to answer any questions from my constituents. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence attended.

How can the member opposite say that there is preferential access when all these town halls were open to the public and they were absolutely free?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to my colleague and to hear her confirm that, in these budget consultations and other consultations, ministers travelled across Canada, and after the consultations, they raised money. That simply means that ministers used taxpayers' money to travel around and raise funds for the Liberal Party. How shameful!

• (1550)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with my colleague's speech, and I would like to ask him a very specific question.

Over the past few days, whenever we in the NDP or members of the Conservative Party questioned the Liberal government about ministers' behaviour and attitude regarding preferential access to partisan fundraising events, we were told that everything is fine because the law was obeyed. However, in section IV.1 of the document entitled "Open and Accountable Government", we are told that ministers "have an obligation to perform their official duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny. This obligation is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law."

I would like to hear my colleague explain how the Liberal Party can say one thing and do the opposite.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Part of my speech was in reference to that.

Suppose we are ministers and a fundraising event is organized by our own party, in this case the Liberal Party. Suppose as well that the honorary chair, that is, the minister of a particular department, is mentioned on the ticket, and that 20, 30 or 40 people, all with roughly the same interest, pay \$1,500 each to attend. Do you think they are just going to listen to the minister's brief address, drink two glasses of wine and enjoy some hors-d'oeuvres? Those people will want to talk about their specific interests, the interests and directions they want to take, and even the funding that the department should provide to their organization. That is a conflict of interest.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I will ask the question again.

The opposition motion before us requests that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner essentially be responsible for interpreting and managing a document that is not a law. The commissioner is an officer of Parliament. She is responsible for interpreting an act of Parliament and helping us with an act of Parliament. This is not an act of Parliament.

So, if the Conservative Party creates rules for Conservative leadership candidates, does the member believe it would be feasible and a good idea for the commissioner to be responsible for interpreting the document for those candidates?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, here in the House, we draft laws together with Elections Canada to govern all political fundraising practices of all parties combined. If we go to the trouble of making laws with Elections Canada for Elections Canada in order to justify where and from whom that money comes, I think it is quite legitimate for us to have taken the day, today, to raise this issue of great importance to Canadian democracy. Unfortunately, the Canadian people are sick of seeing what is going on across the aisle in the House.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would normally say that I am pleased to join the debate on most matters that come before this House, but today is not one of those days. Let me say why, before we get the usual cackles and heckles from the other side. It is because of the type of conversation and particularly the use of language coming from the official opposition. I accept that there is a legitimate role for the opposition to call into account and to question the choices made by the government, but the deliberate use of language like “pay to play” and “cash for access” is not helpful in our democracy. While I accept that there are legitimate questions that the opposition should pose to the government, this type of language ultimately demeans the overall participation and the confidence of Canadians in our political process.

I first want to get back to the whole nature of political fundraising and the fact that all of us in this House participate in that process in order to both fund our individual campaigns within our respective ridings and also participate in the process to support our political party. That is part of our system. Canadians can participate in our democratic process in a multitude of ways. They do so in part by volunteering in our campaigns, they express their particular opinions and positions to their elected officials, and they also participate by way of donating money. That is part of our democratic process.

At the end of the day, the key for me is this. What are the checks and balances that are put on our system? I would remind folks that we are dealing with human nature. If someone makes a donation to a member, or if someone is providing volunteers to a particular member's political campaign, it is human nature, it is natural, that the member would perhaps view that person in different light than he or she might view someone who is highly critical of his or her position or political party. That is human nature. We understand that. However, the question is whether there are appropriate checks and balances placed on our political system as it relates to fundraising and the conduct of the government of the day.

I would suggest that there are basically four criteria that have evolved over a series of reforms to the political financing system. It started back in 1974, but it has subsequently moved through to, more recently, 2003.

There are basically four criteria that ultimately have an impact with respect to circumscribing the potential view that the government is providing preferential access.

The first is the change with respect to who can contribute. This change was brought about in the reforms of 2003, which limited contributions to individuals and removed the capacity of corporations and unions to make political donations.

The second is how much each individual can contribute, which is again an evolved practice. The major concern back in 1974 with the first set of reforms was the view that large corporations had undue influence due to the large amounts they could contribute to parties, and that was subsequently circumscribed in the reforms that took place in 2003, which limited individual donations to \$5,000.

Then, to be fair to the Conservative Party on the other side, when it came into power it decided to lower that threshold down to \$1,000. There has been a gradual adjustment upward, and now the figure

rests at \$1,525, and there is a built-in mechanism within the election financing provisions to allow that to grow by \$25 a year. Therefore, this year individuals can donate up to \$1,525 to political parties, can donate up to \$1,525 to individual riding associations, and can then make a one-time contribution to leadership candidates for the same amount.

● (1555)

The third important thing is caps. The cap is a really good thing that exists within the Canadian political system, when we compare it to what we are seeing south of the border. We have strict limits with respect to the quantum of spending that can take place in a political campaign. Caps are placed on political parties and caps are placed at the individual riding level. Those caps are major constraints from the undue influence of financing on our political system. That is quite different from what we see south of the border.

The fourth is the reform that is taking place, and to be fair, a reform that was introduced by the previous government. It deals with the issue of public reporting and transparency with respect to donations. What basically has been done ensures that any donation that is over \$200—it started out as \$100—and up to the donation limit must be transparently and publicly reported. It is that transparency that provides the ultimate check in terms of the perception of undue influence or preferential access given to any particular participant in the political process.

My colleagues on this side of the House and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health have noted that, when it comes to the issue of consultation, this particular political party has provided unprecedented levels of consultation with Canadians since it took power in 2015. We have been engaging incessantly, consulting on a broad range of issues. I will be frank: I am literally inundated by requests from various ministers to consult on their particular mandate items, to make sure they get feedback from Canadians and to provide that report to the ministers so that they can take that into account as part of the government's decision-making process.

In my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt I have held several town halls and consulted with my constituents on a wide variety of issues. I have also worked in concert with my fellow members from the Scarborough area to collaboratively bring issues to the public, ranging from electoral reform, to Canada Post, to the environment, to defence, to the economy. Next week, we will be gathered together again, and I am taking this opportunity to invite those who want to participate to join the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance in a pre-budget public consultation with respect to the direction the government is taking.

We are extremely accessible to all Canadians, and we remain accessible in a variety of ways. We can be accessed through our constituency offices or here in Ottawa. We take feedback through letters, online, or by way of the telephone. All members treasure the opportunity to get that feedback as part of our political process. We should all be exceptionally proud of that.

The bottom line is that we all follow the rules. We follow the rules in the open and transparent ways I laid out, and that circumscribes the perception that there is any undue influence.

Business of Supply

I particularly find it rich that we are getting a lecture from the Conservative Party, a party that literally took the issues of ethics, political financing, and electoral accountability to new lows. They were such lows that Canadians responded, quite rightly, in the last election in a rather vociferous way as to how they felt there was a complete lack of transparency coming from that other side. In case my friends on the opposite side, particularly those in the official opposition, are having some trouble with respect to that particular issue, let me take them down memory lane and remind them of some of the troubles we have faced that came from the opposition.

In question period today the member for Carleton asked a question of the President of the Treasury Board. The President of the Treasury Board rightly reminded us that it was the Conservative government that took the issue of partisan government advertising to unprecedented levels, taking essentially what are government resources for partisan personal gain.

● (1600)

The Conservative government awarded unprecedented numbers of contracts to parties outside of government at unprecedented levels, to the point that nearly \$1 billion in spending took place over the previous government's mandate, for advertising that was really about driving the government's re-election plan; things like the so-called economic action plan. Members will recall that those particular ads seemed to be in a particularly interesting colour that was somewhat similar to the party colours of the current official opposition, which was using essentially what was the cash or the resources of government for its partisan political purposes.

I am proud that we are part of a government that has instituted a process to ban this type of practice and that there is an independent review.

There are appropriate times for the government to advertise, particularly as it relates to providing public information, but it should not be featuring members of the government in those particular informational ads, which is quite different from, for example, the practice of the member for Carleton when he was serving as a government minister.

Let us go to the second particular issue. Let us look at the actual changes to the Canada Elections Act itself.

This is, again, a subject matter where the previous government, the Conservative government, tried to use the rules to disproportionately benefit itself. For example, let me remind members that the Conservatives, interestingly, just before the previous election, decided to suddenly raise the individual contribution limit, which at that time had been \$1,200, up to \$1,500. Then, subsequently, during the election itself, they changed the rules within the Canada Elections Act to allow the amount of compensation coming back to political parties to be increased the longer the writ period was and to allow them to use the spending advantage they had as the incumbent governing party at the time, more so than the other political parties. Doubling from the traditional 37-day campaign to an unprecedented 77-day campaign, which we had not seen since the 1800s, allowed the parties and individual ridings themselves to spend more than double the traditional amount that would be permissible in a particular election campaign.

They thought that would give them an electoral advantage. Luckily, Canadians saw through that particular action.

Then let us look at the activities of the previous Conservative government. I raise this with some regret, but I think it is important to remind ourselves as we engage in this debate that it was in fact the Conservative Party that had some real ethical breaches with respect to its particular practices.

Remember, it was in fact under the Conservative Party itself that actual convictions took place under the Canada Elections Act. For example, there was a particular scheme, known as the in-and-out scheme. That took place in the 2006 election and saw an unprecedented number of Conservative ridings, 67 to be exact, see \$1.3 million get shuffled in and out of their ridings in order to try to hide advertising that was done for a national purpose and, yet, was attributable to ridings that could not spend up to their election limits. That allowed those particular riding associations to claim a larger rebate than they were otherwise entitled to and allowed the Conservative Party to spend more money than was allowed under the cap that was imposed on political parties.

Elections Canada said that violated the rules. The Conservative Party knew there were going to be convictions on that particular matter and, as a result, ultimately chose to negotiate a settlement before it would be found in actual violation of the Canada Elections Act.

● (1605)

Let us remind ourselves of who one of the main parties was in that particular election scheme. I believe the gentleman's name was Irving Gerstein, who was actually appointed a senator. Again, I contrast how the Conservative Party has treated the Senate, which, of course, it uses for its partisan fundraising purposes. I can think of another senator, good old Senator Michael Duffy, who was expressly recruited into the Conservative caucus for fundraising purposes.

These charges were laid and ultimately resolved without having to go to criminal court, because the Conservative Party knew that it was ultimately in the wrong.

Let us remember that when we are dealing with the issue of partisan fundraising, all of us participate in this particular process. However, it is important that we ensure that it is done above board.

To continue with the points I made earlier, namely about the constraints imposed on political financing and who can contribute, to be fair, these have been even further narrowed to the point that now only citizens or those who are permanent residents can contribute. The quantum that can be contributed is relatively circumscribed. The strict spending limits imposed both on ridings and political parties are important and one of the critical constraints that ultimately limit the capacity of political parties from having excessive funding drives.

Finally, with respect to the public reporting process for any donation, anything that is basically over \$200 has to be reported publicly and be accessible to all Canadians. It is important to note that this reporting includes the name of the particular individual and the fact that they have a reportable address, so that Canadians can know who is supporting a particular political party.

Business of Supply

Again, I find the motion before the House not helpful. There are very clear rules with respect to the conduct of all political parties and ministers, and they were followed. In fact, it was important that we sat down and spoke with the Ethics Commissioner so that there would be very clear guidelines and rules with respect to the appropriate activity. As a result, it is my submission that there are no violations and no existing problems requiring a fix that my friends on the other side are suggesting.

I would also remind those members that they too fundraised in an incredibly aggressive fashion. Over the nearly 10 years that the Conservatives served in government, I have a very long laundry list of instances where ministers of the previous government engaged in fundraisers of similar quantum, subject to the caps, and that they took the position that they were following the rules applied at the time.

Again, these rules were established primarily by the other side and are the current ones that exist today. We are following those rules. Those rules are being abided by.

• (1610)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member prepared very carefully for his speech, but the problem is that almost nothing in his speech was relevant to this motion.

This motion is not about the Elections Act. It is not about public consultations in his riding. It is not about town halls. It is not about spending limits. It is not about comparisons between the American and Canadian electoral systems. It is not about the Senate. This motion is about the Prime Minister's statement on open and accountable government, and cash for access fundraising, and the enforcement of that statement.

If everything is just fine and if there is nothing wrong with the style of fundraising the current government is engaged in, why did the Ethics Commissioner last Thursday call it "unsavoury" and why does the Lobbying Commissioner have open investigations into lobbyists over their cash for access fundraising?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise of my friend's question. There are processes to look into particular fundraising situations, but the rules clearly circumscribe the participation of ministers in various activities. At the end of the day, transparency is ultimately in the reporting process that takes place when those donations are subsequently made public. Again, I do not accept the premise of the question by my friend.

• (1615)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member and have agreed on many occasions with his statements and speeches in the House. The hon. member has good insight into many important things that we are doing in the House. I do not want to repeat what the previous member asked, but I feel I have to, because we are repeatedly getting the response he made back from the government.

We are not talking about how many times Liberals have consulted with people. We know they know the rules, the Elections Act, but that is not what we are talking about today. We are talking about ministers of the crown who have a higher level of accountability to the public for their actions.

We all heard the big fanfare when the Prime Minister said that things were going to be different and read his big letter that ministers were going to be held to a higher account. Why write that letter, why ask people to do something, if he had no intention whatsoever of asking them to fulfill that accountability?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, again, the key in dealing with the whole issue of fundraising is that there are clear guidelines that are established. Ministers go through that process with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to make sure that their activities comply strictly with the rules. We know that each individual who was vetted by the Privy Council went through that process and had a very clear understanding of those rules.

The member is asking about the individual mandate letters by the Prime Minister to his ministers. My point is that there are clear guidelines governing the activity of ministers. The suggestion that somehow there is preferential access to these individuals simply because they are attending a particular fundraiser is false. These ministers consult broadly.

The other point I would make is this. Does the attendance of those individuals fundamentally change public policy or a particular decision-making process? I would argue that it is not the case.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that once the connection is made that special access has influenced a government decision, that is where the RCMP will be involved. We have seen the Liberals do that before, whether in the sponsorship scandal or other ones. We are trying to advise the government not to go down the same road it has gone before. Instead of heeding our good advice and their own advice, the Liberals are doubling down on the wrong policy with regard to ministerial ethics.

My hon. colleague started to talk a little about the Prime Minister's mandate letters. I have in my hand the annex B to the Prime Minister's guidelines, "Open and Accountable Government". It states, "There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access".

Does my hon. colleague, in all honesty and in his genuine opinion, believe that having a minister of finance meet someone who is a stakeholder of his department for a cost of \$1,500 not have the appearance of preferential contact? If it does not, then what would?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, let me flip that around and simply say, for example, that if that same minister met with that particular individual in his office to discuss whatever matter of public policy the individual wanted to discuss, or if the Minister of Finance wanted to have a conversation with constituents in his riding, or if the opposition House leader wanted to raise a particular issue before the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Finance, subject, obviously, to his rather busy schedule, would do his best to ultimately accede to the opportunity to listen to that particular issue.

I do not accept the premise of the question.

Business of Supply

• (1620)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the opposition wants to talk about the content of the opposition motion, we can do that.

There are two key elements to it. One is that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has the power to investigate. She already has that power. She already has the power to investigate conflict of interest and ethics. That is why she has the title she has.

I reject the premise of the opposition day motion, and the second half of it is to end the current practice of cash for access. I reject the premise of that too. There is no cash for access. There is fundraising by members and there is government business. They are separate things.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on that.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, the proposal from the opposition is, ultimately, that all ministers of the crown should cease fundraising, period.

Do not forget, we live in a Westminster parliamentary model in which ministers also have to be members of Parliament, and they have every right, like the rest of us, to engage in fundraising activity.

The question again is the transparency of the process, which ultimately involves a recording mechanism that allows Canadians to judge for themselves whether there seems to be undue influence and whether there is a direct connection between the fact that someone contributed and a specific public policy outcome. I simply reject that particular premise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the motion tabled by the Conservative Party simply states that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner should be able to assess the behaviour of ministers in light of the Prime Minister's Office's document entitled "Open and Accountable Government".

So, why is the Liberal Party afraid of including the very principles it claims to embrace in the law?

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Laurentides—Labelle has already noted that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has been engaged with all members of the Privy Council and cabinet on the appropriate conduct that should govern their behaviour.

I would again simply say that this particular motion, in my respectful view, does not add anything to the powers that she already has with her office.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion my party put forward today. One day a week Conservatives get a chance to bring forward a motion that we feel is important and that needs to be talked about.

Right now, Canadians are concerned about jobs and the economy. We looked at this issue and out of respect for Canadian taxpayers, this place, and each one of us as parliamentarians, my party felt it was very important to bring this motion forward today and to deal

with it, once and for all. We have been having a very difficult time getting any answers during question period and all we are hearing from the government is what would be described as the doubling down defence of its position.

I will be sharing my time today, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Edmonton West. I look forward to his remarks.

There seems to be a pattern with the Liberals, which we have seen very clearly from the outset. The Liberals say what they think people want to hear. They say what they believe the general public would like to hear. They certainly say what the media would like to hear. They say what they think will sell well on Facebook and social media. They do a very good job of that. Then, in action, they do the exact opposite. We have seen that over and over again.

For me, the examples that have really jumped out are in the budget. Liberals were going to run a very small deficit. Now they are running a massive deficit, without even any discussion of going back to a balanced budget. Whether one agrees or disagrees with that position, the Liberals have said one thing and then done something completely different.

Something I believe in very strongly is this. A policy of the Liberals is to have a gender equal cabinet. They have said one thing and done another. I find it very insulting that they have given all of the women junior positions, without the same responsibility or ability to manage their departments. I am very black and white, I admit that. I see things in life, and there is not always a lot of grey. It is black or it is white, and with the Liberals it is always grey. They say one thing and then do something completely different.

We saw it with Bill C-22, which would apparently provide oversight for CSIS. The Liberals made a big show about providing this oversight, but, again, this group has no ability to oversee CSIS and the Prime Minister whitewashes all of the reports. It is the typical Liberal way of saying one thing and then doing something completely different. That is exactly what is before us today with respect to the Liberals' approach to ethics and cash for access at which they have been very good.

Let us talk about what happened.

This started very early on last year when we noticed that the Minister of Justice was having big fundraisers in Toronto with lawyers. We immediately said that there must be some mistake, that she must not have realized that it was a contravention of the code of ethics that the Prime Minister himself had set out.

Those of us of this side who were in government knew that because as soon as ministers were sworn in, we were immediately told by the prime minister what he expected of us. He gave us guidelines with respect to avoiding conflicts of interest and told not to raise money with lobbyists or our stakeholders. He expected us to follow those guidelines.

Business of Supply

The former prime minister, Stephen Harper, was a man of principle, a man of character, a man who, when he said something, we knew he would do it. No one ever questioned his word. When he said he wanted his cabinet to avoid conflict of interest, even the appearance of a conflict of interest, he meant it. We knew what that meant and we followed it. We were not raising money off the backs of our stakeholders. I will give an example.

When I was minister of state for social development, my portfolio included issues to do with people with disabilities. I was going to Newfoundland to deal with a housing agreement related to my housing portfolio. At the same time, lo and behold, there was going to be a fundraiser. It was not for the Conservative Party or any political party. It was for a wonderful cause, helping people with spinal cord injuries. I was asked to attend that fundraiser as minister of state for social development.

● (1625)

However, I knew the guidelines that the prime minister had set out. I knew how important it was that we follow those guidelines and stay away from even the appearance of not following them. Therefore, I did what most of my colleagues did during our time in government. We wrote to the Ethics Commissioner and asked for her guidance. She gives soft guidance and hard guidance.

Here is what her office told me. In its letter, it said, “in light of the above, I advise that the Minister not speak at the event in her personal capacity since the association is a stakeholder of her department. As I also mentioned, in the examination report for Minister Glover”, and I will pause here because members may recall that Ms. Glover was a former minister in our former government. She errantly started to do a fundraiser with some stakeholders. It came to light and she immediately cancelled it, returned the money, and got an opinion from the Ethics Commissioner. That is called ethics.

I will go back to what the office of the Ethics Commissioner said, “the commissioner indicated that it is inappropriate for stakeholders of Minister Glover's department to be invited to make donations in order to attend a fundraiser at which the minister was also present.” These are not my words. These are the words of the office of the conflict of interest commissioner, saying that cash for access was inappropriate. That was her advice.

The letter went on to say, “I realize that the Spinal Cord Injury Association event is not a political one; however, they are still a stakeholder of the Minister's that received funding from her department”.

The advice was not to attend, so I did not attend. I was extremely disappointed. It would have been a real joy and a privilege to attend. I am going to repeat a quote that it is important, “Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have the right to do and what is right to do.” That seems to be where there is a huge lapse in judgment by the Liberals.

I will bring us right back to the motion we presented to the House. This is not about what is legal in terms of what Elections Canada says. Of course the Liberals can take donations from every lawyer, every lobbyist, every mining executive. They can take \$1,525 from

every one of them and they will not break the law. Congratulations, that is what it means to be a Liberal.

On this side of the House, we are not talking about the Liberal absolute lowest standard, just trying to reach the lowest bar ever. Have the Liberals not changed at all? How about the higher bar they set for themselves? I will read about that higher bar:

General Principles

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government.

...no preferential access to government...

...no singling out, or appearance of singling out, of individuals or organizations as targets of political fundraising because they have official dealings with Ministers...or their staff or departments.

It is in black and white. This nonsense that the Liberals keep spewing that it is Elections Canada is absolutely ridiculous. I am embarrassed for them. The only thing I will say is that this is sad for democracy and sad for accountability. Frankly they can keep doing it because Canadians will see through it. Canadians are not dumb. They were fooled by Liberals once. They will not be fooled again with this kind of typical sponsorship entitlement where the Liberals will keep saying one thing, do something opposite and get away with it. It is not going to work.

● (1630)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, leaving aside some of the very clear inaccuracies in the hon. member's statement, I want to ask about one thing in particular. If I heard correctly, I believe the hon. member said that there were no senior female cabinet ministers in our government. I would like to know whether the member considers these ministers to be senior cabinet ministers: the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health, the Minister of International Trade, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, and I could go on and on.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I am glad my hon. colleague asked about this. It is incredibly important for us to set an example for the young women who are watching us.

Many times we see women appease men just because it is the easy thing to do. However, strong women do not appease men just because they say something. Therefore, this is my point. A number of ministers have been appointed because of their gender. The Prime Minister said that we would have an equitable female and male cabinet, but he put the majority of the female ministers in junior positions. They do not have deputy ministers, full budgets, or full departments. I would be happy to explain that further for my hon. colleagues. It is disgraceful and sad.

As a woman, if some man were to say to me, “Don't worry, sweetie, we're going to give you that job and we're paying you as much as everybody else, but you won't have the same worries or the same responsibilities, just be happy”, members do not want to hear what I would say to him.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention an event that took place under the previous government and concerned Mr. Duncan. He used his ministerial letterhead. In addition to being censured by the commissioner, he lost his job as minister. He later became Government Whip.

Since my colleague has already been a minister, I would like to know what she thinks of the use of the ministerial title. When invitations are sent out, they are not being sent out solely in the name of a member of Parliament. For example, it is not the member for Papineau who is asking people to attend a fundraising event. People are being asked to attend using the title of Prime Minister, Minister of Finance or Minister of Natural Resources.

Does she think it is appropriate to use the ministerial title to draw people to fundraising events? Personally, I believe there is a problem from the outset when a ministerial title is used, and I think only the title of member of Parliament should be used.

• (1635)

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, that is a problem because it sets up not only the perception but the reality of cash for access. Therefore, when a minister is selling a fundraiser based on his or her portfolio and title, he or she is literally saying to people to pay an amount of money so they can come and be part of a gathering with a minister of a particular department and have access to that minister.

Because our practice was not enshrined in the Canada Elections Act, we made it part of the guidelines we followed, which ensured that when there was any kind of fundraising for our local EDA, whether a breakfast or a dinner put on, and we would have a guest there, the member would not attend as a minister but as a member of Parliament. Then we made sure that no stakeholders knowingly were there. We were very careful. However, when that slipped, John Duncan, the former minister to whom the member referred, immediately stepped down and took responsibility.

We are looking for accountability, something where the Liberals will say that they are doing the wrong thing and that they are going to reverse course.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner has called these cash for access arrangements, where people pay \$1,500 to get access and lobby a minister in the guise of fundraising, “unsavoury”, and has said, “One wonders whether people are getting unfair access.”

Is it enough to say that the Ethics Commissioner was consulted, or to ask the minister to simply give the money back?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, it would be good for all of us to know if the minister did consult the Ethics Commissioner. Obviously, I think we know the answer to that. I would assume that had the ministers who had done these cash for access events consulted with the Ethics Commissioner, she would have given them the same advice she gave me a number of years ago. Therefore, I do not think that happened.

We certainly want to see the money given back. However, we also want to see these ethical guidelines, which we do believe in, upheld.

I had asked a question on the Order Paper, and there is a precedent whereby ministers are accountable to the Prime Minister for their adherence to these guidelines. Therefore, if the Prime Minister will not uphold those guidelines, then he should let the Ethics Commissioner do it and let us get this done.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Edmonton-West, Public Services and Procurement; the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, National Defence; the hon. member for Okanagan-South—Kootenay-West, Natural Resources.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying that I am glad to be speaking to the issue as opposed to asking questions of the House leader.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to address the motion calling on the Liberal government to grant the Ethics Commissioner the authority to enforce and oversee the directives outlined in the Prime Minister's “Open and Accountable Government” document.

Every time I rise in the House, I am reminded of its history, its unique place in Canadian society, and our responsibility to Canadians as their elected representatives. It is this responsibility that means that we, as parliamentarians, are held to a higher standard of acting ethically that goes above and beyond the simple word of law. Our words and our votes, through majority action in the House, are literally the law. This is not a responsibility that should be taken lightly, nor should criticism of bad behaviour be dismissed so easily.

We witnessed in recent weeks a shirking of responsibility by the Prime Minister and the finance minister. Indeed, almost a third of the Prime Minister's cabinet have demonstrated cavalier disregard for their responsibility to be ethical and honest with Canadians. In the mandate letter, written and signed by the Prime Minister, he directed:

As Ministers, you and your staff must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

This mandate letter specifically and repeatedly references the Prime Minister's much vaunted “Open and Accountable Government” document. I will therefore refresh the memories of members of the House on exactly what that document directed. It states:

a public office holder should not participate in a political activity that is, or that may reasonably be seen to be, incompatible with the public office holder's duty, or otherwise be seen to impair his or her ability to discharge his or her public duties in a politically impartial fashion, or would cast doubt on the integrity or impartiality of the office.

If it has not been made clear, there is sincere doubt about the integrity or impartiality of their offices due to these political activities, not only among members of this House but among Canadians across the country.

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The fact that the government House leader and the Prime Minister are minimizing and dismissing these concerns is not only a slap in the face of the integrity demanded of our elected officials in this place but is a strong example of their entitlement and privilege when interpreting the rules of our democracy to suit their political needs.

We know that the government is fond of big rhetoric and big deficits, and their actions over the past year demonstrate that they are extremely fond of breaking promises. In April of this year, the Minister of Justice was roundly and rightly criticized for attending an exclusive Liberal fundraiser with Bay Street lawyers. When the minister and the government were questioned in the House, the Liberals, led by the Prime Minister, resorted to the old-style tactics of the Liberals of yesterday. Rather than acknowledge that they were ignoring their own rules, the government shamelessly accused the opposition of racism.

The Liberal response was, as *The Globe and Mail* stated so accurately, “unworthy of parliamentary debate”. After much denial of any problem with such a blatant conflict, the justice minister finally at least apologized. The Prime Minister and the government House leader should take note.

Perhaps we could have hoped that the Liberals had changed their ways, but recent events demonstrate the same pattern we are very used to. When criticized, be arrogant. When criticized more, be opaque, and deflect as much as possible.

Over the past several weeks, the Prime Minister, the finance minister, and the government House leader have attempted to justify their flagrant disregard of ethical standards by stating that they acted within the confines of the law. They try to justify their actions by saying, “It’s okay, everybody does that”, notwithstanding the fact that the previous Conservative government did not.

Perhaps the Prime Minister’s, the finance minister’s, and the government House leader’s justifications would be more accurate if they said, “It’s okay, because every Liberal government does that”. Either way, that is just not good enough, plain and simple.

The Liberal government, to put it mildly, is demonstrating contempt for Canadians. They promised to act above and beyond what is required by the law, as is our responsibility as leaders of this country, yet they have no shame in playing dumb when it comes to acting in a grey area.

I refuse to believe that the Prime Minister is so blithely unaware of the fact that his and his government’s actions demonstrate not only a clear breach of the ethical policies written at the stroke of his own pen but also demonstrate complete disregard for the trust of Canadians. No, the Prime Minister and the members of his government know very well that what they are doing is wrong.

● (1640)

To quote *The Globe and Mail*, the Prime Minister “prefers to duck behind the camouflage of an inadequate law” rather than tell the truth to Canadians.

It is at times like these that I am reminded why citizens in countries across the globe demonstrate an almost universal disrespect for politicians. This opinion is not always rooted in fiction. When a leader promises to be open and transparent, then

refuses to answer questions when he is asked, Canadians lose faith. When a leader attempts to circumvent parliamentary institutions and ram through reforms because he can, then gets angry when opposition members, heaven forbid, oppose, Canadians lose faith. When the Prime Minister mandates specific guidelines on how he expects his ministers to act and then fails to live up to his own words, Canadians lose faith.

This is not a debate. The Prime Minister actually wrote those letters and wrote the guidelines cited in the letters and was confident enough in his guidelines and his mandate that he signed his name at the bottom of every one of those letters. Try as they might, there is no way the members on the other side of this House could get around the fact that the Prime Minister actually wrote those guidelines.

Perhaps members will understand why we, and Canadians, are just a little upset when the government decides that the rules and guidelines apply to everyone except themselves.

Do not take it from just me. Let us see what other Canadians are saying.

Andrew Coyne, of the *National Post*, says, “If it isn’t influence peddling, it looks enough like it to leave people wondering”. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, I am pretty sure it is a duck.

The Globe and Mail calls the Prime Minister’s actions an indefensible practice.

Former Liberal deputy prime minister Sheila Copps, not exactly a non-partisan, said, in response to the cash for access schemes, that the Prime Minister should ban these elite fundraisers.

Here is a great one. Try to guess who said this about pay to play:

Ministerial responsibility, the issue of fundraising and the people who were targeted by this invitation, all of those three things should not appear on the same piece of paper. Otherwise I think you’re asking for trouble. And it obviously looks like a troubling situation

He goes on:

This kind of event clearly crosses the line.... It is improper, and quite frankly the donation should be paid back.

This brilliant passage, in case anyone on the other side is wondering, came from none other than the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

There is no one, except the Prime Minister and his government, who is prepared to defend the indefensible. Yet rather than simply agree to abide by the rules, the government is happy to continue pretending that it has done nothing wrong. However, it did do something wrong.

It has broken yet another promise. It speaks one way in public and another way in the House. It misleads Canadians by promising to be better than the law and acts against the spirit of the law. It breaks the trust Canadians invest in Parliament. It fails to go above and beyond the literal interpretation of the law and set an example of ethical behaviour for Canadians everywhere, as is our responsibility as the elected leaders of the country.

Canadians are right to be disappointed in the Prime Minister. However, we cannot be surprised. It is our own fault for believing that the Liberals could do better than this. It is our own fault for thinking that the Prime Minister was sincere when he wrote up those mandate letters so long ago. It is our own fault for expecting leadership from the government.

When we look at the Liberal government, like the old Liberal governments before, some familiar things keep popping up. When challenged, it hides behind the lowest standard, deflects questions of ethical integrity, and acts like it is better than everyone else.

I will finish off with a quote from *The Globe and Mail*, again, as it comments on this scandal: "It's all very Liberal indeed".

• (1645)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat disappointing to see the Conservatives working in co-operation with the New Democrats to try to put a spin on this.

It is very important to emphasize that in fact no law has actually been broken, and where no law has been broken, there is no conflict of interest.

The irony is that those two parties are the ones that have broken the law. Those two parties have been ordered to give back tax dollars, because they broke the law. It is really interesting to see how close the two have gathered together on this.

Is the member prepared to apologize to Canadians for actually breaking the law, something that has been determined by the courts?

The Liberals have been following the law.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Gomery is over, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate how difficult it must be for the member across the way to basically throw himself on the ethical hand grenade that has been tossed in his lap by his cabinet. I hope his colleagues in cabinet recognize his sacrifice and that when the time comes for a sacrifice, he will make it into cabinet himself and will have a higher sense of ethical standards than his current people and will refuse to participate in pay to play fundraisers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which was really full of idealism for our parliamentary system.

Indeed, that system is highly commendable, and we must safeguard it from all forms of cynical attack. The member is quite right. I admire that. One can see that, after one year in this House, he hopes to take on work that will be meaningful to his constituents and all Canadians.

Nevertheless, I must remind him that, if there was a party that undermined the fundamental values of this Parliament, it was certainly his party, the Conservative government, which he was not part of at the time, thank God.

For example, that party constantly used the parliamentary process to introduce completely senseless bills in order to please a voter base

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that would receive emails saying that such and such was not good and that their rights were being defended on such and such an issue. It was using Parliament for partisan purposes. I should say in passing that it was not much better. In fact, it was quite awful and disgusting.

Here is the question I could ask my colleagues opposite. Is it not true that this state of affairs exists simply because those people are bluebloods who think they are above the law that they put forward themselves?

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I find that an amusing comment from my colleague on the far, far left over there.

We talked about how there has not been one single new job created by the Liberal government since it came to power, but I am pretty sure that a few have been created in the collection industry, people going after NDP members for their constituency offices.

I agree that the government across the way has to pull up its pants on ethics.

I want to discuss one of the items that came up on the finance minister and his fundraiser in Halifax. He said that it was a consultation process for the budget that allowed him to listen to Canadians.

It was a \$1,500 fundraiser. It is quite offensive to believe that Canadians should have to pay \$1,500 for a private consultation with the finance minister.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we think about the *Royal Canadian Air Farce*, and Dave Broadfoot having just passed away, the member from Kicking Horse Pass would have had a field day with today's debate. Maybe Sergeant Renfrew will be in eventually, or Big Bobby Clobber.

I am wondering if the member could talk about the need to hear from some of the cabinet ministers who are affected by this particular ruling.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Red Deer—Mountain View for bringing up Mr. Broadfoot. I quite enjoyed watching him on TV when I was growing up. I had long forgotten about Bobby Clobber.

It is disappointing on such an important issue that we have the B team or the C team answering all the questions. I appreciate their throwing themselves on the ethical grenade left behind by their cabinet colleagues. It would be nice to actually hear from cabinet members themselves, but as *The Globe and Mail* has said, they are hiding behind someone's skirts.

The Deputy Speaker: I would just remind hon. members, and I do not think I actually got the exact wording there, but just in a general sense, a member should not make reference to either the presence or absence of other members in the chamber. That is a protocol and a convention that we observe around this place.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

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Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with my dear colleague, the member of Parliament for Elmwood—Transcona, a beautiful riding. I want to congratulate him for all the work he is doing on the ethics committee. It is really impressive, especially for someone coming from a family that has nothing to do with federal politics. It looks like he knows quite a bit.

I think everyone remembers the Prime Minister saying with great pride that Canada is back. In fact, what he was actually saying is that the Liberal Party of Canada is back, and with it are the old stories of scandals and friends. They try to hide their natural instincts, but guess what? They are back with cash for access to ministers, even though they are pretending to do otherwise.

What we see in the behaviour of those ministers of cabinet is that two things are certain in life. We are all going to die and a Liberal is a Liberal. It is like a time machine going back to the old days, giving access to big businessmen, to the elites of this country, to Bay Street, again and again.

•(1655)

[Translation]

This shows how disappointing the Liberal cabinet's behaviour is in light of the expectations it created. The Liberals said they were going to combat cynicism and do politics differently. They said that after the years of darkness, it would be sunny ways. They said they were going to rebuild Canadians' trust in political institutions as well as integrity in our institutions and in Parliament. However, at the first opportunity, the Liberals flout the laws and principles they took such pride in putting forward. It is extremely disappointing.

Before going on, I have to say I am a great admirer of Georges Brassens. I listen to him as often as I can. During the previous Parliament, the song that came to mind most often was *Le temps ne fait rien à l'affaire*, or time does not change anything. In the current Parliament, my favourite Georges Brassens song is certainly *Les copains d'abord*, or friends first, because everything works for the government's friends thanks to the government's friends. That is certainly not what Canadians and Quebecers voted for last year.

Today's motion is interesting because it calls on the Liberals to face up to their own contradictions, to have a look in the mirror and tell us whether promoting something and then hiding behind the existing law is good enough for them. Is that the kind of hope they put into the hearts and minds of people during the last federal election campaign? I do not think so.

The document entitled "Open and Accountable Government" is fairly clear cut, and it is posted on the Prime Minister's website, which is significant. The document lists a number of principles that ministers must follow. That document, which is talked up by the Prime Minister and says that things are going to be done differently, prohibits all "preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties."

How can it be that, according to *The Globe and Mail*, there have now been about 20 such events where people paid \$400, \$500, or \$1,500 to attend an evening with the justice minister, the heritage

minister, or the finance minister? They have some nerve. In fact, they have a whole lot of nerve because they get double the payoff: \$1,500 for access to the finance minister just days before the economic update and a few months before the tabling of a budget that will see billions of dollars in infrastructure funding flow to our communities.

Still, they would have us believe that a \$1,500 dinner at a house in Halifax, an event organized by the Laurier Club, is not privileged access.

I do not know many people in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie who can write a \$1,500 cheque to dine with the Minister of Finance. That kind of thing is not about fighting for the middle class or representing ordinary people. It is old-school politics with old-school elites, real estate developers, big-time business people, and people who are on the boards of institutions and corporations under federal jurisdiction, such as the Halifax Port Authority.

The Minister of Finance put himself in an extremely delicate position that is entirely inconsistent with the Liberals' own rules and principles. What a bad example for the public. Imagine if this is how we talked to our children; tell them not to do this or that because it is against the rules, and then turn around and do it ourselves and say that it is not that bad. That is what the Liberals are doing.

They brag about doing politics differently. They apply new standards. They set high standards. Then, they turn tail and hide, saying that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has no jurisdiction over the document presented by the Prime Minister. In fact, why are we not legislating this? Why not take this principle and make it law? That way, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner would have jurisdiction over the document. What are the Liberals afraid of? It is rather odd.

The cherry on top is that their own document also says that their attitude and behaviour should be held to a higher standard than what the law requires. By trying to put a square peg in a round hole, they end up chasing their own tails.

Chapter 4.1 of the Prime Minister's document states:

Moreover, they have an obligation to perform their official duties...in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny. This obligation is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law.

Need we say anything more?

What people also need to know is that these events are not open to the public. With respect to the October 13 event in Halifax, a Google search using the words "Halifax", "Minister of Finance", and "Liberal Party" does not return any results. It is all very hush-hush. Private invitations are sent out in secret. It is a meeting of friends, hand-picked from the inner circle, who are going to influence public policy. I do not believe that someone is going to pay \$500 or \$1,500 and not expect to have some influence on the Minister of Canadian Heritage or the Minister of Finance when tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure money is on its way.

Business of Supply

Investing in infrastructure is a good thing. However, why do people have preferential access to the Minister of Finance when they have a monetary, financial and economic interest in influencing the Liberal government's decision?

• (1700)

It is extremely disappointing, and we expected better of the Liberal government. I hope that it will support the motion and that it will live up to its promises.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, philosophically I am about as far from a New Democrat as a person could possibly be. I listened to my colleague's speech, word for word, and quite frankly, there was nothing I could disagree with. That is probably a first.

I am old enough, I have the grey hair and the grey beard, to remember Liberal corruption and the famous minister who once said, "I'm entitled to my entitlements." That is a phrase that will go down in history.

More importantly, however, the federal government makes a lot of choices. It allocates, for example, broadcast licences. It determines which pharmaceuticals get approved. It determines who gets fishing licences. It determines where and how airports are built. It determines shipbuilding contracts.

Again, certain individuals, certain elites show up at these fundraisers, pay the cash for access, and let us say their competitors are either not invited or do not show up. Later, some tribunal, some decision, or Treasury Board plan is made, whether it is about a shipbuilding contract, a fishing licence, an environmental licence, or any of a number of decisions that the federal government makes. How does the member think the individuals who do not get those licences or agreements would feel about not being at those cash for access events?

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I was not expecting to be congratulated by a Conservative MP. It threw me off a little at first, but he is quite right.

In my opinion, people who are not friends of the Liberal Party must feel extremely frustrated that they are not at the table when major decisions are being made about the future of their communities.

My colleague spoke about the choices the government has made about prescription drugs, for instance. The Minister of Finance just happens to be attending a fundraising activity in Toronto on November 7 that was organized by pharmaceutical companies. These companies are organizing the event and selling tickets, and in return they get the finance minister. If that is not a perceived conflict of interest, I do not know what is.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a stakeholder is defined as somebody with a material interest in what somebody else does. If we look at every minister of the crown, every

Canadian is a stakeholder because everyone has a material interest in what they do.

Now, the question becomes, who is getting access? Every minister on this side has heard, either directly or through email, from hundreds of thousands of Canadians who paid nothing for that privilege and continue to have that privilege today.

If the member opens the vault at NDP headquarters and sees that the cupboard is pretty bare, will he be pining for the good old days of that per vote subsidy that our friends over there did away with?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, if my Liberal Party colleague decided it was a good idea to restore public funding of political parties, I would have to applaud him because that would be a great thing. However, that does not excuse the behaviour of the Liberal government cabinet.

The government has just created the Canada infrastructure bank, which quite frankly resembles a privatization fund. The Liberals are going to toss \$15 billion in there and ask private investors to participate. In the coming months and years, there will be major business interests in the bank. Because it is so transparent, the government should be able to show that it cannot be corrupted; however, its current actions indicate the exact opposite. Perhaps the Liberals have come to realize that they have more problems than they thought. The Minister of Finance participated in public consultations in Calgary. Yesterday evening, he was supposed to attend a fundraising event. However, that event was suddenly cancelled at the last minute. Maybe the members opposite are beginning to understand.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it might just help to step back and mention for a minute what it is we are here to talk about. Really, what we are here to talk about is how it is that the government intends to implement and enforce the very same rules that the Prime Minister sent out to his ministers when he appointed cabinet.

We have heard from some Liberal members that somehow they do not think that putting it into law is the best way. If they have an alternative, let us hear it, but right now, we have a situation where ministers of the crown are obviously not following the rules set out by the Prime Minister. If the Liberals have a great idea on how to see that policy actually enforced, let us hear it. In the meantime, writing those rules into the law and allowing the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to enforce those rules seems like a pretty good idea, and we certainly have not heard anything better from members opposite today.

To give hon. members a sense of what those rules are, may we step back and say something about the context into which the new government stepped in October? We really just have to name some names in order to get a sense of what Canadians were feeling about the standard of ethics in politics in October 2015, when we were talking about Dean Del Mastro and Mike Duffy. There were a lot of names on the tip of the tongues of Canadians that suggested to them that the ethical standard in Canadian politics was not high enough.

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In came the Prime Minister, if we listen to him, on a white horse, and he would make things better. He went so far as to say in his instructions to ministers:

Moreover, [ministers] have an obligation to perform their official duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny. This obligation is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law.

He went on in annex B of that same document to flesh out what exactly he meant. He said, “In order to ensure that there is no differential treatment or appearance”, and that is really the crux of the matter, because it is not just whether there is differential treatment.

According to the Prime Minister, the issue is whether there may even be the appearance of differential treatment, and he himself said, as I quoted just now, that merely acting within the law would not be enough to meet the bar he was setting just over a year ago, so he said:

In order to ensure that there is no differential treatment or appearance of differential treatment for individuals, corporations or organizations because of their financial support of politicians or political parties, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries should adopt the following best practices

What are those best practices that this motion simply calls on the government to enforce by allowing the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to enforce?

First, it says that “Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries should not seek to have departmental stakeholders included on fundraising or campaign teams or on the boards of electoral district associations”, so when we hear that the chair of Apotex is organizing a fundraiser for ministers of the crown, I think that is a pretty obvious contradiction of the guidelines that the Prime Minister set out and that we are simply asking to have enforced.

It says that “Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries should ensure that the solicitation of political contributions on their behalf does not target: departmental stakeholders, or other lobbyists and employees of lobbying firms”. When we find out through *The Globe and Mail* and others that there have been confidential websites set up and that people are getting access to those websites to buy tickets to those fundraisers by invitation, that is clearly not meeting the standard set out by the Prime Minister in these guidelines.

It makes us wonder. If the Prime Minister is not willing to police his members, who would? The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is an obvious choice, and this motion simply calls on the government to allow the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to go ahead and do that work that the Prime Minister has decided he will not do, because he is not enforcing his own rules.

As I say, any time Liberals want to chime in and say that they have a better mechanism to ensure that this document and instructions on open and accountable government are actually followed by ministers of the crown and not just talked about, let them put them on the table, but we have not heard anything from them, and we have been debating this all day.

The other notorious thing about what is going on, in my view, about these particular fundraisers that we have talked about—because it is a problem—is that they do create the appearance of preferential access when people are paying \$1,500 to get into an exclusive night with the Minister of Finance.

●(1710)

Incidentally, there is this idea that somehow a little old lady from Elmwood—Transcona who takes Handi-Transit to sit in the back of an open house, and leaves without talking to the minister, is the same as a high-powered corporate executive paying \$1,500 to get into someone's private residence with only 14 other people. That there is no difference between those interactions with the minister is laughable. Shame on the members who have been getting up today to insinuate that somehow those two situations are not significantly different for the purposes of influencing ministers. That is just totally ridiculous.

When they pay that \$1,500 to get into that privileged night with the minister, as advertised, then what? Well, at tax time they get about \$650 of that back. So that is really nice. If a person has the \$1,500 to fork out now—and this is a cash flow issue—then that person gets the preferential access, but the very same people who did not have the \$1,500 are the ones who are going to pay almost half of it back to that person later.

Therefore, Canadians perversely are being made to pay for preferential treatment for high-powered corporate executives. I think there is something shameful about that, and it has not gotten enough attention. They are not actually paying \$1,500 out of their own pocket. They are paying about \$800 out of their own pocket, and the rest is coming out of the pocket of Canadian taxpayers.

I referred earlier to Dean Del Mastro and Mike Duffy. We have heard as kind of a defence from the Liberals that it seems to be that they are not like Dean Del Mastro; they are more of a Mike Duffy. Duffy went through court, and it ended up that he did not break any rules, according to the law. We have that from a judge, and so there was no problem. We know that Dean Del Mastro was bad and he went to jail, but the Liberals do not have a problem as they are really like Mike Duffy. They have this kind of strange Duffy defence.

I can tell members that, given the last five years of Canadian politics, for the government to get up and think that an acceptable defence is to say not to worry, because it is just like Mike Duffy, I think is pretty pathetic. However, that is what we have been hearing all day. I am at a loss on that.

I think there is another elephant in the room here. Actually one of the Liberal members earlier raised it as a bad thing, but I have always believed in a per-vote subsidy for political financing. That came in under the Chrétien Liberals. When they said that corporations and unions would not be able to donate, they recognized that political parties were going to have a harder time raising money.

Therefore, the Liberals brought in public financing so that, based on the support that political parties had, they could expect to have some money to fund their activities, so that parties would not be in a position where they were prostituting their ministers of the crown for money. When we create that kind of imperative to have politicians spending all of their time raising money, certain governments get into political hot water, because they start to use all the tools at their disposal to raise that money, whether it is right or wrong, and that is what we have been watching.

Business of Supply

I dare say that, if the Liberals put their focus on bringing back reasonable public support for political party financing, then they may not have to be in the embarrassing position of having to defend ministers who are doing cash for access fundraisers. As far as I am concerned, that is part of the debate and where it ought to go.

I think it is an embarrassment to Canadians that ministers are out parading around asking for money for attention. Frankly, I think that if they are not ashamed of it, it is an embarrassment to the Liberal Party. They should care more, frankly, for their own brand. It is an embarrassment to Canada. It is an embarrassment to the Liberals that they are out doing this. They could bring in a proper political financing regime in Canada like the one we had.

What we are hearing from Liberals when they attack the political financing model is that they think Stephen Harper and the reforms he brought to political financing in Canada were better than Jean Chrétien's. If that is what they think, let us have them get up and say it again, that they are on team Harper when it comes to electoral reform, that they are disowning the actions of previous Liberal governments, and that if they had to choose between Stephen Harper's electoral reforms or the Chrétien Liberal reforms, they would be voting for the Harper reforms. Is that how far we have come? Is that what the last election was about? I do not think so.

• (1715)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague. He lost me in the last minute, but that is okay. However, I absolutely agree with the majority of things he said.

We see investors going to speak with the finance minister for \$1,500. We see natural resource stakeholders going to speak to the natural resources minister. I just want to know. Am I dumb, or do members think they are speaking about gardening, about what book they are reading, or do we think they are actually talking about the topics that are dearest to their hearts?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, this harkens back to the defence of the justice minister, who was actually one of the first to engage in these unsavoury fundraisers. I am now using the language of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. The minister went to a fundraiser with a bunch of high-powered lawyers in Toronto and then, when questioned on it, said she was there as an MP from Vancouver and that was all, that the lawyers were really excited to meet an MP from Vancouver, so there was no problem.

The member is quite right. It is ridiculous to maintain that a bunch of high-priced Toronto lawyers wanted to meet the Minister of Justice in her capacity simply as an MP from Vancouver. I do not think they are in the practice of having MPs show up regularly at their firms and paying them lots of money just to chit-chat about how things are going in their ridings, what the weather is like, or whatever else. It is laughable. It is laughable but it has been going on for months now.

The member is absolutely right. It is just not credible to think that is what is going on. As I say, the idea that someone showing up in the back of a free town hall versus someone paying big money to go to a private dinner is somehow equal access to government is just as ridiculous.

• (1720)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, it was not that long ago that a New Democratic member of Parliament said she would mention people's names in the House of Commons for a \$50 donation. We have two political parties, the New Democrats and Conservatives, that have actually broken election laws. While I sat in opposition, they were breaking the election financing laws. No election laws have been broken here. There is no conflict of interest if no laws have been broken.

My question to the member is this. Does he not recognize that it is somewhat hypocritical for two political parties to be calling for something when they are the two parties that broke the law and have been ordered to return money by the courts and Elections Canada, whereas this government has not? If no election laws have been broken, there is no conflict.

Will the member at least apologize for his party's behaviour in breaking the election laws?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: For those keeping score at home, Mr. Speaker, that is another instance of the Duffy defence.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting to listen to comments from the Liberal side of the House today. It appears that, the closer we cut to the chase, the louder the wails and screams seem to be. I have noticed that quite often from the members opposite today.

They really have not come back with a good answer as to why they cannot go along with this motion. I would like to ask the member what this is about. Again, it is not about the laws; it is about the ethics and the appearance of conflict of interest. Could the member reinforce that to the members on the other side who have continuously distracted from what this motion is really about?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to reinforce that—at length, even. The member is quite right. An important point is that the standard of ethics and appearance of conflict of interest does not come from just this side of the House. It comes from the Prime Minister himself. It did not come in a footnote or scribbled on the back of a napkin; it came in a huge document that was released with great fanfare. It was repeated many times that this was part of the instructions to ministers.

All the motion today is really about is how the government is going to enforce those very same rules that the Prime Minister made such a big show of subjecting his ministers to. The fact of the matter is that, as these fundraisers continue, we see that there is no mechanism. Maybe there are other mechanisms, but the one suggested today is perfectly reasonable. We already have a Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner; we already have the rules laid out by the Prime Minister; so we should allow the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to enforce the rules, and it would solve the problem.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Business of Supply

Many students and young professionals voted for the first time in this last election. These are Canadians who chose not to vote in the previous election, but they voted this time because the Prime Minister promised them something. He promised them to function according to integrity, to be transparent, and to offer hope against the cynicism that they feel about politics and politicians. The greatest sin from my generation, because I fit within that, is hypocrisy. Since taking government, the Liberal Party is proving to be every single last thing that this rising generation stands against.

The Prime Minister made big promises to get elected, but once he gained power it was simply business as usual for the Liberal Party, which happens to be the most cynical appeal to the values of students and young professionals that we have ever seen in politics to date. The damage this will do is astronomical in terms of the trust Canadians should be able to place in government and the promises a government makes, particularly with regard to ethics.

The Liberals promised Canadians a “fair and open government”. Shortly after winning the election, the Prime Minister publicly released the standard that his cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries were supposed to hold to. Unfortunately, they have not done so. The “Open and Accountable Government” guideline states, “Public office holders have an obligation to perform their official duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny, an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.” The guideline goes on to say that ministers and parliamentary secretaries must “act with honesty and uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity...and impartiality of the government are conserved and enhanced”.

What is the test of whether or not public confidence is in fact met? The Prime Minister answers this for us. He goes on to state that this obligation to integrity and impartiality “is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law.” Therefore, even when acting within the law, one's actions can in fact be unethical and that is what we see from the present Liberal government.

This is why it was so concerning last week for us to have the finance minister busily telling reporters that he did nothing illegal and that he followed all of the rules, as he sold access to himself to rich business individuals on the eve of his fall fiscal update. This was not just a one-off. This follows on the heels of the justice, natural resources, and industry ministers attending similar high-profile, swanky \$1,500 events for access. It does not take an expert with a legal degree to see that the Liberals are not living up to the standard that they set at the beginning of their term.

For a government that came to power with the promise of greater transparency, the Liberals only seem to offer a chair for those who can afford to make the maximum donation to their party. This is unacceptable. This is baffling, seeing as how the “Open and Accountable Government” document explicitly states, “There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties.”

Why should a law firm specializing in mining and resource permits and regulations then be able to meet with the Minister of

Natural Resources? Why should the firm's representatives be able to meet with him in the home of a host who is in fact a registered lobbyist? The Prime Minister will meet with his youth council maybe twice per year, but if people have \$1,500 in their back pockets, they can have access to a minister far more often.

Are the voices of top Liberal donors more important than the voices of any one of my constituents in Lethbridge? Is this why those people who lost their jobs in the province of Alberta cannot seem to get the ear of the current government, while the millionaires running Bombardier are able to get \$1 billion in subsidization?

•(1725)

The Liberals are putting a price on policy, and they are allowing the highest bidder to influence its making. Cabinet ministers directly shape the policies of this nation, which will affect all Canadians from farmers in Alberta to moms in Nova Scotia to students in Ontario.

How can the Liberals truly grasp the gravity of the job loss and economic stress that is plaguing our country if they are only hearing the opinions from their friends on Bay Street? Canadians can clearly see the hypocrisy in only allowing those with cash to have access to top decision-makers. This is absolutely unacceptable, but not surprising.

This is the same Prime Minister who felt that it was all right to charge \$25,000 to charities for the privilege of hearing him speak. How cynical is it to promise Canadians accountability, transparency, and hope, and then so blatantly throw it back in their faces with these hypocritical moves, this cash for access? To make matters worse, Liberals put the responsibility for policing this guideline in the hands of the department that reports to the Prime Minister directly, instead of an independent and impartial Ethics Commissioner. We know why.

Under our previous Conservative government, we introduced the single biggest piece of accountability legislation in Canada's history, the Federal Accountability Act. We created the Commissioner of Lobbying, the registry of lobbyists, and expanded the powers of the Ethics Commissioner. The Commissioner of Lobbying and the Ethics Commissioner used these expanded powers to crack down on even perceived conflicts of interest by lobbyists and stakeholders.

These changes significantly limited the events and the gifts that lobbyists are allowed to use to entice policy-makers to change their policies. Ministers and staff were banned from attending industry rubber-chicken dinners, because that could create a perceived conflict of interest.

We know that there is absolutely no way that the Ethics Commissioner would approve of the cash for access events that the Liberals are pulling off right now, should she be given the opportunity to weigh in, which is exactly why the Liberals are opposed to the motion that we brought forward today.

It looks like we are back to the days of the 1990s. Those were dark days, when the elite old boys' club worked the backroom of Parliament, trading influence for cash, making backroom deals.

Private Members' Business

Today, I call upon the Liberal government to grant the Ethics Commissioner the authority to enforce the “Open and Accountable Government” policy. I believe that only an independent officer of Parliament, like the Ethics Commissioner, has the trust of the Canadian public to fairly and impartially apply the ethical standards that the Liberals say they will abide by. If the Liberal government is as transparent as its election promises and its guide to ministerial conduct, then it should in fact support the motion. Alas, it does not.

As someone who is part of this rising generation, I know what it is to distrust or question authority. This generation is often skeptical of words. It is actions that demonstrate the nature of an individual's character. The Prime Minister made big promises to this generation, promises to do politics differently, promises to be accountable, promises to be transparent, and promises to do things the right way.

However, he is failing to live up to those promises. The cynicism that this demonstrates is absolutely deplorable. Saying anything to get elected is exactly what he promised not to do. However, he is doing it very well. If the Prime Minister is incapable of living up to his own words, he needs to allow an independent, impartial officer of Parliament to do what he clearly lacks the integrity to do himself.

● (1730)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I disagreed with almost every word of my hon. colleague's speech.

Again, I would like to come back to the substance of the motion, and I would like to see this in a much more non-partisan way. The substance of the motion is asking for the Ethics Commissioner to rule on and to become a judge of something that is not a law of Parliament. Currently it is an act, adopted by Parliament, that she is in charge of having us work on and respect.

The same can be said if the Conservative Party passes a code of ethics for its own leadership candidates. Do you believe that the Ethics Commissioner should then be in charge of enforcing that, or that of the NDP? I understand that you are trying to say that this is a different issue, but reading the motion, the motion is calling on the Ethics Commissioner, so please explain—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure that the hon. member does not mean he wants to know what I mean. He is talking about the hon. member.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: You are absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker.

Does the hon. member believe that guidelines set out by each party should then be enforced by the Ethics Commissioner?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is about something entirely different. We are talking about a policy document that governs a party. In other words, it is fully partisan. As Conservatives, we do follow our policy document.

What we are talking about today is a party that has been given government. That party has been entrusted by the Canadian public to run our country, to make decisions on behalf of a country. It is exactly that. It is to make decisions on behalf of a country, not make decisions on behalf of 10 of its best friends from Bay Street. It is for this reason that the Liberal government needs to be held to account with regard to its unethical actions.

● (1735)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only did those events take place, but on top of that, the Liberals used public servants, employees paid by departments and therefore by the Government of Canada, to promote and organize these fundraising activities.

Could my colleague comment on that?

[English]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, it is true. Individuals within these departments are paid through tax dollars and these tax dollars come from the Canadian public. The Canadian public expects ministers and the staff within their offices and their departments to be working on behalf of the Canadian public, not on behalf of a privileged few.

In this case the Liberal government is taking money from taxpayers and using it to propagate their own events, which are limited to very few people. That is just absolutely deplorable. It is unacceptable.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 5:37 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 15, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

It being 5:37 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.) moved that Bill C-235, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fetal alcohol disorder), be read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

[English]

I am moved today to start the debate on my bill, Bill C-235, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (fetal alcohol disorder).

Private Members' Business

We have all seen television episodes of someone wrongly imprisoned and how that devastates their lives and how heart breaking it is. I am sure that has moved many members to tears. We have it in our power with Bill C-235 to end a number of cases of needless suffering of innocents. It is not one, not two, not three, but potentially over 2,000 cases a year. In fact, for people alive in Canada today, it could potentially affect 180,000 Canadians. This is an immense challenge and humanitarian opportunity.

First, I will explain the bill briefly. FASD, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, is permanent brain damage caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. In a vast majority of cases, unlike other ailments, it is an invisible affliction. Among the symptoms of the resulting defects in the central nervous system are impaired mental functioning, poor executive functioning, memory problems, impaired judgment, inability to control compulsive behaviour, and impaired ability to understand the consequences of one's actions. These distinct set of attributes are capably diagnosed by today's modern assessments. Through no fault of their own, those born with this have brains that do not have the ability to keep them from committing crimes or understanding the consequences. Therefore, normal sentencing, normal incarceration, normal release do not make any logical sense in their regard, and do not fulfill the purposes for which they were created.

The bill comprises four recommendations from the Canadian Bar Association, which represents the thousands of lawyers and judges who deal with this affliction every day. First, it would allow the court to order assessments of an offender to see if they have FASD. Second, if they have FASD, it would allow them to use that as a mitigating factor in sentencing. Third, when a person with FASD is in custody, the bill directs that they be treated specially for that. It would be added to a list of other conditions and groups of people treated specially in the correctional system. Fourth, when a person with FASD is released they would have an external support plan so they do not miss probation, for example, and end up, as judges say, through the revolving door and back in prison.

While *prima facie*, it is a simple bill, many bills can be improved in committee and I would welcome any logical amendments to it.

My goal is to reduce unnecessary, tragic human suffering, but some may want to know the financial savings. Assessments cost in the order of \$5,000. If Ontario were to keep one-half of the early potential 840 FASD offenders out of jail for just one year, at \$100,000 a year, it would provide the province with over \$40 million a year for more logical, just, humane, effective ways of dealing with these offenders and their afflictions.

It is important to note that in the last Parliament, similar bills to this were twice before the Parliament. One was Conservative and one was Liberal. However, there was not enough time for them to complete the legislative cycle. We will shortly hear some of the excerpts from that debate. Speakers from all parties supported and spoke in favour of that bill.

It is important to recognize that this bill is only a small piece of the much larger puzzle of steps needed to alleviate the suffering, and sometimes tortured existence, of people with FASD. Other steps that need to be taken include prevention. This is a totally preventable condition. They include steps to prevent contact with the justice

system in the first place, further research, special services, restorative justice, information sharing, targeted interventions, and supportive living arrangements.

These are important tasks for others, but this bill only deals with FASD sufferers who are involved with the justice system. That is about 60% of them. Yes, I said 60%.

• (1740)

As I outlined at the beginning, and as we can see, the need is staggering. It is estimated that one in 100 Canadians is afflicted with FASD and studies have indicated that, minimally, between 10% and 30% of inmates in today's prisons have FASD, costing us tens of millions of dollars.

This is perhaps why in its call to action No. 34, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on the governments of Canada, the provinces, and the territories "to undertake reforms to the criminal justice system to better address the needs of offenders with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)".

As I said, I am open to amendments, and I will just give members four questions that people might want to debate in committee.

First, should the judge have the power to make assessments mandatory?

There are mixed views on this. There are already precedents in the criminal justice system for ordering assessments, but if parliamentarians feel that these should not be mandatory, then it would be easy to amend the bill. We do have to protect the offender from self-incrimination during these assessments. If parliamentarians wanted, they could expand the assessment section to clarify Criminal Code assessment powers in general, and that would also include FASD assessments. To the credit of the territories and the provinces, assessments are much more widely available now than in the past.

Second, what about people with other afflictions who are not included in the bill?

Private Members' Business

First, they are not filling our jails in the thousands like the FASD offenders are; second, if there were a big need in other identified afflictions needing special conditions that could be prescribed, someone would have proposed legislative remedies for that situation; and third, most other conditions are visible and otherwise known to the judge, while FASD is known as the invisible affliction because, until diagnosed, many people, including judges, would not know the offender had FASD and impaired brain and central nervous functions. Indeed, some have high IQs but still have the interaction deficiencies that I outlined at the beginning of my speech. Fourth, if another condition and its deficiencies and special provisions were presented to the committee, these could easily be added to the bill now or to the Criminal Code at a later date. To date, no serious evidence has been presented to us of another condition with near the magnitude of a problem that FASD poses in our present day justice system, as identified by lawyers, judges, and FASD workers across Canada.

A third question that members might want to debate in committee is the following. What if, in the rare violent offender FASD cases, the assessment results in the offender being put in protective custody for a longer time than would have occurred without the assessment, for the safety of both himself and the public?

I say, so be it. As an evidence-based government, it is better to have more evidence to make a decision.

A fourth question is, should the external support plan be approved by the judge or the probation officer, and should it be voluntary, after the time of a normal sentence of a person who does not have FASD?

Those are four items we could discuss. As I said, I am open to amendments.

We can save thousands if we act now, from injustice and needless suffering. Perhaps, in the future, we could even add a few more if a condition and its legislative remedies are identified and documented. However, there is no reason to delay. If in fact someone launched and won a challenge and were added to the criminal justice system, then our pioneering efforts would have paved the way for that to happen, for that person or that group to have justice, too.

There is a huge desire on the part of MPs on all sides of the House to improve greatly our dealing with mental health issues in Canada. What a great humanitarian advance it would be if we could improve the lives of thousands with this mental deficiency. It goes without saying that in Canada, and in fact around the world, there is great support for legislative assistance for people afflicted with FASD who come into contact with the legal system. When a similar bill was before Parliament, the Conservative proponent said he had 1,500 stakeholders supporting his efforts. I have my own large network of support.

The Conservative member also said, on June 5, 2014, in *Hansard*:

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the legislators of the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories, both of which recently passed unanimous motions calling on the Government to support Bill C-583.

Some FASD workers in other countries applaud Canada for these pioneering efforts and want to use them as models in their own nations.

● (1745)

However, it is not only FASD experts in the field who are so passionate and excited about the bill. We must remember that the bill is different from a lot of normal private member's bills that may not have a legislative background. The bill is comprised of only the four recommendations from the Canadian Bar Association, and crafted by its president at the time Rod Snow, thousands of its member lawyers, legal experts, and judges who deal constantly in the courts and corrections system with offenders who suffer with FASD. Who better to craft the legislative improvement?

The purpose of sentencing is to protect the public by presenting a deterrent to offenders so that when they get out, which virtually all of them do, they do not reoffend. However, the damaged brain of FASD offenders often do not connect the crime with the punishment. Therefore, if they do not know why they are being punished, why would we continuously, cruelly, and senselessly incarcerate them, at the cost of tens of millions of dollars, instead of treating and supervising them appropriately on the basis of the reality of the sad truth of their physical brain deficiency?

I want to quote again from the Conservative speech from *Hansard*, when the bill was before Parliament on June 5, 2014. It is a quote about a young FASD woman speaking at a conference. It states:

She talked about going to work in the morning and forgetting her keys and then returning home to get her keys, but then forgetting why she had come home. Then, when she finally realized what she was looking for, her keys, she forgot what she needed her keys for. She had to slow down and calm herself and deal with that confusion and frustration of not being able to really grasp exactly what she needed to get done.

Imagine this young woman being tasked with making a number of probation or court appearances or appointments. What happens if she misses an appointment? She would go back to jail because of an administrative breach. These people have a damaged nervous system and little concept of timing, and we are irrationally and unjustly sentencing them to a painful and personal purgatory.

Our current federal justice minister said it as well as anyone I have heard, when she said this to the Canadian Bar Association last February:

The truth is that many offenders have some combination of mental illness and addiction....

Imagine if we could change the system to better align it with the needs of all Canadians. What if an offender's first interaction with the criminal justice system did not become the first in a series? What if it triggered mechanisms designed to address the factors that inspired the criminal behaviour in the first place?

Private Members' Business

It has been a long day. Let us imagine we are going home. However, what if after we have walked a couple of blocks from here, to our horror, we are picked up by the police and put in jail for a couple of years, far from our friends and family, and we did not know why? Then, when our time was up and we got out of this horrible situation, we were picked up by a police car again and told that we missed an appointment and we were thrown back in jail. We would wonder how people could be so cruel.

Colleagues, let us show what it means to be Canadian and end the suffering of thousands who, through no fault of their own, cannot help themselves.

● (1750)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know within my own riding of Elgin—Middlesex—London I deal with several cases of FASD. Therefore, I recognize it is in the member's community, but we also see it all throughout Canada.

I have some concerns, but perhaps you can help me with this. I have spoken to different people in the justice system to get some advice because I have worked with these clients and want to make sure that the best outcome is there for them. However, I have been assured that when they are in the court system this disorder is being looked at and it is being recognized that they have fetal alcohol syndrome at the time of sentencing, if it gets to that extent.

Am I absolutely wrong on that or have I received the wrong information? Maybe you can clarify that because I have been advised that during the sentencing process for FASD victims, and that is how I see them as it is not their fault, their condition has already been taken into consideration.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind the hon. members to speak through the Speaker as opposed to directly across.

The hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes and no. I think it depends on what part of Canada one comes from.

The member mentioned a very good point, which is that it is in certain parts of Canada. In certain areas like mine, where people are used to it, the judges and lawyers understand this and they make those special provisions. Sometimes the judges will go out on a limb without any legislative backdrop to do that and use it as a mitigating factor when maybe they should not.

However, there are parts of Canada where they do not understand this yet, even though people drink and have babies, so it is just as prevalent. They do not know it and do not realize this could be a factor. If they put it right in the system, it gives them the authority so that they are not stepping outside their bounds. Also, it educates those who do not understand that these people need to be treated in a different way.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is such a good idea that it is distressing it has not happened already. I was at a conference last week and spoke with women who suffered disabilities. They told me that 40% of women who were incarcerated had suffered a brain injury. Of course, they

would have volatile, unexplained behaviour that would get them in trouble and very much go down the path that the member described.

I am in full support of the bill. I hope the member can give us some indication of why we are so far behind on the science of understanding how injuries to the brain affect behaviour and then intersect with the criminal justice system.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I listed some of the concerns. There is excellent research now, so it is speeding up a lot more. Some of the reasons have been more political as opposed to research. I tried to address any legislative concerns people might have with the bill.

That is a good question and it gives me an opportunity to say something brand new. There is some very fascinating research going on now. By testing genes and chromosomes and their reaction to alcohol, there may soon be a way of doing biological testing, which there never was before. This would be a huge advance if that research, which is taking place somewhere the Prairies, is successful. It would be great for all of us.

● (1755)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute the hon. member for Yukon for this wonderful initiative.

I would also like to highlight that in the annual report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014-15, he indicates that between 10% and 23% of people incarcerated perhaps suffer from this disorder. He states that CSC does not have a reliable or validated system to screen, assess, or diagnose this spectrum disorder at intake and this lack of reliable prevalence data means offenders with undiagnosed FASD may not be benefiting from specialized interventions that take into account an offender's mental health needs, as per legal requirements.

It is something we need to look at and it is well-documented. This is important.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I, the correctional investigator and the member for Charlottetown all spoke at a conference on this. The investigator is quite supportive and understands the correctional system and those needs very well. It is good that the member mentioned it was reflected in his report. It is pretty obvious to the people who work in the jails that there are special needs.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill C-235, introduced by the hon. member for Yukon. I believe this is a very well-intentioned bill to deal with the incredibly complicated issues surrounding fetal alcohol spectrum disorder within the context of Canada's criminal justice system.

Private Members' Business

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD, is a non-clinical umbrella term to describe individuals who suffer permanent brain damage as a result of prenatal exposure to alcohol. FASD is not new, however. Over the last number of years there has been increased awareness about FASD and its effects.

There is no doubt that persons who suffer from FASD are more likely to be caught up in the criminal justice system. While it is unclear exactly what percentage of offenders within the criminal justice system has FASD, the fact is that because there is increased awareness about it, the issues of FASD are becoming relevant in more and more reported criminal cases throughout our courts.

Our criminal justice system is based upon a number of different assumptions. One of those assumptions is the presumption of voluntariness, that individuals act in an informed manner when they commit a crime. In that regard, it is only in very narrow circumstances that an individual may be exempt from the imposition of criminal liability in a mental health context.

Normally, in order for an individual to be exempt from criminal liability on the basis of mental health, the mental illness defence would need to be made out. In order for that defence to be made out, it would have to be established that the individuals suffered from a severe impairment that went to their ability to comprehend the wrongfulness of their actions or the harm that their actions brought about. It is again only in a very narrow set of circumstances, and indeed there are many instances involving FASD or other mental illnesses that would not meet the threshold for the mental illness defence to apply.

Given the increased prevalence of cases involving FASD, many of the assumptions that have long underlined the criminal law in Canada are being challenged every day, including principles of voluntariness and free will.

One of the most common areas in which the issue of FASD becomes an issue in criminal cases is at the sentencing stage. Bill C-235 seeks to amend the Criminal Code by establishing a presumption that FASD is a mitigating factor for the purpose of sentencing. The principles of sentencing are set out at sections 718-718.2 of the Criminal Code. The most important principle in sentencing is set out at subsection 718.1 of the Criminal Code, which provides that a just sentence is based on the degree of responsibility of the offender.

• (1800)

Whenever judges apply the principles of sentencing under the Criminal Code, including assessing the degree of responsibility of the offender, it is a very complicated task. It is one of the most complicated tasks, usually, in the course of a criminal trial. That task is made all the more complicated when dealing with offenders with FASD.

While Bill C-235 seeks to establish a presumption that FASD is a mitigating factor for sentencing, it should be noted that the courts have not responded in a uniform way on that particular issue. There are many reported cases in which the courts have taken into account the particular facts and circumstances of the case and the particular facts and circumstances surrounding the offender, and determined

that FASD should be a mitigating factor for the purpose of sentencing.

However, there are other cases in which the courts have held quite the opposite in finding that FASD should be an aggravating factor. One such case, for example, is the I.D.B. case in which a provincial court judge in Alberta found that it was an aggravating factor. The decision of the provincial court judge was upheld by the Alberta Court of Appeal.

The bottom line is that, any time we are dealing with a case involving FASD, every case is unique, no case is the same, and each case is incredibly complex. I certainly note that Bill C-235 seeks to amend the Criminal Code by creating this presumption. I do have some questions as to whether that presumption is appropriate, given that there is no one-size-fits-all case involving offenders with FASD, and yet to some degree part of Bill C-235 could create a one-size-fits-all approach in terms of sentencing, arguably, in terms of at least establishing this presumption of it being a mitigating factor. That being said, it would be only a presumption.

Second, I do have some concern with the fact that Bill C-235 deals exclusively with offenders with FASD, but it does not encompass offenders who have other illnesses, including the fact that it creates a specific presumption for persons with FASD but would not extend that presumption to persons who suffer from other mental illnesses. In that regard, I have some concern that the bill could perhaps create an inconsistency in the Criminal Code that could potentially be problematic.

In closing, I want to congratulate the member for Yukon for bringing forward the bill. It is an important issue, a complicated issue, and I look forward to the debate this evening on it.

• (1805)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support Bill C-235.

I have had the privilege over the past year since my election as the member for Saskatoon West to meet with a wide range of groups and individuals in my community. One meeting which stood out for me was the one with representatives from the FASD Network in Saskatoon.

The FASD Network of Saskatchewan is a provincial organization that works with families, children, and adults affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is a group of dedicated parents who came together in the early 1990s, seeking support and understanding. They have common concerns about the challenges related to parenting children affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

When the network began, very little was known about FASD. Families faced stigma, lack of services, and misunderstanding. Now, 20 years later, the network is a community-based, provincial organization with an office in my riding in Saskatoon. Over the years, the level of knowledge and understanding in Saskatchewan communities has grown along with the network. Today, the network offers support, training, and events across the province.

Before I speak to the bill itself, I would like to reiterate and emphasize some facts about FASD, some of which we have heard already.

Private Members' Business

FASD is the biggest single cause of mental disabilities in most industrialized countries. According to Health Canada, FASD affects nine in every 1,000 babies in Canada, or 3,000 births per year; 300,000 Canadians are currently living with FASD.

As we have heard, FASD is an umbrella term to describe a range of disabilities and diagnoses, the severity of which may be affected by how much alcohol was consumed by the mother and when.

The effects of FASD, such as difficulty reasoning, inability to remember things like appointments, trouble learning from past experiences and not repeating mistakes, can often contribute to other problems, including mental health issues, dropping out of school, trouble with the law, chronic unemployment, drug and alcohol addiction, and homelessness.

Amy Salmon, executive director of the Canada Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Research Network, CanFASD, has said:

We know that people with FASD are overrepresented—both as offenders, but also as victims—within the justice system. And we know that in many places around the country, people with FASD are also overrepresented among those who are incarcerated.

Living with FASD is about more than a diagnosis. It is also about living with strengths and struggles. It is about living with a disability. All across Canada, infants, children, youth, and adults live with FASD and experience a range of primary disabilities caused directly by prenatal alcohol exposure. No two individuals experience the primary cognitive, behavioural, physical, or sensory disabilities in the same way.

FASD affects not just the individual, but families and their communities as well. There are no confirmed statistics on the number of Canadians living with FASD, but the commonly stated rate is 1%. Using that rate, about 153 Saskatchewan babies were born with FASD in 2014.

It is a lifelong disability, but when we have the right attitudes and put the right supports in place around both the families that are going to be having children and the families that may be living with children who live with FASD, we can set people up for success.

Here are some sobering numbers. An estimated one out of 100 newborns are affected by FASD in Canada and, of that population, 60% of those individuals will have interaction with the justice system. In 2014-15, the cost of incarceration for individuals ranged from \$199 for provincial jails to over \$300 per day federally. FASD is an invisible disability, thus, opting for FASD testing and referrals to community services and support systems will decrease the fiscal impact of high cost incarceration, while ensuring continuous support from the community.

This combination of individual, professional, and systemic factors converge to result in a disproportionate number of youth with FASD being incarcerated. In fact, youth with FASD have been found to be 10 to 19 times more likely to be incarcerated than youth without FASD.

• (1810)

In another sample of 253 individuals with FASD, 60% reported a history of being charged, convicted, or in trouble with authorities, and 42% of adults had been incarcerated. Recent data from the

forensic outpatient clinic in Saskatchewan revealed that the rate of FASD diagnoses was 55% in its adult population. All of the available evidence to date indicates both the necessity and value of incorporating FASD screening and diagnosis into the justice system.

In the absence of a full diagnosis that requires a multidisciplinary team, several screening tools have been developed and validated, including the FASD checklist and the Youth Probation Officers' Guide to FASD Screening and Referral.

With improved understanding and recognition of FASD in the criminal justice system, appropriate and early interventions and management plans can be implemented. Whether encountering the justice system as a witness, victim, or offender, individuals with FASD have unique and often complex needs that are not supported in the current justice system model. With improved training of FASD for front-line workers, individuals with FASD will have access to equitable justice outcomes.

The framework for action on FASD, unveiled in 2003, recognized that:

The costs of FASD to society are high—without taking into account the lost potential and opportunity, direct costs associated with FASD over a lifetime have been estimated at about \$1.5 million per person with FASD.

I am in full agreement with FASD Saskatoon when it says it is imperative for Canada to recognize FASD as a cognitive disability that reduces moral culpability and thus should be a mitigating factor during sentencing. FASD is brain damage.

While Bill C-235 should not eliminate culpability, the courts need to question the ethics and fairness around proposing sentences without accounting for organic brain damage, which could result in charges that the person does not understand stem from his or her actions.

It is essential to have mandated training for front-line workers to increase awareness and understanding of the impact an FASD diagnosis has on individuals entering the justice system.

As is so often the case, when formal systems fail, the community steps in to address and support individuals who fall through the cracks. In my community, I am grateful for the work of the CUMFI Wellness Centre and the FASD support network, and now they need government to partner to ensure equity and fairness for individuals living with FASD.

With training, the legal system can adapt to these individuals with FASD and formulate manageable criteria for interaction.

Private Members' Business

Since the inception of Saskatoon's Mental Health Strategy court, the network staff in Saskatoon have connected with 29 individuals who live with FASD. Of those 29, 22 became part of the support program's case management and were supported through and after the court process. Of these 22 individuals, three are still going through and being supported through the court process. So far, of the 19 people who have been supported and sentenced through the mental health strategy Court, 17 have not re-offended.

The evidence is clear. People with FASD need support systems both within and without the court system.

Because this disability is often overlooked, those working in the justice system need to be trained to recognize it, and there must also be recognition that individuals and their unique circumstances matter in the pursuit of justice.

It is about making the sentence fit the crime and letting judges exercise discretion based on the facts of the case. In other words, it really is the antithesis of the prescriptive, costly, often ineffective, and frequently unconstitutional approach taken by previous governments, which really removed a lot of judicial discretion in favour of a one-size-fits-all minimum sentence.

We in the NDP support quick passage of this legislation, which has been introduced in past Parliaments and enjoyed support across parties. We look forward to studying the bill in committee.

• (1815)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today to Bill C-235, an act to amend the Criminal Code, regarding fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

I would like to begin by thanking the member for the Yukon for his long-standing advocacy on this important issue. By introducing this private member's bill, he has focused the attention of Parliament on a disorder that goes too often unnoticed in society. For this he is to be commended. He is clearly motivated by a desire to help society's marginalized and in the process create a safer and more just society. This private member's bill proposes to make changes to both the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to address the pressing challenge of persons with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in the criminal justice system.

The issue of FASD was discussed by federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for justice and public safety at their recent meeting this past October. At that meeting, the ministers approved a report from a steering committee of officials who were tasked with examining the issue. The report, which is now publicly available, sets out several comprehensive recommendations for addressing FASD in the criminal justice system. I will return to that report in more detail in a few minutes because it raises some key points.

First, though, I would like to say a few things about FASD itself.

As we have heard, FASD is a diagnostic term used to describe brain damage caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. When a woman consumes alcohol while she is pregnant, the alcohol can impact the developing fetus and alter both the physical structure of the brain and the brain's capacity to function. This brain damage is

permanent and has lifelong and far-reaching impacts on the individuals it affects and on society as a whole. FASD poses challenges for the criminal justice system, because without appropriate supports, individuals with FASD can be impulsive, unable to regulate their behaviour, and may be unable to learn from their mistakes. In fact, one study has estimated that 60% of individuals with FASD end up in trouble with the law.

This concern is compounded when combined with the limited available data about the number of individuals with FASD who are incarcerated in Canadian prisons. The most recent data on FASD in corrections comes from the Yukon. In that jurisdiction, the prevalence of FASD among convicted offenders is at least 17%. This number could in fact be as high as 34%, but given the challenges in confirming maternal alcohol consumption, the diagnosis cannot be conclusively made for these other individuals.

When faced with an overwhelming challenge to the criminal justice system such as FASD, often the first instinct is to look for a legislative solution. Amending the Criminal Code to specifically address FASD seems like an obvious place to start. However, as with many complex social issues, the most effective solution is often just as complex and may not be found in legislation. I would encourage all of us to think about the most effective way to truly have a positive impact on the lives of people with FASD.

It is worth noting that the report approved by federal, provincial, and territorial ministers in October, which I mentioned earlier, was the product of several years of study by the Steering Committee on FASD and Access to Justice comprised of officials from across the country. Their report did not recommend specifically naming FASD in the Criminal Code because that would single out one disorder to the exclusion of all others. Rather, it recommended further study of whether a more general assessment power for all mental disorders, including but not limited to FASD, would be a useful reform to assist courts in sentencing persons who are living with these conditions. Such a recommendation, especially from this source, merits consideration.

I would like to spend my remaining time discussing some of the specific proposals of Bill C-235 that raise some thought-provoking issues.

Bill C-235 proposes a legal definition of the term "fetal alcohol disorder" for the purposes of the criminal law. I note that this is slightly different from the medical term that is used to describe the condition, which is "fetal alcohol spectrum disorder".

• (1820)

As part of the legal definition, the bill also lists some common symptoms of FASD, including impaired mental functioning, memory problems, and the inability to control impulse behaviour. I would note that this element of the bill would be a significant change in the Criminal Code, which currently does not single out specific disorders for differential treatment. The current approach is to use the general definition of mental disorder in section 2 of the code, which, according to the Supreme Court of Canada, can include an "illness, disorder, or abnormal condition which impairs the human mind and its functioning".

Private Members' Business

I am given to understand that FASD is already considered a mental disorder for the purpose of criminal law, so it is entirely fair to ask whether it is necessary to create a separate definition specifically for FASD. Should we be concerned that this may result in pressure to single out other disorders in the Criminal Code?

The bill also proposes to permit the courts to order FASD-specific assessments for the purpose of bail and sentencing. It would require a sentencing court to adjust the sentence of the offenders if it was shown that they had FASD and that the FASD contributed to the commission of the offence.

These elements of the bill appear to be aimed at ensuring that the court has the necessary information to make appropriate decisions about a particular individual at the bail stage and to be sure that any sentence imposed is proportionate to the degree of responsibility of the offender. These are commendable objectives and ones that I know are shared by all those who advocate for a fair and effective criminal justice system.

The proposal for an assessment at the bail stage raises questions about the potential impact on the presumption of innocence and the liberty interests of accused persons who are suspected of having FASD. In particular, the bill would permit an accused to be held in custody for up to 60 days in certain circumstances while the assessment was undertaken. Given that this would occur before any trial on the merits of the charge, or potentially even before the bail hearing itself, it is possible that an assessment could in fact work to the detriment of the accused in some cases.

At the sentencing stage, it is fair to question whether the objective of imposing a proper sentence should only apply to individuals with FASD or whether there may also be a pressing need to consider the relevance of mental disorders or disabilities more generally, as the report from the federal-provincial-territorial steering committee recommended.

Finally, the bill proposes amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which would further require the Correctional Service of Canada to provide FASD-specific programming for individuals with FASD who are serving a federal sentence.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the member for Yukon for providing us with an opportunity to debate this important issue facing the criminal justice system. As he indicated, this is an issue that was presented in the form of two private member's bills in the last Parliament. They never did make it to the stage of having gone through committee, in part because of the call of the election and also in part because of some determination by the former member for Yukon to withdraw the bills to have them converted into a study.

It is a timely debate. It is one that needs to be had. The member for Yukon is doing the right thing by bringing it forward, and I look forward to hearing from other members of the House on this important issue.

• (1825)

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to contribute to this important debate on Bill C-235, which aims to assist those with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

The proposal before us today is to require that the courts take into account that fetal alcohol spectrum disorder may be a mitigating factor in the Criminal Code infraction and should be taken into account during sentencing. It also proposes to address the fact that those with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD, would require additional support to reintegrate into society following the serving of any sentence. There are a number of other proposed changes, but the principal focus are those I have just outlined.

My perspective on this subject is somewhat different than many. In the past, I served on the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission for a certain number of years before I began my political career. Through direct interactions with people with FASD, with those working with them, and with those affected by their actions, I got to know the issue quite well. However, just when we think we have seen and heard it all, something happens to remind us that this subject is so broad and complex that a lifetime is not enough to become an expert in this field.

FASD cannot be cured. It affects about 1% of the Canadian population. Of course, we know that the rate of incidence is much higher among certain populations and in certain areas of our country. These communities are looking to us for help, understanding, compassion, and strength. As I mentioned before, I served on AADAC, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, and this work took me to many communities around Alberta, communities impacted by FASD. Sadly, this is a common issue in first nations communities, often in remote locations, which makes education and treatment work much more difficult.

Having also served as Alberta's aboriginal relations minister for a number of years, I also saw first hand the devastating outcome of Alberta's aboriginal communities from this increasingly common condition of FASD.

One of the challenges is identifying this disorder early in order to deal with it appropriately. The average assessment alone costs around \$4,000 to \$5,000. Then, there is the never-ending stigma attached to this mental illness. Families often do not even seek help for their children because of this alone.

Sadly, we know that those born with FASD are already facing an uphill battle in life. Many are born into poverty and often into a world of substance abuse, neglect, and endless other challenges. We know these conditions are the base conditions for problems later on.

FASD victims, and I call them victims as they suffer due to the negligent actions of others, specifically their biological mothers, are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system and experience health and learning challenges.

Private Members' Business

Before I go any further, this bill will not improve or change the situation for people affected by FASD. We know judges already, in every court case, are required to exercise their judgment and discretion when sentencing. I do not think the bill will change that.

As with many mental health issues, talking publicly about it goes a long way to helping everyone understand and cope. The justice system is becoming much more aware everyday of this mental illness. I am concerned that we are singling out FASD for special consideration from other mental health conditions. We need to understand that the situations faced by one's mental illness often and significantly overlap with those faced by another. Why only help those suffering from one mental condition?

As a nation, we are quickly opening up the conversation on mental health issues, and this is a good thing. It was inevitable that we would end up discussing mental health in terms of the Criminal Code. We know that those with mental health issues are at a much higher risk of having a relationship with our criminal justice system.

• (1830)

Our justice system holds Canadians to a certain standard of conduct and a certain standard of compliance. It presumes rational thinking and it presumes certain sensibilities.

We know that mental illness makes these societal expectations go beyond the reach of those suffering from a mental health condition. The challenge is balance. How do we balance the expectations of large portions of a population that expects people to follow all the rules with another portion of the population that is not fully capable of doing so? If something goes wrong, who is the real victim? I say they both are.

We need to be compassionate and understanding to realize that both are victims, one long ago and one more recently. This is the challenge that we face as a society, as 90% of those with FASD have behavioural issues and more than 40% have mental disabilities and intellectual impairment. More than 40% have issues with depression. Often these issues overlap and make treatment even more difficult to tailor to that particular individual.

The statistics are really shocking. According to research by University of Alberta Professor Jacqueline Pei, 95% of people who suffer from FASD have been diagnosed with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. This makes daily functioning in our society an extreme challenge and explains their high interaction rate with the criminal justice system.

The executive director of the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon explained it before a parliamentary committee quite succinctly. Wenda Bradley said that FASD sufferers can often speak at a normal adult level, but end up understanding at a grade four level. Imagine how this causes issues on the streets in their interactions with the police or when they seek medical care.

As the May 2015 parliamentary report by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights noted, it is estimated that each individual with FASD creates roughly \$1.5 million to \$2 million in direct costs to the federal, provincial, and territorial governments over their lifetime. Each individual is cause for \$2 million in costs.

Many witnesses reported that people who care for a child with FASD also bear a heavy burden psychologically, socially, and financially, as well as in their professional and marital lives.

A great deal of work was done on this issue in the last Parliament and the conclusions were clear. We need better, more rapid diagnosis, and we need timely and appropriate interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of this disorder.

The bill, while well-intentioned, fails to capture the fact that this FASD involves a variety of mental illnesses and disorders that result in criminal justice issues.

I urge my colleagues to do what they can to assist FASD affected people. My experience has shown that they often cannot speak for themselves. They know what they need, but they often cannot articulate their needs.

They often live beyond the reach of urban support programs. They often lack any family support for treatment. They often suffer alone. I believe that we can do a better job of helping them before they become part of our criminal justice system.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue has three minutes remaining, which she can use when debate resumes.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today.

We need to be aware of the damage done by FASD, which is often under-diagnosed. It would be nice if women were as honest as possible with their doctors, but it can be uncomfortable for them, especially if they are grown 20-, 25-, or 35-year-old women, to admit that they cannot help getting drunk every night even knowing it can harm their baby.

That is why the disorder is often under-diagnosed, and that can have significant repercussions. It often becomes clear later on, but many people have grown up being told they were unruly when really they were not properly diagnosed.

This addition to the Criminal Code is about recognizing that FASD can cause defects such as impaired judgment that make it hard for people to tell right from wrong. This will help make better treatment available for people convicted of a crime, ensure they receive appropriate behavioural therapy, and make sentencing commensurate with their intentions.

It is good to have this bill back in the House. I had an opportunity to speak to the subject when a similar bill was introduced by Ryan Leef, a member for Yukon who was not re-elected. I sincerely hope that we will be able to adapt our justice system to this important reality.

Adjournment Proceedings

●(1835)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement told us last month at committee that the backlog of 82,000 government employees affected by the Phoenix payroll fiasco would be cleared by October 31.

In fact, we were told this was a real deadline. This was confirmed by the deputy minister in her department at the same committee when responding to a question posed by my colleague, the member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Yesterday, the minister's department told us they missed the deadline by over a whopping 20% and refused to provide a new one. In fact, when asked if they would have the backlog cleared by March 31, 2017, the end of the fiscal year, the minister's department would not confirm.

The Liberals have not been forthcoming with Canadians or Parliament. Public servants who have been waiting for months to receive proper paycheques expect the minister to put an end to their financial hardship. Canadians deserve to know the full truth, the full figures, and deserve a minister they can trust.

Yesterday's technical briefing from the Department of Public Services and Procurement offered no details, no plan, and no new deadline. We are not looking for a political answer here. For months, we have been questioning this minister and her department, and the information keeps changing.

First, they told us the backlog would be solved by October 31. Then we learned that the information they were providing us did not include the new pay system cases that came in after July of this year. Now we are being told that the cases they have been referring to are only those being processed in Miramichi, and not the other pay centres.

This is becoming an issue of trust. Canadians want to know, what is the Liberal plan to fix the Phoenix pay fiasco?

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the interest of the member opposite in this issue, and we agree that the ongoing public service pay problems are completely unacceptable. That is why I can assure the member that our team at PSPC is working tirelessly to ensure that all employees receive the pay they have earned.

Many employees across the public service are facing financial hardship because of the current pay issues, and I recognize how frustrating this situation is. Resolving these cases is our priority.

We are committed to openness and transparency throughout this process. We have held bi-weekly technical briefings, nine in total, and spoken in depth with the media. Our minister has already appeared twice at parliamentary committees, and she has met with union representatives. The deputy minister, at our request, meets on a regular basis with the joint union-management committee.

Over the summer we took a number of steps to address the issues associated with Phoenix. Temporary satellite pay offices were set up and additional staff were hired over the summer. Enhancements have been made and continue to be made to Phoenix, and employees across the government who use the system are becoming more adept with it as a result of training and experience. Compensation advisers are working day and night, seven days a week, with one priority in mind: to clear the backlog and ensure that each and every Government of Canada employee is paid accurately.

While I acknowledge the efforts of the men and women of our department, I am disappointed that we did not hit the October 31 deadline. I recognize how frustrating the situation is. Close to 75% of the backlog has now been dealt with, and there are cases remaining for approximately 22,000 employees. We continue to work tirelessly to close the remaining cases as quickly as we can.

These cases are more complex and require time-consuming manual calculations. In fact 82%, or four out of every five, of those cases predate the implementation of Phoenix, and some date back several years.

●(1840)

[*Translation*]

As I have said before, there is no justification for not paying public servants. Employees can request emergency pay advances through their department. These advances can be paid within 24 to 48 hours of the request. Anyone having difficulty obtaining an emergency pay advance should ask for help by filling out the Phoenix feedback form online.

As far as employees who have been overpaid are concerned, these sums will be recovered over several pay periods in order to reduce any related financial burden. A process was set up to reimburse employees for the out-of-pocket expenses they have incurred as a result of missing pay. This could include insufficient fund charges or penalties for late payments.

We will continue to keep public servants and the public informed of our progress.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, numerous reports were provided to the Department of Public Works on the risks of going live with Phoenix. They were told exactly what is now happening to public servants.

They were wrong on the readiness of Phoenix, wrong on the extent of the issue, wrong on the cost to clean it up, and now wrong on the resolution deadline.

Adjournment Proceedings

The minister can sit there and announce her disapproval all she wants, but that does not fix the issue. Public servants are suffering. It is bad enough that they are being forced to pay new tax after new tax by this government, but now they are not being paid at all.

When are the Liberals going to start taking this situation seriously and actually help the tens of thousands of public service employees affected by this boondoggle?

[Translation]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, no public servant should have to go without the pay to which they are entitled. This is a difficult situation, but I can assure the members of the House that our officials are doing everything they can to resolve the pay problems of their colleagues.

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to revisit a question I originally asked back in June. I want to go back to the whole conversation that was taking place at that time about our CF-18s, the imaginary capability gap the minister was talking about at the time, the life-extension project our previous government initiated, with \$400 million to make sure that our CF-18 Hornets could continue to serve the security needs of Canada, and ultimately, the replacement of our Hornets and the interim stopgap measure the government is considering with the sole-source purchase of the F/A-18 Super Hornet from Boeing.

There is no question that the comments made by the minister do not reflect the reality coming from the Royal Canadian Air Force. When we had General Hood at committee speaking about the capability gap, he actually stressed that there was no capability gap. He said that the CF-18s we have can meet all operational requirements well up to 2025.

Since that point, the minister has initiated an entire review, which is a duplication of the process undertaken by the previous government to ensure that all aircraft manufacturers' capabilities were put on the table so that we could look at all the different options available to the Royal Canadian Air Force.

It is important to note that when we talk to a number of specialists and experts in this field, they have grave concerns about the direction the government is taking. Retired General Paul Manson, who was the former chief of the defence staff back in 1977 to 1980, led the new fighter aircraft program that led to the selection of our current fleet of CF-18s. He said that purchasing the Super Hornet is a solution that, however attractive politically, would have serious consequences for the air force and Canada's future security posture.

One of the retired senior air force officers said that purchasing the F/A-18 "gives Canada the wrong aircraft forever, or certainly for the next generation. The fact is that there is no urgent need to bolster the fighter force now". That was in the press.

We had Elinor Sloan at committee. She said:

Canada needs a next generation fighter to defend the country and fulfill our NORAD and NATO obligations. The answer is not an unnecessary stopgap measure but to expeditiously proceed with the open and transparent competition the government signed on to.

It is important that we get to an open, fair, and transparent competition to find the correct jet to meet our NORAD and NATO obligations, one that is interoperable with our allies.

I wonder where the government is at. It has gone dark on this particular issue. We have not heard anything. Maybe it has to do with gag orders that have been issued throughout national headquarters at National Defence. However, we do want to know where we are at in finding a replacement for the CF-18s and whether the \$400 million has been invested to extend the life of our current fleet of CF-18s.

• (1845)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a certain resplendent irony debating a Conservative member about the replacement jet that Canada so desperately needs. After all, for the past 10 years, it was their opportunity to replace the CF-18, which everyone agrees needs to be replaced. By the end of its current life extension in 2025, it will be a 40-year-old jet. There are currently 77 jets available to the Royal Canadian Air Force, down from something in the order of 120 jets. There has been an erosion in the number and the availability of the jets for the Royal Canadian Air Force to do the job they need to do.

Again, it is a resplendent irony to be debating a Conservative member whose government created this difficulty in the first place. The only thing that it did achieve were some glorious photo ops for various previous ministers.

For the life extension of the CF-18s, \$2.6 billion has already been spent, and in October a further \$379 million has been committed.

The member rightly identifies that the minister has talked about a capability gap. As the numbers I just recited indicate, we can readily see that going from 120 planes to 77 planes on a platform that is getting upwards of 30 years of age is not a recipe for meeting all of the needs of the RCAF.

I think there is an irony within an irony when the hon. member was quoted in September in a Metroland Media newspaper as saying:

It's about making a decision to replace the plane. A decision, in my personal opinion, that should have been made before this. We have to make that decision within 12 months because time is running out on the CF-18s.

We can actually agree with that. Time is running out. We are developing a capability gap. The hon. member is correct to say that this decision does need to be done sooner rather than later.

As members know, we inherited a bit of a procurement mess from the previous government. There were no appropriate guidelines for the replacement of the jets, so cabinet met and made a decision in the early spring as to the requirements that would meet Canada's needs. In the first part of July, notices were sent to all of the relevant manufacturers, all five of them, in an open and transparent way, for them to update all of their information so that we would have a complete picture. That information has been received and is being collated at this point, so the next stage of the process can be entered into and we can get done what the previous government did not get done in the previous 10 years.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1850)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, it interesting listening to the parliamentary secretary reference a breach of privilege that he had at committee, in releasing information from a draft report that he should never have had been in possession of in the first place, which we had dealt with at committee. Unfortunately, the committee did not proceed to deal with that as a prima facie case of privilege to report back to the House.

Regardless, the fact remains that the government is interested in a sole source, which is the worst possible option to move forward, both from the standpoint of putting the right fighter jet into the operations of the Royal Canadian Air Force and for our aerospace industry.

The second part of this is as Elinor Sloan said, in that we need to move expeditiously on an open and fair competition. We are not hearing from the government in one way, shape, or form. So it is important that the government actually starts acting in a transparent manner to provide a competition to get the right equipment for our Royal Canadian Air Force so that we can have interoperability with our allies in NORAD and NATO.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I take note that the hon. member talks about a breach of privilege. It is a little like trying to get one's conviction ahead of one's facts. The hon. member needs to be somewhat careful as to accusing anyone of a breach of a privilege.

I speak directly to the hon. member that the situation that this government found itself in was a procurement process that defied logic. The basic information that we needed to be able to encourage interested potential suppliers to submit their information had to be put in place. That was sent out and meetings have been held. There have been questionnaires and site visits. Submissions have been received from Boeing, Dassault, Eurofighter, Lockheed Martin, and the Saab Group.

This is progress. It is a pity the progress did not occur 10 years ago.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 23, I rose in this place to ask the Minister of Natural Resources a question regarding the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, concerns raised by whistleblowers in the agency, and the response to them by CNSC president Michael Binder. These whistleblowers made very serious allegations about the lack of due diligence and the work of the CNSC, which in turn raised very serious questions about the CNSC's impartiality and its concern for safety.

In response, at a meeting on August 17, the CNSC president actually questioned whether the whistleblower letter was in fact genuine. A report by Mike De Souza of the *National Observer*, quoted Mr. Binder in that meeting as saying:

So I'm listening to all of you and then the question is was this letter written by our staff?...Because the conclusion...is completely diametrically opposed to anything in this particular letter.

This apparently prompted laughter from some of the staff. When another staff member questioned the expertise of whoever wrote the

letter, Binder decided to make a joke of it, "So if you're correct, we're into a conspiracy theory," Binder said, drawing more laughter."

The president of our nuclear safety regulatory agency, when faced with serious questions about his department, decided to make jokes about it. That was simply inappropriate on his part, and I have yet to hear the minister say as much anywhere on the public record.

Further to this, the environment commissioner's most recent report also raised many concerns about the CNSC, validating many of the concerns raised by these whistleblowers. The commissioner pointed out that three-quarters of site safety inspections were carried out without an approved guide. She compared that to a pilot taking off on a flight without going through a safety checklist.

As the commissioner said on the day of the release of her report:

This kind of lack of precision in a precision industry I think is really not acceptable...These mistakes should not happen when we're dealing with nuclear power plants.

With all of these issues that have come forward in the past months, I believe a change in the culture at CNSC is warranted. Right now the government has a chance to start that change by starting at the top with the appointment of new commissioners.

Two commissioners saw their terms end on October 20, and another will see hers expire on December 15. This is a golden opportunity to help this agency turn over a new leaf.

The minister's mandate letter states:

You are expected to do your part to fulfill our government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, to help ensure gender parity and that Indigenous Canadians and minority groups are better reflected in positions of leadership.

On September 9, I sent a letter to the Minister of Natural Resources regarding these appointments and the Prime Minister's commitment to make changes to the appointment process. I am still awaiting a reply from the minister to that letter.

Therefore, I will take this chance to ask this again tonight. What changes are the government making to the appointment process to ensure it meets the standard the Prime Minister laid out in the minister's mandate letter, when will these changes take effect, and when can we expect new commissioners to be appointed to the CNSC?

This is a golden opportunity for the government to follow through on its commitment for real change. I hope to hear tonight that the minister will seize the opportunity.

•(1855)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay, for his work and contribution on the natural resources committee.

Adjournment Proceedings

Canadians rightly expect that our government place the highest priority on health, safety, and security as they relate to the nuclear industry in Canada. I am proud to say that we do. We expect the work of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to be safety focused, and we expect the commission to operate in a way that is transparent and open to hearing the concerns of others. We are committed to ensuring that Canada's nuclear sector remains a dynamic industry committed to the highest standards of safe, secure, and reliable operations because nothing else will do.

Canada's nuclear regulator plays a central role in all of this. The CNSC regularly undergoes external peer reviews by international nuclear experts, including those from the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency to allow for the sharing of best practices and to verify the high standards of its operations.

In order to ensure that the CNSC has the technical capacity to regulate the nuclear industry, more than 80% of employees in mid- and senior-level positions have degrees in nuclear engineering, chemistry, physics, and environmental and radiation science fields. Canada has established one of the most stringent nuclear regulatory regimes in the world, and it is the responsibility of the commission to oversee its implementation and to ensure that Canada's nuclear industry meets the highest standards of safety and security.

That being said, the anonymous letter received by the CNSC raised important issues that would concern any Canadian. That is why the CNSC took immediate action to review those claims. The resulting report, presented at the commission's public meeting in August, was reviewed by the commissioners, who had a chance to ask questions of nuclear safety experts regarding the content of the letter.

Other issues raised, such as a way for employees to voice technical and scientific disagreements are also taken seriously by the CNSC. As a science-based organization whose success depends on hiring and retaining technical experts, the organization encourages its staff to provide their best professional judgments in the review of nuclear licences and other related activities. On occasion, this can result in differences of professional opinion, which is why the CNSC has mechanisms for staff to discuss those disagreements. Resolving scientific differences of opinion in a productive way is crucial to the CNSC being able to carry out its mandate. CNSC has those mechanisms in place to address such disagreements.

It is my expectation and that of the minister that the CNSC and its staff keep the health and safety of Canadians as their highest priority and that they operate in an open and transparent manner to ensure Canadians can have full confidence in our nuclear industry.

● (1900)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, I am still waiting to hear about the naming of new commissioners and this opportunity we have to get a new culture in CNSC.

I am glad to hear that the employees of CNSC are highly qualified. It is important in any organization that there are employees with the highest qualifications, but certainly in a nuclear power plant that is even more important.

However, what is as important or more so is the culture of the workplace in these organizations. This is what we really need to see change at the top in CNSC and to get a sense from the new commissioners that we need a new culture. Canadians expect safety in any workplace, but these are nuclear power plants. We really expect the very best.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member opposite expects that the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission operate in the best interests of Canadians. I want to repeat and reassure all Canadians that our government believes the health and safety of Canadians is the single most important consideration related to activities of the nuclear industry in Canada.

I also want to respond to the member's concern around appointments, and let him know that appointments will be made in the new, transparent way. There have been a number of announcements in the House about appointments. As the member rightly notes, there are vacancies and another one coming up. Those appointments will reflect the gender, ethnic, and regional diversity of our country.

I thank the member for his comments and his concerns, and I look forward to working with him on this very important file.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:03 p.m.)

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