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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 19, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

PETITIONS

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

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

The first petition is from residents throughout my community of Saanich—Gulf Islands, and it is one that is shared widely across Canada. The petitioners urge the government to restore the funding and to create predictable, long-term, stable funding for the nation's public broadcaster, the CBC and Radio-Canada. I note that progress was made in this direction in the last budget.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is also from residents of my community, as well as from a number of petitioners from Calgary.

The petitioners call upon the government to recognize animals as beings that can feel pain. They urge the government to move animal cruelty crimes from the property section of the Criminal Code and strengthen language in federal legislation. A private member's bill currently before the House would help in this direction.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE MEDAL

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by constituents in my riding of Guelph regarding the creation of a Canadian military volunteer service medal.

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to present two petitions from my constituents.

The first petition calls upon Parliament to establish a department of peace that would reinvigorate Canada's role as a global peace

builder and that would have the abolition of nuclear weapons as a top priority.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is with regard to physician-assisted suicide.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to allow sufficient time for broad and timely consultations on this issue and that any legislation passed be stringent and serve to minimize the occurrence of physician-assisted dying. They also call for the legislation to accommodate medical professionals who choose to refuse to participate in this program.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—POLITICAL FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC) moved:

That the House urge the Minister of Justice to:

(a) follow her government's own guidelines for Ministers and Ministers of State as described in Annex B of Open and Accountable Government 2015, that "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"; 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 and political parties"; and that "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";

Business of Supply

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with disappointment that I rise today to speak to this matter. It is never a good day when a minister of the crown breaches ethical standards which the minister is bound by. It is particularly disappointing when that minister of the crown is the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, someone who is bound by the highest ethical standards.

As Minister of Justice and Attorney General, the minister must not only at all times act with the highest degree of integrity, the Minister of Justice must also be seen to at all times act with the highest degree of integrity.

Mr. Speaker, the role of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is an important role. It is a unique role, and in that role a special trust is placed in the minister. We are here today to debate this matter because the Minister of Justice and Attorney General has broken that trust.

It was not long ago, in fact it was indeed only in November of 2015, that the Prime Minister, with great fanfare, unveiled “Open and Accountable Government”, the ethical guidelines for which ministers and parliamentary secretaries in the government are bound.

The Prime Minister, in his opening letter contained in “Open and Accountable Government”, said it is not just a matter of adopting the right rules and seeing that those rules are complied with on a technical basis. Rather, he said that ministers in his government would be held to a higher standard; indeed they would be held to the highest standard of honesty, integrity, openness, and accountability. Today we will learn whether the Prime Minister meant what he said and said what he meant, or whether those words, like so many words of the Prime Minister, are merely hollow words with no meaning at all.

The Prime Minister's ethics code states that ministers shall ensure that political and fundraising advertising clearly separates fundraising from department responsibilities. Consistent with that, the Prime Minister's ethics code provides that ministers shall not engage and converse on matters related to their ministerial responsibilities at fundraisers. Despite those rules, this particular fundraiser was billed as a fundraiser with the Minister of Justice; it was not the hon. member for Vancouver Granville, despite the very clear guidelines from the Prime Minister that provide that ministers must separate their ministerial duties from fundraising.

Admittedly, if that was all it was, a situation where the event had been advertised as a fundraiser with the Minister of Justice as opposed to the hon. member for Vancouver Granville, it would be fair to say that it was a breach of the Prime Minister's ethics code, but a minor breach, a technical breach, something that might be attributable to sloppiness, that certainly should not be repeated in the future, but something that would not require any further action.

●(1010)

However, that is not what happened. What happened was far more serious. It was not only advertised as a fundraiser with the Minister of Justice, but as an opportunity for those who paid \$500 to engage the minister on matters pertaining specifically to her responsibilities as the minister. If people wanted to talk about medical marijuana, physician-assisted dying legislation, or missing and murdered indigenous women, they could pay \$500 for that opportunity. There

is only one way to characterize this type of fundraising. It is called “pay-to-play” fundraising. What the minister did was attend and participate in a pay-to-play fundraiser.

It gets worse. It was not only a pay-to-play fundraiser that anyone could attend. Rather, it was targeted to a select group of elite Bay Street lawyers to pay in return for access to the Minister of Justice to talk about issues that pertain specifically to her responsibilities.

Then there was the location of the fundraiser, which was Torys LLP, a law firm which has extensive legal dealings with the federal government. Not only does it deal extensively with the federal government, lobbying of the federal government is one of the core services that Torys LLP provides to its clients. Also, amongst its most senior partners and senior lobbyists, happened to be an individual who was registered to lobby the Minister of Justice up until the eve of the fundraiser.

So much for the Prime Minister's ethics code, which states that ministers shall not raise funds from department stakeholders and lobbyists. Certainly, the Minister of Justice disregarded that part of the Prime Minister's ethics code.

Let us take a step back and look at what we are dealing with. We have a Minister of Justice, who has broad authority and power over legal matters concerning the federal government, attending a fundraiser at which attendees were invited to pay in return for the opportunity to engage the minister on matters that pertain directly to the minister's responsibilities. It was targeted to a select group of Bay Street lawyers, hosted at a law firm with extensive legal dealings with the federal government, including the minister's own department, and which counted as one of its most senior lobbyists someone who up until the eve of the fundraiser was registered to lobby the minister herself. That is what we are dealing with. It stinks. That is what it does.

●(1015)

What is very clear is that the minister broke the Prime Minister's ethics code by failing to ensure that fundraising advertising did not mix fundraising with her responsibilities as minister. The minister broke the Prime Minister's ethics code by raising funds from department stakeholders. The Minister of Justice broke the ethics code by failing to sufficiently separate her duties as Minister of Justice with Liberal Party fundraising activities; and the Minister of Justice broke the Prime Minister's ethics code by giving at least the appearance of preferential access to government.

These are not technical breaches of the Prime Minister's ethics code; these are substantial breaches of the Prime Minister's ethics code; these are multiple substantial breaches of the Prime Minister's ethics code.

Business of Supply

Instead of taking responsibility for these multiple breaches, the minister refuses to stand up and answer even the most basic questions about this sordid fundraising affair. If the minister has nothing to hide and if everything is above board, then the minister, as a starting point, could release the list of attendees at the fundraiser, but the minister will not do that. I guess her reason is that there really is nothing that could be above board about a Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada participating in a pay-to-play fundraiser.

Canadians deserve better than this from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. Canadians deserve better than a Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada engaged in pay-to-play fundraisers. Canadians deserve a Minister of Justice who adheres to the highest ethical standards in government. Canadians deserve not only a Minister of Justice who is at all times independent, but a Minister of Justice who is at all times seen to be independent.

By attending this pay-to-play fundraiser, the Minister of Justice has not only breached the Prime Minister's ethics code; the minister has compromised her independence and impugned the integrity of her office.

I would be remiss if I did not note that it was not long ago that members on that side of the House, when they were in opposition, certainly had harsh words for the former minister of Canadian heritage in the previous Conservative government, the Hon. Shelly Glover.

Shelly Glover, as minister, attended a \$50-a-head fundraiser, not a \$500-a-head fundraiser, and upon arriving at this fundraiser she discovered that there were department stakeholders in attendance at the fundraiser. What did Shelly Glover do when that happened? She immediately reported the incident to the Ethics Commissioner, she took responsibility, she returned the cash that was raised from the fundraiser, and she instructed her electoral district association to be absolutely certain that, in the future, department stakeholders were not invited and in attendance at fundraising events. That is what Shelly Glover did under the previous Conservative government. What has the current minister done?

•(1020)

The current minister has refused to take responsibility for her actions. She has refused to answer basic questions about who was there and what was said. The minister has refused to release the list of attendees. The minister has refused to return the pay-to-play cash.

Instead of saying, at the very least, that she made a mistake and that this would not happen again, the minister is lined up to attend yet another pay-to-play fundraiser, effectively thumbing her nose at the Prime Minister's ethics code, and thumbing her nose at Canadians who expect their ministers to be open, accountable, transparent, and independent. If the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada took her responsibility seriously and took the office she holds seriously, the minister would do the right thing: stand up, apologize, and return the pay-to-play cash.

If the Prime Minister's ethics code is worth the paper it is written on, if it is actually meaningful, if it is something more than just hollow words and hollow gestures, which sadly have become hallmarks of the current young government, then the Prime Minister

will insist that the Minister of Justice return the pay-to-play cash, if the Minister of Justice does not see fit to do so herself. Very simply, the Prime Minister's ethics code demands that the minister return the pay-to-play cash; and Canadians deserve no less.

•(1025)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to take a step back and look at the facts here.

The Minister of Justice was proactive in seeking the advice of the Ethics Commissioner before she attended the event, and the minister was advised that it was okay for her attend.

Second, the minister stated in this chamber that, at this fundraiser, she discussed the future of Canada.

Third, the information the member is seeking with regard to who, how much, and all that other information is available online, and he can clearly have access to that information, at his will.

Fourth, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton has received a three-page response from the Ethics Commissioner outlining her response to his questions.

Therefore, I would ask the member this. What part of that three-page response from the commissioner did you not understand?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to remind the member that when she is saying “you”, she is directing the question to the chair and not to the member, and I can tell her that I understood.

Second, I would remind members on this side of the House that, when others are speaking, you should show them respect. If you have comments or wish to say anything, please wait for your turn to ask a question.

The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary indicated that the Minister of Justice took steps to contact the Ethics Commissioner in advance of the fundraiser. In fact, the fundraiser became public on April 5, through CBC. It was only after the fundraiser became public that the minister saw fit to contact the Ethics Commissioner, so the Minister of Justice did not take proactive steps. In fact, this fundraiser was intended to be secret. The Minister of Justice did not want Canadians to know about it. The Minister of Justice wanted to keep Canadians in the dark. Canadians would not have known about it and Canadians would have been kept in the dark but for the fact that the fundraiser was leaked to the CBC, and it was only then that the Minister of Justice saw fit to go to the Ethics Commissioner.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister asked about the letter that I received back from the Ethics Commissioner. The letter merely stated that the minister did not break section 16 of the Conflict of Interest Act, that the minister did not technically break the law. I do not think that is the standard that the Prime Minister set when he unveiled an open and accountable government. I would think that all Canadians would expect ministers to adhere to the law. The issue is that she broke the Prime Minister's ethics code.

Business of Supply

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think that irony is lost on Conservatives. Even though they are pointing out a real problem and something that will appear to be really strange and odd to many Canadians, let me remind them of some of their old friends. Do the Conservatives remember Dean Del Mastro, Mike Duffy, Nigel Wright, Pamela Wallin, Patrick Brazeau, and others? Do they remember the in and out scandal? Do they remember the RCMP getting to the Conservative Party office? It is always dangerous to throw rocks when one lives in a house of windows.

I will ask this for my hon. colleague. What did the Conservative Party do when it was in office recently to change the law about conflict of interest, to strengthen the ethics codes, and to restore the trust of Canadians in their federal government?

• (1030)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the Conservative Party took office after the Liberal Party brought the sponsorship scandal to Canada. The former Liberal government brought corruption in government to a level that had never before been seen by Canadians. That was the situation that our previous Conservative government inherited from the former Liberal government.

What did the Conservative government do when it came to office? It took action. It cast the Federal Accountability Act, the most open and comprehensive piece of legislation to open up government. We banned secret donations to political parties. Our Conservative government strengthened the powers of the Ethics Commissioner and the Auditor General and improved access to information.

The record of the previous Conservative government is a record to be proud of, when it comes to openness and transparency. That is something that cannot be said about the former Liberal government, and it is starting to look as if the current Liberal government is following the sordid record of the previous Liberal government.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for trying to hold us to a higher standard here in the House. One thing I heard in his speech was about trying to get hold of the list of who attended the fundraiser. I have gone to the Elections Canada website and found that we cannot actually search by specific funding events, so it is very difficult to get that information.

My concern is that the Minister of Justice, in her role, will be appointing judges and other positions of note within the department, and it could be construed that people who payed to play are getting preferential treatment. I wonder if the member could comment on that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for the good question.

Yes, it is true that this information is publicly available, but it is not readily available in the sense that people can go online and find out the names of individuals who attended a specific fundraising event on a specific date. In fact, had this fundraiser not been leaked to the CBC, Canadians might very well have never discovered that the minister attended this fundraiser, because it is quite possible that no one would have been able to put all the pieces together.

That is a problem. It is particularly a problem given the appearance of preferential access. It may be that although the minister broke the Prime Minister's ethics code, there really is nothing to hide and everything was more or less above board. If that is the case, then the minister can do something very easily, which is to release the list of attendees. It is very simple. It would be a major step to help clear the stench that surrounds this event.

I really, for the life of me, cannot understand why the minister is reluctant to do this if she really has nothing to hide.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, but my colleague on the other side pretends he is a judge and starts to bluster about the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice while having difficulty distinguishing between Mr. Speaker and Madam Speaker.

If he believes strongly in what he is saying and he has enough courage, why does he not go outside the chamber and claim what he is claiming, rather than taking advantage of being in the chamber that protects him? My question to the hon. member on the other side is this: why does he not go to the ethics commission and complain, perhaps giving it some advice on reform?

• (1035)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I am really amazed by that question. Obviously the member has not been paying much attention to this issue at all. If he had, he would know that I not only wrote to the Ethics Commissioner but also made my letter public. Not only did I make my letter public but I have also gone on television about this issue. I have talked to the media. I have engaged the public. I am not hiding behind parliamentary immunity.

The member should know better.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand before you today to speak on this baseless motion put forward by the member for St. Albert—Edmonton. While this motion has no merit, I am excited that after 10 long years of being in the dark, of dealing with one of the most opaque and secretive governments in our history, Canadians finally have a government that they can trust and depend on.

[*Translation*]

I am proud to rise today to talk about a government that is committed to accountability and transparency, a government that espouses a simple but powerful idea: open government is good government.

[*English*]

Before I get into what our current government has been doing to advance accountability and transparency, I want to take a moment to remind my colleagues across the way of what the former Conservative government was responsible for, in case they have forgotten.

It was the former Conservative government that was behind the in-and-out scheme in 2006 that had them pleading guilty for exceeding election spending limits and submitting fraudulent election records.

Business of Supply

The Conservatives transferred money between different levels of their party to obfuscate their election spending and circumvent Elections Canada rules in order to exceed spending limits.

In total, \$1.3 million was transferred to 67 riding offices to pay for national advertising for the Conservative Party during the 2006 federal election. These offices included those of several cabinet ministers of the day, such as foreign affairs minister Lawrence Cannon, Treasury Board president Stockwell Day, natural resources minister Christian Paradis, and intergovernmental affairs minister Josée Verner, as well as the former foreign affairs minister, the current member for Beauce.

It is clear that unethical behaviour is deeply entrenched on that side of the House. Unfortunately, in the end it is Canadians who have to pay. Over a five-year period, investigations to uncover this Conservative scheme cost taxpayers \$2.3 million.

The Conservative tactics that hinder our democratic system do not end there.

Let us recall the robocall scandal during the 2011 federal election, when individuals from the Conservative Party sought to suppress voter turnout through misleading calls in Guelph and elsewhere. In that case, a former Conservative staffer was found guilty of using misleading calls to send voters to the wrong polling station on the day of the election.

In ridings across the country, hundreds of voters had reported receiving calls purporting to be from Elections Canada that gave erroneous information on the location of polling stations.

It is also that party whose former minister of human resources was found to have violated the Conflict of Interest Act when in 2011 she awarded federal money to an infrastructure project that was backed by an individual with close ties to the former prime minister.

It was the former Conservative government that believed it could hide unethical behaviour with a \$90,000 payout.

Also, how can we forget Dean Del Mastro, who was a Conservative parliamentary secretary to the former prime minister and who has been found guilty for violating the Canada Elections Act during the 2008 election? Now we have corruption in all three elections. Mr. Del Mastro has been convicted of three electoral offences, including failing to report a personal contribution of \$21,000 that he made to his own campaign and filing a false report.

However, unethical behaviour is not limited to just the Conservatives. The NDP misappropriated millions of taxpayer dollars when it used its parliamentary office budgets to pay for satellite party offices across the country.

In that case, 68 NDP MPs improperly pooled their House of Commons office budgets to pay for the salaries of 28 staffers to work in satellite offices in Montreal, Quebec City, and Toronto. In total, the NDP misappropriated \$2.75 million of taxpayer money. The NDP has still not repaid this amount.

This is unacceptable behaviour. Canadians deserve better.

Unfortunately, the list goes on for both parties across the floor. This is just a small window into the type of behaviour from that side of the aisle that Canadians have grown tired of.

Our government knows that Canadians deserve and expect more from their members of Parliament. That is why our government is committed to full accountability to Canadians. We expect ministers and parliamentary secretaries to uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity and impartiality of government are maintained and enhanced.

We believe in integrity, honesty, and transparency—all values that are exemplified by our Minister of Justice.

In fact, while the member for St. Albert—Edmonton tries to make claims against the Minister of Justice about her conduct, it was the minister who proactively sought the advice of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. She attended a fundraising event—something that all members here have done before and no doubt continue to do—as an MP and engaged with Canadians.

In my opening remarks, I said that this motion was baseless. Let me tell members why.

The member for St. Albert—Edmonton wrote to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and received a response indicating that the Minister of Justice was not in contravention of the act—yet here we are, debating a motion from the member for St. Albert—Edmonton trying to suggest otherwise.

I would ask that the member from across the way again review the response he received from the commissioner. It might, on a second reading, provide him with the answer he is seeking.

To be clear, in case the member for St. Albert—Edmonton and members across the way are not aware, with regard to the specific activity, pursuant to Elections Canada regulations, the Liberal Party will be entirely responsible for all costs associated with the event.

As I said, our government is committed to accountability and transparency. Even before forming government, the Liberal Party has always been raising the bar on transparency.

In 2013 the Liberal Party was the only party to require members to proactively disclose expenses. We believe Canadians deserve to know how their dollars are being spent.

The Liberal Party also introduced motions to advance transparency and accountability in the House. Unfortunately, the NDP did not support this effort to increase transparency and the motions did not pass.

Finally, in 2014, a Liberal motion that called upon the Board of Internal Economy to adopt a more comprehensive disclosure mechanism received all-party support. We are proud to have led the way on this front.

Business of Supply

●(1040)

[Translation]

In November 2015, as part of this commitment, the Prime Minister published a ministerial code of conduct entitled “Open and Accountable Government”. This guide is available on the Prime Minister’s website for all Canadians to read. It is an important and fundamental document for the government.

I would like to draw the House’s attention to some of the main ideas in this document.

[English]

Today our government continues to work toward increased transparency and accountability. As part of this commitment, in November the Prime Minister issued “Open and Accountable Government”, a guide for the conduct of his ministry. This is an important and foundational document for the government, and I would like to draw the attention of the House to some of its key themes and topics.

As the Prime Minister states in his message to ministers at the start of “Open and Accountable Government”:

For Canadians to trust our government we must trust Canadians, and we will only be successful in implementing our agenda to the extent that we earn and keep this trust.

I would like to take this moment to again highlight the conduct of the minister, who proactively sought advice from the commissioner. She is someone Canadians can depend on as an individual with utmost integrity. She is someone Canadians can trust to protect our rights and ensure that our legislation continues to meet the highest standards of equity, fairness, and respect for the rule of law.

I am proud to be working in this House alongside such an exemplary individual. I am also proud to be part of a government that understands the importance of integrity and honesty. This importance is highlighted in “Open and Accountable Government”. As the Prime Minister 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 an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

To assist members in meeting these duties, “Open and Accountable Government” sets out the Prime Minister’s expectations for their personal conduct, which includes compliance with statutory obligations under the Conflict of Interest Act and the Lobbying Act, with the ethical guidelines set out in annex A of the guide, and with the guidelines on fundraising set out in annex B.

While I am on the topic of the Lobbying Act, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some key features of this act.

The Lobbying Act requires anyone who lobbies federal public office holders to register as a lobbyist with the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. All lobbyists are obligated under the act to report on lobbying activities, including communication with designated public office holders, on a monthly basis. This information is published on the Internet on the public registry maintained by the Commissioner of Lobbying.

Who is a lobbyist? The Lobbying Act identifies two types of lobbyists.

A consultant lobbyist is an individual who, for payment, communicates with public office holders on behalf of any person or organization. This individual may be a professional lobbyist but can also be any individual who, in the course of his or her work for a client, communicates with or arranges meetings with a public office holder.

An in-house lobbyist is an individual who is an employee of an organization and whose duties are to communicate with public office holders on behalf of his or her employer.

If the employer is a corporation, there are two other ways in which a person can be identified as an in-house lobbyist. The first is if that individual’s duties are to communicate with public office holders on behalf of any subsidiary of the employer. The second is if that individual’s duties are to communicate with public office holders on behalf of any corporation of which the employer is a subsidiary.

●(1045)

As I said earlier, all lobbyists are obligated under the act to report on lobbying activities, including communications with designated public office holders, on a monthly basis.

What are these activities? The Lobbying Act defines activities that, when carried out for compensation, are considered to be lobbying. Generally speaking, they include communicating with public office holders about changing federal laws, regulations, policies, or programs, obtaining a financial benefit, such as a grant or a contribution, and in certain cases, obtaining a government contract. As well, in the case of the consultant lobbyist, it would include arranging a meeting between a public office holder and another person qualified as lobbying.

The commissioner has provided additional interpretation on what must be reported. In-house and consultant lobbyists must report all oral and arranged communications relating to financial benefits, even when initiated by a public office holder. Likewise, consultant lobbyists must report oral and arranged communications relating to a contract regardless of who initiated the communication.

What are these communications the act refers to? For the purposes of the Lobbying Act, communications include both verbal and written. Examples of verbal communications with a public office holder are arranged meetings, phone calls, informal communication, and grassroots communications. Examples of written communications with a public office holder include hard copy or electronic formats.

Some types of communication do not require registration. These include, for example, inquiries about publicly available information and general inquiries about the terms and conditions of programs and application processes.

Registration is also not required for participation in government initiated activities, such as consultations, hearings, round tables, or like activities where transparency is comparable to that of a parliamentary committee where participants, proceedings, and decisions are readily made public. The same goes for preparation and presentation of briefings to parliamentary committees.

Business of Supply

As I mentioned, the Lobbying Act requires anyone who lobbies federal public office holders to register as a lobbyist to the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. Who are these public office holders? Public office holders as defined under the act are any employee or officer of Her Majesty in right of Canada. This includes virtually all persons occupying an elected or appointed position in the federal government, including members of the House of Commons and the other place and their staff.

Now, on a broader level, “Open and Accountable Government” also lays out the fundamental principles of our system of responsible government, including the core tenets of individual and collective ministerial responsibility.

All this to say that the minister did not break any rules. She is completely in compliance with the law. Her actions were consistent with the actions of other members of this place and I defend her actions very strongly. I challenge any member to not fundraise and see how the next election goes.

More important, there has been no violations of any ethics codes by members of the government since October 19, 2015. Prior to that is entirely another story. When will the member for Calgary Heritage, for example, release his donor list from his leadership run of the Canadian Conservative Reform Alliance Party? Members will remember that party. Its first official name was C-CRAP. When will the member for Calgary Heritage release his donor list for his leadership run for the Conservative Party? What does he have to hide? How many members have been taken away in leg irons and from which parties were they?

The Conservatives talk about ethics as if they have some basis for doing so, as if they do not have the longest history of unethical practices.

There are a couple of books I would refer them to. One is called *On The Take*. Another one is called *Blue Trust*. These are fascinating books by author Stevie Cameron on the long and colourful history of Conservative ethical standards.

I am looking forward to having this conversation go a little further and hearing more about how the Conservatives believe they understand what ethics are and how they believe they have any moral basis to bring it up.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. It was interesting that two-thirds of the member's speech was a bunch of bluster in regard to history rather than the facts of the case that is before us.

He mentioned their proposed standard of withstanding the highest of public scrutiny, so I have some very simple questions for the member.

Does a pay-to-play event by a minister of justice for \$500 meet Canadians' highest public scrutiny? Does a \$500 donation and a face-to-face meeting with a minister of justice who makes judicial appointments withstand the highest public scrutiny in Canadians' eyes? Does a minister accepting an invitation by a law firm which has significant dealings with the federal government to attend a lavish reception catered by the law firm in its offices withstand the highest public scrutiny? Finally, would any appointment in the future

of any person who attended that event withstand the highest public scrutiny?

• (1050)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes, and I should probably insert a coin to continue this conversation as that is how we pay to play around here.

The minister followed every rule. The minister acted within the practices of this place. Every member here must fundraise. That is what we must do to fund our next election campaigns.

If we want to have a conversation about how to get money out of politics, that is a conversation I am open to, but we have to operate within the rules that we have here. In that context, the minister had every right and every obligation to hold fundraisers and carry through with her activities in that regard.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I do not think anyone here would argue with the fact that people need funding to carry out their political activities.

Let us focus on the fact that the minister's actions violated the Liberals' own code of conduct. Annex B states the following:

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

That is exactly what we are talking about here. First of all, it was clearly against the Liberals' own code of conduct. Second of all, the minister said she attended the fundraising event organized by the law firm Torys LLP as the member for Vancouver Granville.

Can my colleague tell us what concerns and desires of the people of Vancouver Granville the minister shared with Torys LLP?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, I was not invited to the event, either.

However, if everyone was invited to an activity to support the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, we would see how many people would want to attend. I know the member would be very keen to have everyone attend.

Fundraising is part of the job of an MP. The minister did her job well, and I encourage her to continue to do so.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, we are wasting time today with a supply motion that deals with one specific case. A large conversation could be had about the ethical framework of this place and the failure of the previous government. Although the former prime minister promised to bring in 52 specific changes to ethics, 22 of those promises were never kept. That government changed the ethics code in the Federal Accountability Act by removing the duty to act honestly. It would be good to get that back in.

This issue is also worth debating in terms of the context of fundraising, and what more could be done to take undue influence out of money.

Business of Supply

I do not approve of the current level of ethics rules for this place, but I do not believe the current minister violated the current ethics rules. They could be higher and we could all insist that the government do more to ensure that fundraising events like this do not happen.

Would the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle agree with me that the overall standards should be raised both to ensure that with fundraising events there is more public money in election campaigns and exclude influence and to ensure that we return the duty to act honestly to federal ethics codes?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, there is always room for improvement and I am always open to looking at more improvement.

I want to congratulate the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on a book that she wrote which I read when I was younger called *How to Save the World in Your Spare Time*. I found it quite inspirational.

I applaud the member's constant work in the public interest.

•(1055)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

My NDP colleague, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, mentioned a number of former members and Conservative Party MPs who were in a bit of trouble considering some of their actions in the past. I am not about to go down that rabbit hole, since there are so many examples of this behaviour that I am likely to forget some.

Would my colleague like to tell the House, once again, what the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner said about what the minister was allowed to do, in terms of her presence?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, the commissioner was very clear. She said that there was no breach of any rules. She could not have been any clearer.

As the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said, we are wasting an entire day on something that is not a real issue.

[English]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a father of four, and this conversation that we are having with members opposite reminds me of my kids. It is like, “Well, they started it first,” and “Don't look over here; take a look over there”. It is kind of a diversionary tactic: let us remind people of the past.

Let us talk about today. The fact of the matter is that the minister stood in the House and she was not clear and consistent with the code of conduct. She took part in trying to mislead the House and Canadians. She was not proactive in going to the Ethics Commissioner. She went to the Ethics Commissioner after this event was made public. Then she went to check and make sure that it was above board. The Ethics Commissioner, in response to the letter from our hon. colleague on this side, said that given the information that had been received, there was no conceivable issue or conflict of interest.

However, the actions speak for themselves here. The Minister of Justice stood in the House and said that, indeed, she attended the event, not as the Minister of Justice but as the MP for Vancouver Granville, and her head policymaker attended the event as a volunteer. Then, when everything blew up, she said that, actually, she attended as the Minister of Justice, but everything is okay, and by the way, the Conservatives did this and the NDP did this.

Again, I am in this Parliament. I was not in the previous Parliament. Instead of diversionary tactics, why can we not speak to the issue today and agree that perhaps mistakes happen? There is nothing wrong with standing up in the House and saying that one was wrong and made a mistake.

My question for the hon. colleague across the way is, can those members not see where the vagueness and confusion can come from with the verbal gymnastics and changing of the stories? Again, going back to my being a father, when I talk to my kids, where there is smoke, there is fire. There is a lot of smoke here.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, the member makes a very serious accusation that the minister misled this House. As the member knows, that is not parliamentary language, nor is it true. In fact, he just misled the House.

If the member is not happy with the state of affairs, why not use the opposition day motion to change the rules? Why not say, “This does not work, so why not try that,” instead of what he is saying? I think we can do a lot better.

The minister is working within the current rules, within the current ethical boundaries, and I think she is doing a very good job.

However, if the member wants to change the rules, that is a separate issue, and he is welcome to make a motion to that effect.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to the Conservative Party's motion. The NDP will support this motion because it addresses a problem that clearly raises doubts in some people's minds about the role of partisan political fundraising when combined with the role of a minister in the performance of his or her duties.

We must look at this matter from a broader perspective with respect to the role of an institution such as the House of Commons in a system of representative democracy. Our system essentially operates on the trust that people place in the individuals they send to the House of Commons to discuss and pass legislation and budgets for the country. As a result of that trust, people expect that the work of the elected representatives will be impartial and as objective as possible, without being influenced by money.

Business of Supply

The big problem with scandals, whether they involve Liberals or Conservatives, is that they keep fuelling the cynicism that people feel about our democratic system. This undermines our representative institutions and even has an impact on voter turnout. The general perception is Liberal, Tory, same old story.

We are always mired in some scandal or other involving either the Grits or the Tories. There is mudslinging, and the sin of one is less egregious than that of the other. There is reference to the previous scandal. I will talk about this, but I want to take a moment to say that finger pointing may not be the best use of parliamentarians' time.

That said, in order to maintain Canadians' trust in the system, the conduct of parliamentarians, the government, and its ministers has to be beyond reproach and there must be no perception of potential conflicts of interest. That is a more noble objective, in the medium and long term, and much more important than the scandal of the day.

I would like to quote the Prime Minister, who spoke about this very trust when he introduced his new government and referred to the guide governing his ministers' conduct:

In order for Canadians to trust their government, they need a government that trusts them. We will be open and honest with Canadians, and we will uphold the highest standards of integrity and impartiality both in our public and private affairs.

We would like that to be the case at all times.

The documents we are releasing today provide guidance on how we must go about our responsibilities as Ministers, and I encourage Canadians to read them and to hold us accountable for delivering these commitments.

I will get back to the fact that the Minister of Justice's actions quite obviously did not meet these highest standards of integrity and impartiality. We all agree that she made a mistake, that she should apologize, and that, like a previous Conservative minister, she should probably reimburse the money she collected at this fundraising event, organized by a Toronto law firm.

Before I get to the heart of the matter, I want to say that the leader of the Green Party's speech earlier was more or less in line with my introduction. There are many things we should be discussing today, but the Conservatives' motion is forcing us to once again talk about scandals and point fingers at each other. This is what we will spend our day doing. We know very well how it will look at the end of the day. It has already started. Someone did something worse before, the others are not nice, someone else was involved in such and such scandal, the police visited this person, and so on. This is true, but the Conservative Party is hijacking our parliamentary business.

This issue is already out there. Conservative members have already spoken. I also gave interviews. There is pressure on the minister. She is being asked to be accountable. However, the Conservatives are essentially wasting our day here, when we could have been talking about issues that affect people's day-to-day lives.

● (1100)

The people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and, I believe, most people in every riding send us here to solve their problems and improve their living conditions, their working conditions, their retirement situation, and the quality of care they receive. Today, I would have liked to be able to take the time to talk with my colleagues, to discuss, debate, and exchange ideas with them about things that change people's lives in a real and tangible way.

Take, for example, public day care spaces. We saw in Quebec how making affordable and accessible day care spaces available to everyone changed families' lives. The Liberal government has not done anything on that file since it took office, even though something like that could quickly change people's lives. People in Ontario and western Canada pay between \$60 and \$80 a day for day care. As a result, one parent usually ends up staying at home because it costs too much to send the child to private day care. Unfortunately, it is usually women who assume that role.

A study conducted in Quebec by economist Pierre Fortin very clearly showed the effect that the provincial program had on women. Approximately 70,000 women went back to work and were able to begin contributing to the overall productivity of society again and enhancing their own financial self-sufficiency within the couple or family.

We could have talked about that, but the Conservatives did not want to. We also could have talked about health care, which is still the number one priority of Quebecers and Canadians. For example, it is important for people to be able to get treatment when they are sick, to not have to wait in the emergency room for 14 hours, and to have access to specialists.

The Liberal Minister of Health has a mandate to enforce the Canada Health Act. I have called on her a number of times to explain what she is doing about the fact that the governments of Saskatchewan and Quebec are introducing and legalizing ancillary fees in private clinics and thereby restricting access to care. This has a direct impact on people. When they are being forced to pay \$80 for eye drops that cost \$4 at the pharmacy and \$300 to \$500 for procedures such as colonoscopies, that is restricting access to care and it is against Canadian law.

The federal government has a role to play here, and we are calling on it to take action. Unfortunately, the Conservatives did not want us to talk about that today. The clock is ticking: it is time to renew the agreement on provincial transfers that will be expiring soon. We know that the Conservative Party wanted to cut those transfers and take \$36 billion away from the provinces over the next 10 years.

What is the Liberal plan regarding the new agreement for health transfers to the provinces? We have no idea. It is still vague. We are told that we will debate it, that negotiations are under way, and then it is put off to a later date. These are issues that matter to our constituents, and once again, the Conservatives are wasting an entire day to talk about something else.

Obviously, the behaviour of the Minister of Justice must be singled out. Yes, it was less than impressive, but as I said a little earlier in the debate, in my questions to my Conservative colleague, the irony of the situation is lost on the Conservatives. They are in no position to bring up any issues of ethics. They are looking for trouble, to some extent.

Business of Supply

Need I remind the House that the RCMP raided the Conservative Party office, seized documents, and had to investigate because the Conservatives violated the Canada Elections Act? Need I remind everyone that the Conservative Party was found guilty in the in-and-out scandal, whereby the Conservatives used local riding associations to hide federal, Canada-wide election spending? That scheme enabled them to exceed the legal election spending limits allowed by Elections Canada. The Conservatives were caught red-handed and found guilty.

I do not really understand the point of stirring all this up again six months after a new government was elected. Let us not forget that Dean Del Mastro personally committed fraud and broke the election law. It is rather mind-boggling. He wrote a \$20,000 cheque to his own election campaign.

• (1105)

We know that the cap is \$1,500. The hon. member was the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, in other words, the person who speaks in the House on behalf of the Prime Minister when he is absent. Today, that same member has to serve a prison sentence for breaching the Canada Elections Act. Furthermore, he keeps insisting he did nothing wrong. This motion and this debate might backfire on the Conservatives.

I could also say a few words about our friends in the red chamber at the other place in the Centre Block. The former Conservative prime minister promised, hand on his heart, that he would never appoint senators that were not duly elected. If memory serves me correctly, he appointed 58 senators in order to have a majority in the upper chamber.

Those appointments were not always successful. For example, there was Mike Duffy. It has been a while since we mentioned his name. Mr. Duffy had his potentially fraudulent expenses for his secondary residence reimbursed directly by Nigel Wright, who was the Conservative prime minister's chief of staff. Mr. Wright wrote a personal cheque for \$90,000 to Mike Duffy. In my opinion, the Conservatives are in no position to lecture us on ethics today.

I could also talk about Pamela Wallin, Patrick Brazeau, and many friends of the former Conservative prime minister. These people undermined Canadians' trust in our institutions. Taxpayers were outraged by the actions of the previous Conservative government, which did not respect them or obey the rules.

That said, the Minister of Justice's conduct recently was strange. She attended a private fundraiser for the Liberal Party of Canada, organized by the Toronto law firm Torys LLP. Tickets were \$500 each. The invitation indicated that those attending would have the privilege of having the Minister of Justice as the guest of honour. Unlike several other Liberal Party fundraisers, this one was not listed on the party's website. It was kept somewhat secret, but we learned about it from a media outlet that broke the news.

In the quote I read earlier, the Prime Minister refers to the new Liberal government's guide. I will now read excerpts from annex B of this much-touted guide that the Liberals are so proud of, entitled "Fundraising and Dealing with Lobbyists: Best Practices for Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries". It 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 following is a summary of best practices that Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are expected to follow to maintain appropriate boundaries between their official duties and political fundraising activities. It is important that Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries familiarize themselves with these practices and apply them in all appropriate circumstances. In addition, they must ensure that their staffs are well acquainted with the practices and that adequate processes are in place in their offices to ensure compliance.

The practices complement, and do not replace, other rules that Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must observe, including the *Conflict of Interest Act*, the *Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons* and the *Lobbying Act*. [That is too bad because the guide is not legally binding, which is a serious problem.] Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries should communicate with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner if they have any questions...

That is what the minister did, but that poses another problem. We believe that, if the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner said that the minister's actions did not pose a problem, it is because the rules she is applying are not strict enough.

Let us move on to the general principles set out in the guide.

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.

That is where the problem lies. It continues:

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.

• (1110)

The fundraising event was organized by a Toronto law firm and it was explicitly said that a \$500 donation to the Liberal Party would give donors access to a minister. This seems to be a clear violation of the Liberals' guidelines, which they claim to be so proud of.

I would like to hear their thoughts on this, because there was preferential access. Everyone agrees that this appears to be preferential access. This has raised some eyebrows in the NDP. A former Conservative minister was caught up in the same kind of mess. She participated in a fundraising event attended by people directly connected to her portfolio and her position as minister. At the time, these included people from the arts and culture community. The minister reimbursed the money that had been collected at this event. I think that it would be appropriate for the Minister of Justice to do the same. The Liberal Party's defence is that she was not there in her capacity as minister, but rather as an MP. First of all, that is not what the invitation said, and second of all, I would like to know how she was able to remove her minister's hat when she walked into the room, especially since she was at a law firm in Toronto and she is a member of Parliament from British Columbia.

The question I am asking my Liberal colleagues is therefore very clear. If she really was there as the member for Vancouver Granville, I would like to know what concerns and demands she conveyed to the lawyers of Torys LLP, a Toronto law firm, on behalf of the people of Vancouver Granville. It seems to me that that was a long way to go to talk about the concerns of her constituents. I think it is more likely that the event violated the best practices guide that has been so highly touted by the Liberal Party of Canada.

Business of Supply

We were looking forward to a fresh approach and new beginnings, after 10 years under the Conservatives. More and more, we see that the Liberal Party is reverting to its bad habit of circumventing the law. That is the party responsible for the sponsorship scandal and partisan appointments. Not much has been said about it, but the first ambassadors appointed by the new government, specifically to the United States and the United Nations, were people with direct ties to the Liberal machine. That is exactly the kind of partisan appointment that the Liberals denounced in the past when they were in opposition, and yet they are doing the same thing today.

There was also a contest on the Liberal Party website. The prize? Join the Prime Minister on a trip to Washington. People had to provide their email address, which would be added to the Liberal Party database. There have also been contests for access to certain ministers on certain occasions.

Once again, there is some risk of blurring the line between official government and parliamentary business and partisan activities. Since coming to power, the new Liberal Party has been making mistakes and falling short of the very high standards of integrity it espoused during the election campaign.

I call on the new government to listen to the concerns of the people and the opposition members and to change course in order to honour its promises and commitments, which it has not yet done.

• (1115)

[English]

Although it is important to talk about respect for the law and the scandals that could affect the new Liberal government or the old Conservative government, because of the Conservative motion, we will spend all day speaking to those kinds of issues, rather than the issues that are of real concern to the people from my riding, and I think from most ridings. People want to hear about jobs, child care, health care, and good pensions. The NDP would like to talk about that.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend. He gave quite the speech on this issue.

I think that what he said in closing is very important. We talk about very important things here in the House. Last week we spent a lot of time, a whole evening, talking about what is going on in Attawapiskat. That was important.

Today, we will spend the whole day talking about a partisan issue. It is a bit sad that we are spending our valuable time doing that kind of thing here.

I would like to ask my colleague whether he has ideas about how we might redirect this conversation and turn a partisan issue into something meaningful for the people in our ridings.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

We share the same concerns about having topical, constructive debates to help us move forward to resolve certain problems. We can

and must improve many things together. I am talking about things that affect our constituents, everything from rail safety, protecting dairy farmers, and public transit, to our aging infrastructure. We can and must do better for our constituents.

As far as the scandals and stories about election financing are concerned, our system is much better than the one in the United States thanks to the limits imposed under the Canada Elections Act, not only on election spending, but also on donations to political parties. Removing the ability of labour groups and corporations to make donations to political parties helped clean up fundraising a bit.

That being said, we could improve things by restoring the public funding for political parties that was abolished by the Conservatives. It used to be there, but the Conservatives cancelled it. This would reduce the pressure on political parties to constantly do fundraising and might prevent such gaffes as the one recently made by the Minister of Justice.

This would put all parties on a level playing field and would improve the quality of our democratic life, which would reduce the pressure to do more fundraising all the time. This would benefit our entire democratic process.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank our colleague for his speech, which was quite interesting.

I would like to ask him a question. Our Liberal colleague spoke about issues that are not important in our society at present. We are debating conflicts of interest and public trust, and we want to address Canadians' cynicism regarding certain actions of politicians. If we want to take meaningful action by creating other bills, Canadians must trust us.

I again heard certain references to the former government. People always look back in time instead of focusing on the present and the future. However, in the past, reprehensible actions were met with sanctions. That was very well said by my colleague. People are now in prison. People have had to pay back sums of money following certain events organized by influential players.

I would like to know what he actually thinks about this situation. Should the minister pay back the money raised by this event?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska very much for his question and his desire to look to the future and make things better.

Indeed, the conflict of interest code for MPs and ministers could be strengthened. The commissioner should also have powers with more teeth. The guide that the Liberals adopted, which is really a set of recommendations, should be in some way binding so as to force ministers, especially, to conduct themselves according to the highest ethical standards possible and to avoid not just conflicts of interest, but any perceived conflict of interest.

In this specific case, I do believe that the minister made a mistake and that she should pay back the money raised at this \$500-a-ticket private fundraiser held at a law firm in Toronto.

Business of Supply

•(1125)

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his excellent speech. He really covered all the important points.

We are dealing with a major ethical issue that, quite frankly, is of serious concern. It is as just as worrisome as the Nigel Wright affair, when Mr. Wright gave Mike Duffy a cheque for \$90,000. That scandal was extremely worrisome and it is not over for the Conservatives.

Just six months after taking office, the Liberal government is already involved in scandals and its ministers have already shown a complete lack of judgment. That is very disappointing.

While the government is dealing with that lack of judgment, it is not dealing with files that all Canadians, including the people in my riding of Drummond, really care about.

For example, the government is not doing anything to advance the development of official languages. In its budget, the Liberal government could have indexed the amounts allocated to the roadmap. It could have indexed the amounts allocated to the Commissioner of Official Languages. The same is true with regard to the environment. The government is not doing anything in this area, which is really disappointing.

The people of the greater Drummond area want the government to invest in green energy and energy efficient retrofits. That could help drive our regions' economies and ease the transition to a low-carbon economy.

I really have more of a comment than a question for my hon. colleague. I would like to congratulate him on his speech and tell him that it is really important to keep working for our constituents, as we are doing, and not as the Liberals and Conservatives are doing. It is really shameful that these sorts of scandals are happening again.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond for his excellent and relevant comments. I am also sad that scandals keep popping up one after the other. We have gone from Tory scandals to Liberal ones.

I also want to congratulate my colleague for his work on the official languages file and for introducing a bill to require Supreme Court judges to be bilingual. This is an important issue to most francophones across Canada, including Quebecers. This is an initiative that the New Democrats are putting forward.

In the previous Parliament, we managed to require that all officers of Parliament be bilingual. That was a great NDP victory for the French language, and we are continuing this fight. I also share my colleague's concerns about the decisions made by this government that have a real impact on people's lives.

With respect to the environment, the new Liberal government went to the Paris climate change conference with the same plan and the same greenhouse gas reduction targets as the Conservatives. That is disgraceful and it is not enough. We need to do more and better so that we can transition to renewable energies.

Furthermore, I do not understand why the Liberal government blindly signed the trans-Pacific partnership agreement negotiated by the Conservatives, which the Liberals had criticized when they were in opposition. Now they say that it is the best thing that could happen.

However, Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, said that it was likely the worst trade deal ever and that a number of studies had shown that the agreement could lead to the loss of 60,000 good jobs in Canada.

I am calling on the Liberal government to go back to the drawing board and come up with a real job creation plan for the people of Quebec and the rest of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to join in the debate today on what I consider to be a very serious topic. We are talking about the inappropriateness of a fundraiser that was conducted by the Minister of Justice.

Before I get into the specifics of that particular fundraiser and why we are having this discussion today, let me start by saying that I think we all agree in this place that fundraising is both legitimate and necessary for political parties and for politicians to engage in. However, it has to be done within the rules.

There are rules for everything. We all know that. We all know that we need to abide them. I would remind you, Madam Speaker, and other members of this place, that when our Conservative government first took office in 2006, we made some very necessary changes to the method in which all political parties, and, in fact, individual members could fundraise.

We reduced the level of fundraising significantly that one could for ask from an individual. We eliminated corporate and union donations entirely. We did that for a very legitimate and very necessary reason. We did not think it would be appropriate for our government, or in fact any government, to be beholden to an individual, a corporation, or a union simply because they donated money.

In years past, and I am talking many years ago, it was not uncommon to see some corporations donate tens of thousands of dollars to political parties. Why would they do that? I think it is very appropriate to say that many would donate vast sums of money to try to receive some form of benefit down the road.

That is basically what happened years ago, and it continued until a subsequent series of governments started to change the fundraising regime to lower the amount of money that individuals and corporations could actually donate. They did that to get away from the undue influence of big business or wealthy individuals, to the point where we have it now, where all corporate and union donations are outlawed; they are banned. The amount that an individual can donate to a party or to an individual member of Parliament is somewhat less than \$1,500.

I should also say, and I should have said at the outset, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Business of Supply

That brings us to where we are today. We brought forward a motion basically talking about what we consider to be inappropriate fundraising by the Minister of Justice. Since I talked earlier about the reasons behind changing the fundraising regime to try to get away from any undue influence that individuals or corporations might be able to exact upon a government, what did the Minister of Justice do exactly that was so inappropriate?

She attended a fundraiser hosted by a number of well-heeled Bay Street lawyers at a law firm. These individuals, for the privilege and the right of attending this fundraiser with the Minister of Justice, paid \$500 a person to do so.

Why would any individual do that? I can assure this House that, at least in my opinion, it was not because these lawyers wanted to hear the minister spout profundities about the government. No, quite simply, these members spent \$500 a piece, shelled out \$500 per person, in order to get close to the minister so they perhaps could receive some benefit in the future. Perhaps they might be able to receive a government contract for their law firm, or perhaps they hope to personally receive a government appointment somewhere in the future.

This type of approach is in direct violation and contradiction of the Prime Minister's own code of ethics in which he instructed all of his public office holders, all ministers and parliamentary secretaries, to not engage in fundraising that could be a conflict of interest or even a perceived conflict of interest.

● (1130)

If ministers attending a \$500-a-person fundraiser is not considered to be a perceived conflict of interest, then nothing is. Even more damning is the fact that one of the attendees, until the night before the fundraiser occurred, had been registered to lobby the Minister of Justice.

I suspect what happened was that when the individual in question knew that this might be viewed as a conflict of interest, he took steps to deregister himself. It was literally the night before the minister attended the fundraiser. That was to try to make it at least appear that there was no inappropriate lobbying that would occur. That simply does not pass the smell test. It simply does not.

Whether one could technically argue that this was in the rules, from a perception standpoint, it certainly does not pass the smell test. Clearly, if lawyers and stakeholders were paying \$500 per person to sidle up to a minister to discuss who knows what, an average Canadian would have to think there was something fishy going on, that perhaps they wanted to curry favour with the minister to some extent. This is, as I said earlier, completely in contradiction and violation with the Prime Minister's own code of conduct.

I also have to say one thing that I frankly find somewhat disturbing, and that is, in the House when we have raised questions to the Minister of Justice, she has steadfastly refused to answer any direct questions about that specific fundraiser. Instead, the government House leader has stood in her defence to answer and deflect any questions.

One of the things that I find, perhaps not disturbing but almost humorous, is the government House leader's contention that every MP does this; this is no big thing. The Ethics Commissioner has

cleared the Minister of Justice and we all do it, so why are opposition members complaining?

I would simply say this: Earth to government House leader, backbench MPs do not charge \$500 a pop for fundraisers. They might charge it, but no one would show up. Therefore, to contend that at one time the minister said she was only doing it in her role as a member of Parliament, people would not attend fundraisers at \$500 a pop for any backbencher in this place, let alone \$1,000 a pop, which the Minister of Justice is going to do at a future fundraiser.

The reason that these lawyers spent \$500 a person was to get next to a minister who has influence within her department obviously, and who might be able to benefit those individuals attending the fundraiser. That is clearly inappropriate. One does not have to be a political scientist or a political pundit to understand that. It is just common sense. There is a perception that it was a pay-to-play fundraising event in which individuals wanted to curry favour with a minister and were willing to pay large sums of money to do so.

Clearly, it was inappropriate. We are asking the minister to simply admit that she made a mistake, return the money, and do what is right and appropriate.

● (1135)

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member stated very clearly at the beginning of his speech that fundraising is legitimate and necessary but it must be done within the rules. On that, we absolutely agree. I do not think anybody disagrees with that.

The interesting thing is that we have rules. We also have an arbiter of those rules, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, who was in fact put in by the previous government. Something was brought up, was adjudicated by the commissioner, and it was found to be completely within the rules.

My question would be this. Obviously, because of this debate, the member made a statement that the commissioner has made an error. Could he explain to us what specifically was the error in her judgment?

● (1140)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, I hate to correct the member opposite, but I never said that the Ethics Commissioner made a mistake. In fact, what the Ethics Commissioner has said on many occasions is that if members want to make the rules around fundraisers even more stringent than they are now, she would welcome that. In other words, she is basically saying that members of Parliament should get together and tighten up the rules, because she probably thinks they are a little too lax.

I agree that the Ethics Commissioner technically said there was no breach in this case, but I point out, as I did several times in my intervention, that the Prime Minister said there should not be any real or even perceived conflict of interest. If the member opposite cannot see where a bunch of well-heeled lawyers paying \$500 a pop to sidle up to the Minister of Justice is not a perceived conflict of interest, he is simply fudging the facts.

Business of Supply

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have heard from members on the opposite side arguing the legalistic aspect of whether the letter of the law or rules were broken. However, as the member on our side has eloquently said, it is a perception of conflict. It is a perception that the public has, and an issue of moral suasion.

I would like to hear the member speak more about the morality and ethics of it. It is not just about hard black-and-white rules. This is in a grey area. This is where the problem is. I would like to hear him comment on it a bit more.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, my colleague is quite correct. We are talking about something that most Canadians would consider to be inappropriate. I point to what I said earlier in my intervention, that one of the members of the law firm hosting the fundraiser, who paid \$500 a pop, until the night before the fundraiser had been a registered lobbyist, someone who was registered to lobby the very minister who was coming to the fundraiser. All of a sudden, he deregistered. Why did he do that? It was because he knew that would not just be a perceived conflict, but a real conflict of interest. Therefore, he took the step of deregistering to try to make it look appropriate on a technical basis.

It is not appropriate. Why in the world would he want to lobby the Minister of Justice to begin with? It would be to try to gain benefit on behalf of a client. Just because he deregistered 24 hours before a fundraiser does not mean that he did not still have that intent in mind.

On all levels, any normal individual, any rational-thinking individual, would recognize this for what it was. It was inappropriate fundraising by a bunch of individuals who wanted to use money to gain influence with the minister. That is simply wrong.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to comment on the fact that as I was knocking on doors across my riding, one of the things I heard repeatedly was that people were feeling disillusioned, that there was not the ethics that there should be in the House based on the previous Conservative government. I am wondering if you agree that the Conflict of Interest Act needs to be reviewed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I assume that you wanted to address that question to the chair. I will allow the member a very brief answer, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, yes, I do think it should be reviewed. For nine years, while we were in government, I was on the procedures and House affairs committee. The Ethics Commissioner appeared before us on several occasions, always requesting us to do a review.

It should be reviewed. The code of ethics that we all live by, and some public office holders have a slightly different code than regular members, is a living, breathing document. It should continuously be at least examined, and hopefully improvements made on a continuing and ongoing basis.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House. I would like to thank my hon. colleague for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan for splitting his time with me today.

The Prime Minister's mandate letter or code of conduct to his ministers regarding ministerial conduct reads as follows:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must act with honesty and must uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity and impartiality of government are maintained and enhanced. As public office holders, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are subject to the Part I requirements of the *Ethical and Political Activity Guidelines for Public Office Holders*.

The final line says:

Moreover, they 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 bring that up because, as I said earlier in the debate, I agree with the comments made in the House that we definitely have more important things to debate, but the facts are the facts. The government campaigned on bringing real change to the House and bringing an open and transparent government. Now, all of a sudden, within the last six months of the short term it has been in power, we have seen some questionable activity. The perception is that some things are going on that may not right.

The issue for me is the fact that when this event was discovered, it was not a matter of the Minister of Justice being proactive, as mentioned earlier by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. It was when a media outlet reported this event and made it public. Then and only then did the Minister of Justice report the event and asked if any rules of conduct had been broken. It was then and only then that it was brought to light.

Shortly after the event, it was brought forward in the House. The question was raised by my hon. colleague. At that time, the Minister of Justice stood in the House and said that she attended the event merely as the MP for Vancouver Granville and that her head policymaker or adviser was there merely as a volunteer.

Mistakes happen. We are all human. We all make mistakes, as I tell my kids. I have been married for a long time so I know when to say am sorry and say that I made a mistake. Sometimes we have to do that. We can forgive, but sometimes we cannot forget.

The minister stood in the House and said that she was merely there as the member for Vancouver Granville, and that her head policymaker was there as a volunteer. Therefore, the question off the top of my head would be this. Was the policymaker there merely as a volunteer? Did she claim per diems? Did she take a day off? The actions and fact were not clear and consistent, as brought forth by members of the other side.

I have been married for a long time. I have four kids. I have coached for a very long time. I am very used to diversionary tactics. When the kids say "look over here", or "they did it first", it does not make it right.

We are talking about today's Parliament. We are not talking about what has been done in the past.

Business of Supply

As my hon. colleague previously mentioned, perhaps Canadians were disillusioned as to how the government was moving forward. With successive governments, everybody sets out with best intentions. However, in the ways of the world, and as we go about our daily lives, sometimes we stumble. However, stumbling is one thing. Standing and saying that one made a mistake is another, which is commendable.

● (1145)

The minister not only attended the event, but was advertised as a \$500 a plate event to gain access to the Minister of Justice, held at a law firm that did a considerable amount of work with the federal government. As well, the lawyers who might attend it could be in line for government appointments. I am sure members can see where some of the confusion and concern lies with those of us on this side.

When we talk about an open and transparent government, the story has changed many times. She said that she was just there as a member of Parliament for my riding, or that her head policymaker was there as a volunteer. Oftentimes when we stand in the House, we forget who we really represent and who we should be speaking for, which is all Canadians, and we should speak in common language.

Would this pass the smell test in a family if a family member said one thing and the next day the story changed? The facts are the facts. There is a bit of a smell to this.

While we should be debating and talking about the crisis at Attawapiskat, or the deficiencies in budget 2016, or the reason why it took the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs a week after our emergency debate on the suicides in Attawapiskat to get to that community, we are talking about an issue that is relatively small in the grand scheme of things. However, it speaks volumes to what we have seen over the course of the last six months with the government. It campaigned that it would have a mere \$10 billion deficit. On March 22, we saw a \$29.4 billion deficit. It campaigned that it would lower the taxes on small business. Instead, it has put a freeze on it, and, from what we have seen, it will likely increase those taxes. It is again another string of confusing and perhaps misleading tactics.

On this side of the House, it is our job to hold the government's feet to the fire, and that is what we are doing, because Canadians have that same question. As our hon. colleague stated earlier on, maybe they were looking for some real change. Instead, they have the same Liberal government making the same promises, breaking them, and perhaps looking after its friends a little too much. Canadians deserve better. They deserve better from all of us.

I would agree that there might be things at which we need to look. Perhaps we need to do better collectively, as a whole, strive to do better, be more accountable, remember who we represent, and to speak the common language of our constituents so they understand what this is and what it really means. We should not be pointing fingers saying things such as, "They did it, so it's okay for us to do it too, so take that" or "You ain't seen nothing here", the spoken diversionary tactics and shell games that we see.

Let us be honest. If a mistake was made, all the minister had to do was stand and say that she erred in her ways, that she made a mistake, and that it would never happen again. I think the members

opposite can agree that if we made a mistake, we would do that. I have made a mistake in the House and I have stood and apologized publicly for that mistake. I think all Canadians are asking for is that the Minister of Justice, and perhaps all of us, be held to a higher level. If we make a mistake, we should stand, apologize, say we are sorry, and ensure we move forward with truth and real change.

● (1150)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to be very clear in the House that the Minister of Justice, as well as members of this caucus, place a premium on honesty, openness, transparency, and accountability. As a member, a minister, or as a parliamentary secretary, the concerns of the people of our riding are in fact the concerns shared by many Canadians.

There are other important issues to the people of Canada. In my riding of Whitby in particular are the issues of jobs, particularly for youth; climate change; and, mental health issues. These are all issues we could be discussing today.

I want to ask the member opposite this. Why are we continuing to make an issue where there is no issue?

● (1155)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, we should all be discussing the issues that are most important to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

We sit without a softwood lumber agreement. We are 40 days into a 100 day timeline. The Prime Minister and President Obama have said that they would have a solution in some fashion to the softwood lumber irritant. Yet today we have no further information on that.

We are still sitting without a trans-Pacific partnership agreement that would create thousands if not tens of thousands of jobs.

We have an energy crisis in terms of a pipeline that we could approve, which would take Canada's reliance off foreign oil and allow us to maybe take advantage of our own products and employ hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

I agree wholeheartedly with the member opposite. We should be talking about other things, but the facts are the facts. The Minister of Justice made a mistake. Would she stand in the House and apologize, and return the money she received at that fundraiser?

Business of Supply

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am a bit concerned that we are really wasting time in the House today with a lot of back and forth accusations. The past Conservative and Liberal governments have had ample opportunity to address tougher rules. We in the NDP have been calling for that for a number of years. I know from knocking on doors during the election campaign that Canadians, especially those in Windsor—Tecumseh, are astute. They know about the semantics and the smoke and mirrors. They understand how strategy and diversion sometimes just cast aspersions instead of really talking about the crux of the matter, which is the need to revise our rules.

Earlier on I heard a colleague from the official opposition say that perhaps a review of the Conflict of Interest Act would be in keeping with this issue. Is a mere apology enough? Should we be looking at a review?

Could the member give me his opinion on the concept of conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest not really being addressed? That may be the crux of this issue.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, oftentimes we in the House start placing blame when we talk about what was done in the past, what should be done now and what those guys did. I will not even bring up the \$3.5 million that the NDP took from Canadian taxpayers and failed to repay. We will go on from that.

I agree with my hon. colleague that we should be talking about other things. However, the core issue we are talking about right now is a matter of trust. In the last six months, the Liberal government has broken the trust of Canadians.

• (1200)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the motion.

When the government was elected, we committed to work tirelessly to honour the trust Canadians have given us. We committed to bring new leadership and a new tone to government, listening to the needs of Canadians and working collaboratively to tackle the real challenges we face as a country.

Unfortunately, instead of focusing on these real challenges that Canadians across the country face, challenges such as seeking better job opportunities, finding affordable housing, advancing equal rights, or dealing with other pressing issues like climate change, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton felt it was important to discuss this frivolous motion—a motion that I can confidently say is without merit.

However, I am happy to stand here today to speak about the amazing efforts our government has made to increase transparency and accountability, as well as our strong commitment to an open and honest government that Canadians deserve.

We also committed to tracking our progress and relying upon evidence. What does the evidence say about Canadians' trust in government? An EKOS poll this week showed that Canadians' trust in government has skyrocketed to levels not seen since the mid-1970s. Canadians trust us because they know we are serious about openness and accountability.

For the past 10 years, Canadians have witnessed the most secretive government in Canada's history, one that has shut out scientists and closed the door on evidence-based decision making. It was also a government that was riddled with election scandals and unethical misconduct. Under the former Conservative government, Conservative Senator Mike Duffy inappropriately billed taxpayers as he engaged in Conservative Party fundraisers across the country. This happened under the former government's watch.

This unethical behaviour is not just limited to the Conservatives, but the NDP has also misused Canadian taxpayer dollars. From the Conservatives' many instances of overspending on election expenses, to the NDP's misappropriation of millions of taxpayer dollars, which it funnelled to partisan satellite offices, Canadians have had enough of this behaviour. Canadians want a government they can trust, which is why voters chose to elect a Liberal majority to bring real change to Canada. I am very proud to be part of this change and to stand here with a government that is committed to measures for a more open and accountable government.

Our government is committed to taking a different approach from the previous Conservative government. That is why, in November, our Prime Minister issued "Open and Accountable Government", which sets core principles regarding the roles and responsibilities of ministers in Canada's system of responsible parliamentary government.

At the core of this guide is the understanding that public officeholders must maintain integrity in order to be worthy of Canadians' trust. "Open and Accountable Government" recognizes this importance. It states in its guidelines on ethical standards:

Public office holders shall act with honesty and uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of the government are conserved and enhanced.

I have no doubt, while the member for St. Albert—Edmonton would like to make claims that question the Minister of Justice's conduct, that she is an individual of utmost integrity whom Canadians can trust as the legal advisor to the cabinet and the chief law officer of the crown. It is a tremendous role but one I know the Minister of Justice is well equipped to take on.

In fact, despite what the member for St. Albert—Edmonton's motion seems to imply, the justice minister acted according with the Conflict of Interest Act and proactively sought the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's advice on her fundraising activity.

All members in the House are familiar with, and have likely engaged in, fundraising activities for their party. These are normal, routine activities that members undertake, not only to support their party but also to engage with Canadians. At the fundraising activity that the member for St. Albert—Edmonton is referring to in his motion, the minister appeared as a member of Parliament.

Further to this, her conduct was cleared by the commissioner, and the member for St. Albert—Edmonton knows this very well. He received a response from the commissioner, addressing the baseless claims he had raised in relation to this fundraising activity.

Business of Supply

I am not sure why the member has continued to pursue this, in light of the response from the commissioner, but I will take this moment to again reiterate that the Minister of Justice took all the appropriate measures to ensure she was not in contravention of the Conflict of Interest Act and did not transgress section 16 of the act, which pertains to fundraising activities.

• (1205)

Further to this, pursuant to Elections Canada's regulations, the Liberal Party will be entirely responsible for all costs associated with the event. The Liberal Party fully complies with the Canada Elections Act in all of its fundraising activities.

Our government is committed to being open and accountable and ensuring that our ministers discharge their duties with integrity and meet the fundamental principles of our system of responsible government. In meeting these duties, "Open and Accountable Government" sets out the Prime Minister's expectations for ministers' personal conduct, which includes compliance with the statutory obligations under the Conflict of Interest Act and the Lobbying Act.

At this point, I would like to take the opportunity to discuss Canada's conflict of interest regime. Our country has benefited from a robust regime, and Canada continues to rank among the most ethically governed countries in the world. This is due to the fact that the Conflict of Interest Act establishes strict rules for all full-time public office-holders. The act applies to the Prime Minister, ministers, ministers of state, parliamentary secretaries, and ministers' exempt staff. It also applies to almost all Governor in Council appointees, including deputy and associate deputy ministers, heads of agencies, and the CEOs, chairs, and members of crown corporations, boards, commissions, and tribunals. All of these public office-holders are subject to a set of general conflict of interest rules set out in part 1 of the act. This includes the core rule that public office-holders are to avoid conflicts between private interests and their official duties.

Some public office-holders are also considered to be reporting public office-holders under the act, and this includes ministers, parliamentary secretaries, full-time exempt staff, and full-time Governor in Council appointees. Reporting public office-holders are subject to additional rules and obligations under the act, including a prohibition on engaging in outside employment or other activities; a requirement to make various confidential and public disclosures of assets, liabilities, and other private interests, and to divest through sale or a blind trust certain assets such as publicly traded stocks; and a one- to two-year cooling-off period in which they are prohibited from accepting employment or appointments with organizations with which they had direct or significant dealings during their last year in office.

As I mentioned, the conflict of interest regime in Canada is a robust regime that has evolved over time. Let me give a bit of its historical context. It used to be that the conflict of interest rules that applied to ministers, parliamentary secretaries, other public office-holders, and parliamentarians were found in federal statutes like the Criminal Code and the Parliament of Canada Act. However, starting with former prime minister Pierre Trudeau's guidelines for cabinet ministers in 1973, these statutory rules were replaced or supple-

mented by conflict of interest rules and guidelines. Today, the Conflict of Interest Act outlines the expectations and requirements for public office-holders. The Senate and the House of Commons have further adopted the parliamentary conflict of interest codes to govern the conduct of their members.

Changes were made to the conflict of interest regime by the Federal Accountability Act, which brought the Conflict of Interest Act into law. It is clear that the conflict of interest regime we have in this country has helped to guarantee the integrity of our public office-holders and our democratic system of government. I believe Canadians are well served by the framework we have in place today. Indeed, despite the claims made by the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, the Minister of Justice was not in contravention of the act.

Moving forward, I have every confidence that Canadians will continue to be well served with this framework.

We are committed to an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians and lives up to the highest ethical standards. As detailed in "Open and Accountable Government", it is critical to the principle of responsible government that all organizations within the executive be the responsibility of a minister who is accountable to Parliament. I can confidently say that the Minister of Justice is an individual of utmost integrity whom Canadians can depend on to be fully accountable to Parliament.

Again, as stated in "Open and Accountable Government", the minister is accountable to Parliament for the proper functioning of his or her office and department and all other organizations within his or her portfolio. Ministers fulfill this accountability by demonstrating appropriate diligence and competence in the discharge of their responsibilities.

Of course, what constitutes appropriate ministerial oversight will depend on the nature of the organization and the minister's role. Where arm's-length bodies are concerned, the minister's engagement will be at a more systemic level. I am pleased to note that "Open and Accountable Government" includes new guidance to assist ministers in respecting the parameters of their responsibilities with respect to arm's-length organizations.

• (1210)

Ministerial accountability to Parliament does not mean that a minister is presumed to have knowledge of every matter that occurs within his or her department or portfolio, nor that a minister is necessarily required to accept personal responsibility for every matter. Given the size and complexity of government, this would be an impossible standard to meet.

However, the Prime Minister has made clear in "Open and Accountable Government" that his expectation is that ministers will take appropriate corrective action to address any problems that may arise in their portfolios in a manner that is consistent with their role with respect to the organization in question.

He has also indicated that he expects ministers to attend to all matters of Parliament that concern any organizations for which they are responsible, including responding to questions. As the Prime Minister has stated:

Business of Supply

Open and transparent government is good government. It strengthens trust in our democracy and ensures the integrity of our public institutions.

Canadians have indicated their support for the progress the government has made so far in this area, and they expect us to continue. We must never cease to earn and to keep their trust.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the member for St. Albert—Edmonton's motion is baseless in questioning the conduct of the Minister of Justice. Again, as I said before, she attended the event as a member of Parliament and followed all fundraising rules outlined in the Canada Elections Act.

In her correspondence with the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, the commissioner found that the minister was not in contravention of section 16 of the act, and I am proud to call the minister a friend and a colleague. I know that Canadians are being well served by a minister who is committed to upholding the rule of law and protecting the rights of Canadians.

I am also proud to be a part of a government that is committed to being open and transparent with all Canadians.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Status of Women for her speech today.

This is about trust. That is all it is. I will not go as far as saying the Minister of Justice misled Canadians. Again, we will go back to saying maybe there was a mistake made, but it also should pass the smell test. I have a quote here that I would like to read:

...it is totally incomprehensible to me how a minister of our federal Crown, the minister of justice and the attorney general at that, participating in a private fundraiser with lawyers can be said to escape either the reality or the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Who said that? It was a former premier of British Columbia, a former attorney general of British Columbia, and a former Liberal minister of health, Ujjal Dosanjh. If it does not pass the smell test with this gentleman, how can the government expect it to pass the smell test for Canadians?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, actually we have an Ethics Commissioner, and the Minister of Justice followed all of the requirements of a minister in consulting with the Ethics Commissioner about the appropriateness of this particular fundraiser.

Like the Canadians who have placed their trust in us, I have confidence in the Ethics Commissioner's ruling, and I believe that the Ethics Commissioner has details that perhaps the people quoted by the member do not.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing a lot in this place, including from the hon. member, about what the law states and the ruling by the Ethics Commissioner, but what troubles me is that this new Liberal government has a propensity, instead of amending the law to include what they uphold as stronger principles—for example, with environmental assessment, instead of amending the rules to allow citizens to participate—to simply issue non-binding guidelines.

The member's party in November last year issued “Open and Accountable Government”, stating that ministers and parliamentary secretaries must ensure their fundraisers avoid soliciting political contributions.

Then the Prime Minister issued to all of his ministers and parliamentary secretaries the very clear directive that they must ensure that they do not appear to affect the exercise of official duties or access of individuals:

There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access....

There should be no singling out, or appearance of singling out of individuals....

Those are very clear directions to the ministers and parliamentary secretaries that they should take greater care in solicitation of political contributions.

There is a lot of argument being made that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada was there in her own right, but surely the presumption is that the Minister of Justice is there with people who could potentially be seeking judicial appointments. Surely greater care and attention should be taken by the Minister of Justice, of all cabinet members.

• (1215)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what the question is in that statement, but I will say that in fact we stand by the “Open and Accountable Government” policy. It is a significant improvement in our commitment to transparency and accountability to Canadians.

Furthermore, the Minister of Justice dealt with her responsibility to act in an ethical manner by seeking the advice of the Ethics Commissioner. This is not to be understated. We all have the responsibility as ministers to work with the Ethics Commissioner. In fact, I have several times asked the Ethics Commissioner about actions that may or may not be prudent and have received excellent advice.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Status of Women for giving her statement and giving us a better history of the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

In my discussions with people in my community and riding, people talk about jobs, about health, about transit funding, about the budget. There are many questions that they have raised. When I heard the opposition presenting this motion, there were a lot of questions about the trust and the faith of Canadians, and that is what the issue is.

Does the minister have any comments about what she is hearing in her community about trust and faith? What are people looking for?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I have not had any conversations about this issue in my riding in terms of the Minister of Justice. Just as the member has pointed out, the conversations I am having are twofold. The first is about the incredible need that exists in our communities for good legislation that addresses many of the needs that Canadians are facing in regard to housing, employment, the widening gap between people who have wealth and those who do not, and the difficulty people have in accessing services. These are the kinds of things that I am facing.

Business of Supply

In our constituency work, one of the things we deal with most frequently in Thunder Bay—Superior North, which surprised me, is immigration issues. One would not think that would be the case in a riding that is not known for a vast amount of immigration, but because of changes made that have deleteriously affected our immigration system, many people in our riding are struggling tremendously to address the needs that they face.

I echo my colleague's concerns around diverting the conversation from these very real challenges that Canadians face to something that has been explained over and over in the House that has the full consent of the Ethics Commissioner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Since arriving in the House today, I have heard members of the government and the second opposition party use words such as “frivolous motion”, “baseless motion”, “without merit”, and other similar expressions to describe our party's motion. They may not realize that we are talking about conflict of interest, privileged access, undue influence, and people's cynicism regarding politicians.

When I entered politics, a journalist asked me what I would do first if I were elected to government and had the power to change something. I replied that I would take concrete steps to restore people's faith in politicians' ability to handle issues related to immigration, finance, and defence along with all of the other issues that people in our ridings talk to us about. We must restore that trust.

Does my hon. colleague think that it was ethically acceptable for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, whose husband is a lobbyist, to attend a fundraiser hosted by a group of lawyers, a lobby?

If so, does she agree that the minister should reimburse all of the money that was raised during the event?

• (1220)

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about trust. It is the member opposite and his party who are seeking to undermine the trust of Canadians.

I have to tell the member and this House that when I was campaigning for the first time for a federal office, one of the most disheartening things I heard was the distrust that Canadians had in their politicians, based on 10 years of unethical behaviour.

To me, one of the best privileges of being an MP is restoring that trust. As I travelled through my riding after winning this candidacy, after becoming an MP for Thunder Bay—Superior North, after receiving the great honour of becoming a cabinet minister, Canadians in my riding and across this country were thanking the government for bringing back accountability, transparency, and ethics. They said that they believe in the work we are doing. They know that it will not be without difficulty and that we will not always agree, but they know that we will always do our best.

I am incredibly and immensely proud of the response that Canadians are giving to our government.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has certainly brought back Liberal ethics, as the Minister of Status of Women has said, Liberal ethics that led to the sponsorship scandal, Liberal ethics that led to many issues over the years, Liberal ethics that have led to a justice minister providing access to lawyers who potentially could request positions on the bench in the future.

I will be sharing my time today with the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Before I begin, I would like to comment on one other thing that the Minister of Status of Women said, which was that this issue is not important to Canadians. Present today, aside from many parliamentarians, are members of the Barrie and area firefighters association, who believe it is so important that they joined us in the chamber today.

I stand to speak to the motion sponsored by the member for St. Albert—Edmonton regarding the fundraising exploits of the Minister of Justice. She is not the first minister of the crown to exercise poor judgment in attending a fundraiser staged by individuals who seek to gain from their responsibilities. This has happened on numerous occasions on both sides of the House. Sometimes it was because the individual did not know, sometimes it was because the minister did not yet understand his or her position, and sometimes it was because the party was trying to raise funds and cared not for the conventions of this honourable House.

Members on the government side will use past issues to clutter today's debate, to rationalize the legitimacy—or illegitimacy, as I see it—of the Minister of Justice's fundraising with lawyers. To put this to rest in advance, I want to outline the most applicable circumstances surrounding this issue.

A minister in the last government attended a fundraiser for \$50 per person, at which there were stakeholders present from the minister's portfolio. The minister was unaware that the event was raising funds using stakeholders from the portfolio. Subsequently, the minister returned all of the funds and addressed the situation immediately.

In the end, the Ethics Commissioner decided that while this event was not technically against the law, the commissioner stated in the ethics report's conclusion that it was “clearly inappropriate”. This sets the standard for both what is expected of a minister in not attending such a fundraiser and also how to respond in an open and honest fashion if a mistake is made in the future.

Other standards that need to be met in matters regarding fundraising are outlined by the Prime Minister. In the letter to his ministers, parliamentary secretaries, and Canadians about open and transparent conduct, the Prime Minister said the following:

Business of Supply

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must act with honesty and must uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity and impartiality of government are maintained and enhanced. As public office holders, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are subject to the Part I requirements of the Ethical and Political Activity Guidelines for Public Office Holders set out in Annex A, as well as the best practices for fundraising and dealing with lobbyists that are set out in Annex B. Moreover, they 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 repeat, “This obligation is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law”, meaning the standard of care is not just to meet the regulation of the law of this land but to be without ethical question and to maintain the credibility of the position with the public.

There is no question that the minister has crossed ethical lines by attending a Liberal fundraiser for members of the law society, whom she oversees.

● (1225)

The Minister of Justice is responsible for naming individuals to the bench and for overseeing the judicial system in Canada. Therefore, having lawyers who could be requesting appointments as judges paying money to meet the person who would appoint those judges is an obvious ethical lapse.

There can be no question regarding the minister's ethics. It would undercut the credibility of not just the Minister of Justice, but the government appointments process, and indeed, the government itself. Since the Prime Minister is failing to hold his minister to account on this matter, it leaves Canadians again questioning the legitimacy of his words, spoken and written, which are in direct contradiction to his actions that are taken or not taken.

My colleagues have clearly outlined the ethical lapses regarding the minister's fundraising practices from a parliamentary standpoint, but what about the ideal that the Canadian government is as accessible to each and every Canadian in the same way?

I would like to tell a little story.

I had the opportunity to take a civics and careers class in high school. At the time, my family was living in government housing. I fell in love with politics, because everything I read about in those textbooks showed that if one believed enough, if one hoped long enough, if one worked hard enough, one would be able to attain all of the successes that are available in this country, not because of the amount of money one has, not because of one's age, not because of a plethora of reasons that we could come up with, but because we live in a country where each and every person is valued equally regardless of race, religion, or means, and all those other issues.

In my opinion, what this fundraiser has done is to create two classes of citizens in this country. One is the citizen who must pay to go and give feedback, input, and influence to a minister at \$500 a head, and those who do not have that access, those who do not have the means to be at those meetings. What this is creating in our country is an unequal footing for those who have the financial means to show up and those who have the friends to get the invites. Quite frankly, it is wrong. It is not what our country stands for, and it is not what our government should be practising.

When the Prime Minister during the election promised open and transparent government, when the Prime Minister during the election

promised that his government would be different, this is not the different that I thought I would see. I thought we would make gains on the transparency and accountability front, but we have found the opposite.

Not only has the minister already conducted herself in this way as a minister of the crown, but she is committed to holding another fundraiser in the future. I mentioned earlier a minister in the previous government who realized immediately that the fundraising efforts were done in an incorrect fashion and returned the money and dealt with it right away. The minister is literally doubling down, going from \$500 a head to \$1,000. That is not the example I want us to set for our youth, that if one has \$1,000, one can meet the minister, but if one does not, then one cannot. It is wrong, and I do not believe any of these things about showing up and participating as a member of Parliament. I hope that Canadians see through this as well.

Finally, I think it is important that we know who is benefiting. Who is it that is attending these fundraisers and paying to be able to talk with a minister and perhaps influence policy or maybe even influence appointments down the road? We will find out eventually, but it is important on these matters, because of the ethical questions, that the minister be forthright, step up, and release all of the information available.

● (1230)

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find those comments to be quite interesting. I do understand, however, the member's cynicism being a member of a party that when in government committed atrocities and crossed the line. Some examples are the Senate hush money; contempt of Parliament; government failure to share budget information, even after a court order; granting immunity; falsifying documents; duplicity of project costs; the advertising scam; corruption; and the list goes on. With that, I do understand the cynicism of the member.

We have asked this question many times and I would like to hear a yes or no answer: Has the integrity commissioner failed in her judgment?

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, the integrity commissioner was very clear that there are laws that define the interaction between ministers and the public in fundraising opportunities. There are also things which she has labelled and clearly communicated as wrong, as being unethical and inappropriate. That was clearly communicated in an identical circumstance during the last government. The funds were returned in advance and all necessary measures were taken. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has failed to learn a lesson from that. Instead of learning a lesson and not conducting its activities in such a way, the Liberal government has asked how it can exploit its position and gain money for its coffers for the next election, not only once, but twice.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is with regard to perception.

Business of Supply

Canadian taxpayers are exhausted and disillusioned, and taxpayers in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh specifically are feeling the same way.

Does the hon. member believe that we are ready for a comprehensive and crucial review of the Conflict of Interest Act? Is it time for us to make real meaningful changes that would address the problematic issue of perception and appearance?

• (1235)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, when we are looking at any of the acts that govern the way in which we conduct ourselves as parliamentarians, the way in which ministers of the crown conduct themselves, it is important to remember that they are living, breathing documents. I would hope that if we see people, ministers and other parliamentarians, looking for loopholes that we would look at opportunities to make the acts better.

The cynicism that the member has heard in her riding is something that I have heard across the board, especially from young people. At 30 years of age, I am a young member of Parliament. I have had the opportunity to speak with many young people who feel that they are being told one thing during an election campaign and one thing during a throne speech, but the government's actions are completely different. It needs to change.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague did a great job in presenting his case. I just want to ask my hon. colleague if he believes in some of the rhetoric that we heard from the other side about how today's debate is frivolous. Today's debate is all about a document called "Open and Accountable Government" which has been, if not penned, at least signed by the current Prime Minister of Canada. If so, is any document that the Prime Minister of Canada signs frivolous?

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I do not believe it is frivolous. What the Prime Minister wrote set the standard and tone for how the government should conduct itself. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister also appointed people to his front bench who have failed to uphold the tenets of that document.

I would ask the governing party to stop referring to things as being frivolous or small. These are not small issues. These are the underlying tenets of our entire democracy to which all have access. One is accountability of the government. I would ask the Prime Minister to start enforcing it.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte for sharing his time with me today.

Before I get to the formal part of my remarks, I want to introduce Mr. George Taylor. For those in the House who do not know Mr. Taylor, he was a resident of Barrie and is the former solicitor general in the province of Ontario. I am sure you would know him, Mr. Speaker. He is a well-respected former member of the provincial legislature in Ontario.

Just last week on Facebook, Mr. Taylor weighed in on this debate. What he had to say on Facebook was quite interesting and quite telling. I corresponded with Mr. Taylor when I was a city councillor in Barrie. I never had the chance to meet him face to face. He is an

honourable man, a man of great conviction, and a man who is well respected.

Mr. Taylor wrote on Facebook, "The Minister of Justice must have missed the conflict of interest course, as did the Ethics Commissioner, to conclude the attendance of a Tory law firm dinner, as she has said to CBC, that she was there as the MP for B.C. Law firms do not ask MPs to dinner. MPs do not appoint judges. They do not grant QCs. They give out great amounts of legal work and determine who to prosecute. The Minister of Justice is to be more independent than other ministers. She will have to learn more about her duties. You are never not a minister."

Those are wise words from a well-respected man.

I was at the epicentre of this issue when it started taking root. It became a regional issue. I was called to CBC on Tuesday, April 5, to comment about this issue taking place. I was not sure what it was about on my way there, but I was certainly briefed on the issue. When I walked into the CBC building, I was told by a producer that I was going to be interviewed by Mr. Terry Milewski. We knew that this story was going to have legs. We knew that it was going to be one of the lead stories on CBC. As it turned out, it was.

I asked Mr. Milewski what angle he was taking on the story. Quite clearly he told me that he had received an email from someone stating that there was an event to take place with the Minister of Justice at a law firm and that it was, in effect, a secret meeting. There were no formal invitations sent out. In fact, the email reminded people to pay for the event, \$500 a ticket as we found out, by going to the Liberal Party of Canada website. However, in searching for the website, there was actually no page. There was a link that led to the website. That was the angle he was taking on the story.

What was interesting about that was the fact that there was a regional component to this. At that time, the controversy in Ontario was breaking out with the Wynne government. We were finding out then about the pay-to-play scenarios that were going on, where cabinet ministers in the Ontario Liberal government were asked to find donors, some of them up to \$5,000 each, to attend functions where cabinet ministers would attend. This sounded eerily similar to what was going on in Ontario.

Should it have surprised anyone that this in fact was going on? The reason I say that is it is quite clear now that the same players who are running the Prime Minister's office were the ones who were running the premier's office, both Premier Wynne's and McGuinty's office. It should come as no surprise to any Canadian, and it should come as no surprise to anyone in the House, that this is now happening at the federal level.

I know it is not germane to what we are discussing here, but it should come as no surprise that we are starting to see the debt and deficit situations happen federally that we have seen in Ontario, because the Liberals now have access to a bigger piggy bank and they will surely go at it.

• (1240)

What is interesting and I think is the root of what this whole debate is about, which my hon. colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe spoke about, is that on the Prime Minister's own page it states:

Business of Supply

For Canadians to trust our government we must trust Canadians, and we will only be successful in implementing our agenda to the extent that we earn and keep this trust.

To be worthy of Canadians' trust, we must always act with integrity. [...] 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.

The Prime Minister goes on to state:

I draw your attention in particular to areas of the guide that we have expanded or strengthened for our mandate, including the guidance on non-partisan use of departmental communications resources in Annex G;

When we look at the government's website and the document entitled "Open and Accountable Government", which was one of the tenets that the Liberals sold Canadians on during the last election, that they would truly be open and accountable, it 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. [...]

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. [...]

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.

It goes on and on, and speaks to the issue of government ministers being held to a higher standard, as with all governments, in the areas of perceived or real conflicts of interest.

I know that the members opposite will say that it has been cleared by the Ethics Commissioner. We have seen the government House leader stand up time and again in the House and defend the justice minister. For whatever reason, the justice minister is not in a position to defend herself or does not feel that she should be defending herself. Rather, it is the government House leader who is doing that. However, it goes back to the root of the issue, which is the perception of it.

As my hon. colleague from Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte said, it does not pass the smell test. It is that question that I was asked on CBC. It does not pass the smell test. I think most Canadians would feel that way. This is about open and accountable government.

It is clear that we have gone back in time to when the Chrétien Liberals were in government. The Liberals are simply paying lip service to Canadians and to this House about their commitment to a high standard of ethical conduct. I am holding out hope that the minister and the Liberal government will do the right thing for Canadians, which is to agree with our motion today, return the money, and apologize for attending the event.

In conclusion, because I believe it is worth repeating, I will repeat what Mr. Taylor, the former solicitor general of this province, said. He stated, "The Minister of Justice is more independent than other ministers. She will have to learn of her duties, you are never not a minister."

That night, the Minister of Justice attended that fundraising event with one of the largest law firms in the country, which has registered lobbyists who lobby on behalf of organizations right across this country, and who will deal with the justice department and the Attorney General of this country. I suggest to this House that she was

a minister that night and she should apologize for her actions and give the money back.

• (1245)

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made a good statement when he said that government ministers have to be held to a higher standard. We also heard him, and many of our colleagues on that side of the House, say that this does not pass the smell test. He also acknowledged the fact that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner made a ruling and found nothing untoward. However, we can see that they clearly are not happy with the ruling, and they have brought this motion to make that statement. Many have risen, including this member, and have said that they are unhappy.

What I would like to learn is this. Are they unhappy with the rules, or are they unhappy with the ruling of the commissioner? Which one are they unhappy with? They are clearly unhappy. The rules have been followed, the commissioner has made a ruling that we followed the rules, and they are still unhappy. Is it the rules they are not happy with, or is it the commissioner?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, that is a fair question on the part of the hon. member.

If we look at what the Ethics Commissioner said subsequent to the ruling, she herself is not happy with the rules. She says that the rules should be looked at.

What is important here, and we are going to hear this all day, as we have heard it all morning, is the fact that it is the Prime Minister's own accountability in this situation that is being called into question. I gave various examples from the Prime Minister's own page, the expectations of his ministers, the "Open and Accountable Government" website, where it says very clearly in annex B:

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.

That was not the Ethics Commissioner who wrote that. That was the Liberal government. That was the Prime Minister of our country who made that very clear to his ministers.

I would ask the hon. member subsequent to what he asked me, which part of that did not happen in this case?

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as one of the two MPs for Barrie, I think the hon. member got the better end of the riding name stick; the other one is just too long for me to remember.

In so far as ministerial conduct is concerned, my colleague quoted from a document referring to ministerial conduct:

Moreover, they have an obligation to perform their official duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny.

When the Minister of Justice left her role as chair of the First Nations Finance Authority, her husband stepped in as the registered lobbyist, and then she went to cabinet meetings to which the Ethics Commissioner had no access to what is discussed at those meetings. Then we find a \$20-million kickback in the budget to that same group. Does my colleague from Barrie—Innisfil believe that meets the test laid out by the Prime Minister?

Business of Supply

• (1250)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question, one that again calls into question the Prime Minister's own ethical standards that he set for his ministers.

If in fact these types of things are happening, Canadians rightly have a reason to be concerned. What they should be concerned about is what is going on within the government. Are friends, cronies, and Liberal stakeholders benefiting from the fact that the Liberal government has taken over?

I would suggest that it is back to the future, and we are seeing what happened in those years of Liberal cronyism. I am concerned about it, and not just as a parliamentarian; I am concerned about it as an individual Canadian.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a cold, so I might lose my voice, but that does not mean I am not tremendously interested in the debate we are having today.

[*English*]

I am obviously pleased to rise today to join with some of my colleagues in the Liberal caucus who have spoken previously to explain to the House and to Canadians why we are opposing what we think is a frivolous and gratuitous motion.

We are proud to oppose the motion. We recognize its cynical origins, and we recognize the attempt to distract Canadians and parliamentarians from issues that we think concern the vast majority of Canadians. It is an attempt to fabricate a circumstance around one of our colleagues, which we believe obviously has no merit.

During my speech, I intend to demonstrate to the House that not only has the Minister of Justice acted honourably, ethically, and in a manner beyond reproach, but I will also, I hope, be able to point out that many current and former members of the other parties in this House could in fact learn enormously from her outstanding actions. I will show how in a few short months, Canadians have witnessed how different and improved things can be when they have a government that truly believes in openness and transparency.

Every action that this government has taken is based upon the idea that as an institution, whether it is a government or Parliament, we can and must do better.

Unfortunately, instead of moving ahead with us on this particular approach, the opposition has chosen to spend today debating a motion which, in our view, as I said, has extremely limited merit. It is designed to fabricate an issue where in fact no issue exists.

Conservatives could have decided to debate today one of the numerous issues that continue to worry Canadians, issues which they have ignored in a decade in government. A few examples might be the weak economic growth that the previous government saw, or Canadians' eroding ability to ensure a secure retirement, or a lack of diversification in our economy, or the increasing unfairness in various government programs such as employment insurance, or a failed relationship with indigenous peoples.

Instead, they want to spend today talking about our colleague, the Minister of Justice, so let us do exactly that.

[*Translation*]

Today, we are talking about integrity, transparency, and honesty. These are character traits that perfectly describe the Minister of Justice. These principles are at the heart of a good government. They form the foundation on which we will continue to rebuild the relationship of trust between elected members and voters. These are the principles that guide the actions of the government and the actions of our colleague, the Minister of Justice.

• (1255)

[*English*]

When we formed government, the Prime Minister made this clear to all members of cabinet as well as our colleagues in the Liberal caucus.

After a decade where Conservatives found themselves repeatedly before the courts, where insiders close to the former prime minister were hiding, for example, in Panama, fighting extradition, and where a \$90,000-payoff to a sitting senator was simply seen as business as usual in the Prime Minister's Office, we believed that things needed to change.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember this, as you were in the previous Parliament. When caught, the former government would deny the charges, obfuscate the facts, and sometimes mislead Canadians.

I heard in my constituency, and colleagues on all sides of this House heard it in theirs, in community after community, that the previous government lacked transparency.

I am happy to say, thanks to the Prime Minister, these dark days are over and have given way, as we see outside Parliament today, to a very sunny way. We have an open and transparent government that believes in putting its trust in Canadians as a way to have Canadians better trust their government.

[*Translation*]

I know that everyone here agrees. We must never give Canadians a reason to distrust their government. They will not always like what we do, and that is understandable. Some will not support every one of the government's decisions. That is okay. Diverging ideas and opinions are what make our democracy great because they encourage people with different points of view to work together to reach a consensus.

However, disagreeing with some decisions is quite different from not trusting the government. Canadians should not think that the government is hiding things from them or not listening to them. Worse yet, they should not think that their elected representatives are playing by a different set of rules than the rest of society. This is a fundamental principle for our government.

Business of Supply

As the Prime Minister said, 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. That is where the Prime Minister set the bar, and we must accept nothing less.

[English]

This is exactly what the Minister of Justice has done. Unlike in the previous government, she proactively sought the advice of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. That is what a responsible government does. The member for St. Albert—Edmonton knows this because when he wrote to that commissioner, she responded to him in writing—it was a three-page letter—and indicated that the justice minister had followed every rule outlined in the applicable legislation.

That is an important difference between how the previous government acted then and how we have chosen to act now. The Conservatives would usually wait until the commissioner found a wrongdoing, then deny and obfuscate the circumstance and, in fact, in some cases try to mislead investigations.

We seek to proactively disclose these concerns to the commissioner. Then we are guided by her advice. That is exactly what the Minister of Justice did, and exactly what the government will continue to do.

[Translation]

Publishing the ministerial mandate letters in November 2015 was a tangible reflection of our commitment. For the first time in Canadian history, a prime minister clearly and publicly articulated exactly what he expected of his ministers. These expectations addressed not only what the ministers should be doing, but also how they should do it. These letters were a blueprint for taking action on a broad scale. They included investing in infrastructure, restoring Canada's constructive leadership in the world, and renewing the nation-to-nation relationship with our indigenous peoples.

● (1300)

[English]

However, opposition members know that our economic policy of growing the middle class is extremely popular with Canadians, and exactly the suite of economic policies that Canadians expect. They know that asking the top 1% to do a little more in order to lower taxes on the middle class is more than fair. The Conservatives and the New Democrats, much to our surprise, in the election opposed programs like the Canada child benefit, an economic measure which would help nine out of every ten Canadian families by giving them a more generous tax-free monthly cheque.

They know the importance of investing in crucial infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and transit, green infrastructure and social infrastructure. Because the opposition of the Conservatives to these measures is not resonating with Canadians, they find the need to fabricate an issue involving the justice minister.

Unfortunately for the opposition, but thankfully for the justice minister and for Canadians, all of the rules in this circumstance were followed. The minister met the very high expectations of the Prime Minister, as well as her obligations under the code applying to members of Parliament and the Conflict of Interest Act, which

applies to public office-holders, ministers being principal among them.

It is a very old method, sadly, that the Conservatives have spent a decade in protecting. When they cannot win an argument with respect to the substance, they turn to personal attacks and fabricate allegations. We do not have to go very far to find such examples. We can easily remember the numerous spokespeople in the former Conservative government, when they would answer a question in the House of Commons time and again by simply indicating a circumstance that had absolutely nothing to do with the question. Uninterested in the substance of the question, the previous government had one responsibility; that was to ignore the questions posed and respond with a series of baseless and fabricated allegations, something we see at the heart of today's motion.

[Translation]

In addition to the mandate letters published by the government, there is another worthwhile document recognized by the House. Some of my colleagues have already mentioned it, and it deserves close consideration.

I am referring to “Open and Accountable Government”, which the Prime Minister released in November 2015. The title says it all. It is an ambitious and comprehensive document.

I regard that document as a ministerial game plan, a game plan that the minister has always followed in a very responsible manner, I would say before the House.

“Open and Accountable Government” describes what is generally expected of ministers and their staff in terms of their conduct. It provides a framework for establishing an ethical government. Nothing is more important to Canadians.

On the subject of public office holders, the document states:

...they have an obligation to perform their official duties and arrange their private affairs in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny.

It also states:

Public office holders, in fulfilling their official duties and functions, shall [as the Minister of Justice did] make decisions in the public interest and with regard to the merits of each case.

● (1305)

[English]

This is exactly what the Minister of Justice has done and what she will continue to do. I know my colleagues across the aisle like to fabricate a series of accusations and allegations. Canadians understand that these have no merit. They know that at all times the Minister of Justice followed these rules in a rigorous way and proactively sought the advice of the independent officers of Parliament, who are, in fact, given the responsibility of enforcing those rules and applying them. In the case of a disagreement between an opposition member of the House and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, we will always defer to the judgment of the commissioner in all cases.

Business of Supply

Openness and transparency for our government is more than a slogan. One example, which we find rather disturbing, is the opposition's continued request to have a list of who attended a particular event in question. The opposition knows full well that the names will, indeed, be made public. As per the Canada Elections Act, donations of over \$200 are disclosed and made public by political parties on the Elections Canada website and this information is shared with all Canadians.

These are rules of which we are very proud. The opposition knows full well that these rules apply to the particular event in question and will always apply to events where members of Parliament raise money for political parties or local riding associations. Canadians deserve to know that politicians keep their best interests in mind at all times and will not be swayed by particular funding from particular groups. That is why this transparency is so important.

Unfortunately, that is a principle that some members of the Conservative Party have had considerable trouble in following. We remember when the former prime minister, the current member for Calgary Heritage, ran for the leadership of the then Reform Party. He kept secret the source of \$900,000 he raised in that leadership campaign. When that member ran for the leadership of the new Conservative Party, the biggest donors to his \$2 million leadership campaign were quickly hidden by the Conservative Party. If it had nothing to hide, we would have assumed this information should properly have been made public. The fact that it has not done so, has led Canadians to question exactly why. The Conservatives refused to share this information with Canadians and we will never know what kind of funding may have motivated the former prime minister in some of the decisions his government made.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I am proud to be able to say that our colleague, the Minister of Justice, is also a friend. She is doing a tremendous job as the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada. Her conduct has always been exemplary.

[*English*]

The impressive record of our colleague, the Minister of Justice, of public service, as a lawyer, as a prosecutor, as an elected indigenous leader is something we believe should inspire all Canadians.

The Conservatives who brought this motion forward, in an attempt to distract from other issues that we think are more important to Canadians, have themselves a very difficult laundry list of Elections Act violations and ethical breaches.

In question period in previous weeks, I referred to some of the more shocking examples, where Canadians saw the Conservative Party plead guilty in the in-and-out scheme, for example, and pay a \$250,000 fine as a political party for not having respected basic Elections Act provisions, which determine spending limits for a national party and a local campaign. People will remember the Conservatives attacked Elections Canada and they attacked the commissioner. When Parliament adjourned one spring and when nobody was looking, on a Friday, they plead guilty and paid a \$250,000 fine as a national party for not having followed the elections rules.

There are other spectacular examples, such as the former prime minister's parliamentary secretary being led out in leg irons and handcuffs to a van, and then taken to jail for problems with election financing. I think that might have acted as a break on the Conservative Party's enthusiasm to fabricate allegations against hon. members of the House and members of the cabinet, who follow the rules and serve Canadians.

This is why when this frivolous motion comes to a vote, we look forward to the House defeating it.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear my friend and my colleague, the hon. government House leader, make his comments. However, in all seriousness, we are dealing with an issue now that seems to contradict on all levels the code of ethics imposed by the Prime Minister on his public office-holders, his ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

While I will agree with the government House leader that the Ethics Commissioner did indeed say there was no violation in her ruling, the Prime Minister went further than just what the technical aspects of an ethics violation may be. He went on to say not only real but perceived conflicts of interest.

My friend and my colleague must agree that for well-heeled lawyers to spend \$500 a pop to sidle up to a minister is a perception of conflict. Clearly, these well-heeled lawyers wanted to get next to the minister for a reason that would ultimately, in at least their hopes, benefit the members attending that fundraiser.

The minister and the government House leader have also said on many occasions during question period that all members do the same, that we all engage in the same practice. I will assure my colleague and my friend that a backbencher will not be able to charge \$500 or \$1,000 to get people out to a fundraiser. It was specifically because it was the Minister of Justice that these lawyers wanted to be in attendance.

Will the member not simply agree that, at the very least, there is a serious perception of conflict of interest, and on that basis alone, the minister should at least apologize if not repay the full amount of the fundraiser?

• (1310)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to scandalize my friend from Moose Jaw, but I can assure him that in fact in our case, in our party, some people do pay \$500 to come to events where backbench MPs are featured as guest speakers.

I hosted an event in my riding a year or two ago, and we were then the third party in opposition. I was the guest speaker at my event. I think it was \$500 or it may have been \$750 a person. It was to get ready for the election campaign. This is how we raise money in constituencies. In all circumstances, we followed the law and the requirements. Therefore, I do not want to disappoint my colleague, but we have members of Parliament, even as the third party in opposition, who are able to attract that kind of support at fundraising events, and we are proud of that.

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My colleague said that he could assure us that this kind of event would not have happened in the previous government. However, on February 12, 2015, at the Sutton Place Hotel in Edmonton, the current member for St. Albert—Edmonton hosted a fundraiser where the special guest was the then minister of health, who is now the leader of the opposition. Therefore, a little over a year ago, a very similar event took place. I do not know if there were well-heeled lawyers there, but it was an exclusive event at the posh Sutton Place Hotel with the minister of health. Maybe my colleague has been there.

However, it is interesting that on the Facebook page, the minister of Health and the member for St. Albert—Edmonton said that the minister of health was there simply as the member of Parliament for Edmonton—Spruce Grove. The hypocrisy is a little shocking.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to agree with the government House leader that this is perhaps not the most fruitful topic we could spend an entire day debating, but that said, I agree with the motion in that the appearance of a conflict of interest is as important as any real conflict.

Whether the Minister of Justice followed the rules exactly or had the blessing of the Ethics Commissioner after the fact does not really measure up to the fact that we would not be talking about this issue today if there were not a pretty strong appearance of conflict of interest.

Does the government House leader agree that the Conflict of Interest Act needs to be reviewed and more strongly incorporate this concept of the appearance of a conflict of interest?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I disagree a little with the member's statement that the Minister of Justice attendance at a fundraiser, as happens with many members of Parliament on all sides of the House, necessarily leads to the impression of a conflict of interest. What removes the impression of a conflict of interest and what should reassure Canadians is that all of the rules that are public and well known were followed in this case, including the disclosure of all of those who attended this event.

The reason we have severe penalties for people who do not properly disclose political donations—and the former Conservative member for Peterborough saw exactly what happens when we do not follow those rules—is to reassure Canadians. Events like this are a necessary part of the democratic process. Individuals make personal donations, unlike the case with the NDP, which had to pay back union donations that were received inappropriately at one of their conventions. Those types of donations are no longer possible. These are individuals who donate a certain amount of money personally.

All of this disclosure comes out according to law and publicly, and that is what, in our view, makes this a very normal, very routine part of democracy. The Minister of Justice, in following all those rules, in fact did absolutely nothing wrong, and to suggest that she left an appearance of conflict of interest is extremely disingenuous.

•(1315)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague would care to comment on a fundraising controversy that arose in the previous Parliament when the former

minister of transport, who had been using a government agency to fax fundraising letters prior to being elected to the House, was caught using public assets to fundraise as a member of a federal port authority.

Subsequent to that, people who were appointed to that port authority by Governor in Council appointees who had been appointed by the previous government were then donating their salaries back to the political party that appointed them. That behaviour was dismissed as simply a Twitter battle and not anything of any significance. It is questionable whether that scandal was properly handled by the previous government and whether the ethical standards of that party should have any standing in the House to raise an issue like the one we have today when they could not follow those rules either.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister identified yet another example that we think deeply disturbed Canadians. That circumstance involved the former minister of transport, who in a previous capacity was involved in a governmental organization. People were appointed to various government agencies, and we do not know if in fact there was an understanding that when people got appointed to a particular board, agency, or commission, they would of course make a contribution back to the Conservative Party.

A perfect example of the reason Canadians became so distrustful of the previous government was just outlined by my colleague. What we did with the open and accountable government mandate was to say that Canadians deserve to trust their government. We have a government that trusts Canadians and we think it is important for Canadians to be able to trust their government, and the only way that we can rebuild trust after 10 difficult years under the previous government is to be more open and more transparent, as the Minister of Justice has been in seeking the advice and guidance of the appropriate authorities before undertaking a particular course of action.

That is what ministers are doing, and that is exactly how we will erase the sad memory of the scandals in the previous Conservative government that were outlined by my colleague and bring Canadians to a better place in terms of confidence in public institutions.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to try to change the tenor of the debate, because this really is about ensuring the credibility of the House and of government and ensuring the trust of Canadians, the trust he is talking about.

The document that is outlined in the motion today is the “Open and Accountable Government” document that was so frivolously penned by his leader, the Prime Minister of Canada. I use the word “frivolous” just as they are referring to the debate today as frivolous.

I am wondering if he would agree with these statements.

—it is totally incomprehensible to me how a minister of our federal Crown, the minister of justice and the attorney general at that, participating in a private fundraiser with lawyers can be said to escape either the reality or the appearance of a conflict of interest. ...

An attorney general is not just any minister. She is the Attorney General of Canada, and in a significant number of her functions she must remain and be seen to remain independent of the office of the prime minister.

Business of Supply

This article was penned by none other than Ujjal Dosanjh, a former Liberal cabinet minister and a former premier of British Columbia, who suggested in the article at the time of its writing that the minister cancel that fundraiser.

I am wondering why the government House leader cannot agree with someone from a former Liberal government who obviously understood that scandals do not do them any good.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe would certainly know that scandals do not do any government any good, if we look at the record of his government.

The previous minister of justice in my friend's party, when it was in government, attended fundraising events. This is not something that is unusual. There is this fake indignation: "Oh my God, some cabinet minister attended a fundraiser." The fundraiser followed all the rules. It was designed to raise money for a political party, exactly as all parties in the House have done, according to law. We hope that has been the case. Certainly it has been in our case.

We see absolutely nothing inappropriate with the actions of the Minister of Justice. What we are concerned about is the case of my colleague from Red Deer and the event he organized in his riding with now-disgraced Senator Mike Duffy, where Senator Duffy apparently used taxpayers' money to attend a fundraiser in his constituency. Then public attention was drawn to this example of Senator Duffy, who Canadians know is facing 31 charges, including fraud of \$5,000. We would not have thought he was the best guest to attend a constituency fundraising event, but my friend from Red Deer obviously did, because he invited Senator Duffy to his riding.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe.

[*English*]

We are here today to talk about the motion introduced by my colleague, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton. I want to pay respect to my colleague, because, first, he is a brand new member, elected only six months ago. It was six months ago that the member for St. Albert—Edmonton and all of us were elected, but it was the first time for him and for me.

I want to pay my respect because in the debate on assisted suicide, he did a tremendous job that benefited the country. He was the leader of our group in the committee and the lead on the dissenting report we wrote with our colleagues. He did a tremendous job, and I want to pay respect to him today and thank him on behalf of Canada and the future of our country, especially for his thoughts on this delicate issue.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to speak to the motion moved today. This is all about ethics. I appreciated the remarks made by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, even though I do not at all agree with his point of view. He believes that there is nothing there, there is no problem, everything is fine, and this is all about nothing.

Let us look at the facts, and Canadians can then judge for themselves. On April 7, the Minister of Justice attended a \$500-a-ticket fundraiser for the Liberal Party at a law firm. The ticket gave direct, privileged access to the Minister of Justice. That is the reality.

When we asked questions in the House about this activity, the minister never really answered them. Of course, she has the right not to answer questions. When someone rises, the whole government answers. However, if I were personally attacked in that way, I would rise every time. Unfortunately, I cannot say that she really helped her cause every time she rose to speak.

Let us remember that we asked questions about ethics, about how she should repay the money, about how she was there in her capacity as the Minister of Justice, and about how she was at a law firm, where there were many people who may want to become a minister or judge one day. What did she answer? She said that she was there in her capacity as an MP and that they spoke about Canada. What kind of argument is that? In her opinion, there was nothing wrong with what she did because she was talking about Canada. A justice minister should show some decorum. I understand that these sorts of comments may sometimes be made with tongue in cheek. However, when a person is accused of unethical behaviour and all she has to say for herself is that she attended the event as an MP and that she spoke only about Canada, it shows that that person does not have a clear conscience.

Everyone is entitled to their mistakes, and the minister made one. Something similar even happened to us a few years ago when we were in office. What did we do? We gave back the money. Everyone makes mistakes. We need to have the honour and dignity to recognize them and take the appropriate action. The incident we are discussing today goes against the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Justice.

We would like to commend the government for making the mandate letters public. That was a good thing. The opposition members do not always say that the government is bad. On the contrary, when the government does good things, we are happy to point them out.

What did the mandate letter to the Minister of Justice say? It is interesting. I would like to quote the Prime Minister. He said:

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government.

Were it not for the CBC report, we would not have known about this incident.

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.

That is what we are talking about, here. In this case, when a justice minister makes people pay \$500 to be able to enter a law firm for a fundraising event, this does not serve the public interest. Ministers must act with dignity, honour, and courage. When someone makes this kind of mistake, they should acknowledge it, as set out in the mandate letter written by the Prime Minister. The Minister of Justice did not adhere to what was in the letter.

What does the mandate letter say?

Business of Supply

As noted in the Guidelines, you 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.

I find that amusing, since this is the very situation we are discussing today. For two weeks, the government has been going on and on about how this situation was not serious, that there was nothing there, and that we were wasting our time talking about it. I am sorry, but these are issues connected to public administration, especially since donations to political parties are eligible for tax credits. When someone donates to a political party, which is a good thing, especially if it is the Conservative Party, and something I encourage everyone to do, they are entitled to a tax credit. This means that we are talking about public money, not private money. We have to realize that.

I encourage the government to reconsider. I also encourage the minister to acknowledge that she made a mistake and to act with the dignity her position demands. The Conservatives are not the only ones saying this. Our friends in the NDP feel the same way.

I want to share something written by the hon. Ujjal Dosanjh, a former health minister in Jean Chrétien's cabinet and former premier of British Columbia. He recently wrote the following in the *Vancouver Sun*:

• (1325)

[English]

...I happily remain a Laurier Club member of the Liberal Party....

[Translation]

I just wanted to give some background on this individual, so there is absolutely no doubt that he is still a Liberal.

He said:

[English]

It is totally incomprehensible to me how a minister of our federal Crown, the minister of justice and the attorney general at that, participating in a private fundraising with lawyers can be said to be escape either the reality or the appearance of a conflict of interest. ...

An attorney general is not just any minister. She is the Attorney General of Canada, and in a significant number of her functions she must remain and be seen to remain independent of the office of the prime minister.

[Translation]

A former Liberal premier said that. This deserves some serious consideration. I have never had the pleasure or honour of meeting that man, but in my previous role in the provincial government, as the National Assembly member for Chauveau, and as a journalist, I had the opportunity to have discussions with many justice ministers. Two of them stand out in my memory: the Honourable Paul Bégin and the Honourable Bertrand St-Arnaud. Mr. St-Arnaud was actually just appointed as a judge, and I wish to congratulate him.

I had a number of very interesting conversations with Mr. Bégin and Mr. St-Arnaud about the ethics of the justice department. Every time I spoke with them, I would ask them if I could talk to them about something. They would say yes, but then as soon as I began asking them about this judge or that judge, they would stop me right away, because as the justice minister, they had to be careful.

These are men of honour and dignity. Those justice ministers did not attend fundraising events in the private offices of law firms at a

cost of \$500 per person. They are men of integrity who were careful in their duties. The minister responsible for justice in Canada should always act with intention.

Should we be surprised by these ethical breaches? Unfortunately, the higher-ups set the example. Just because something is legal does not mean that it is morally acceptable. The Minister of Finance had been running a family business since the 1990s, a business that specialized in tax optimization services, among other things, and whose tentacles reached as far as the Caribbean and the Bahamas. It was quite legal, but is it befitting a minister of finance? I am not so sure.

Recently, we also found out that the Prime Minister of Canada had four numbered companies so that he could pay less tax. Is that legal? Sure. Is it befitting a sitting prime minister? Not at all. When that same Prime Minister was the leader of the second opposition party, he paid his taxes in Ontario to save \$6,000, but he represented Quebecers. Is that legal? Sure. Is it ethical? Not at all. That is exactly what we are talking about here.

When those at the top, such as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, set the example, it is not surprising that the Minister of Justice should fail to act with the honour and dignity befitting her rank. It is very clear that the Minister of Justice did the wrong thing, so she should act with the honour and dignity befitting her rank by apologizing and giving the money back.

• (1330)

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Justice took it upon herself to go see the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, who confirmed that the minister followed the rules.

If the member does not trust the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, who does he trust?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer my government colleague's question.

As I have said about 20 times, just because it is legal does not make it ethical. I would once again like to quote the former minister of health, who said exactly the same thing:

[English]

If the law is wrong and the appearance of a conflict is real and persistent, the minister should cancel the fundraiser even if the prime minister and the Liberal Party think otherwise.

[Translation]

This is also about the image and the integrity that should be associated with the position of Minister of Justice. To us, the Minister of Justice is not like any other minister. This minister is responsible for the law, appoints judges and, as the Attorney General, defends all vulnerable Canadians. This minister must be beyond reproach and must meet a higher ethical standard than any member of the executive branch of the Canadian government.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did appreciate what the hon. member was saying about the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Last week I was at an event sponsored by VIA Rail, and the Ethics Commissioner was sitting with the Minister of Democratic Institutions and a bunch of parliamentary secretaries from the other side of the House. It did not look good.

In this case with the Minister of Justice, I am concerned with how Canadians can even know in the future when she appoints judges and people to positions of authority, if they cannot see the list of who was there, who had preferential access or not.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, that is the main issue of this motion. We are talking about demonstration of justice, and we totally expect members of the government to respect that. When we talk about justice, we are not talking about fisheries. We are not talking about roads. We are not talking about refugees. We are talking about justice, and justice belongs to people who are far away from any partisanship. We like to be partisan, especially me; I like to have a good political fight. I will never be a justice minister because I am not a lawyer, but when we are talking about justice we are talking about everything except partisanship.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton assuming the role of conflict of interest and ethics commissioner in the House. It is unfortunate that we are spending valuable House time on this issue. It is also ironic to hear that this criticism is coming from across the aisle. As has been stated in the House many times, the Ethics Commissioner has reviewed the case and concluded that no impropriety has been found.

Is the hon. member appealing the Ethics Commissioner's ruling, and is this the right time and place to do that?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of the question that I had a few minutes ago. The point is that if it is not so important, why did the Minister of Justice, when she received questions here in the House of Commons, not rise and defend herself? It is always the great leader of the government who rises every time. I appreciate him, but I would prefer to listen to the Minister of Justice explain herself as to why she did that.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. A few moments ago I said “lawyer”, not “liar”.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is going to be hard to follow that, but I will do my best to make sure I say “lawyer” when it is appropriate and the other word when it is appropriate, but I cannot say that word in here.

This debate today provides us with a great opportunity to reflect and take stock as Canadians watch the debate. When Canadians elect people and send them to Ottawa they want them to behave in a way that shows our country both domestically and around the world in the brightest light and in the highest standard possible.

That brings me to what the motion is all about. The government party and members on the other side who are taking us to task for presenting the motion today are using words like “frivolous”. They are making comments like “this is a waste of time”. We are debating a rather substantive document, a document called “Open and Accountable Government”. It is written on the letterhead of the Prime Minister of Canada and it bears his signature. This is the standard to which this debate should be held. Members of the Liberal caucus who are rising are hiding behind a technical ruling from the

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Ethic Commissioner's office. I want to be very clear for people watching this debate at home how this works.

Currently, we have the Conflict of Interest Act and the code of conduct for ministers, parliamentary secretaries, and members of Parliament. This is administered by Mary Dawson, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. She has come before the ethics committee many times. I chair that committee and I have been on that committee in previous Parliaments. We are reviewing the legislation, which has not been updated since the 1980s when it was first introduced. That is how archaic the legislation actually is. Every previous government owns the responsibility for not updating the legislation. I am not here to debate that with the member for Lac-Saint-Louis. I would agree that the time has come.

I remain cautiously hopeful and optimistic that the new bar that will be set in law will actually meet the supposed tests that the Prime Minister expects his cabinet ministers to meet. Here is the reality.

The witnesses who come to committee recommended by the Liberal Party, the NDP, and the Library of Parliament, virtually all are unanimous in saying that the Conflict of Interest Code and the Conflict of Interest Act which creates the code do not stand up in today's society. That bar is here. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the access to information commissioner, and the Commissioner of Lobbying, have lobbied many times to raise the bar on all of these things. The bar to which they say that the legislation should be changed is here.

The document that the Prime Minister has penned, which has been quoted from several times today, and I will quote it again, says:

Ministerial Conduct

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must act with honesty and must uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence and trust in the integrity and impartiality of government are maintained and enhanced.

It goes on:

Moreover, they 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.

The law has a standard that is down here according to almost anybody that comes before the committee. That is not a high bar to achieve, and it is not a bar that I would hide behind if I were on the other side of the House today trying to defend.

This document, “Open and Accountable Government”, holds a lot of hope and optimism, but we have to remember who penned this document. This document is supposedly penned by the Prime Minister. My guess is that it was penned by somebody else who might have worked at Queen's Park, where they currently have quotas for ministers to achieve, fundraising targets, and was simply signed by the Prime Minister. Nonetheless, even if the Prime Minister did not pen it, he signed the document, so he is responsible for it.

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Let us take a look at that particular individual's conduct. After becoming an MP, we know that the current Prime Minister accepted numerous paid speaking engagements while he was a member of Parliament, and for that he was admonished, not necessarily technically by the Ethics Commissioner, but certainly anybody with any credibility in the media or in civil society would look at that and say, "You are a member of Parliament. You have been invited to a speaking engagement and you are charging a fee?"

• (1335)

In one particular case, the current Prime Minister, in his capacity as a member of Parliament, actually billed a school board \$780 for a limousine service to take him from Ottawa to Kingston and return him to Montreal. That is when he appeared at the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board, in Kingston, where he was paid \$15,000 to be a speaker. That was in 2010. He was a member of this House. He probably had designs on being the prime minister at some point in time. My guess would be that one would have to do that at some particular point in time.

George Takach said, "MPs shouldn't get paid extra for public speaking, it's part of their job description".

I certainly would not even dream of accepting payment in my capacity as a member of Parliament, which I have had the privilege of being for the last 10 years in this House.

Others go on to say, "I certainly wouldn't be, as a member of Parliament, receiving money for speaking out on matters of public interest". This is something that we already get paid quite well to do.

We have to ask ourselves whether the Prime Minister actually believes the document he has penned or whether it is "do as I say, not as I do". This raises a lot of questions.

He has charged \$20,000 to the Certified Management Accountants of Ontario. Would the certified management accountants have anything to lobby the government about at some particular point in time?

He has also taken speaking fees from the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union. We all know about Bill C-4. The ink was not even dry on the swearing in of the ministers, then there is pro-union legislation on the table in the House of Commons. We have to wonder just exactly where the Prime Minister is at on this.

Notwithstanding the credibility of the author of the document, I still have high hopes, as chair of the ethics committee, that we can actually elevate the legislation we have here.

Then we come to the justice minister and the conflict of interest that is abundantly clear to everybody in the world except the Liberal caucus.

The government House leader just stood in this House and tried to rationalize her appearance, because he is able to get \$700-a-plate fundraisers in his own riding, 20 minutes from his house, where everybody knows him. He is happy with \$750. That is enough to have access. Then he asks us to equate that with an MP from Vancouver, who is unknown to most people in the greater Toronto area, charging \$500 a plate for an invitation-only, not even

advertized, event. That just does not pass muster. It does not make any sense at all.

We can compare that with some of the decisions, and I was hopeful before Christmas. My birthday is at Christmas, so I was feeling good—

An hon. member: That is like the Prime Minister.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I share a birthday with the Prime Minister. That is about all I share with the Prime Minister.

Prior to Christmas, the current finance minister was actually going to attend a fundraising event. On the Liberal website, it encouraged people to make a \$250 donation for a chance to have dinner with the finance minister. I did not sign up. However, at least when the story broke that the fundraiser was going to happen, the finance minister, who had no idea who was even going to be there, had the good sense to cancel the event. Ethical watchdogs around Canada should have jumped for joy and seized the opportunity. Little did they know that it was the last opportunity they were ever going to get to cheer for an ethical decision made by the folks across the way.

Compare and contrast that now with the justice minister who stepped out of her role as chair of the First Nations Finance Authority only to have her husband and business partner step in as a lobbyist for the same group—a group that, by the way, lobbies the Minister Minister of Justice for funding—and then we find out, in the budget, that \$20 million has been kicked back to that organization. Apparently, that passes that bar. She attended the \$500-a-plate private fundraiser anyway at Torys LLP in Toronto. She has made no bones about it. She has no interest in paying the money back. The optics of it do not appeal to anyone I know of. It does not make any sense. That leads us to today.

• (1340)

The question that is before the House in the motion is this. Will the government actually live up to the document signed by the Prime Minister and raise the ethical bar, yes or no?

• (1345)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member believes the rules should be changed, why does he believe the ethically challenged government that recently left office did nothing substantial to change those rules? Why is his party putting forward a frivolous motion that does not make a substantial change now, rather than making solid and concrete proposals?

Is it because the member is afraid that clearer rules would require us to, say, require the preceding leader of his party to reveal who bankrolled his leadership campaigns to the tune of \$2 million, or is it just that more Conservatives will wind up in leg irons? Maybe it is just because the member knows that nothing wrong actually took place.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I am sure if he asks his former colleague or friend Joe Fontana all about this, he will have the answer he is looking for.

Business of Supply

We can cast aspersions here all day long. If legislation is going to come forward that actually meets the test that is laid out in the “Open and Accountable Government” document that the Prime Minister signed, I will gladly, in my capacity as chair of the ethics committee, shepherd that legislation through post-haste to make sure that the bar in the legislation and the code can be raised to a much higher standard than it is right now.

Instead, we have other issues being brought forward by the Liberal government that have absolutely nothing to do with raising that bar. It is very unfortunate. In fact, it looks as if everybody who did anything favourably, whether they had union workers show up at campaigns or any well-connected Liberals connected to various other parts of the Canadian economy, seem to be the target of what is available in the budget; and so far it is the history book on the shelf repeating itself all over again.

If I were Justice Gomery, I would make sure I publish my number, because it looks as if we are going to need him again.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the principles in the justice system is that justice must be done and must appear to be done, and yet here we have a bunch of lawyers getting together and paying \$500 to talk to the justice minister. Is it possible that some of those lawyers are looking for appointments? They are not supposed to lobby a justice minister or a member of government to become judges, but in my opinion—and I would like to hear the member's comments on this—it puts the whole justice system into disrepute, by saying to lawyers that they just need to pay \$500 and they will get access to the justice minister and she will be told how wonderful they are and possibly what a great judge they would make.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Dufferin—Caledon for his question. He is a very knowledgeable member in the House. He knows exactly what he is talking about, and I know exactly what he is getting at.

The reality is that there was somebody from Torys who deregistered as a lobbyist the day before that \$500-a-plate fundraiser so that the \$500 pay-to-play access to the justice minister would not actually have to be recorded in the federal lobbyist register. These are ways that well-connected Liberals can continue to hide what they are actually doing, from Canadians.

As I say, this is how this is going down. This is a government that is actually asking for forgiveness, not asking for permission. We know that the story broke on CBC on April 5, I believe it was, that this fundraiser was going on. On April 7, the Ethics Commissioner's office said that it received a request the previous day, which was April 6.

Therefore, the timeline clearly indicates that the Liberal Party had no intention of ever even asking the Ethics Commissioner whether this private dinner with Torys LLP was going to meet an ethical bar or not. It simply asked the Ethics Commissioner once the story broke and it was scrambling, looking for cover.

That is all Liberals are trying to do. They are hiding behind a very low bar right now, when they should be trying to raise the standard according to the Prime Minister's document, one that they say is frivolous to debate.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I must inform the hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia that he has a little less than 10 minutes remaining for his speech.

The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

When I wrote my speech, I said that I was pleased to rise in the House to debate this motion; however, in reality, that is not the case. The Conservatives were in power for 10 years, a period known as the dark decade, a period of secrets, and today they are moving this motion.

The people in my riding want us to discuss real issues, like infrastructure, in the House. They want additional income so they can make ends meet, and they want the federal government to provide the services they need to do what they have to do.

Those are the kinds of issues we want to debate. Unfortunately, we have to discuss a motion that, in my opinion, is quite frivolous. However, that is part of the process in the House, and we will have to discuss it.

When we were elected, we committed to a new kind of leadership and tone in the federal government, to honour the trust that Canadians put in us. We are very serious about and committed to giving Canadians an open and accountable government.

We stand by the fundamental democratic principles, and we will strengthen our democratic institutions. As my hon. colleagues have explained, our government endorsed the notion that an open and transparent government is a good government. The code of conduct for exempt staff is just one of many measures taken by our government, an open and transparent government.

Our agenda strengthens the guidelines for the non-partisan use of departmental communications resources. We must carefully ensure that these resources are used for official Government of Canada communications and not for partisan purposes. This means that no partisan symbols or content should be used in departmental communications, events, or social media.

An open and accountable government innovates by giving ministers and parliamentary secretaries guidelines on the use of social media.

I believe that every member of the House realizes that social media can be an effective means of communicating with Canadians and that it is important to know how to use them. For ministers and parliamentary secretaries, this means knowing how to use social media and, in particular, drawing a line between the official Government of Canada accounts and their own personal accounts. This ensures that members of the public are able to differentiate between the two types of communication and can continue to expect non-partisan messages from the Government of Canada. That is what is required under Treasury Board policy.

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An open and accountable government innovates, once again, by providing a guide on the role of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. In short, the justice minister develops bills, policies, programs, and services for Canadians in various areas of law, while the Attorney General of Canada is the chief crown prosecutor.

Pursuant to the Department of Justice Act, and as reiterated in our “Open and Accountable Government” plan, the Minister of Justice is responsible for ensuring that the administration of public affairs complies with the law. The minister is responsible for upholding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the rest of the Constitution, the rule of law, and the independence of the courts. The role of the minister is to help the federal departments develop, reform, and interpret legislation. The minister assesses the legal risks associated with the proposals, regulations, and laws brought before cabinet, in order to ensure that they are consistent with the Charter, and clear in both official languages, while taking into account Canada's bijural system, namely our common law and civil law.

Naturally, as all other ministers, the Minister of Justice must adhere to her mandate letter by continuously working with her parliamentary secretary and her advisors to ensure that the work done by her office is done professionally, and that decisions are always made in the public interest.

Her exempt staff give her advice on the political aspects of her duties, while always providing services in a non-partisan way.

● (1350)

The department uses these resources to carry out its duties efficiently and to make informed decisions based on real, verifiable data while adhering to strict ethical standards in all of its activities.

The government also innovated by creating a similar code of ethics for political staff members, who must conduct their activities with integrity and honesty, support the minister's duties, and remain loyal and diligent at all times. That is not something our predecessors had in place.

That is what Canadians have the right to expect from an open, honest, accountable government. However, it is unrealistic to suggest that ministers should be aware of every single thing going on in their department and should take personal responsibility for everything that happens. That would be an unreasonable standard.

Nevertheless, our “Open and Accountable Government” plan states that ministers should take all necessary measures to correct problems that might arise in their portfolios and to be accountable to the House by answering questions. That is how they promote the integrity of our public and democratic institutions.

In that sense, I firmly believe that the claims made by the member for Saint-Albert—Edmonton in this motion are frivolous and unfounded. The minister participated in an event as an MP, which was quite legitimate and in compliance with the Conflict of Interest Act, including section 16, and the Canada Elections Act.

However, by consulting the Ethics Commissioner from the outset, the Minister of Justice demonstrated just how much we all care about conducting our affairs with integrity and diligence. It is to her credit that she took that step, and Canadians view her as being honest and a person of integrity.

She conducted herself in an exemplary manner in this situation. She is an exceptional minister who is dedicated to ensuring respect for the rule of law and defending Canadians' interests. She embodies the guiding principles of our government, and I firmly believe that she will be able to do so throughout her term.

I know that everyone here agrees that we must never give Canadians a reason to distrust their government. They will not always like what we do. Some will not always support our policies, and that is okay. Diverging ideas and opinions are what make our democracy great because they encourage people with different points of view to work together to reach a consensus.

Disagreeing with a policy is quite different from not trusting the government. Canadians should not think that their government and elected representatives play by a different set of rules than the rest of society. There is absolutely no doubt that our “Open and Accountable Government” plan shows that our government is fully invested in the rule of law and the Charter. Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, our government is determined to earn and maintain the trust of all Canadians.

As elected representatives, we should also make this our watchword. We have to carry out many duties as parliamentarians, including participating in committees to weigh the merits of a bill or defend the public.

The current government made a promise to Canadians. It is set out in black and white in the ministerial mandate letters, in our election platform, and in our various policy documents. We will keep that promise.

In my opinion, everyone in the House should accept our promise and commend us for it. Canadians should demand nothing less. They deserve an open and accountable government.

In closing, I would like to remind the House that the men and women who represent their communities in the Parliament of Canada are dedicated to their jobs, regardless of which party they belong to.

As the Prime Minister so aptly stated during the election campaign, Canadians need to believe that their government is on their side and that it is eager to work with them to solve real problems and to bring real change.

● (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia will have five minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[Translation]***BOMBARDIER**

Mr. Simon Marcil (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it only took the government a few weeks to decide to hand over \$10 billion to GM, but the Bombardier file has been on hold for over a year.

The Conservative government did nothing, and the Liberals are even worse: they are doing more harm than good. With a weak dollar and share prices at rock bottom, only the Bombardier family's votes are protecting the company from a foreign takeover and, ultimately, its demise.

Now the government wants to drop the safety net and is threatening the company's very existence in Quebec. Who is the government consulting for advice on this file? It has turned to an American bank, Morgan Stanley, as though Wall Street would recommend keeping Bombardier under Quebec control.

I accuse the minister of issuing a political directive that could kill Bombardier. I accuse the government of listening to Wall Street instead of Quebec.

* * *

• (1400)

*[English]***HISTORY OF CHARLESWOOD**

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to recognize the efforts of Verna and Len Van Roon in preserving the history of the Charleswood community.

Over the years, they have educated many of my constituents, and indeed myself, on the lives of Charleswood's war heroes. They created a book celebrating the history of the community and they played an instrumental role in the founding and running of the Charleswood Historical Society's museum. In 2009, the community honoured their dedication with a plaque.

Verna is no longer with us, but Len and her son carry on the Van Roon family's important work. They remain tireless champions of Charleswood, committed to improving the community's quality of life.

Our past guides our future. To affirm that Canadians' local history is a part of our shared national history and to recognize the Van Roon family's ongoing contribution, I would ask members to please join me in offering the Van Roons our sincere thanks.

* * *

*[Translation]***CENTRE D'ACTION BÉNÉVOLE AIDE 23 VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Centre d'action bénévole Aide 23 for the excellent work it has been doing for my constituents in Beauport—Limoilou over the past 40 years.

This organization's 160 volunteers help the community in many different ways. Their humanitarian mission is to provide services to vulnerable people and help them combat social exclusion.

Centre d'action bénévole Aide 23 plays a huge role on the front lines in my riding. It has received a number of honours and has a special relationship with Quebec City regarding all volunteering matters and issues. The organization's volunteers work very hard on many initiatives, including Meals on Wheels, which delivers nearly 5,000 meals a year to people who are unable to cook for themselves.

I commend Centre d'action bénévole Aide 23 for its involvement and the work it does, and I recognize that its dedication to the community serves as a model for similar organizations across the country.

* * *

TED SZILVA

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 9, 2016, Sudbury lost one of its pioneers, Ted Szilva. It is a privilege for me to pay tribute to him today.

[English]

Ted Szilva was best known as the creator of Sudbury's iconic Big Nickel, a nine metre replica of a Canadian 5¢ piece. It stands today as one of the most photographed landmarks in Canada.

It was in 1963 that Ted, then a 28-year old firefighter, first conceived the idea of developing a tourism centre built around a giant 5¢ piece, a replica mine, and a learning centre to help the public discover the science behind mining.

[Translation]

Ted was a model of resourcefulness. On his own initiative, he obtained a piece of land, raised some money, and designed and began building a park.

[English]

Ted minted and sold mail-order coins to raise money. He built the Big Nickel three feet outside city limits because the city refused him a building permit.

Ted Szilva was a community builder, visionary, a loving husband, father and grandfather. He was 81 years old. On behalf of all Sudburians and Canadians, we thank him.

* * *

NUCLEAR WASTE

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work of the Committee for Future Generations, which has succeeded in keeping nuclear waste out of all communities of northern Saskatchewan. In a united voice with first nations and Métis community leaders the message was clear: no to nuclear waste in the riding of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Nine communities are now fighting the same battle in Ontario. The plan to bury and abandon nuclear waste within a kilometre of the shore of Lake Huron is before the Minister of Environment and Climate Change for review.

Statements by Members

In the spirit of stewardship, there is a mandate to consult with the first nations of Ontario on the proposed plan to store nuclear waste in their region. We hope this mandate will be honoured.

I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Windsor West, for his work on this file. I express my full solidarity with those who are committed to keeping nuclear waste out of their community.

* * *

OUTSTANDING BUSINESSES SCARBOROUGH CENTRE

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize two outstanding businesses in my riding of Scarborough Centre that have shown real leadership in welcoming Syrian refugees to Canada.

David Andrews of 3-D Exteriors has already hired 11 Syrian refugees for his landscaping company. With spring finally here, he is ready to hire more.

Also, grocery store Marché Adonis and manager Hani Tawil have hired nearly 30 refugees. Some are stocking shelves or working in the bakery making pitas, while those with strong English skills are working as cashiers.

The managers have been impressed with how hard-working these newcomers are. The refugees have told me that they are grateful for the chance to provide for their families, and appreciate having the flexibility to schedule shifts around their language classes.

I applaud 3-D Exteriors and Marché Adonis, and I encourage more businesses to follow their lead.

* * *

● (1405)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, volunteers are the heartbeat of our communities. They give their time and energy to make the world a better place. Beautiful Langley would not be what it is without the tireless work of volunteers who care for the environment.

This Saturday we will be celebrating Earth Day with the fifth annual clean-up Langley day. Businesses, community groups, families, and friends will come together to pitch in and clean up. I thank all the volunteers who will be working hard to keep Langley beautiful.

In Langley, we also want to ensure that our environmental heroes do not go unnoticed. Over the past 10 years, over 100 Langley residents and organizations have been recognized for their contributions. For the winners, a heritage apple tree and a bronze plaque will be planted in their honour.

Langley residents, from Langley city, Langley township, who see youth, organizations, or residents doing good work for the environment, please go to my website and nominate this year's Langley environment hero.

[Translation]

LORRAINE HAMILTON

Ms. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Lorraine Hamilton, a constituent in my riding of Burlington, who yesterday received the Ordre de la Pléiade, an internationally recognized honour.

This award recognizes and celebrates individuals who have made remarkable contributions to francophone culture and the French language in their communities and beyond.

Lorraine is a proud Canadian who values our French and English traditions and shares her passion for knowledge and learning with others.

Through her work at Collège Boréal in Hamilton, Lorraine supports and encourages new Canadians in fulfilling their dreams by embracing our two official languages and gives them the tools they need to begin their new lives in Canada.

I want to personally congratulate Lorraine on her efforts and this special recognition. Bravo, Lorraine.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nadia Savchenko, Ukraine's first female fighter pilot, was captured and kidnapped out of Ukraine during Russia's military invasion.

In 2014, Savchenko was among the protestors in Maidan, who stood up to the corrupt rule of Viktor Yanukovich. As an officer of Ukraine's armed forces, she defended the unity of her country against Russian mercenaries and proxies in the East. She is a duly elected Ukrainian member of parliament and a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The attempt to break Ukraine's spirit through the farce of a trial of Ukraine's Joan d'Arc has in fact strengthened her resolve. As she stated at the conclusion of her show trial, which sentenced her to 22 years, "Russia will return me to Ukraine — dead or alive" and declared a hunger strike. She is close to death, another in the long list of victims of Putin's regime.

I call on our Parliament to show our support for Nadia and demand of Putin that she be returned to her beloved Ukraine.

Nadiu, Slava Ukraini, Herojam Slava.

* * *

NATIONAL LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was National Lineman Appreciation Day.

Before I ask the House to join me in thanking linemen for the dangerous work they do, I must tell a story about a cat named Kitty from Princeton, British Columbia.

Statements by Members

Kitty was just an everyday normal feline house cat that just so happened to find herself trapped upon a 60 foot utility pole carrying some 130,000-plus volts of power. Local residents were distraught, particularly her owner, Bill Blackhall. In the course of the four-day ordeal, Kitty became the #savethePrincetonBCcat, a Twitter hashtag that generated worldwide attention from cat lovers everywhere.

Fortunately, it was a lineman from BC Hydro who came to the rescue, and Kitty is now safe and sound with her owner.

Linemen do dangerous and important work, and are the unsung heroes of our national power grid. Please join me in thanking linemen, specifically those who saved Kitty.

* * *

●(1410)

EATING DISORDERS

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently attended the National Initiative for Eating Disorders' fourth annual Honouring the Journey event, at Adath Israel Synagogue in my riding.

Eating disorders are complex and misunderstood mental illnesses, influenced by genetic, psychological, social, and cultural factors. They are not driven by body image or peer pressure but are triggered by them.

Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are among the most prevalent psychiatric disorders in young adult females, and the second most chronic illness in adolescence. They have the highest mortality rates of any psychiatric disorder in adolescence. Youth with eating disorders are 12 times more likely to die than their peers who do not have eating disorders.

[*Translation*]

We must all work together to eliminate the stigma of mental illness and make sure that quality mental health services are available for all Canadians.

* * *

42ND GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I do not know every one of my colleagues, I do know that six months ago to the day, at this very hour, we were all visiting polling stations in our respective ridings to thank volunteers, deputy returning officers, Chief Electoral Officer staff, and especially the voters. That same evening, surrounded by supporters, friends and family members, each of us celebrated victory. Things were different for the other candidates, whose dreams of serving in the House of Commons had been dashed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication to their country and the democratic process. I also invite all of my colleagues in the House of Commons to be grateful to them and to thank them warmly when they see them.

[*English*]

TAXATION

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was tax day, the day that our taxes are due. Canadians can now say goodbye to the lowest taxation levels since 1962 and start looking forward to paying extra taxes if their kids are in arts and sports, extra taxes if their kids are in post-secondary education, extra taxes if people are taking advantage of income splitting, extra taxes for charities, extra taxes for the wealthy, extra taxes for small businesses, and extra taxes for a carbon footprint.

The only people who will not be paying more taxes are the many struggling Canadians who have lost their jobs in this economy.

The government's plan will only reduce the unemployment rate 0.3% over the next four years, so goodbye jobs and hello taxes.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while Ahmadiyya Muslims in Canada mark 50 years of peaceful, productive, and measurable contributions to Canada, not all Ahmadiis have the opportunity to practise their faith motto: Love for all, hatred for none.

Just last month, on Easter Sunday, an explosion at a public park in Lahore, Pakistan specifically targeted Ahmadiis. Tragically, at least 69 were killed, mostly women and children. Hundreds more were left injured in this horrific act of religious violence.

The attack comes just over a year after the brutal 2014 Peshawar school attack, which resulted in the death of more than 150 people, again primarily children, and a recent attack at a university, killing over 30 people.

Despite this community facing attacks and ongoing violence and discrimination, the Ahmadiis' global spiritual leader has responded with a call for peace and understanding.

I join with his Holiness in condemning all religious intolerance and violence, and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

* * *

RAFTING INDUSTRY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after 40 years of successful and safe operations, the rafting industry in Golden, B.C. has been notified that due to safety concerns, it will no longer be allowed to cross Canadian Pacific Railway's tracks to access the lower canyon of the Kicking Horse River.

Oral Questions

The rafting industry is a major economic driver in Golden, and community and industry leaders believe that a simple rail crossing, with safety education for employees and guests, can resolve these concerns. Now, CP is refusing to allow any kind of crossing at all.

CP cannot have it both ways. It cannot insist that the tracks are unsafe to cross and then refuse to make the crossing safer. To make matters worse, this news comes just before the start of the rafting season.

I rise in the House today to stand with Golden's rafting industry, and to call on the government to get this issue resolved now.

* * *

• (1415)

TAXATION

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past number of months, over 100,000 Albertans have lost their jobs, and even more have taken significant pay cuts, while small businesses are struggling to keep their operations afloat. Now is not the time to add another tax.

Unfortunately, that is exactly what the federal Liberals said that they were going to do. In their budget, they announced plans that would force provinces to foist a carbon tax on all Canadians. Last week, Alberta's NDP government announced plans to play along and impose this additional tax on all Albertans.

This tax will make it more expensive for young people to get to work. It will be more expensive for seniors to heat their homes. It will be more expensive for farmers, and forestry, and energy companies to get their product to market. This tax will hurt families, seniors, and small business. This tax will kill jobs.

Albertans are hurting already. Albertans do not deserve this tax, and quite frankly they cannot afford it.

* * *

REFUGEES

Mr. Ahmed Hussien (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, hundreds of men, women, and children from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan sailed from Libya across the Mediterranean in search of sanctuary in Italy. Tragically, their vessel sank, and reportedly up to 400 people drowned in the Mediterranean. My thoughts and prayers are with those who lost their lives.

This comes on the first anniversary of a similar incident last year, in which 800 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea.

Under the Geneva Conventions, those fleeing persecution are eligible for asylum, but they often face many obstacles. Asylum seekers are not criminals; they are human beings in need of protection and assistance and are deserving of our respect.

I urge Canada to provide leadership and work with our international partners to ensure that those fleeing persecution have safe passage to countries that may grant them the protection they are entitled to under international law.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from the Prime Minister's own guidelines for ministers when it comes to fundraising:

There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, [given] to individuals...because they [may] have made a financial contribution to [a politician or a political party].

Given that the justice minister's fundraising activities at a top Toronto law firm are in direct violation of the Prime Minister's own code of conduct, when will he direct the Liberal Party to give the money back?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada has always followed all the rules and all the regulations involved with Elections Canada and political donations.

Indeed, the level of openness and transparency that we continue to display is a direct result of the lack of confidence that so many Canadians had in the way the previous government operated. Indeed, for three straight elections, the Conservatives have been convicted of election fraud in each of those elections. The fact is, Canadians were tired of the way the previous government functioned, and that is why we are committed to openness and transparency.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, that is not true. In the entire tenure of our government, in a fundraiser that was similar to the one in question, a mistake was recognized and the money was given back. Why is the standard different with the current government?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always been open and transparent and followed every single rule of the Ethics Commissioner, of Elections Canada, and of electoral law. The fact is that in reference to the event that my hon. colleague speaks of regarding the former Conservative minister of heritage, the money was only returned after the Conservatives got their hands caught in the cookie jar for that one. We proactively engaged with the Ethics Commissioner on this and got the all-clear ahead of time.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should reread his own ethics code, because this is not about the Ethics Commissioner; it is actually about his own code that he put in place for his own minister. There has been a clear violation of that code. Why is the Prime Minister ignoring a blatant violation of his own code of conduct?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of convictions for electoral fraud and regularly dismaying the public with their partisanship and patronage, Canadians needed a change. That is why we demonstrated a level of openness and transparency, always following the rules, and indeed making available all the documents that the opposition is so blithely recounting now. We have demonstrated a level of confidence in Canadians that for 10 years was lacking from the previous government.

* * *

● (1420)

THE BUDGET

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians still have 40 million good reasons.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal government has completely broken its promises on transparency. Just last week, the parliamentary budget officer said that he did not have everything he needed to do his job properly and evaluate such things as job creation. He did not have the right figures.

Now, the former parliamentary budget officer is adding his voice to the mix and saying exactly the same thing, that there is a lack of transparency. He said there was a reason behind this lack of transparency. It is important.

Why did the Prime Minister break his promise to be transparent—

The Speaker: The hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we are always very open to speaking and working with the parliamentary budget officer to show that we are trying to be much more transparent than the previous government was.

We are putting in place a new way of creating economic growth with longer-term strategies. There will certainly be an adjustment period for the parliamentary budget officer because we are being much more transparent than the last gang.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the parliamentary budget officer is saying .

At the time, we introduced Bill C-377 on union transparency. We believe that Canadians who pay union dues have the right to know how their mandatory dues are spent by union bosses. For us, it is about transparency and accountability.

Why does the Prime Minister want to prevent union members from knowing how their hard-earned money is spent?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I still find it very strange to hear the Conservatives talk about transparency when, for 10 years, their government was the most secretive and opaque of all Canadian governments.

The reality is that the Conservatives are still trying to use transparency as a political weapon against their opponents rather than understanding that true transparency means having trust in Canadians and trust in our unions. It is co-operation and a partnership that will yield better results for everyone. That is what Canadians want, and that is what we are giving them.

* * *

[*English*]**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government keeps changing its story about the Saudi arms deal. After the minister described it as a done deal, he now claims that he, and he alone, made the decision to sign the export permit.

Canadians need to know who is running the show. Is it true that the Prime Minister and the PMO were kept completely in the dark about the signing of the export permit?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said since the beginning, whenever this issue came up in the election campaign and even before, we will not cancel an existing contract. Indeed, we will continue to respect contracts signed, because people around the world need to know that, when Canada signs a deal, it is respected.

For the administrative steps that have followed, we are demonstrating government by cabinet, which means I have tremendous confidence in the ministers in our government to make the right decisions on files that cross their desks, and they do so with the full support of the prime minister, because that is why we put them in this job.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, it would be nice if the government followed its own rules.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been telling Canadians for weeks that there would be penalties if the arms deal with Saudi Arabia were cancelled. However, this morning, he told us that there might not be, which is yet another contradiction. This is a far cry from an open and transparent government. Canadians have the right to know.

Will the Prime Minister stop doing political yoga and make the contract public?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been saying the same thing about this contract for well over six months. We will not cancel an existing contract. It is important for people to know that when Canada signs an international deal, it is respected.

The member for Outremont and the member for London—Fanshawe have stated very clearly that we do not cancel signed contracts. However, obviously, we are concerned about human rights around the world. We are therefore going to be open and transparent in our agreements in the future, because that is what Canadians are demanding and that is how we want to do things.

Oral Questions

●(1425)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the contract has not, in fact, been signed. It is this government's decision. Its responsibility.

Canada is going to completely miss the Conservatives' pathetic greenhouse gas targets. The Prime Minister talks a good talk on climate change, but the Liberals have the exact same targets as the Conservatives. A few days before the agreement is to be signed, they still have no plan.

Will the Prime Minister finally present his action plan, or is his trip to New York just another one of those photo ops he loves so much?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and congratulate him on the quality of his French.

What we know is that Canada must meet responsible climate change targets. We will do so by working with our provincial partners. The Government of Canada, under the Conservatives, spent too much time not talking to or working with the provinces. That is why we are setting targets and developing a plan together, with the provinces, to make the reductions needed to save the planet.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that, when asked when things would actually get better with respect to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, the minister could not even offer an answer.

The Prime Minister went to Paris with no targets, no plan to get there, and no accountability to keep his government honest. Then the Prime Minister met with the premiers and came away with no targets, no plan, and no accountability. Now the Prime Minister is jetting off to New York City with no plan, no targets, and no accountability.

Exactly how are these Liberals all that different from the Chrétien Liberals who failed us so miserably?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his hard work and his devotion to the environment. It is something that we share.

We know that Canada needs to do more on the environment. That is why we have demonstrated every step of the way that we understand that building a strong economy goes hand in hand with protecting the environment.

That is the leadership we showed at Paris. That is the leadership we continue to show on the world stage; and that is the hard work we are doing with our provincial partners and with municipalities to make sure that Canada once again has a well-earned reputation as a leader on the environmental file right across the world.

* * *

MINISTERIAL EXPENSES

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, in an effort to cover her tracks, the Minister of International

Trade said her trade meetings in Los Angeles were booked before her HBO interview.

However, originally her HBO appearance was supposed to be on October 30. That was before she was even sworn in as minister.

This meeting was then postponed until November 20, so on what day did her staff start booking the LA meetings? Is she saying that they started even before she was the minister?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the Conservatives are trying to concoct a story where there is none.

It is my job to promote Canada and Canadian business around the world. Following the APEC summit in the Philippines, I was proud to visit California, one of our largest trading partners, larger than Japan, Germany, or the U.K., where I held six business round tables.

The Conservatives' accusations are absolutely wrong. All of our expenses were clearly posted months before this was raised.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade's story just does not add up. She had a reserved seat on the government jet leaving Manila, but she wanted some TV time on a popular U.S. show, so the minister instructed her staff to book some last-minute meetings and a first class ticket for her personal vanity project.

This minister cost Canadian taxpayers almost \$20,000 just so she could get schooled by an American comedian. Why does the minister believe that Canadians should have to pay for her hard-knock life lessons?

●(1430)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, who do not really like the media, I know it is my job to promote Canada to the world.

In California, I appeared in the media with U.S. Senator Angus King of Maine and with Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom of California. I also spoke to the *LA Times*, which wrote a column about our economic policy, and I very proudly defended Canada's support for Syrian refugees, something I will do again and again.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is the Minister of International Trade spent \$20,000 on an all-inclusive vanity trip to Hollywood, and to cover up this junket in Los Angeles, she instructed her department to create a few meetings, so that hopefully nobody would notice.

Oral Questions

Does the minister really think Canadians believe she just happened to be in LA on business when HBO called, or does she think concocting last-minute meetings will make everything okay?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already answered that question, but since the members opposite are so interested in my promotion of Canada in California, let me talk about some of the meetings I held.

I met with U.S. Senator Angus King of Maine. I met with the Lieutenant Governor of California, Gavin Newsom. I met with Jim Haney, who is the senior VP and GM of City National Bank, recently acquired by RBC. I met with Greg Foster, the CEO of IMAX, a great Canadian company active in California.

I met with Creative BC and Trade and Invest B.C. I met with John Chiang, the treasurer of California. I met with Jeff Gorell, the deputy mayor of Los Angeles. There is more, but I have run out of time.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister took a self-promoting vanity trip to Hollywood. She billed the taxpayers \$20,000 for this trip. She directed her staff to find meetings to try to justify this trip. She even double-billed the taxpayers for dinner in Toronto after she returned home from her trip.

When will this minister pay back Canadian taxpayers who shelled out so she could hobnob with Hollywood elite?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): As I have said, Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are trying to concoct a story where there is none. Whether it is interviews with *The Washington Post* editorial board, the *LA Times*, BBC, or the many media interviews I did with German newspapers and with Bloomberg promoting CETA in Berlin last week, it is my proud job to promote Canada to the world.

Unlike the Conservatives, our open and transparent government speaks to the media, including international media. The Conservatives did everything possible to insult the media. We are doing things differently.

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTERIAL EXPENSES

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we learned that the Minister of International Trade spent nearly \$20,000 so that she could appear on a Hollywood talk show. That \$20,000 was taken from the pockets of the same Canadians and middle-class families that this government claims it wants to help. That is unacceptable. The minister's travel plans clearly show that the main reason for the trip was the interview with HBO.

Will the minister at least acknowledge that fact?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives are trying to concoct a story where there is none. It is my job to promote Canada around the world, and I am proud of that. Following the APEC summit in the Philippines, I was proud to go to California for a trade visit. As everyone knows, California is one of our largest trading partners.

I repeat: the Conservatives' accusations are wrong, and all the rules were followed.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to learning that the Minister of International Trade wanted to be reimbursed for expenses that she should not have claimed, we learned that the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party of Canada had to fire its treasurer, Jean-François Lalonde, because an investigation by the chief electoral officer of Quebec revealed that he had committed electoral fraud.

Mr. Lalonde was fired. What will happen to the Minister of International Trade?

• (1435)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to give my colleague credit for lumping together two or three different issues. He knows full well that the president of the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec asked Mr. Lalonde to step down from his volunteer duties on the board of directors. He also knows full well that the charges laid by the chief electoral officer of Quebec have nothing to do with Mr. Lalonde's role in the Liberal Party of Canada in Quebec.

* * *

[English]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, problems at the Canada Revenue Agency just keep mounting: officials being wined and dined by the very people they are meant to investigate, a senior investigator going over to the company in the middle of a court case, secret sweetheart deals that let millionaire tax cheats off the hook with no penalties. This is an outrage. Canadians are tired of the wealthy and well-connected getting all the tax breaks.

When will the minister stop defending the indefensible and announce an investigation into the KPMG tax scandal?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency's budget for 2016 is unprecedented and historic: \$444 million. That investment will enable the agency to improve its client service, support the government's efforts to fight tax evasion and tax avoidance, and improve the agency's ability to collect outstanding tax debts.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister should put her cue cards down for a minute and use some common sense.

She is still defending the indefensible. This is not just about accountants participating in professional association events. This is about senior officials taking part in secret meetings at the Rideau Club.

What does she not understand about the appearance of conflict of interest? When will she put an end to these practices? When will she tell her officials that the Rideau Club is over and there will be no more secret meetings, period?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my NDP colleague is choosing to doubt the professionalism of public servants. He should listen to his colleague from Jonquière, who had this to say in the House yesterday:

I am proud of Canada's public servants, the services they provide, and their professionalism.

I trust the agency employees to conduct themselves professionally. They are expected to adhere to the code of integrity and professional conduct. Every invitation they receive must be assessed in order to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Liberals' lack of planning has resulted in Syrian refugees being extorted by crooked immigration consultants. These consultants are charging Syrian refugees thousands of dollars and selling them false hope of coming to Canada.

The previous Conservative government cracked down on crooked consultants. When are the Liberals going to close the door on those who are taking advantage of the most vulnerable?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, such behaviour is clearly against the rules and the perpetrators will be held to account. If judged appropriate by the appropriate authorities, they could be charged as well under criminal law.

That being said, the vast majority of Canadians are displaying extraordinary generosity to the Syrian refugees.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, immigration consultants in partnership with refugee sponsorship groups are violating federal rules. A Mississauga organization called Fast to Canada has refugees paying from \$12,000 to \$32,000 before arriving in Canada. The group's website displays the logo of the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council and indicates it is a member.

What is the minister doing to protect legitimate refugees fleeing a dangerous situation from being defrauded?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, such behaviour will not be tolerated. It is possible that sponsorship agreements could be terminated or the refugee could be not allowed, or if deemed appropriate by the authorities, such individuals or organizations could be charged.

This behaviour is not tolerated by this government and perpetrators will be held to account.

• (1440)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the immigration minister would not say how much the Syrian refugee program will cost Canadians. He said it will come under budget, but there is no budget. The minister also admitted that 13% of refugees, or 3,400 people, are still in hotels.

The Liberals renovated five Canadian Forces bases for 6,100 people costing \$6.4 million. Why did the Liberals blow millions of dollars displacing troops over Christmas to house refugees with no intent on using the bases?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Talk about a glass half empty or half full, Mr. Speaker.

I said yesterday that 87% of the refugees have now found permanent housing. That is a very large number and we should be pleased with it. The remaining 13% will find permanent housing very soon.

My colleague beside me, the Minister of National Defence, confirms there is nothing truthful in the member's comments about defence.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that some immigration consultants are charging Syrian refugees fees of more than \$32,000 to process their applications to the federal government. When a program is fast-tracked, there are sometimes weaknesses and, unfortunately, some people take advantage of those weaknesses.

Can the Minister of Immigration assure this House that no refugees applying to come to Canada are being exploited by immigration consultants?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, I can assure the members of this House that that kind of behaviour will not be tolerated. Guilty parties will be punished under the law, where the authorities see fit, or by other means. This kind of behaviour will not be tolerated in Canada.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the process of reconciliation is a long one. Residential school survivors opened deep wounds to share their stories and placed their trust in other parties to hold up their end of the deal. Our collective healing depends upon it. We cannot let a legal mistake by government lawyers jeopardize justice for survivors.

The parliamentary secretary was not clear yesterday, so I ask again, will the government ensure full payment for the victims of residential schools?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all parties to the settlement agreement have a critical role in reconciliation. We believe that the Catholic Church has to honour its obligation. This is not the time to get off on a technicality. Catholic people from coast to coast to coast in this country expect their church to honour this obligation and get on with the reconciliation and they, I am sure, will help in this endeavour.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the victims, the obligations imposed on the Catholic Church were part of the justice and healing process.

Because of a government error, the church can now shirk its obligations. We simply cannot abandon the survivors and their families yet again, for they are still living with the painful legacy of residential schools.

Will the government make a firm commitment today that the victims will receive the compensation they were promised?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his question.

All parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement have a crucial role to play in renewing their relationship with Canada's indigenous peoples and in reconciliation, although the previous government left no legal recourse.

However, it is up to the officials of the Catholic Church to do the right thing and fix—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leak of the Panama papers has highlighted the need for collective action to crack down on people and companies who are trying to get out of paying their fair share of taxes.

At last week's G20 finance ministers' meetings, the world's major economies took a united public stand on tax dodging and sent a strong warning to other countries that are not meeting their international commitments.

As Canada's representative at the G20 finance ministers' meetings, would our Minister of Finance tell us how he is contributing to international efforts and the measures here at home?

• (1445)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure my colleague, the member for Mississauga—Streetsville, that we were a strong voice at the G20 meetings around cracking down on tax avoidance and tax evasion.

We committed that we will move forward on the common reporting standards and work toward those standards internationally. We committed that we will follow through on base erosion and profit shifting deliverables. We are committed to combatting any sort of tax evasion in Canada and abroad.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, on the budget, the Prime Minister's commitment to transparency has gone from a principle to a buzzword.

The current parliamentary budget officer has said, “When you don't see the details, usually somebody is trying to hide something,” and today he confirmed two more things: first, the Liberal budget does not add up; and second, good news, the Conservatives did leave a surplus.

My question for the Prime Minister is, why does he insist on this continuation of misleading Canadians on these basic facts?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have had the opportunity to say to this House before, in the last month of the year, revenues go down and expenses go up. The Conservatives left us with a deficit, as we will see.

I could say that the more important question is, what are we going to do about the era of low growth that has been left to us?

The PBOs independently confirmed that they agree our investments in the economy will grow the economy for the long term. That is what we are trying to do: improve Canada for this generation and the next generation of Canadians.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the justice minister who, in 2014, said about LNG, that there are “discussions that are happening where voices are being heard and concerns are being addressed”, and that LNG remains a “positive prospect for many first nations”.

Yet, the justice minister sits here silently, while billions of dollars in investment and thousands of jobs hang in the balance. When will she break the silence, stand up for British Columbians, and push her cabinet colleagues to approve an LNG project?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no point in pushing me because we make environmental decisions based on evidence, facts, and science. We also do it engaging with indigenous people, in consultation with Canadians. We are committed to getting resources to market, but it must be done in a sustainable way, and that is what we will do.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are that billions of dollars in investment and thousands of jobs hang in the balance.

The president of the Vancouver port authority had this to say in response to the calls from the member for Steveston—Richmond East about shutting down the port operations: “We are the federal manager of lands in the port and are clearly designated as the environmental permitting agency,” and that it is a “regulatory agency, not a political body”.

Oral Questions

When will the Liberals stop colluding with third party environmental groups and approve the LNG project, which would create thousands of well-paying, high-quality jobs?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I will confirm that we will make decisions based on facts, science, and evidence in consultation with communities that are affected and indigenous peoples. That is the way we get resources to market in the 21st century. Unfortunately, the previous government did not understand this and it was not able to get our resources to market.

That is what we are going to do. That is the responsible thing to do.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just last week, two more first nations signed agreements with TransCanada for the Pacific NorthWest LNG pipeline. This adds to a growing list of first nations which have signed on to the project, including, Doig River, Halfway River, Blueberry River, Yekooche, Gitanyow, Kitselas, Lake Babine, Metlakatla, and Nisga'a Lisims.

When will the cabinet approve the Pacific NorthWest LNG pipeline?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we make decisions based on science, facts, and evidence, and in consultation. We have engaged with indigenous peoples and now we are reviewing the project. There are concerns with respect to salmon. I am sure the member opposite would also be concerned if there were environmental effects on the salmon.

We are working with the proponent. We are working with the Government of B.C. We are engaging in consultation with indigenous leaders. We will make a decision when we are ready to make a decision.

* * *

• (1450)

LABOUR

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when strikes and lockouts drag on, families and communities suffer.

Anti-scab legislation would lead to fewer and shorter labour disputes. This is a simple change that any progressive, pro-worker government would support, yet the Liberal parliamentary secretary actually said that he would vote against the NDP bill. The bill is a simple but important first step to modernizing the Canada Labour Code. It is good for workers. It is good for our economy.

Will the minister stand up for Canadian workers and support the anti-scab bill?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to report to the House that 95% of all CBAs in the federally regulated sector were reached without a work stoppage: 215 out of 227 agreements.

This is a process that works. This is a process that will continue to work.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to hear the Minister of National Revenue's response, it is clear that the Liberals do not understand the difference between a manager and an official.

I hope that this government will properly understand the anti-scab legislation I introduced last week. I am proud of this bill to protect workers from abuse. We need to have anti-scab legislation to fully ensure the fundamental right to collective bargaining. A government that claims to be progressive should implement this legislation.

Will the Liberal government support workers and vote in favour of this anti-scab bill?

[*English*]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the House is that this side respects both unions and businesses and their ability to come to a deal together. They both are going to be at the table working hard for their collective responsibilities. Overall, 95% of all agreements are settled at the table, if they are fair and balanced. This is exactly what we are doing with our Bill C-4.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is making defence cuts to create a leaner military and is delaying major procurement projects until after the next election. He plans on replacing Canada's combat capabilities with peace operations. He said that he wants to implement the recommendations from the 2011 transformation report, which would reduce the size of our military.

The Liberals have already locked in their ideological direction for the Canadian Armed Forces, so why should Canadians expect their views to actually be heard in the Liberal defence review?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the Canadian Armed Forces. With our open and transparent defence review that we are launching, I welcome the member holding his consultations with Canadians and experts alike, and I look forward to hearing his comments personally as well.

I will reiterate for the member that our government is absolutely committed to the Canadian Armed Forces, the men and women who serve us.

Oral Questions

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the opportunity to speak at the ninth annual Kyiv Security Forum. All speakers shared concerns over Russia's continued aggressive military actions. Just last week in the Baltic Sea, Russian fighter jets buzzed a U.S. warship and barrel-rolled over an American air force plane. Clearly, Russia is willing to flex its military muscle.

Will the Liberals take the Russian threat seriously in the defence review, or do they think talking to Putin is the appropriate defence posture?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is committed to working with our multilateral organizations, especially NATO. I have read the intelligence report on that. Our troops are actually working with NATO at the moment. I got to visit our troops in Poland and also the troops that are in Ukraine. They are doing wonderful work, and we are potentially looking at other ways that we can support NATO and oppose Russian aggression.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under Jean Chrétien's Liberals, our armed forces went through a decade of darkness. It is sad to see the current government going down the same path.

The Prime Minister already cut defence investments in the recent budget. He does not want to acquire the F-35s, and he is delaying other important procurements. He also promised to replace our combat capabilities with peacekeeping missions.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the defence policy is not yet written in stone and that consultations with the Standing Committee on National Defence will be taken into consideration?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that, as I stated earlier, our government is committed to making sure that our men and women have the right capabilities.

We are having the defence review, but on a separate track we are also moving diligently along to ensure that we replace our CF-18s and our ships for the navy, and we are working on a lot of other projects.

However, the defence review allows all Canadians to participate in looking at where our Canadian Forces need to go.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, countries from around the world will be attending the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem.

The government promised that its drug policy, including support for harm reduction, would be evidence-based.

Can the Minister of Health inform the House about Canada's participation in this meeting?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I will be giving a speech at the special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Government of Canada supports harm reduction, which includes a role for supervised injection sites, the need for good Samaritan legislation, and making naloxone more readily available in emergency situations. The world is looking to Canada for leadership on these issues, and I thank the hon. member for his interest.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by international standards, Canada has fewer doctors specializing in palliative care than countries such as the U.S. or Australia. The Liberal government promised to support palliative care, but there was no word of it in the 2016 budget or in the latest legislation.

How can the Liberal government, in good conscience, open up physician-assisted suicide when palliative care is not available to the large majority of Canadians who need it?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my hon. colleague that Canadians do not have access to high-quality palliative care in a manner that is acceptable. Some records suggest that only 15% to 30% of Canadians have access to such services.

Our government is determined to work with the provinces and territories to increase access to palliative care. I will be working with my colleagues, the ministers of health across the country, to invest in home care and palliative care to make sure people have the care they need at the end of their lives.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago the NDP passed a motion calling on the government to establish a compensation fund for fallen firefighters. The Liberals again promised this fund during the election, yet the Prime Minister spoke to firefighters yesterday and failed to act on the public safety officer compensation fund.

Firefighters are deeply disappointed. When will the Liberals honour this promise and set up this long-overdue fund? How much longer will firefighters have to wait for a fund that will protect their families should they make the ultimate sacrifice while protecting the rest of us?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some years ago I was very honoured to author in this House a private member's motion that was in fact passed and adopted by the House of Commons calling for the creation, among other things, of a public safety officer compensation fund.

It was in the Liberal platform; it is in my mandate letter; it will be delivered.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for St. Catharines and I had the privilege to announce the first foreign trade zone in Ontario last week in our home community of the Niagara region. This FTZ will provide companies that import and export any part of their supply chain and companies looking to sell their products to markets around the world with incentives to trade in Ontario, and specifically the Niagara region.

Would the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development explain to the House what else the Government of Canada is doing to help small and medium-sized business keep costs down while opening new markets around the world?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from Niagara Centre for his question, his advocacy, and his hard work in promoting business development in that region.

The creation of foreign trade zone points in Niagara will provide a one-stop shop for businesses to access information on Canada's foreign trade zone policies and programs.

As stated in budget 2016, expansion of trade opportunities across Canada is a key part of the Government of Canada's plan to create jobs and grow the economy. In helping small businesses to trade domestically and globally, we are able to make sure that they grow, innovate, and create good-quality jobs here and abroad.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, members of the agriculture committee voted against a motion to hear from farmers with regard to the trans-Pacific partnership. While Conservative and NDP members voted to hear from farmers, the Liberal members refused.

Is this the openness and transparency that the Minister of International Trade meant when she was promising broad consultations? When will the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food stand up and ensure that farmers and farm families are heard on this important deal?

• (1500)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we said during the election what we say today.

Our party understands, profoundly, that Canada is a trading nation. We also understand that with a trade deal as significant as the trans-Pacific partnership, we have a duty to consult broadly with Canadians. In fact, the trade committee is currently in British Columbia consulting.

As for consultations with farmers, I have personally held many in Alberta, and I do consult often with the farming community, including my own father, who is—

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Joliette.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of working on Bombardier's recovery, the government is going to cause

this flagship Quebec company to be dismantled and bought out by foreigners.

That is what this government is doing by forcing the company to do away with its multiple-voting shares. This government has it in for Bombardier. This government is well aware of this, because it chose to ignore its officials, who advised giving the company a line of credit.

Why did this government, which has 40 members from Quebec, issue this political directive?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government understands the importance of the aerospace sector, and that is why we are engaged with the company.

The company came forward on December 11 to ask for up to \$1 billion. We have been doing our due diligence and looking at the business case.

We understand this is a solid company. We want to make sure we have constructive dialogue with the company. We will do what is in the best interests of Canadians, the company, Quebec, and the country from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Coalition des Sans-Chemise, which has the support of the main unions in Quebec, launched a campaign this week entitled "Employment insurance is for everyone!"

Although this government wants to improve the employment insurance system, it insists on applying a two-tier policy that overlooks or even ignores workers in Quebec's regions.

Will the minister fix this problem and take into account the reality facing workers in Quebec regions hard hit by seasonal work?

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to remind the House that we have invested \$2.5 billion in improving services and supports for workers who unfortunately get laid off, including seasonal workers from all parts of the country, even those areas that are not affected by the commodity downturn.

We have provided a number of supports that are helping small businesses and workers from coast to coast to coast. We are there for those who need it, when they need it.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from April 14 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 36*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Bratina
Breton	Brisson
Caesar-Chavannes	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Chan	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
DeCoursey	Dhillon
Di Iorio	Dion
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Footé	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland	Fry
Fuhr	Gameau
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Hardie
Harvey	Hehr
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Joly
Jones	Jordan
Jowhari	Kang
Khalid	Khera
Lametti	Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemieux	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
McCallum	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)

Monsef	Morneau
Morrissey	Murray
Nassif	Nault
Olipphant	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Petitpas Taylor
Philpott	Picard
Poissant	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy
Rusnak	Sahota
Saini	Sajjan
Samson	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sorbara
Spengemann	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Tootoo	Trudeau
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Virani
Whalen	Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould	Wrzesnewskij
Young	Zahid — 174

The Budget

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Ambrose
Anderson	Angus
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu	Benson
Bemier	Berthold
Bezan	Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boucher
Boudrias	Boulterice
Boutin-Sweet	Brassard
Brosseau	Brown
Calkins	Cannings
Caron	Carrie
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Cullen	Dellell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeschen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Egliniski
Falk	Fast
Finley	Fortin
Gallant	Garrison
Généreux	Genuis
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Hardcastle	Harder
Harper	Hughes
Jeneroux	Johns
Jolibois	Julian
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kwan	Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Laverdière
Lebel	Leitch
Liepert	Lobb
Lukivski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Malcolmson
Marcel	Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Moore
Mulcair	Nantel
Nater	Nicholson
Nuttall	Obhrai
O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Plamondon	Quach

The Budget

Raitt	Rankin
Rayes	Reid
Richards	Saganash
Sansoucy	Saroya
Scheer	Schmale
Shields	Shipley
Sorenson	Stanton
Ste-Marie	Stetski
Stewart	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Thériault	Tilson
Trost	Trudel
Van Loan	Vecchio
Viersen	Warawa
Warkentin	Watts
Waugh	Webber
Weir	Wong
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 134

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 6

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures be concurred in.

● (1520)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 37)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Barsalou-Duval
Baylis	Beaulieu
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Boudrias
Bratina	Breton
Brisson	Caesar-Chavannes
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Chan
Chen	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhillon	Di Iorio
Dion	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Foote
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland	Fry

Fuhr	Garneau
Gerretsen	Gill
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardie	Harvey
Hehr	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Kang	Khalid
Khera	Lametti
Lapointe	Lauson (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Lemieux
Leslie	Levitt
Lightbound	Lockhart
Long	Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Marcil
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
McCallum	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Socurs)
Monsef	Morneau
Morrissey	Murray
Nassif	Nault
Oliphant	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Petitpas Taylor
Philpott	Picard
Plamondon	Poissant
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Rioux	Robillard
Rodriguez	Romanado
Rota	Rudd
Ruimy	Rusnak
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Schulte	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sikand
Simms	Sohi
Sorbara	Spengemann
Ste-Marie	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Thériault	Tootoo
Trudeau	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj	Young
Zahid — 183	

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Ambrose
Anderson	Angus
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Benson
Bernier	Berthold
Bezan	Blakie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boucher
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brousseau
Brown	Calkins
Cannings	Caron
Carrie	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Clarke	Clement
Cooper	Cullen

Deltell
Doherty
Dubé
Dusseault
Eglinski
Fast
Gallant
Généreux
Gladu
Gourde
Harder
Hughes
Johns
Julian
Kent
Kmiec
Lake
Laverdière
Leitch
Lobb
MacGregor
Malcolmson
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mulcair
Nater
Nuttall
O'Toole
Quach
Rankin
Reid
Saganash
Saroya
Schmale
Shipley
Stanton
Stewart
Stubbs
Tilson
Trudel
Vecchio
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Wong
Zimmer— 125

Diotte
Dreeshen
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Falk
Finley
Garrison
Genuis
Godin
Hardcastle
Harper
Jeneroux
Jolibois
Kelly
Kitchen
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lebel
Liepert
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Masse (Windsor West)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
Moore
Nantel
Nicholson
Obhrai
Paul-Hus
Raitt
Rayes
Richards
Sansoucy
Scheer
Shields
Sorenson
Stetski
Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Van Loan
Viersen
Warkentin
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

Bernier
Bezan
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Calkins
Caron
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Cullen
Diotte
Dreeshen
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Falk
Finley
Gallant
Généreux
Gill
Godin
Hardcastle
Harper
Jeneroux
Jolibois
Kelly
Kitchen
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lebel
Liepert
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Marcil
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Mulcair
Nater
Nuttall
O'Toole
Plamondon
Raitt
Rayes
Richards
Sansoucy
Scheer
Shields
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Stewart
Stubbs
Thériault
Trost
Van Loan
Viersen
Warkentin
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

The Budget

Berthold
Blaikie
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boucher
Boulerice
Brassard
Brown
Cannings
Carrie
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Deltell
Doherty
Dubé
Dusseault
Eglinski
Fast
Fortin
Garrison
Genuis
Gladu
Gourde
Harder
Hughes
Johns
Julian
Kent
Kmiec
Lake
Laverdière
Leitch
Lobb
MacGregor
Malcolmson
Masse (Windsor West)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
Moore
Nantel
Nicholson
Obhrai
Paul-Hus
Quach
Rankin
Reid
Saganash
Saroya
Schmale
Shipley
Stanton
Stetski
Strahl
Sweet
Tilson
Trudel
Vecchio
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Wong
Zimmer— 134

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

INSTRUCTION TO COMMITTEE ON BILL C-2

The House resumed from April 18 consideration of Government Business No. 4.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Government Business No. 4.

• (1530)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 38)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaf
Albrecht
Anderson
Arnold
Barlow
Beaulieu

Albas
Ambrose
Angus
Aubin
Barsalou-Duval
Benson

NAYS

Members

Aldag
Alleslev
Anandasangaree
Arya
Badawey
Bains
Beech
Bibeau
Blair
Bossio
Breton
Caesar-Chavannes
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chan
Cormier
Dabrusin
DeCoursey

Alghabra
Amos
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Baylis
Bennett
Bittle
Boissonnault
Bratina
Brison
Carr
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Chen
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhillon

Speaker's Ruling

Di Iorio	Dion
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Foote	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland	Fry
Fuhr	Gameau
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Hardie
Harvey	Hehr
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Joly
Jones	Jordan
Jowhari	Kang
Khalid	Khera
Lametti	Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemieux	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
McCallum	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk (Soeurs)	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef	Morneau
Morrissey	Murray
Nassif	Nault
Oliphant	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Petitpas Taylor
Philpott	Picard
Poissant	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy
Rusnak	Sahota
Saini	Sajjan
Samson	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sorbara
Spengemann	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Tootoo	Trudeau
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Virani
Whalen	Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould	Wrzesnewskyj
Young	Zahid— 174

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

● (1535)

[English]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF CONTENTS OF BILL C-14—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on April 14, 2016, and again yesterday, by the House leader of the official opposition concerning the premature disclosure of the contents of Bill C-14, an act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other acts (medical assistance in dying).

[Translation]

I would like to thank the House Leader of the Official Opposition for having raised this matter, as well as the chief government whip and the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby for their submissions.

[English]

In presenting his case, the House leader of the official opposition pointed out that specific and detailed information contained in Bill C-14 was reported in a newspaper article and elsewhere in the media before the bill had been introduced in the House. In describing the seriousness of this matter, which he considered to be a breach of members' privileges, he stressed the need for members to access information in order to fulfill their parliamentary duties, as well as the respect required for the essential role of the House in legislative matters.

In response, the chief government whip, acknowledging the problem, stated, "...our government takes any breach of the privilege of members and of the House very seriously". He then noted that such a premature divulgence of the bill's contents had not been authorized and apologized unreservedly, committing to ensure that it would not happen again.

This being the first question of privilege to be raised in this Parliament, I want to take this opportunity to inform members of the role of the Speaker in this regard, particularly as it is a narrowly defined role.

As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, states at page 141:

Great importance is attached to matters involving privilege. A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege in the House must first convince the Speaker that his or her concern is prima facie (on the first impression or at first glance) a question of privilege. The function of the Speaker is limited to deciding whether the matter is of such a character as to entitle the Member who has raised the question to move a motion which will have priority over Orders of the Day; that is, in the Speaker's opinion, there is a prima facie question of privilege. If there is, the House must take the matter into immediate consideration. Ultimately, it is the House which decides whether a breach of privilege or a contempt has been committed.

In adjudicating questions of privilege, the Speaker carefully considers the effect that the alleged breach has on members' ability to function. At page 145 of O'Brien and Bosc, it states:

In deliberating upon a question of privilege, the Chair will take into account the extent to which the matter complained of infringed upon any Member's ability to perform his or her parliamentary functions or appears to be a contempt against the dignity of Parliament.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

As honourable members know, one of my most important responsibilities as Speaker is to safeguard the rights and privileges of members, individually and collectively. Central to the matter before us today is the fact that, due to its pre-eminent role in the legislative process, the House cannot allow precise legislative information to be distributed to others before it has been made accessible to all members. Previous Speakers have regularly upheld not only this fundamental right, but also expectation, of the House.

On October 4, 2010, on page 4711 of the *House of Commons Debates*, Speaker Milliken noted:

[English]

It is indisputable that it is a well-established practice and accepted convention that this House has the right of first access to the text of bills that it will consider.

This important convention exists so that members can properly exercise their functions as legislators. Speaker Milliken saw fit to reiterate it in that particular case, even though in those unique circumstances—the member admitted to having herself prematurely released the contents of her own private member's bill, so no doubt existed as to the provenance of the leak—he chose not to rule that the incident constituted a prima facie case of privilege.

It is within this context that I, as Speaker, must review each case on its own merits. Having done so, the facts are clear and undisputed in this instance: detailed information regarding the content of Bill C-14 was indeed made available through the media before the bill itself had been introduced in the House. There were no arguments raised to the contrary. Therefore, there was a direct contravention of the House's right to first access.

[Translation]

The chief government whip has unequivocally apologized for any breaches of confidentiality in this instance, recognizing the seriousness of the matter; this should be reassuring to all members. That being said, it would appear to the Chair, at first glance, that the leaking of the bill's contents and, thus, the pre-empting of members' access to legislative information, has impeded the ability of members to perform their parliamentary functions. In a strikingly similar case, quoted by the honourable opposition House leader, Speaker Milliken stated, at page 1840 of the *House of Commons Debates* of March 19, 2001:

[English]

The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary, not only so that members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent [role] which the House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

He concluded by affirming that it was "a situation that the Chair cannot condone".

In this instance, the chair must conclude that the House's right of first access to legislative information was not respected. The chair appreciates the chief government whip's assertion that no one in the government was authorized to publicly release the specific details of the bill before its introduction. Still, it did happen, and these kinds of incidents cause grave concern among hon. members. I believe it is a good reason why extra care should be taken to ensure that matters that ought properly to be brought to the House first do not in any way get out in the public domain prematurely.

Thus, the available precedents lead me to conclude that this incident constitutes a prima facie question of privilege, and I now invite the House leader of the official opposition to move the appropriate motion.

● (1540)

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC) moved:

That the matter of the premature disclosure of the contents of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying), be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief in my remarks.

First, I want to thank you for your ruling. I think you approached it with the gravity it deserves, and you had excellent examples to cite.

As mentioned in the ruling, the details around the case have not really been disputed; therefore, I do not suspect there will need to be a whole lot of debate, hopefully not. I hope all members appreciate the importance of preserving our rights in this matter and, as mentioned, the rights of having first access to legislation.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank the chief government whip for his remarks when this matter was first brought up. It demonstrated the good faith that all members attempt to bring to the chamber. I hope it is instructive to the administrative staff on the government side, perhaps in the ministers' offices or wherever this leak originated, that their first duty is to serve members and the ministers, not to serve political masters or to achieve political ends. They really do have to put the dignity and authority of the House at the top of the list.

Whoever is responsible for this must understand that we are a parliamentary democracy and that political decisions made by staff to try to frame the debate in the media are not acceptable when that infringes upon our rights and dignities.

I hope the House agrees to send this to the procedure and House affairs committee so that the committee can look into what happened, perhaps determine who did it, perhaps determine what systems could be put in place to avoid this type of thing in the future, and if the culprit is found, bring that detail back to the House for the House to decide what to do with it further.

I am going to conclude my remarks there. I think I said everything I had to in my remarks. I do not want to belabour the point. I do appreciate your ruling, Mr. Speaker. You summed it up very nicely. I do hope that my colleagues will join me in voting for this motion. It is important that each and every one of us send the message back to the political people with whom we work that the rights of the House are important, that we take those seriously, and that we put them at the forefront when we make these kinds of decisions.

Business of Supply

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my distinguished colleague.

Perhaps we could consent to refer this to the committee as proposed by the hon. opposition member.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion, which I believe are to adopt the motion and refer the matter to the committee on procedure and House affairs.

Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to present this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The 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)

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—POLITICAL FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by 18 minutes.

● (1545)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on this traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples in support of the justice minister and against this motion. I will demonstrate that she has followed all the rules regarding fundraising.

As Minister of Democratic Institutions, I believe that accountability is a major aspect of a healthy democracy. While we are addressing this, the party opposite decides to engage in petty politics that contribute to the erosion of our democratic institutions. Do not get me wrong. We welcome the opposition holding us to account; it is a sign of a healthy democracy. However, spreading rumours despite facts is the very behaviour that Canadians rejected this past October.

The motion is a vicious and unfounded attack on an indigenous leader, a woman who has and continues to serve her nation honourably. The motion is not helping Canadian democracy. I urge members to put an end to this unhelpful practice of using valuable House time to pursue baseless accusations that do nothing to promote a healthy democracy.

Let me begin with the evidence, as is consistent with our government's approach to decision-making.

The fact is that, for nearly 10 years, the previous Conservatives chipped away at the core of our democracy. Their tenure in government saw an increase in cynicism and mistrust toward the very institutions that underpin our democracy. Instead of trying to build consensus, they divided. Instead of being accountable, they prorogued. Instead of basing decisions on evidence, they muzzled

scientists, abolished the long-form census, and based their decisions on ideology.

Canadians chose respectful dialogue over division. They chose an open and transparent approach to government. They chose a government that puts their needs ahead of petty partisan interests.

I find it quite rich too that the party that prorogued Parliament on two separate occasions to avoid answering to Canadians on its actions, the same Conservative government that was found in contempt of Parliament, is suddenly so committed to ethical behaviour and accountability. However, there will be more on that later.

For now, I will point out once again that this behaviour does not help our democratic institutions. Such careless disregard and blatant lack of respect for our democracy has led to a general public sentiment of disengagement, skepticism, and cynicism about politics, a reality that our government is working hard to change every day.

I have said this before and I will say it again. Today's motion is a vicious and unfounded attack on an indigenous leader, an accomplished woman, who continues to serve her nation honourably both as an MP and as Attorney General of Canada. Today's motion is not helping democracy.

Let us review more evidence.

Our government's commitment to a healthier democracy and the accountability that Canadians deserve is clear in the Prime Minister's issuance of the "Open and Accountable Government" document that is a major plank of our commitment to a better government.

As my hon. colleagues before me have explained to the House, the Minister of Justice followed all the rules. In the same interests of evidence-based decision-making, let us review the chronology of what actually happened.

The justice minister consulted the Ethics Commissioner prior to the event taking place, to ensure that her participation would be within the rules. The justice minister was given this very assurance: she was following the rules. Following her participation at the event in question, opposition members began questioning her presence. The member for St. Albert—Edmonton even took the step of writing to the Ethics Commissioner asking for her opinion. At this point I can only assume that he respects her expertise and was intending to accept her decision, whatever it would be. The Ethics Commissioner responded to the member for St. Albert—Edmonton in writing, indicating that contrary to the member's baseless accusation, the justice minister had followed all the rules.

There are no secrets on this side of the House. The rules are clear. The actions taken by the justice minister were all within the rules, and she proactively acquired information to ensure that this would be the case.

Business of Supply

•(1550)

This is what an open and transparent government does, which brings me back to this important document. This document shows that this government is fully committed to our charter and the rule of law, including the Canada Elections Act. I am disappointed that members opposite are more interested in continuing false accusations against my colleague than discussing how we can better ensure the respect of our charter.

This is what we are committed to, and which all ministers, including the Minister of Justice, aim to achieve. The Prime Minister has high expectations for all members of his caucus, including those in cabinet, and I am proud of the fact that we have shown a high level of integrity. I believe this is a commitment that we will continue and Canadians will be proud of.

Let me be clear. We welcome constructive criticism based on facts and intended to improve outcomes for Canadians, but spreading untruthful rumours despite the facts is evidence of the same old reckless behaviour that Canadians rejected this past October. This careless behaviour leads to an erosion of public trust and reduces the health of our democracy.

As Minister of Democratic Institutions, I am alarmed. Canadians expect us to use our time in the House responsibly. I am alarmed. Is this how the Conservatives plan to spend their time over the next four years? Instead of serving constructively as Her Majesty's loyal opposition and improving the tone and the legislation in the House, the Conservatives continue to spend valuable House time pursuing non-issues and spreading lies. Canadians asked for a better tone and deserve a more productive Parliament, less petty and divisive politics, and more evidence-based decision-making.

Do the Conservatives want to go down in history as a divisive party that consistently ignores facts, evidence, experts, and divides Canadians, or do they have an appetite to focus on trying to build the kind of legacy that the Hon. Flora MacDonald left behind? Time and time again in the House, we have been reminded that our time here is a gift. I urge members opposite to put an end to their baseless accusations, put party interests aside, and resume the task that they are here to do: serve Canadians.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions for her comments. I appreciated it when she said there are no secrets on this side of the House. I would like to ask the hon. minister if she would therefore be willing to disclose the list of attendees at the Minister of Justice's fundraiser, and perhaps while she is at it also tell us where the \$40 million is that the Liberals lost and squandered in the sponsorship scandal.

•(1555)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, I may have spoken for nearly 10 minutes, and the member opposite may have thanked me for speaking for nearly 10 minutes, but it appears that he has not heard a single word I said. This factless, baseless line of accusations is not helping democracy.

Members and the party opposite have received the facts in writing from the Ethics Commissioner. Let us move on and speak about the issues that matter to Canadians, like a healthier economy, a healthier

democracy, ensuring that we are moving forward on our commitment to get closer to truth and reconciliation with our indigenous communities.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the speech and reply, and I thought the hon. member on this side had an excellent question. I am just wondering, if everything is transparent, why she will not disclose the list.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, not only do members opposite not hear me, but they have not had the opportunity to review the information that is already disclosed online.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no wonder Canadians are so skeptical about government, when we are absolutely wasting a whole day on something as frivolous as a story created from nothing.

Let us talk about Del Mastro, about Duffy. Let us talk about the long trail of fundraising patterns by the party opposite. Canadians are faced with a country which has record levels of unemployment, poverty, and a shrinking middle class. I could go on and on. Instead, we are wasting time today. When Canadians are looking for good debate and good dialogue, we are wasting time on something as frivolous as this.

My question to my colleague is this. Would she not agree that Canadians are tired of this type of politics and this tired government?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, while it is important to remember our blemished past, I believe Canadians have trusted all of us, on all sides, to bring a new tone of respect and collaboration to this place to inspire the next generation of voters and leaders. That, I believe, is a cause that transcends partisan interests and that we all need to be working on collectively.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am actually alarmed, and I am offended. I could go on with a lot more adjectives about how I am feeling right now by the comments of the colleague across the floor. She brought race into this, and I am absolutely 100% offended. Whether the minister is indigenous or not has nothing to do with it.

As somebody who has strong indigenous women in my family, I am absolutely offended and, through you, Mr. Speaker, I demand an apology.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, I had no intention of violating the sensibilities of the member opposite. I was merely stating the facts. The fact is that our Attorney General is a woman. The fact is that our Attorney General is of proud indigenous descent. That is nothing to feel outraged about. Instead, I urge the member to consider celebrating it.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, the hon. colleague from across the floor did not apologize but inflamed the situation by making further comments about racism.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Let me consult with the table officer and I will get back to the member in approximately 30 seconds..

My initial thoughts were right. I am afraid that this is not a point of order; it is an issue of debate.

Business of Supply

We will resume debate with the hon. member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie.

• (1600)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the motion that is before the House. It is unfortunate that the member across the way, the Minister of Justice, took it upon herself to conduct herself and her affairs in such a way that there have been many questions asked.

There have been a great number of questions asked, and not just on this side of the House, I should note. The hon. member across the way spent some significant time suggesting that it was simply members in this caucus or on this side of the House who have been asking questions with respect to the conduct of the justice minister. However, before I get into the topic of the other folks who were asking these questions, I should note that I had the privilege of getting to know the Minister of Justice long before she entered partisan politics. As a matter of fact, I had the opportunity to work with the minister on a number of occasions and in a number of capacities.

I had the privilege of serving as the chair of the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee. In that capacity, I met the now minister from time to time, and we often collaborated on projects. Therefore, it is with great regret that I stand in this House this afternoon to support this motion, but I remind the justice minister that she has had a proud and noble career up until this point. I believe that she is an honourable member. I will provide some suggestions as to how I think she might be able to reclaim the reputation she has spent her entire career helping to build.

There are many people who are proud of the minister for the accomplishments she has achieved in her life. She has certainly done great things, both in her private life, and obviously becoming the Minister of Justice of our country. There are many who have a great respect for her.

It is this conduct that she has engaged in in her role as a minister that has obviously sullied her name. It is not just me saying that. People across the country are asking questions about this member. It is important that the minister do everything in her power to rectify what many people believe is the incomprehensible conduct that she is alleged to have engaged in and what they know her character to be.

One person who has called for a review of this is none other than the former Liberal minister Ujjal Dosanjh. I do not think that anyone on the other side would suggest that Mr. Dosanjh is somehow a partisan Conservative or that he is writing the talking points on this side of the House.

However, just some time ago, on April 5, the former minister wrote the following. He stated:

[The Prime Minister] and the Liberal Party have defended the fundraiser as being within the four corners of the federal law and its reasonable donation limits. In the days when the influence of big private money is being debated everywhere - from the Panama Papers to the current US presidential campaign to Queens Park in Ontario — it is totally incomprehensible to me how a Minister of our Federal Crown, the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General at that, participating in a private fundraiser with lawyers can be said to escape either the reality or the appearance of a conflict of interest. If the current law allows our minister of justice to be placed in the

improper position of at least the appearance of a potential conflict of interest, the law is wrong and must be changed.

If the law is wrong and the appearance of a conflict is real and persistent the minister should cancel the fundraiser even if the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party [believe] otherwise.

Therefore, it is not just partisan Conservatives who have questions with respect to the conduct that the Liberal minister has engaged in.

• (1605)

As a friend of the Minister of Justice, having worked with her long before she entered this partisan place, I do have some suggestions as to how the minister could conduct her affairs in such a way that she can recapture some of the respect that she had when she came to this place.

The first thing I would suggest is that she immediately release the names of the people who attended this secret fundraiser.

One might ask why I would suggest that this was a secret fundraiser. The reason I suggest it was intended to be secret is that on the Liberal Party of Canada's website, which lists a number of different fundraising opportunities, at no time was this particular fundraiser posted on that list. As a matter of fact, it was newspapers that broke the story that this fundraiser was going to be held at Torys LLP in Toronto.

The question of why the Liberal Party chose not to advertise this fundraiser has to be answered. Was it because the Liberals believed that this fundraiser would not pass the smell test? Did they believe that some might question the idea of the Minister of Justice going into a private law firm of friends of the Liberal Party when people were required to pay \$500 to be there?

I should note that I probably could talk all day, but I will be splitting my time with the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London. I know that she will have an even better speech.

I would suggest that if the Minister of Justice hopes to recapture some of the necessities of transparency, she would release immediately the names of those who were invited to pay \$500 a person to be there.

The second thing the minister should do is make a commitment that she will rule out the appointment of any person who was at that fundraiser. She will commit today to ensure that no person who showed up at that fundraiser, or any future fundraiser, would be appointed by her to any federal position during her time as justice minister.

In addition to that, it would be appropriate for the minister to refund the money. There have been important questions asked about the justice minister engaging in this type of activity. The appropriate thing to do is return the money.

The cost to her reputation at this point has been great. Is it really worth the money to the Liberal Party to have brought about the diminishment of her reputation with the amount of money they collected from these highly paid Bay Street lawyers? I am certain that they will at some point make another donation to the Liberal Party, but it is important that the money be refunded just to clear the air.

Business of Supply

Finally, I have a suggestion to the Minister of Justice if she wants to make a speech, as she has told the House, encouraging all people of all different backgrounds to involve themselves in politics and affirming that every person can make a difference.

I make similar speeches. I go to high schools. I do not charge them a cent to do it. There is something ironic and sad about a federal justice minister going to a room to talk about the inclusion of all people, all Canadians regardless of background, in federal politics, but charging them \$500 at the door. The vast majority of people who are marginalized, the vast majority of people whose voices need to be heard in this place, the people who are under-represented today, do not have \$500 to hear that speech.

I would call on the Minister of Justice to reflect on the reality that she has been caught in and recognize that her reputation and the work that she can yet do is only diminished by this activity, and that undertaking some of these steps might actually ensure that she has the ability to continue to make a difference in this place.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it is ironic that my Conservative Party colleagues are using the precious time of the House to raise this kind of frivolous accusation, when their 10-year run in power was known as the dark decade, a period of secrets.

I would like the opposition member to respond to my constituents who are telling me they would like to hear about issues that affect them in the House. They want us to talk about economic development, jobs, and measures to ensure that they have enough income to make ends meet.

Does the opposition member have an answer for my constituents who tell me that, instead of wasting our time in the House on this kind of debate, we should be talking about solutions for their families who need help?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question but I am struggling with it. The hon. member talks about the necessity for transparency and suggests that this is what his party believes in, yet it is his party that stands in the House and refuses to disclose the names of the donors, the people who showed up at the secret fundraiser. This is a secret list of the secret fundraiser.

If the justice minister is going to continue to conduct herself in a way that people would believe is beyond reproach, it is an absolute necessity that this debate happen, that transparency prevail, and that Canadians know the facts with regard to the conduct of the justice minister.

[*Translation*]

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

The Conservatives certainly have no shortage of moxie, or at least they have a sense of humour. They are casting stones at the new Liberal government, when there were all kinds of scandals in recent years. There was Dean Del Mastro, the in and out scheme, the

RCMP in the Conservative Party's offices, Pamela Wallin, Mike Duffy, and I could go on.

I think that the Minister of Justice made a mistake by failing to comply with the guidelines set by the Liberal government. Beyond that, could we not simply ask her to reimburse the money she raised at this fundraising event in Toronto and move on to other issues that concern people, such as jobs, pensions, or the health care system?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I think that there is enough misconduct in every party that we might be able to throw stones, but Canadians expect transparency and expect to be repaid if taxpayers' dollars have been misused. Of course, the NDP is currently engaged in a debate in the courts with regard to whether or not they will repay funds that were clearly misappropriated.

I think the member across the way would agree that the minister across the way could clear the air by simply refunding the money, making a clear and transparent effort with Canadians to disclose who was there, and assuring them that she will never ever appoint those who showed up at these fundraisers for fear that it would look as though these people had engaged in payment for special access to the minister.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, off and on through the day, I have had the opportunity to sit and listen to the debate on this opposition motion introduced by my colleague, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Earlier I heard a member from the government talking about raising the bar and taking pride in the government's transparency and the enhancement of its ethics. All of the government speeches and questions highlighted the conduct of the ministers while taking potshots at the opposition parties, trying to diminish the hot water situation the Liberals are currently in themselves.

However, let us be real here and have a real discussion. We are sitting in the House of Commons, all hiding behind the Lobbying Act and letters from the Ethics Commissioner. For a minute, let us pretend we are sitting at the kitchen table having coffee and cookies—or, for many people in my riding, it would be sitting at the Tim Hortons coffee shop.

What is that Canadians see and what is the appearance of ethics in this particular situation? Is the government truly trying to raise the bar? If it is trying to raise the bar, then let us have an open discussion, stop hiding behind the rules and regulations, and just look through the one lens we need, which is the appearance of conflict.

As many in this House know, I have asked the minister several questions specifically on this situation, at which time I have had no response from that minister. Each and every time, the House leader chooses to rise and answer for the minister.

I have heard several times that the minister has inquired of the Ethics Commissioner, but we all know in this House that was after the fundraiser had become public.

I have heard members of the government ask the opposition members to take this outside and at other times to speak to it publicly without hiding behind members' privilege within this House.

Business of Supply

Earlier today my colleague, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, reminded the government that we have already done this by publishing the letters that he had written to the Ethics Commissioner.

I stand here today speaking about ethics, not trying to hide behind anything, speaking as a Canadian. Let us just be honest here and discuss this.

Let us start with the simple facts. The member was a guest speaker at a Toronto law firm. This particular law firm has legal dealings with the federal government. An attendee at the event decided to deregister as a lobbyist the evening before the event—something he had been for five years prior. The member attended the event and indicated that her speech focused upon the path for Canada. This event cost participants \$500 a plate to attend.

Now, let us add the following to the situation. The member is the justice minister and Attorney General of Canada.

I am going to read, specifically, this. The Prime Minister has publicly and transparently provided Mandate Letters to all of his Ministers and has indicated to all members that

... political fundraising activities...do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government.

These are just the facts, and I truly think at this point that I should sit down, because it is obviously clear that there has been a conflict of interest.

We can look at it through the telescope or the lens of “Did this appear?”. Did we see a justice minister at a law firm? If anyone asked that question, they would probably say, “Yes, it seems as though it does appear that way.” We are talking of the Canadian general public. Does this or does this not appear to be a conflict of interest?

The minister should apologize and pay back the money from this fundraiser. That is a nice and simple easy solution.

As any member in this chamber would have experienced, we are all members of Parliament and we must stand, be a pillar in our society, and lead by example, and I think every member does his or her best to do so. Even I, a speedy driver, make sure I set the speedometer now so that I do not speed. It sounds very simple, but we need to be the leaders. We need to set that bar for what Canadians are supposed to be. Just because we are members of Parliament, it does not mean that we have different privileges.

When I am sitting in a restaurant, nobody comes up to me to ask how my meal is, but they want to know what is happening in Ottawa. They want to know what is going on up there. I believe every other parliamentarian has the exact same thing happen to them. It is not just in Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Specifically, with this member, we are talking about the Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada at a law firm. I think they have some common ground for discussions. Do we really think they talked about the Raptors game or when they were going to plant their spring gardens? These may be the common discussions at a sports bar or at a horticultural meeting, but we are talking about lawyers in the same room, with one common background, which is justice.

Does this fundraiser the Minister of Justice held at a law firm pass the sniff test?

● (1615)

In other words, we look at the pitcher of milk in the morning and it is curdled and it is lumpy. Then we proceed to smell it, assuming the milk has gone bad, even the date and the package shows that it has expired. If the Minister of Justice already thought it might be an issue with the Ethics Commissioner, why did she have to ask? Because it was obviously potentially a conflict of interest, going back to the appearance of an interest.

Let us go back to some questions. If the Minister of Justice needed to take this to the Ethics Commissioner, would it not appear that there had been a potential conflict of interest? The key question on all of this is, did the political fundraiser activities or considerations affect or appear to affect the exercise of the minister's official duties or the access of individuals or an organization to the minister?

This truly is a simple yes or no answer, but instead we find ourselves debating this on the floor today because the minister and the government refuse to live by their own ethical standards.

I will state, as many others have done from our caucus, that when the Hon. Shelly Glover found out a stakeholder under her portfolio was in attendance at a fundraiser, she took it to the Ethics Commissioner then paid the money back. It is that simple. There is a fix, an easy solution here.

As I indicated throughout this discussion, the government has repeatedly responded to all questions by pointing the finger back at any previous wrong doing, wrong doing in the previous government's case, that resulted in either the money being paid back or the member being removed from the caucus.

I already anticipate the questions coming from the government, asking me to articulate what our previous Conservative government did to rectify this issue. One of the first bills that we brought forward back in 2006 was the Federal Accountability Act. It removed the donations from big business and unions and the idea that an individual could buy a member's vote. Now Canadians can only spend money from their own pockets and pocketbooks to make those donations up to \$1,525.

Earlier today, I was advised by Dr. Ted Hewitt, a long time person from the city of London, that I was a positive and forward focused individual. I hope the government today, during this debate, can adopt this type of personality, stop throwing mud at all the opposition parties and just do the right thing.

The Liberals should take the words of the Prime Minister when he campaigned on open and transparent government, let the light shine on this issue and take it for exactly what it is, instead of hiding behind the legal jargon and the code of ethics. They should rise above and do what their Prime Minister asks them to do: be honest to Canadians.

Business of Supply

Earlier today when discussing this speech with my staff, Scott attributed this situation to the following. This ethic issue is like the difference between a circus and a zoo. Why do we pay so much to go to the fantastic circus performance and much less to go to a simple zoo? Plainly it is because we know that the animals at the circus can do incredible things. We know that those highly-trained animals can jump, leap and fly, which is much more entertaining than the sleepy lion at the zoo.

We also know these attendees went to the event with the minister because they recognized that she was one of those who could actually make difference in her high profile job. She is a powerful, high profile individual in the Government of Canada. Let us not forget that. We are acting like it is a simple thing.

Finally, the Minister of Justice should not accept the funds from those who have a vested interest in her incredibly important portfolio. Even if she was simply attending the fundraiser as an MP, something is clearly wrong and the appearance of a conflict of interest is definitely evident in this activity.

Many members on the other side have offered the financial statements, showing this fundraiser. I would ask that they come over here and show me why I cannot find it on my iPad. Yes, once in a while I just cannot find it, but I do not believe those records are yet available. If you can find it, please show me. We are telling Canadians that it is available, but I cannot find it. If I cannot find it, many Canadians cannot find it. I invite you to have coffee with me and you can show me where I can find it.

• (1620)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid, as Speaker, I cannot not show you. I am sure you meant everyone else.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am having a hard time believing the hon. member and her party are serious, notwithstanding the fact that the Minister of Justice has a ruling in writing from the Ethics Commissioner that no breach of ethics occurred, that no conflict of interest occurred and notwithstanding the fact that the hon. member represents a party that found was guilty on the in-and-out scandal. It was guilty on the robocalls scandal. It blatantly tried to suppress the vote through the conflict of unfair elections act. The former prime minister's former chief of staff gave \$90,000 cheque to Mr. Duffy. As well, the parliamentary secretary to the former prime minister was led out in shackles and went to jail.

That party is guilty of everything I have mentioned. Therefore, do you actually believe Canadians feel you have any credibility whatsoever when you talk about ethical scandals?

• (1625)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Once again I want to remind members that they are speaking through the Speaker and not directly to each other. Otherwise this could turn into a real hodgepodge of things.

The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, that was an easy question for me. I am 100% serious.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot get over what I just heard my Liberal friends say. I would remind them that they still owe Canadians \$40 million.

That being said, I totally agree with my colleague. Does she believe there was a perceived conflict of interest on the part of the Minister of Justice? Should the minister reimburse Canadians?

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely believe 100% that the justice minister should give that money back to the people who attended.

I will remind everybody in here that we were elected in the same way members on the opposite side were elected. I came here with the idea of working with others. I have been heckled today by the backbenchers on the opposite side. There is a gentleman who did not listen to my 10 minute speech. I sit here, I listen, and I almost laugh. The hypocrisy drives me crazy. If we are to sit here as parliamentarians and do things for Canadians, then we must live with what we say. Is the government going to be doing things sunny ways?

As the member of Parliament for Elgin—Middlesex—London, I wonder why we are seriously discussing this. It is because the Prime Minister promised Canadians transparency, the accountability, and the truth, and that promise is not being upheld.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it concerning that I am even rising in today's debate. The issues that have been raised recently remind me of the Shakespeare comedic play *Much Ado About Nothing*.

The point members opposite, including the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, are raising is the appearance of a conflict and I want to get specifically to that, which is the nature of my question.

If we are to apply the same standard that those members seek to apply to us, would the member also be willing to go back through 10 years of records when her party served in government, go through each of the records of the members of its executive council to see whether they had stakeholders attend their fundraisers when ministers attended as the guest speaker? Did they return the money to Canadians as well where there was that appearance?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I think all parliamentarians agree that we need to move forward in a more positive manner for Canada. We talk about what the NDP did and the \$40 billion. We talk about the scandals.

Nobody in the House is perfect, but from this day forward, the new Government of Canada and members of Parliament should rise above this. Everybody wants to sit here and throw mud. How about we rise above that? If this is what the Prime Minister is asking us to do, all members of Parliament should rise above it and live up to those standards, including the ministers.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, International Trade.

*Business of Supply***AIR CANADA PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT**

BILL C-10—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-10, an act to amend the Air Canada Public Participation Act and to provide for certain other measures.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting day a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

● (1630)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION — POLITICAL FUNDRAISING

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we just heard a notice of closure motion. That is timely because I was going to start my speech by saying that this is a fine debate that reminds us of the old saying, “Liberal, Tory, same old story”. That is what we have here.

Today's debate is on political fundraising issues, which often come up in the news and never for good reasons, unfortunately. We are in a situation where the Conservative Party opposition motion calls on the Minister of Justice to apologize and return the money.

She is being asked to follow the example of a Conservative Party minister, Shelly Glover, who, in a similar situation, returned all the money she collected. If we are setting the bar to meet a standard created by the Conservatives, then that bar is not very high and easy to jump over. I would hope that the Minister of Justice will be able to do so.

I want to talk about a number of points raised in this debate. First, with regard to political fundraising, I heard the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons answer questions in question period by saying that every member participates in political fundraising, that there is nothing unusual about doing so, and that we should not worry about it. We are talking here about ministers, and their responsibilities and requirements differ from those of ordinary members.

I am not trying to minimize the responsibilities of individual members. However, there is a big difference between a minister responsible for justice sitting down with lawyers and me being given \$20 by a woman in my riding because she thinks that I do a good job and she wants me to have the resources I need to get re-elected. It seems likely that, in the case of the minister, she and the lawyers will be talking almost exclusively about subjects related to her portfolio and her department. There is a very big difference there. That is where we get into the matter of appearances.

The code of conduct that the Prime Minister himself imposed on his ministers, for lack of a better way to say it, indicates that they

cannot engage in partisan or fundraising activities that give the appearance of preferential access, the appearance of conflict of interest, or the impression that one can pay to obtain access to a minister. That is the problem. Perhaps it is the eternal optimist in me who is talking, but I would like to believe that the minister does not just lend an attentive ear to people who are prepared to pay to attend fundraisers. Once again, the problem is the way it is perceived. People see that and wonder whether someone has to be able to pay \$500 or \$600 to meet with the minister.

I almost forgot. Before I continue, I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona. I was so outraged to hear the government House leader move a motion to invoke closure after only six months in office that I completely forgot. I hope I will be forgiven.

I will come back to the matter before us. We now find ourselves in a situation where Canadians have doubts and questions. There is already too much cynicism about politics and the political system. The problem is now being exacerbated by this type of fundraising, which gives the impression that one can pay to obtain preferential access. I find that absolutely unacceptable.

When going door-to-door during and even before the election campaign, we inevitably meet people who say they could not care less about politics. I dare say this is the experience of all MPs from all parties. When you ask these people to explain why they feel that way and you try to talk about the files you are working on, the good work that MPs can do, the difference one can make as an MP, and the difference one can make in the community, quite often they will say that politicians are all dishonest and that only people with power and money have access to elected officials. It seems that the average person cannot get this type of access, nor make a difference and communicate with an elected official, an MP or even a minister, as in the situation we find ourselves in today.

This is what happens in situations like this. Although I make no assumptions about what the minister will do and what access she will provide, she has nevertheless created the impression that she will give her attention and her time more readily to those who are prepared to donate to the Liberal Party of Canada. That is unacceptable and it creates a problem for all of us. It is a big black cloud that will settle over Parliament and the political system, and it will follow us everywhere.

● (1635)

I am not a member of the Liberal Party, but when I knock on doors in my riding, citizens inevitably talk to me about this situation or that situation. I reply that it is the good old Liberal Party that we all know, and I personally promise to do politics differently. However, that does not change anything, because people say that it does not matter, since politicians are all alike. As elected representatives, we have a responsibility to do better, and ministers have 10 times as much responsibility. After all, they are not just representatives of their constituencies, because they also represent institutions. Ministerial responsibility is even greater for the Minister of Justice.

Business of Supply

What is happening is, unfortunately, the current trend. That is not limited to the Minister of Justice. We are dealing with another case involving privileged access; just consider the case of the Minister of National Revenue. We are right in the middle of income tax season. Some people are quite happy, because they will be getting a tax refund. Others will have to write a cheque to the government. It is a happy or unhappy time of year, depending on whom you ask. Ultimately, it does not matter how those people feel; they pay their fair share, with the exception, of course, of the millionaires and the people who do business with KPMG, because they can have nice agreements with the government and benefit from tax evasion. That would not be a problem if we had not learned this week that there are cocktail buffets for senior public servants and managers who oversee investigations to combat tax evasion. Here we are again in a situation that feeds public cynicism. We are creating the perception that preferential access is possible.

The Minister of National Revenue, much like the leader of the government when he was defending the Minister of Justice, stood in the House and said that the people who work in the department are members of the same professional association as the people facilitating tax evasion. Therefore this was not about tax evasion; it was an opportunity to attend an event with fellow accountants.

The problem is still one of perception. Who knows what happens at those meetings? Who knows what is discussed? Essentially, the members of the public who pay their fair share of taxes think that we have enough money to attend a little cocktail party or pay the big fee of an accountant at KPMG, which has a nice network that includes a manager or maybe even an elected representative. We hope not, but this type of situation creates a very problematic perception, because it undermines people's confidence in their public institutions and their elected representatives. It is a completely unacceptable situation.

In the end, this is why we will support the Conservative Party's motion.

In conclusion, I would like to say that although we support the motion, I would hope that we will find more urgent situations to discuss. Yes, what happened is scandalous and appalling on the part of a minister. However, when I think about the people who are losing their jobs, the debate on Bill C-10, an act to amend the Air Canada Public Participation Act and to provide for certain other measures, and the hypocrisy of the Liberals on this issue, and when I think of the people who do not have access to employment insurance, despite the government's lovely words about changing the system, and of the issue of tax evasion, I firmly believe that despite the ethical problems that are eating away at both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, which have succeeded one another in power, when all is said and done, there are real people who need us to stand up in the House. People need us to hold debates on the issues that affect them personally. That is what we should be doing. We will support the motion, but we have to get back to real business and tackle those issues. It is very important to do so.

I would like to tell everyone listening not to throw up their hands at such behaviour. They must not let cynicism control their relationship with politics. If they consider it a deplorable act, that is one more reason for them to get involved in changing the attitudes of elected representatives.

In 2019, a government that does not keep its promises of transparency and openness, not to mention all the other broken promises, may well be replaced. That is what we are hoping and aiming for.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I am asking myself this question: Are our friends on the other side of the House burying their heads in the sand? They are playing with words. It is all very well for them to attack the minister, but I am really surprised to hear a colleague say that they do not know what happened, that they do not know whom the minister spoke to, and that they do not know what the people who were with her did or whom they spoke to. That does not make sense. Do they even have to know whether the minister is talking to her husband? If they have the courage to tell the truth, if they think it is true, do they have the courage to say that the minister committed an illegal act, in the House and outside the House? Did the minister take part in an illegal activity? Let them say so in the House and outside the House.

● (1640)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, in the context of the conversations with her husband and given the circumstances, I think we need better answers about this situation.

I hope my colleague listened carefully to my speech. I even said that I did not question the minister's integrity regarding her ability to listen to people. The fact remains that even if it is not illegal, we can certainly wonder whether it is ethical. That is the distinction that must be made.

The situation is as follows: People are giving the Liberal Party of Canada \$500 or \$600, whatever the amount is, which gives them the impression that they have preferential access to a minister, when the code that the Prime Minister himself gave his ministers prohibits precisely that kind of situation.

I will not say outside that this is illegal, because it is not. However, it is certainly unethical, and it is certainly a breach of the promises that were made over and over by this party during the election campaign on the subject of openness and transparency.

You can put "openness" and "transparency" in quotation marks, because that has not materialized, far from it.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to listen to my colleague from Montreal's south shore, whose statements are always factual and well documented. I enjoy his prose very much.

Like him, I think that it is quite normal to have this kind of debate, like many other debates we have here in the House on job creation, wealth creation, promises not kept, and the assistance we must provide or the support we must give to small and medium-sized businesses, which are the backbone of our economy.

Like him, I have concerns about the management of public finances and ethical issues, not to mention that his party is currently in court on a matter concerning satellite offices, where 2.7 million taxpayers' dollars are at stake; we will let the court decide.

Business of Supply

Here is the question I want to ask the member. He rightly noted that beyond the facts, there are also appearances, and in this case, I would like to hear what he has to say about the fact that the minister in question is the Minister of Justice.

In the member's opinion, when a person is the justice minister, should that person have an even stricter code of ethics concerning political party fundraising than any other member of the House?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his compliments.

I will not waste too much time recalling the bogus process that led to the partisan accusations against NDP members. I will remind my colleague of the Conservative majority on the Board of Internal Economy at the time. However, as I said, that is a debate for another day. Today, it is about the problems that ministers face.

It is about a code that the Prime Minister himself established for the ministers. With regard to the question my colleague raised, the fact remains that ministers, including the Minister of Justice, have more responsibilities than an ordinary member, if I can use that term, because ultimately, they represent not only their constituents but also a government department and institutions.

That is especially true for the Minister of Justice, and that is what makes this situation even more problematic.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just to set the context, and I doubt I am the first to read them into the record today, but I think it is worth quoting the ethics principles that the ministers were given:

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.

I share the view expressed by many members here today on both sides of the House that these are not the kinds of things I came here to talk about. There are a lot more important issues that we should be addressing.

However, that cannot be used as an excuse. I would say that is an argument for ministers not to engage in this kind of activity, so we do not have to spend time talking about it. However, as long as there is going to be that kind of activity, we have to talk about it.

It is not opposition members who should be blamed for having brought this issue forward. If the government earnestly wants to spend our time talking about the other issues, and I would agree with the government that we should be talking about an expansion of the Canada pension plan, instituting a national pharmacare program, and rolling out child care across the country, that is what I would like to be talking about. However, as long as the government is going to engage in the kinds of activities that brought about this debate, then we are not going to be able to do that.

These things have to be addressed and not cynically used as a smokescreen to try to get the government out of trouble when its ministers are behaving in ways that are obviously inappropriate. They are not illegal. We are not here to say that this is an illegal activity, but they are inappropriate activities and we do hold

ministers in this country to a higher code of conduct. That makes sense. That is what Canadians expect. It is certainly what I expect.

We have seen this with other governments; we saw it under the previous government, and we saw it under governments previous to that government, this tendency to insist on the narrow, legal definitions of conduct for ministers and not accept that there is a higher code of conduct and that ministers not only have to be following the law, and not only following principles of ethics, but they have to be seen to be following those principles, or there is a problem.

Traditionally, ministers would step aside if there was a problem while it was investigated. Those ministers would come back later if they were cleared, and not if they were not.

This tendency, which I find quite unfortunate, to bear down and say that if it cannot be proven in a court of law, then too bad, they are going to carry on as if it does not matter, is not acceptable. It flies in the face of the code of conduct that the Prime Minister himself brought in.

It was not eons ago, 100 or 150 years ago, that some former prime minister brought this in. This is something that the new Prime Minister himself, just months ago, brought in. He said it was important that his ministers be held to this higher standard. It is not something that the opposition is suddenly making up. It is not something that the Prime Minister just brought in willy-nilly either. We hear it every day, ad nauseam, frankly, when ministers get up to talk about transparency, openness, accountability, and how they are setting a new bar.

What has happened here, a private fundraiser for lawyers to meet the justice minister and to advertise access to the justice minister, is not anywhere near consistent with setting a new bar. It is pretty low, and people have a right to be concerned. They have a right to be concerned not just because this is selling access to a minister of the crown, but also because it is doing that within her area of responsibility, which is quite significant. This is a person who appoints judges for Canada.

It is a fundraiser of potential candidates, or we do not know exactly but certainly people who practise law are potential candidates for appointment to the bench. They bought a \$500 ticket to an event to meet the person who could be the gateway to the next promotion in their career. One does not have to be a lawyer or a professor of ethics to understand what is wrong with that. I do not think one does.

I was sympathetic early on. There were accusations levelled pretty early on about the justice minister. Another member alluded to that earlier, having to do with her husband. Privately, I kind of felt that one cannot put one's spouse in a blind trust. I understood that and there had not been any evidence that she was going to demonstrate poor judgment, so let us wait and see.

Business of Supply

•(1645)

We did not have to wait very long to show that this minister is capable of great lapses in ethical judgment, because this is not defensible. Then she tried to say it was not really in her capacity as minister that they wanted to meet with her, that a whole bunch of high-priced lawyers in Toronto just wanted to meet with her because she is an MP from Vancouver. Come on.

I appreciate that government members want to defer to the ethical lapses of the previous government. There is a lot of material to mine there. I can appreciate that the Liberals want to bring those things up. They want to bring them up because, in part, it was those arguments and actions by the previous government that created the impetus for change. It is a double-edged sword for the Liberals to remind Canadians of just how angry they were with the ethical lapses of the previous government when their Minister of Justice is involved in the very kinds of activity that we are here to talk about today.

Part of the issue is about trust. When we hear the kind of defence that the Minister of Justice is putting forward about her actions and it does not pass the smell test, that hurts trust in government. It speaks to questions of openness and transparency.

Just before the member previous got up to speak, the government came into the House. Again, if the Liberals want to distinguish themselves from the previous government, what should they do? There is a serious debate before the House about the jobs of Canadian aerospace workers, and we just witnessed the government House leader come into this House and serve notice of a motion to invoke closure. Of all the cynical and worst tools of a majority government to ram its agenda through, closure is the worst. The previous government took that tool and reformed it, and brought it to new heights, I would say.

Again, consistent with this criticism of the previous government, we were told we were going to have a new government. It was going to take the role of Parliament differently. It was going to treat Parliament differently. The ministers were going to be held to a higher ethical standard. We see this on the legislative end. They hardly have a bill before Parliament. They have had several routine bills on the estimates. They have two bills that are mandated by the Supreme Court with a deadline before summer. They have a few bills that will simply repeal some acts of the previous government.

They hardly have a bill of their own that they wrote themselves. We have had two days of debate on that bill, and they are already invoking closure. It is unconscionable, when we have such a sparse legislative agenda, that they would be using closure. Then they want to say to just trust them on the other stuff and not talk about their conduct outside of the House, that it is a trustworthy government. However, when we want to have a discussion—or not, as closure would seem to imply—about the 2,600 families, with members who are working for Air Canada, the Liberals are going to shut that down. That is what the Liberals are doing, and that is what we are seeing from the government today.

The Liberals want to show us that they are to be trusted and that we do not have to have these kinds of debates to hold them to account. However, I submit that as time goes on, their methods are beginning to look a lot like those of the previous government. Where

the previous government, to its small credit, had a similar fundraising scandal with a member of Parliament from my hometown, the former MP for Saint Boniface, she at least paid the money back.

I heard the arguments of members across the way on the government side in terms of their disappointment in the ethical conduct of the previous government. However, I would say that the more they make those arguments, the more it raises the question: Why would they not at least do what they did, at the very least? Never mind holding themselves to a higher ethical bar. At the very least, they could hold themselves to the same bar. We are not seeing that. Already the current government is beginning to adopt some of the habits of the previous government, and I find that quite unfortunate.

•(1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his natural, well-documented speech. We can immediately sense his passion for democracy and for an election campaign marked by a series of themes that the Liberal Party harped on, saying how different, pure, pristine and idyllic things were going to be. However, we suddenly encounter an obstacle. What is maddening here is that while the work of the Official Opposition and the third party opposition is to get this kind of story out, we are being criticized as if that were a horrible thing to do. It is awful to question this fine government. That brings to mind the old concept of the natural governing party.

Does my colleague not think that the government is wholly convinced it is sacrosanct?

•(1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question and the well-made point within the question. I would agree with him on the summoning of the kind of indignation we have seen from the government benches on this issue when the facts are quite clear. We are not here to say that what is being done is illegal. That is a red herring according to the very criteria that the Prime Minister set out not more than six months ago. At issue is not whether the law was broken, but whether this is conduct becoming of a minister under the code of conduct implemented by the new Prime Minister.

Unless the member for Vancouver Granville was wrapped in an insulating blanket of self-righteousness, she could not be blind to the fact that this does not meet that bar. There is clearly something getting in the way of Liberal members having an heretical appreciation of the facts. I do not know what that is, whether it is rose-coloured glasses, that blanket of self-righteousness, or what, but this merits an apology. It merits giving the money back, and then it merits moving on and getting down to knowing how to behave.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the very interesting speech by my fellow member. Beyond today's debate, should the real debate not be about funding for political parties, here in the House?

Business of Supply

Let us remember that prime minister Chrétien established two principles. First, following the sponsorship scandal, he said that in the future, only those who have the right to vote could contribute to political parties. The second principle is that the state has a duty to contribute to each political party an amount of money proportional to the number of votes it has received.

Now, the Conservatives erred in eliminating the principle of the state contribution, and I think they realize that today. By reinstating the principles established by prime minister Chrétien and the Liberal Party of the time, one requiring that the state contribute \$2 per vote and the other allowing only persons who have the right to vote to contribute to political parties, we would ensure that they are not besieged by lobbyists and forced to organize \$500-a-plate cocktail parties to raise funds for their campaigns.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I agree with the principle that we should support political parties with public funds up to a certain point. However, we should not use that argument to excuse actions that are inexcusable.

Accordingly, we should indeed reopen the debate on funding from the public purse, but that does not excuse what the Minister of Justice did.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Riverbend.

Quite a few members have risen here today to talk about new facts related to the motion. Of course I would like to debate any subject pertaining to the federal government, such as how this government is managing its finances. I would also like to have the opportunity to debate its lack of respect for workers in the province of Alberta, workers in the oil industry who are looking for work and for whom this government is doing nothing. This Parliament can debate any topic at all. This particular topic has to do with the ethics of this government and the ethics and decisions of the Minister of Justice.

I will begin with an excerpt from her mandate letter, which states:

We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government.

That, of course, was written by the Prime Minister. It goes on to say:

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.

I agree. Here on this side of the House, we do not expect the members opposite or cabinet ministers to be perfect; however, we do expect the mandate letters sent to each of the ministers to be respected.

It is also stated:

Moreover, they 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.

● (1700)

[English]

When we have been debating this issue so far, we have been looking at the law and the expectation. However, that side set the expectation very high. Therefore, we are asking on this side of the House simply that the expectation that the Liberals put forward to the general public and to members of the House is met, regardless of the party they are in. However, they are not doing this. They are not living up to this high expectation that they set. If they want to be treated differently, if they want to get credit for acting to a certain ethical bar, they should meet this new expectation.

In fact, when the previous Conservative government was brought to power by Canadians who voted for them, the very first large piece of legislation they brought in was Bill C-2. This was the Federal Accountability Act. It was the greatest change to how this House works, how public office holders are expected to act, and what they are expected to be doing in their dealings with interest groups, stakeholders, and persons who may want something from the government, who are seeking an advantage of some sort.

I am worried when certain members get up and begin to pontificate and tell us that we cannot be debating this because it is not an issue. Let us go back to 2006. Let us go back to the 1990s, if you want, and see what happened that eventually led to the introduction of the Federal Accountability Act.

The Accountability Act was directly in response to the sponsorship scandal, and it was members of the Liberal Party who caused the sponsorship scandal. In fact, I recently read *La Rébellion tranquille*, by Martine Tremblay, which gave us a history of the Bloc, the movement in the province of Quebec. The sponsorship scandal gave fuel to that party. It basically allowed it to continue on for an extra decade. The scandal involved millions of dollars, with Liberal Party organizers funnelling money from government programs into their pockets. It did more damage to our confederation, more damage to federal unity, than I think any other act in the last 50 years that I can remember. Therefore, we should start with that.

It is interesting too, because when we think about this, it was about 10 years ago, on April 11, 2006, when the first reading of that bill was tabled in the House. The third reading was in June 21, 2006. Therefore, it is almost exactly 10 years since that happened. In that act, the then Conservative government proposed the Conflict of Interest Act, creating for the first time a legislative regime governing the ethical conduct of public office holders, both during and after employment.

We have to imagine that no party is perfect; no individual is perfect. The only expectation we have is that if we set a public expectation, we will rise up and live up to the expectation that has been set with the public.

Business of Supply

It is important to remember that, when that bill was reported back, it was after a fulsome debate at committee, and many amendments were made, both by members of the government and members of the opposition at the time. Therefore, the bill that basically reset ethical standards, the expectations that both ministers and members of Parliament have to live by, was given unanimous agreement that this needed to be done, that the content of it was something everybody could agree to.

I want to take this opportunity to do something I have done in every single speech, and I am sure the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount will appreciate this. There is a Yiddish proverb that I think applies here. It is that caution brings speed in the end. If the Minister of Justice had been more cautious in her dealings with stakeholders and in how she approached these types of events, she would not find herself in a situation where members are calling into question her behaviour and actions outside of the House. It is really unfortunate.

I heard, during question period today, the Prime Minister say that he leads the government by cabinet. We do not do any favours for members of cabinet when we do not allow them to speak for themselves. The Minister of Democratic Institutions spoke up today on this matter and she raised a few interesting points—I will give her that—but she also said that the previous Conservative government disrespected Parliament and the House and did not meet her expectations for ethical conduct.

What could be more disrespectful than not allowing the minister to speak up for herself and defend her own actions and, instead, the government House leader often doing it? I would love to hear from the Minister of Justice and get her version, her facts, and her way of thinking when she took those actions. That is an important thing to remember. We should always live up to the expectations we have set, not perfection.

A member previously mentioned prorogation. The Conservative government prorogued Parliament, as I remember, but former prime minister Chrétien also prorogued Parliament to avoid the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship scandal. Therefore, let us remember that, too. We are not all perfect, and not all governments are perfect. Governments make mistakes, and sometimes individuals in governments make mistakes, so let us not call for perfection. Let us call for meeting a new standard.

When I think of these facts, I think that the debate until now has kind of ignored the fact that nobody has called for perfection. People have been calling for common sense, a test of reasonableness. The Minister of Justice is going to be headlining a \$1,000-per-head fundraiser later this month, basically copying what the provincial Liberal government has been doing up to now, which is setting fundraising targets for its ministers. It leads us to wonder if that is happening on that side of the House as well, and if members are adopting these practices.

I go back to the budget document. On page 210, in chapter 7, it says, “Better Government for Canadians, Focusing on Outcomes”, and that is what the government and the minister should be doing. Whenever they attend fundraisers, whenever they agree to a meeting with stakeholders where there is an exchange of money, potentially,

because people buy tickets to attend, they should look at the outcome: what will the public outcome of this be?

What will the public think if they are meeting with individuals who could potentially be eligible to be appointed to a Governor in Council appointment, either to become judges, heads of crown corporations, or ambassadors? What would the outcome be of having this fundraiser? Will there have to be debate in the House as to whether their actions were correct or incorrect or whether they should return the money or keep it?

The debate has been fulsome. Lots of members have raised interesting points. They have spoken about the importance of ethics and meeting a new expectation, and that is what I want the government to do. This is a government by cabinet. I want the Minister of Justice to speak up for herself. I call on her to return the money. That is the right thing to do.

I would invite all members to vote for this motion. It is a good motion. It is straight to the point. It is all Conservatives are asking for.

● (1705)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, the previous government was not brought to power by the people who voted for it, as the member says, as much as by the sheer force of the number of voters who were suppressed by the Conservatives' unethical electoral practices. How do Conservatives sleep at night knowing that they have condemned a young, unilingual, non-technical local staffer to jail for a national, coordinated, bilingual, and highly technical voter suppression scheme?

When it comes to the Conservatives, ethics are as mythical a creature as balanced budgets.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. I speak as a bilingual member of Parliament from Calgary Shepard. I remember that this election had one of the highest voter turnouts, despite what members claim on that side of the House, that there was a problem with the Fair Elections Act. We had the highest voter turnout ever in my riding. I won by 43,706 votes, the highest number of votes in Calgary. Therefore, I thank my constituents for entrusting me with this. I believe I received more votes than the former prime minister did in his riding. There was nothing wrong with the act itself. If I look at the Ottawa region, there was a 80% voter turnout. Therefore, the act had no effect on voter turnout.

As far as staffing decisions and the conduct of the previous government are concerned, I am one of the members who was just elected to this Parliament, so I can speak to what is happening now.

Business of Supply

• (1710)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I note the hon. member for Calgary Shepard's point that he was elected to this 42nd Parliament. However, I recall the beginning of the 41st Parliament, where the previous Conservative platform called for an accountability act with 52 specific measures. Many of them dealt with the issues we are debating today. We would not be debating them today if the previous Conservative government had kept its word and brought in those 52 specific measures. It was an issue much discussed by the most knowledgeable group in the country, Democracy Watch.

I ask the hon. member this. Would he support bringing back the 22 missing ethics commitments of the Conservative platform from 2006?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I would not mind looking at all 52 of those recommendations one more time. It has been many years.

When it comes to the question of ethics, it is not so much what is put into the law but its application and the expectations that are set. As I mentioned, on the Prime Minister's website there is a question of what the law states and the expectation one has to live up to.

When I was the registrar for the HR profession in the province of Alberta, what I would tell members when they asked me an ethical question was this. The law states the minimum requirements, the minimum bar one has to meet. However, it is the perception of a conflict that one should worry about. At the time, basically what the members were dealing with were issues with respect to a company code of ethics and a professional code of ethics and how the two come together. In that respect, they would have to see where the minimum bar was set and then what the expectation would be for their clients, the employees, the employer, and the outside stakeholders. Therefore, when we are looking at the law and what it states, we also need to look beyond that to what society expects from professionals, members of Parliament, and ministers as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I salute the member and congratulate him on his excellent speech. His references were on point, particularly those about Quebec's political history. His French is excellent. I would also like to remind everyone how well he performed in the election. I am ashamed to say that I won by just 19,000 votes. I am not in the same league as him, but still. He is an inspiration to us all. My question for the member is as follows:

What should the minister do to start over, put all of this behind her, and move forward?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

The minister should give the money back and apologize to the House.

[English]

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would not necessarily say it is an honour to rise in the House today. It is something we all have to do, unfortunately, particularly when there is an incident like this one.

I commend the member for St. Albert—Edmonton for bringing the motion before the House. It is something he has worked hard at, to ensure we are holding the government to account, not only in his critic role but as a member of Parliament as well. He has been doing a bunch of media interviews. I have seen him on them. I know it is something that has kept him up late at night and something he prepares for each next day.

When the government House leader gave his speech, he had some interesting points, but then he began to attack the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton on the very issue that he is debating here, that he had a fundraiser with the then minister of health. It was a \$35 fundraiser versus a \$500-a-plate fundraiser, and it was not in her capacity as the minister of health. There were no stakeholders there. There was nothing to be gained by people in the health care profession attending.

It is rich to hear. That was the attempt made by the members opposite because, quite honestly, we are here because there is a lot of back and forth.

We have had finger-pointing all day from both sides of the House. It reminds me of being back home in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton Riverbend. I have two little daughters. One is eight and one is seven. They constantly attempt to blame each other and say, "It was her" and "No, it was her". However, at the end of the day, it is not necessarily about who did it or why they did it; it is about getting an apology from one to the other. That is a value I try to instill in them.

It is frustrating to see the Minister of Justice repeatedly refuse to stand in the House and let the House leader stand and do the dirty work for her. Also, it is frustrating to not have her admit the mistake. That is simply what we are looking for. I imagine how this day would be different if she did do that, even if the government House leader did that on her behalf. I am sure that would have made the day a bit less like this and a bit more progressive a day.

In the motion, we say the minister should follow her own guidelines. We are assuming the minister read the guidelines. Perhaps that is where it has gone south for the minister. Quite honestly, I read the guidelines. They are penned by the Prime Minister. The document is called "Open and Accountable Government".

I have a number of tabs here. One of the parts reads: "...sets limitations on outside activities, acceptance of gifts, invitations to special events and hospitality, and post-employment activities".

Just for that alone, if a minister were looking at that, he or she would say, wait a minute, maybe this is an event they should not attend.

Next, under part I, public scrutiny, it 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.

I imagine that the minister would have read that and decided it was not an event she should have attended.

Business of Supply

Next, in annex B, the big one, it states: "...the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest".

That is what we are debating here. We are not debating whether we agree or disagree with the Ethics Commissioner, as a lot of the members on the other side have suggested in their questions. We are talking largely about this specific point in annex B. That is on page 21, for those following along.

The Prime Minister has told his entire front bench this is what he intends to hold them up to. When they disregard this very point, it is questionable what they will disregard from the Prime Minister in the future.

● (1715)

Again, under "General Principles", on page 22, it states:

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.

That again should have a huge check mark beside it. I would think the minister would have looked at it and said, "Wait a minute. Let's double-check this before we go ahead", not 48 hours before, but weeks before the event happened. I bet this would not have gone forward if she had done that.

The last one is this:

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.

That gets me to the points I would like to discuss.

We do not know who was at this fundraiser. We will find out eventually, when the report comes out. However, the motion simply asks that the minister tell us who was at the fundraiser. We want her to let us know so we can be clear, on this side of the House, that whoever was there is not going to be appointed to a federal bench job or appointed to any other sort of special committee.

It is something that we need to know on our side, as critics, to ensure that we are holding the government to account. Not knowing these sorts of things makes our job a lot harder. This speaks to open and accountable government, and it would be a lot more open and transparent if we could have that information.

I am assuming, with everything I said about "Open and Accountable Government", the letter penned by the Prime Minister to all of his frontbenchers, that she did not read it, or if she did read it, she did not read it thoroughly. However, I assume she read her mandate letter.

In the mandate letter from the Prime Minister to the justice minister, he states, first, "It is my expectation that we will deliver real results and professional government to Canadians."

I think the mere fact that we are having this debate calls that into question.

He further states, "We made a commitment to Canadians to pursue our goals with a renewed sense of collaboration."

I am certain that he did not mean to indicate that was a fundraiser with a law firm.

At page 3, he says, "It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them."

She is not standing up and recognizing that a mistake was made. Obviously she was not there as the member for Vancouver Granville. I think the laughter from our side of the House was a good indication that it probably was not going to go over too well with the general public either. Why would she be there as the member for Vancouver Granville to speak at a downtown law firm in Toronto?

It boggles my mind to see each member standing up and defending the position that she was there as—what were her words?—a member of Parliament to talk about Canada.

I talk about Canada every day. People are not paying \$500 to come to hear me talk. Granted, I am a backbencher on the Conservative side, but still, as a member of Parliament, I go out and talk about Canada. I think it is rich to argue that as the reason she should be invited to a downtown law firm. She is the top lawyer in the country talking to a bunch of other lawyers, a lot of whom could possibly be looking for contracts in the future.

I think it was an exercise of poor judgment on the minister's part. If this motion is defeated, I would encourage the minister, since this is not her first run in the House, to consider that maybe she should think twice, three times, four times, before she attends these events or any future events.

● (1720)

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to resist the temptation to provide some suggestions about what my hon. colleague across the way might fetch in the way of a speaker's fee.

We have spent a lot of time today speaking about openness and transparency with respect to fundraising. From our side of the aisle, this is not just about fundraising, this is about stitching together a number of components with respect to achieving that goal.

My hon. colleagues across the way used to introduce bills in an omnibus fashion. They would bury all sorts of policy in their bills and the public would try to unearth some of the essential components of those bills, but it could not do it because they were buried among volumes of pages of legislation. We have done away with that practice.

The past government never published a single mandate letter that was attached to a ministry or a responsible minister. We have done away with that practice. In the spirit of openness and transparency, we are now putting the mandate letters on the website, making them accessible to all.

With respect to the membership fees of our party, the party on that side of the aisle is raising its membership fees. The fee has now been put up to \$25 and our—

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would direct you under Standing Order 11(2) to remind the member to return to the relevancy of this debate. He is going off on things that are not related to government business. I would encourage you to remind him to return to relevancy.

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): There have been a number of issues discussed this afternoon. I think judgment is what comes up. I will let the hon. member finish what he is saying and we will see what happens when he is done.

● (1725)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is about a culture of openness and transparency and our party and our government is committed to making this party and this government as open as possible and setting the threshold higher than it has ever been.

With respect to fundraising—

Mr. Ron Liepert: Release the names then if you are so transparent. Your five minutes are up. Get to the point. Answer the question.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague would demonstrate just a tad more patience, I will get to that in a moment.

The minister consulted with the Ethics Commissioner. She has abided by all of the laws and the rules that are set and she absolutely at no time has breached any of them. Why will the hon. colleague across the way not acknowledge the proactive steps she took in consulting with all of the appropriate authorities before she attended this event?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, that was a bunch of inaccurate facts.

Let us first of all talk about the omnibus bills. We just heard not even an hour ago a notice of time allocation. I cannot see how that member can stand and argue that fact.

I would like to think I could fetch a fee, but perhaps we will see how the justice minister survives this and I will go from there.

With respect to the mandate letters, I bet the member wished that there were some changes to those mandate letters, particularly the lines which were quoted from. It is important that we acknowledge our mistakes when we make them.

I have outlined pretty clearly that the justice minister showed a poor lack of judgment when she went to this fundraiser and when she did a media interview in front of the fundraiser, saying that she was there as a member of Parliament. Absolutely nobody believes that. Even members on the other side have to admit deep down they do not believe that. Then the minister stood in the House and said that she was there talking about Canada. It speaks to some of the culture the member talks about, that we supposedly have changed.

This is the minister's second incident. We have talked about the agriculture minister in the House. We have talked about the House leader in the House. We talked today about the international trade minister. I would like to know what type of culture the member is referring to because this is not looking too good.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe I have a limited amount of time to speak in this debate, probably not as long as the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence used in the questions and comments period. However, that is good, because to be honest, when I was first elected to Parliament, I did not really expect to be speaking in debates such as this one.

I have been very proud to rise in the House each and every time thus far that I have spoken, talking about issues such as the amendment to the Air Canada act, the budget, the response to the throne speech, and our united opposition in this House to the BDS movement. However, to be honest, I have very little interest in speaking in a debate that is simply one side throwing mud against the other side, and going back and forth.

Personally, I did not get elected to complain about what the last government did and I did not get elected to throw mud at my own government. I think that this debate is a futile waste of the time of the House of Commons.

As somebody who is generally non-partisan, and I hope my colleagues in the official opposition believe that, I do not think that this was the best motion the Conservatives could have come up with for today. I have seen much better motions from that side, and I hope that in the future I will be speaking to much better motions from them.

Given that there is a concern right now over a fundraiser that the Ethics Commissioner has declared to be perfectly legitimate and in line with current guidelines, what might have been useful would have been a motion as to how we should change Canadian fundraising laws, rules, regulations, and procedures so as to make something clearly not possible. However, that is not what came forward. What came forward was simply a criticism of the Minister of Justice.

I do want to say that I have had the pleasure to work with the Minister of Justice for several months now. I know her to be a woman of great integrity. I know her to be a woman who is not only intelligent but who is also a person who would not put herself in a position that was compromising. She is somebody who checked this out. She checked with the Ethics Commissioner and asked the questions.

I could understand complaints if nobody ever asked a question as to whether or not this was okay, but she asked in advance. She took the precaution. She wanted to be sure. I can only say that as a result, I disagree with the text of the motion.

I would much rather that we were talking about the economy. I would much rather talk about the \$120 billion we are putting into infrastructure. I would much rather talk about issues of substance and interest to Canadians, such as the money we are giving Canadians under the Canada child benefit or the extra amounts for seniors under the guaranteed income supplement, because that is what Canadians really want to hear about.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to wind down, because I would like to share good wishes with all of the members of the House. There has been a lot of rancour going back and forth today, I only hope that despite that rancour, we all leave here today as friends and colleagues.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would rather have talked about this government's \$30-billion deficit and its changes to the tax system, which will cost \$1.7 billion.

Private Members' Business

However, the reason we are talking about something else is that the Minister of Justice violated her own government's code of conduct.

How can a member defend a minister, the Minister of Justice, to be precise, who broke the rules and charged lawyers \$500 for a chance to talk to her?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer my friend and colleague. I will answer him in a less aggressive tone.

Frankly, I believe that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner already answered that question. She said that the rules have not been broken.

My colleague maintains that the rules were broken, although the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner told his own colleague the opposite. That is untenable.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I being 5:33 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I do wish as well, as the member who was speaking earlier said, that we all leave today as friends and colleagues, but I do request that we defer the recorded division on this motion until tomorrow at the end of the time allocated for oral questions, tomorrow being Wednesday, April 20, 2016.

• (1735)

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division is deferred until tomorrow at the end of the period allotted for oral questions.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:48 p. m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:48 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:48 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

SAFE AND REGULATED SPORTS BETTING ACT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP) moved that Bill C-221, an act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-221, the safe and regulated sports betting act.

I served in the municipality of Windsor for two terms and have served in the House for six terms. One of the things I have noted as a member of Parliament and formerly as a city councillor is that we often have time, energy, and opportunity to vote about spending in these institutions, including this one. This bill would give us a chance to increase revenues by taking them away from organized crime and putting them into the coffers of the provinces, should they so choose.

I am talking about the underground economy, the organized crime economy, and that of offshore betting that is taking place for single event sports. It is common culture in Canada, North America, and across the globe, but it is not regulated here.

The bill is an opportunity to redirect to the provinces approximately \$10 billion which is going to organized crime, and that is a modest estimation. There is another \$4 billion from overseas accounts and betting that is unregulated. Some are seeking regulation. The provinces could use that money for health care, education, infrastructure, for public projects that we support. This would dismantle a significant, if not the most profound, basis of monetary support for organized crime.

That is what we are talking about in the bill. It is not just fun, not just jobs, not just the reality that is taking place in other jurisdictions at our expense; it is about taking away the capability of organized crime to affect our society.

The bill was formerly Bill C-290, which was brought forward by my colleague Mr. Joe Comartin, the former member for Windsor—Tecumseh and the former deputy speaker. That bill passed unanimously in the chamber. It went through this chamber, went to committee, came back from committee and went through this chamber again and on to the Senate. It made it to the Senate, but there just was not enough time to pass it into law. We have had to table the bill in the House again to make sure that we get the job done. It is my pleasure to do so.

Private Members' Business

Things have changed. When we look at illegal gaming globally, it is a \$500-billion industry, half a trillion dollars, not only in North America, but also in China and other jurisdictions. It is a trough fund that often goes to organized crime or other businesses that are unregulated and unaccountable. We know taxes have been a big issue in this chamber over the last number of weeks. They are not necessarily paying the taxes that they should. It is important to know that.

Currently, Las Vegas has a monopoly on this product for North America. There is the Super Bowl and other jurisdictional betting that has been taking place. There are around 30 million visitors to that area. There are significant revenues coming from tourism on top of that. It is not just the actual wagering that is taking place, but it is the tourism as well.

The bill would protect our jobs and economy. We have 250,000 jobs directly or indirectly related to the gaming industry in Canada. We are talking about places like Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Windsor, Niagara, Montreal, Halifax, and Charlottetown. Some people think these are just entry level jobs, that they are not significant enough to look at. How more wrong could they be?

• (1740)

There are value-added trained jobs that require education from our colleges and our universities. There is web design. There are slot attendants, cashiers, and blackjack dealers in a casino, and also industries outside that which are related to tourism.

I apologize for my voice, Mr. Speaker, but I was coaching hockey this weekend and it is hard to get 11-year-olds and 13-year-olds off the ice. I would say to my colleagues that it is a lot of fun but it takes a lot of energy.

When we look at the sports information industry itself, we see online sports information, statisticians, odds-makers, journalists, web-tech supporters, and marketing. All those things are so important for our value-added economy. They are also jobs where people can actually have benefits, a salary, and contribute to a pension, something all of us in this House agree should happen. Often there are pensions that relate to the private sector, a growth sector where we need to have pensions for the sustainability of our economy.

This bill has a number of different elements which the provinces could choose if they wanted to. There is nothing in this bill that would make the provinces do anything. It is all about choice. Right now in the federal Criminal Code there is a prohibition to betting on a single event sport or games. To do that, people go to the underground economy, whether it be organized crime or other types of venues, or with the click of a mouse they can go offshore somewhere. Canadians, Americans, and people across this planet enjoy single wager sports.

All that revenue is lost, unaccounted for, and does not lead to the results we need as a country. With that type of revenue stream, we would also have accountability. Most important, we would have the reduction of crimes committed from this unregulated activity. In Canada, that is \$10 billion in organized crime and nefarious betting. Offshore we are talking about \$4 billion and we do not know where it goes. We take that element and create jobs that have taxable

income, that pay benefits, that deliver pensions, that bring in tourism. It would ensure that the billions of dollars of infrastructure that we have in our gaming facilities would be protected.

This is coming to the United States. It is not just Nevada that has a toehold and is alone in this. There are others, like New Jersey, that are moving toward this target, and others will soon follow. There is no doubt about it. Coming from Windsor, I can say that we watched as the province twiddled its thumbs about building a new conference centre, and Detroit went ahead and did it and took our market share quite significantly. We still do well with a good brand, a good industry, and most important, great customer service that creates a number of jobs. However, if we do not do this, we will lose out. We will lose billions of taxpayer dollars in infrastructure. That is not smart.

When we think about having a regulated environment, it is not just somebody in a bar, in a back room, or a basement who collects these bets. We are talking about going to gaming authorities of the provinces that choose to do so where they have age controls. Right now, if people want to make a single sports bet in our country, does anyone think that organized crime, bookies, or agents are carding people to make sure they are 18 years of age? I do not think so. I do not think that is happening. They will prey on those who want to bet. With legalized regulated betting, there are age controls in place, sports security in place, monitoring of lines, and regular wager bets that take place. That is accountability. Gaming authorities across Canada are the largest contributors to player education programs and self-exclusion programs.

• (1745)

People can actually go to the websites of the provinces that regulate this and get face identification. That is important. If people want to opt out of gaming and tell the associations they want to be prohibited from entering into casinos or other betting venues, they are allowed to do that. They can do it in the privacy of their homes. It is a self-awareness protection program. There is staff training that takes place to ensure that does not happen.

The scope of criminal activity associated with organized crime is best detailed by a quote that I have by Detective Inspector L.D. Moodie, who spoke at a Gambling, Law Enforcement Systems Issues Conference. He stated:

Illegal gambling, while appearing to be a minor part of a Traditional Organized Crime...network, is actually a foundation upon which most other illicit activities are supported. Illegal bookmaking, card dens and video gambling machines are Traditional Organized Crime's main source of revenue. Illegal gambling and related crimes such as loan sharking, money laundering and corruption provide working capital to invest in more legitimate enterprises, thereby strengthening their entire illicit operation.

They use that to transfer the funds to other operations, sometimes legal, sometimes not.

He further stated:

At least 8 murders have been committed in the Toronto area over the past 3 years that can be directly related to Organized Crime members dealing with the illegal gambling industry, whether by gambling debts or turf wars between the different Organized Crime Groups.

Plain and simple, there is a direct correlation. Do we allow this to simply happen, or do we take a stand here today and decide as members that we are not going to spend revenue on an issue. We get a lot of those bills, and that happens, which is a good thing, because they are good issues about changing Canada. That is not a criticism. However, in this unique case, we have found in all the evidence that we are simply shifting money away from organized crime and offshore accounts and putting it toward our public systems that are important.

By the way, the offshore accounts are not insignificant. If we were to google Canadian sports betting sites, does anyone know many hits we would get? We would get 530,000 hits for sports betting sites alone. On Canadian sports betting sites alone, we would get hits including Bodog, bet365, Pinnacle, and Betway.

Even more importantly, if we look at organizations, the NBA, for example, supports a regulated environment. It is saying it wants to be regulated to ensure that the quality of its product is not influenced by illegal factors. Knowing that this is the future, it wants to work with the government to do it. We could go to other sites, like the NHL site DraftKings. We could go on the NHL site right now and actually make a bet on the DraftKings website.

There have been major issues raised in the United States, other provinces, and other jurisdictions around the world that are now concerned with this unregulated environment that has no accountability. Forget about the Isle of Man, the Bahama issues, the Panama papers. We are talking about an annual stream of sports wagering that, if we do nothing, will continue to fester and undermine the intentions of the House and other provincial houses that are asking for this. They are asking for the right to do this. All we are doing is allowing that facilitation.

I do not understand. I can bet on three games in Ontario, which I will most likely lose, because with my betting skill that is usually what happens. I could bet on two games, which again would result in the same situation, I am sure. I can pretty well guarantee the success of an other team because I would pick the team that loses, on a single sports bet. That is, unfortunately, my history.

● (1750)

In all seriousness, it does not make any sense. It was borne from the frustration of dealing with problems from a time long past. Today we need to deal with reality, and that reality has been brought together.

In conclusion, because the bill does not require that money be spent but would create new revenue, it is supported by the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. It is very unique, very real, and it would be very wise for us to move it forward.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the passion that he brings to this topic. I know it is extremely important to his riding. I was there

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for the debate in the last Parliament when Joe Comartin brought the bill in, which passed on a voice vote and then went to the Senate.

It encountered some considerable headwinds at the Senate. It actually went to committee for study, as my hon. colleague would know. The Senate heard from the NCAA, the National Hockey League, the National Football League, and the Toronto Blue Jays on behalf of major league baseball, all of whom expressed concerns that this would affect the integrity of the game.

In fairness, I would invite my colleague to speak to those concerns that were raised at the Senate committee. I fully expect that he is aware of them, and the House should be as well.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it would be great to have the Final Four in Canada. However, the NCAA is not really coming to our country, aside from a few exhibition games between colleges and universities that are not even sanctioned, so I would not give that much credibility in the sense that it is a product and a situation that is foreign to us. It would be like us having a sports team over here, an association, demanding something in the U.S. where it does not even play. That is one take on it.

I am glad my hon. colleague was here in the days of Joe Comartin, because he will know the history of this issue.

The NHL still has concerns. However, people can use their app to go to the NHL's website right now and bet on DraftKings.

With respect to the integrity of the game, historically there have been problems with some sporting issues. There is no doubt about that. However, those problems were reined in by the development of the association. Most importantly, it has important issues to deal with, such as concussions and accountability.

In the case of the NFL, it is the same issue. After a few games in Toronto, it was dealing with concussions as well, and other issues. However, it has its voice, another product that is not in our country.

Lastly, if the Toronto Blue Jays and major league baseball are okay in Vegas, why are they not okay here?

● (1755)

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member on his efforts to get this bill through. I know it is the second time that he has had it in front of the House.

We just had a question asked about the National Hockey League. In the last year or so, we have been hearing about the potential expansion of the NHL, which I am really excited about. I am hoping it means we will have another team in Canada. Hopefully we will have an NHL team from Canada in the playoffs in the next season.

However, it appears that the city of Las Vegas is in the running right now. It looks as though it is very likely to get a National Hockey League team. Therefore, I ask the member what his views are on what the National Hockey League has had to say about this bill.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, probably one of the most important things to note that I have heard so far in this session is the member's statement with respect to getting a Canadian team back into the playoffs. We are all in remorse.

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I sincerely thank the member for his question, because it is interesting that the NHL is allowing organizing and growth to take place in Las Vegas and at the same time saying no to Canadians for a product that it allows in the United States. That does not sound right.

As well, guess where a lot of the NHL awards are held? That would be in Vegas.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my friend from Windsor West for bringing this bill forward again. I thank Joe Comartin, a former colleague and a friend, for initially bringing it forward.

As someone who is essentially opposed to gambling and concerned about gambling addiction, it is an entire educational experience for me to realize that there is an underground economy that is fuelling organized crime. I would ask my friend to comment on this, because there is a lot of literature on it. How does his bill—which I fully support, and I want to ensure that I say that while I have a chance—help us address the problem of gambling addictions when we are, in a sense, creating a legal form of single-event betting?

Mr. Brian Masse: I appreciate that very important question, Mr. Speaker. There is a couple of ways we would tackle it.

If we go to offices, workshops, go online, or any place, there is usually some type of gaming going on. Sometimes it ends up being a single sport event. Look at the final four brackets that everyone has at work and all that kind of stuff. It leads to one event at the end of the day. Therefore, that is happening.

The studies show that we will shift revenue away from organized crime and put it toward a regulated market. In the regulated provincial markets there are avenues, money and support from the revenue that comes in to problem gaming. Therefore, problem gaming finally gets a revenue stream. I do not think anybody from organized crime is writing a cheque for problem gaming.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to contribute to the debate on Bill C-221, an act to amend the Criminal Code with regard to sports betting, sponsored by the member for Windsor West.

During my remarks, I will be highlighting the concerns I have with the proposed reforms. The government will be opposing the bill.

As Canadian law now stands, single-event sports betting is illegal. However, provinces and territories may offer another type of sports betting, known as parlay betting, to their residents. Parlay betting requires the bettor to correctly predict the outcome for a number of games in order to win. Parlay betting offers bettors an opportunity to participate in a legal and provincially or territorially controlled betting environment.

Single-event sports betting involves betting on the outcome of one single game, such as a game in the Stanley Cup finals. This private member's bill proposes to repeal paragraph 207(4)(b) of the Criminal Code, which prohibits betting on a single sporting event. If enacted, the amendment would allow a province or territory to offer this type of betting, if it chose to do so.

In Canada, provinces are responsible for operating, licensing, and regulating most legal forms of lottery schemes. Each province determines the types, amount, and location of this kind of gambling activity within the province. If single-event sports betting were permitted, each province would be left to determine how to implement this reform.

There are a whole host of issues that need to be considered when looking at legislative changes to the gambling provisions in the Criminal Code. The impact of Bill C-221 on issues such as match-fixing and problem gaming would be best examined in conjunction with provinces and territories, which would be responsible for single-event sports betting.

The amendment proposed in Bill C-221 may be familiar to many parliamentarians because the same reform was proposed in former private member's Bill C-290 and before that in former private member's Bill C-627, both of which were sponsored by Joe Comartin, the former member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

During debate and committee study of Bill C-290 in the Senate, senators and witnesses raised concerns with regard to the proposed reform. For example, the Senate Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights considered Bill C-290 in 2011, and it heard that the NCAA, the National Football League, the National Hockey League, and the Toronto Blue Jays, on behalf of Major League Baseball, were all against this proposed reform.

The major concern for these leagues was that the proposed reform could affect the integrity of their games. The government shares these same concerns.

It is possible, as suggested by many sports leagues, that legalizing single-event sports betting could encourage gamblers to fix games, especially in areas where players do not earn a lot of money and may be more susceptible to bribes. The current parlay system of betting makes it unattractive to fix a game, because the only way to achieve a guaranteed payout would be to rig multiple events, which would be much more difficult to accomplish. Single-event sports betting would make a fraudster's task easier, since only one event would need to be fixed.

I believe it is very important to ensure that the integrity of the game is sedulously fostered, and I believe that we should oppose legislation that may significantly affect this integrity.

One of the sponsor's stated objectives is to stimulate the economy and to bring American consumers to Canada. The provinces and territories would stand to gain economic benefits from the proposed reform, but the question arises: at what cost and, specifically, at what social cost?

Studies suggest that 3% to 5% of Canadians are at risk for problem gambling, and 30% to 40% of gambling revenues come from that small percentage. In 2011, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto filed a letter with the Senate committee studying the former Bill C-290 and indicated that the empirical evidence in the field demonstrated that an increase in legal gambling opportunities could lead to an increase in problem gambling. The letter indicated a concern for sports betting in particular.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health reported an Ontario study that found that people with incomes of less than \$20,000 per year were the least likely to gamble. However when they did, they were more likely to experience problems than those in higher income brackets.

• (1800)

These statistics indicate that the cohort of Canadians in the lower income bracket who gamble are the most vulnerable for experiencing problem gambling issues.

As well, individuals who live at or below the poverty line have little or no disposable income to spend on gambling. The amount spent on gambling takes a bigger bite out of their monthly budget. For someone making \$20,000, spending even \$1,000 a year on gambling is a very significant percentage of their disposable income.

Opposing this bill means protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health also demonstrated that people, now patrons of illegal bookmakers, would likely continue to do so because of easy access to credit, convenience, and better odds.

The suggestion that this reform would be funnelling money away from organized crime and redirecting it into provincial coffers is clearly not strong enough to rationalize supporting the bill. In short, this proposed reform would bring about more gambling and would contribute to the many ills in society brought about by problem gambling.

While I appreciate that many would see these changes as a welcome way to stimulate the economy and to fund provincial activities, I do not believe that it should be supported. As such, I would ask members to join me in opposing this private member's bill.

• (1805)

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill C-221 in the name of the New Democratic member for Windsor West. I want to congratulate him on all of his efforts to try to get the bill passed.

First, the Conservative Party will allow a free vote of its members on the bill, and I would hope the government would reconsider this opportunity to let its members have a free vote on this as well.

I would like to lay out the reasons for my support for the bill.

First, in Canada, sports betting is only legal through parlay betting over a series of three games on what the outcome of those three games would be, which we have heard already tonight. It is not a great leap to shift from parlay betting to single sports betting.

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Tourism in Canada has been on the decline. The legalization of single sports betting would give us the competitive edge that we need to bring some tourism back to Canada, especially along the border with the United States.

In my riding of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, well over a decade ago there was a great debate that raged about allowing a casino to set up somewhere in the Thousand Islands region. After a great debate and a number of plebiscites in the municipalities, a casino was established on the boundary between the town of Gananoque and what is now the township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands.

At the time, many detractors were talking about the evils of gaming. However, at that particular casino, very little of the fears of the detractors have been realized. In fact, on the contrary, the casino has become a significant tourist anchor. Furthermore, it has contributed literally millions of dollars to the tax base of the municipalities, as well as direct payments to those municipalities, and it has helped boost other businesses in the region.

Therefore, with the new avenue of gaming, Canadian casinos would have a product that many of the those in the United States do not have. We have heard that it has been available for many years in Las Vegas. This would give us the upper hand on competing casinos right across the border and take back the traffic that Canadian casinos originally had.

Currently, as I said, this form of betting is only legal in one state, which is in the state of Nevada. Why should Nevada have a monopoly on this?

The legalization of single sports betting gives us the opportunity to attract more Americans to Canadian casinos, taking advantage of our proximity in comparison to the state of Nevada. It would not only give us the ability to compete with Nevada for its tourism and casino traffic, but it would put us in a strong position to grow both our industry and our economy.

Not only would the legislation before us be beneficial for the Canadian tourism industry, it would also be mutually beneficial for our economy.

We have recently seen in Nevada the mass tourism for the Super Bowl. They were not there for the Super Bowl game in Nevada; they were there to bet on that game. Nevada prepared for at least 200,000 extra visitors than it usually would have had. There was about \$90 million that was spent betting on the game, and \$150 million spent in Las Vegas on miscellaneous industries.

This one event generated mass amounts of revenue for communities. With our geographic close proximity to the United States, I have no doubt we would be able to reap those economic benefits.

Recently, I read a case study that was done by the Canadian Gaming Association on towns such as Niagara Falls, which would be heavily impacted by the proposed legislation of single sports betting. What the association found was that although single sports betting did produce revenue, the greatest increase in revenue was in the hospitality sector and entertainment industries due to the increased volume of tourists in the area.

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Therefore, single sports betting would not just generate more financial flow within the casinos or betting pools, but it would have greater financial implications that could benefit the whole economy. Imagine the opportunities that could open up for Canadian cities such as Niagara Falls if the legislation is passed.

It is increasingly important that we work to better our economy in every possible way. Not only would single-event sports betting generate greater income in our tourism and gaming towns, it would also open up greater job opportunities for the people who live there.

As we are all aware, unemployment has risen this past year to about 7.3% in Canada. Creating more jobs in Canada would be very beneficial for all of us.

• (1810)

The Canadian gaming industry currently employs close to four million people, already having a significant impact on the economy. With the opening of single event betting, the increased traffic would allow for casinos to employ more staff. In Niagara Falls alone, it could create more than 200 jobs. That means 200 more people who would have security, and 200 more people who would not have to struggle to survive. Not only would 200 more people be employed, which in itself is already beneficial, it is 200 people in one area.

The availability of more jobs in every major town that would facilitate single event sports betting would give us the means necessary to strong arm the current high unemployment rate and substantially lower it. The reality of the situation is that while single game betting is illegal in Canada, it is still happening, as we have already heard this evening, through offshore gaming or through the black market.

Through offshore or illegal bookmaking operations, the single events sports underground market generates as much as \$14 billion a year in Canada. Instead of this large market going off radar, we would make it both legal and regulated provincially. Passing the bill would mean that the provinces could tap into money that is currently being spent illegally, and use it provincially to support social programs as they see fit.

Niagara Falls is estimated to make a net profit of between \$9 million and \$12 million each year. Imagine what that money could do in a community such as Niagara Falls.

The bill is not a question of whether or not single sports betting will automatically become illegal. Instead, it will follow suit and give the provinces the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to legalize it. Due to the economic advantages of job employment and increased tourism revenue, it is necessary that the provinces have the opportunity to decide for themselves whether this is something they want to support.

The bill has passed the House before, until it was stuck in the Senate. Sports betting is already legal in Canada. It would be wise to further the scope of that legality. I would ask members to vote yes again, taking note of the vast economic growth both in the tourism or employment sectors that could occur in Canada through its passing.

I leave members with the words of the mayor of Niagara Falls, "Whatever your opinion is on [single sports betting], it's happening and it's happening online or in Las Vegas."

Let us keep these billions of dollars in Canada by making it work legally here.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today on behalf of the bill and convince members of its recognized merits. I do believe it is very important at this time for me to also acknowledge my predecessor in Windsor—Tecumseh, Joe Comartin, who provided me with a lot of history that I think will help members put it in perspective as well.

This is a concise bill that is simply the repeal of one very brief section of the Criminal Code. In effect, it would allow for sports betting on single sporting events in this country, in provinces that choose to allow it.

There are two reasons for my pushing for this change and for the widespread support that this has garnered. One is the economic development tool, as has been mentioned. It would provide communities with revenue, particularly those communities with existing casinos or race tracks and other gaming operations.

We have heard from some provinces, as they are the ones responsible for deploying this tool, that they would be placing the operations in those centres, some more broadly and others on a more limited scale.

We had a study done by the Canadian Gaming Association two summers ago, and it showed, for instance, that it would secure 150 to 200 new jobs in my region of Windsor, which has a very substantial commercial casino, Caesars Windsor. The same is true for the casino in Niagara. I mention these two casinos because they are immediately adjacent to the American border and a number of bets would be placed by our American neighbours, because this practice is illegal in the United States, with the exception of Nevada. I will get to that later.

It would be a good economic tool that would draw tourism and gaming dollars from the United States and potentially from other parts of the world, depending on how it were deployed.

The other major reason that was the impetus for this initiative is that this type of gaming is going on now, but it is almost exclusively offshore, and in Canada it is completely controlled by and is a major revenue source for organized crime.

We have estimates of billions of dollars being gamed in Canada and tens of billions of dollars in the United States because it is illegal there. This legislation would strike a blow against organized crime by taking revenue away from it.

One of the major tools the government can deploy to fight organized crime is to take away financial incentives. This legislation would help us do that. It is a very important bill from this perspective. That industry is very big and it is entirely controlled by organized crime at the present time, both here and in the United States, because it is generally illegal in the United States to bet on one sporting event.

The estimate in the United States is that \$30 billion a year is bet on that, all going into the pockets of organized crime and some of it offshore. It is estimated that as much as \$2 billion is spent in Canada annually.

Private Members' Business

With all of that money going out of the country to organized crime syndicates in the United States and the Caribbean, we can see just from those figures that it is important that we move on this.

The other thing is that there is a national gaming association in Canada, and a couple of years ago it completed a study that showed the employment that would be created by making this into a legal business. For instance, in Windsor, there would be another 150 jobs directly secured for current employment at the casino in Windsor.

In the riding of the Minister of Justice there is a casino, and a similar number of jobs would either be saved or added and thus secured in this job creation.

The stakeholder support for this legislation is broad in both the public sector and the private sector. The legislation has support from provincial and municipal governments across Canada, as well as unanimous support from the chamber of commerce community and Canadian labour councils.

In addition, businesses and organizations operating in the tourism sector have expressed support, as well as firms in the so-called grey market, which is the legitimate multinational sport betting operations catering to Canadian clients on the Internet, who want to operate in a clearly defined and regulated environment.

• (1815)

I would also note, as my colleague from Windsor West has discussed, that this legislation has support from the law enforcement community. It is generally recognized as a safe, legal, and regulated environment around this activity that will detrimentally impact organized crime by significantly reducing its revenues from illegal wagering by providing customers with a legal option.

The previous legislation was originally opposed by all four major sports organizations in North America, the NBA, NHL, NFL, the MLB. However, since 2011, the NBA has completely changed its position on single-event sports wagering and the NHL is increasingly becoming involved in gambling after announcing a formal partnership with a major online fantasy sports wagering operation, DraftKings. In short, the leagues are coming to the realization that sports wagering can be an asset to their business and they are beginning to alter their position.

What is the best thing about the bill? It costs the government nothing and it generates considerable revenue for the province, which regulates the practice and puts funding in the coffers for adequate treatment. From this perspective, it is a safe bet indeed.

It is important to set the bill within a historical context, and I take this history from the esteemed member who held my riding, Joe Comartin, prior to the 2015 election.

If we go back and study this closely, the laws on gaming in our country go back to the 1600s in England. I believe Charles I was King at the time. It was a period of time when he was very worried about the military gambling excessively. Laws were passed in Westminster to prohibit all gambling in the country.

Over the centuries, we have eroded that position. In fact, to follow the history in my riding, my predecessor, who is the immediate predecessor of Joe Comartin, the late Shaughnessy Cohen, moved a

similar amendment to the Criminal Code that allowed for betting at roulette tables, which was prohibited at the time. It allowed for roulette tables to come into casinos across the country.

Following in that tradition, this is one of those periods of time when we should have our criminal law catch up to the reality of what is happening in our society.

In 1985, the federal government effectively gave up the administration of gaming operations to the provinces. It was one of those periods of time when there were some trade-offs going on with regard to revenue sources. This was a mechanism for the federal government to create new revenue sources for the provinces.

Since that time, a number of provinces have moved into gaming in a variety of ways: lotteries, casinos, additional betting being allowed at racetracks, and the list goes on.

Allow me to recap the reasons for supporting the bill. It would be a blow against organized crime. It would be a potential creator of good jobs for our economy. It would move additional revenue into the hands of the provinces that chose to allow single-event sports betting now that it would no longer be a criminal act. It is a very simple amendment that does not require a great deal of effort to understand. I would encourage all members of the House to reconsider and support the bill.

• (1820)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to Bill C-221 today, an act to amend the Criminal Code. This bill would modernize the Criminal Code by allowing provinces to properly regulate sports betting. If single event sports wagering were permitted, each province would therefore determine if and how it would be implemented.

The Canadian Criminal Code, which is enacted by the Parliament of Canada, sets out the parameters of legal gaming in Canada. However, since 1985, as a result of a federal-provincial agreement, the federal government has given up its right to conduct lottery schemes. Sports wagering is defined as lottery schemes in the Criminal Code and explicitly prohibits provinces from allowing wagering on any race or fight, or on a single sports event or athletic contest. This bill calls for the deletion of this section of the Criminal Code.

The bill would help modernize the Criminal Code to recognize the jurisdictional responsibility and reality of gaming throughout the country. If provinces were able to provide a legal, regulated sports wagering product, the economic impact would be significant, particularly for communities with casinos. A recent report by the Canadian Gaming Association on the impact of sports wagering on Ontario border casinos highlighted the benefits of offering a legal, regulated sports wagering product in the Ontario border casinos of Windsor and Niagara Falls.

Private Members' Business

Another thing that Bill C-221 would allow us to do would be to reduce the influence of organized crime. Illegal sports wagering includes both illegal bookmakers and illegal Internet betting companies operating within North America. While the exact size of the illegal bookmaking market is not certain, published reports by government and law enforcement officials suggest it is substantial. For example, based on a review of the annual reports of the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, bookmaking exists in every region of Canada. According to the reports, gaming profits provide revenue to organized crime groups to fund their illegal and legal activities.

Once more, while the size of the illegal bookmaking market in Canada is unknown, it is thought to be significant. It has been estimated that Canadians illegally wager between \$14 billion and \$15 billion annually on single sporting events. Bill C-221 would allow the provinces to police this unregulated market, and in so doing return the economic benefits to our communities and reduce the influence of organized crime. It would afford the opportunity for bettors using illegal systems to use the safety, security, and surety of the government regulated betting regime.

I would like to mention that much support has been expressed for Bill C-221. Many validators, such as municipalities, associations, and corporations, have already supported this bill. Among those, there is the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation, the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority, the municipality of Windsor, the Attorneys General of Ontario and British Columbia, and the Canadian Gaming Association.

• (1825)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my speech by thanking my colleagues who worked so hard on this bill.

[English]

I would like to start by thanking the member for Windsor West for the work he has done on this bill, not only in this Parliament but in the previous Parliament, and also my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh, and her predecessor, Joe Comartin, who worked very hard on this bill as well in the previous Parliament.

[Translation]

This bill is very important because it seeks to modernize the situation. Gambling is currently a provincial jurisdiction. We know that and this bill does not take away from that. However, the regulations need to be modernized. I appreciate this bill because it essentially seeks to establish regulations to help reduce, if not eliminate, the influence of organized crime.

This is not necessarily an issue that affects my riding. We do not have a casino. However, I know that my colleagues in Windsor have experienced this situation. Their expertise and that of the stakeholders who support our position illustrate the need to adopt new regulations and update the statutes governing gambling in Canada, in order to eliminate the influence of organized crime. That is the most important thing.

However, I cannot talk about this bill without raising an absurd situation that affects the work of parliamentarians here in Ottawa. I am referring to the fact that the Senate again delayed the study of a

bill that then died on the order paper when the election was called. That is what happened to the bill we are debating today.

We believe that the Senate's undemocratic action impacted a private member's bill. The same thing happened to Jack Layton's bill on climate change. The House passed the bill, but the Senate failed to pass it by one vote.

No matter what an MP may think of the bill put forward by my colleague from Windsor West, it is absurd that in the 21st century, in a democracy, some senators can delay the study in committee of a bill passed by the House of Commons to the point where it would die on the order paper. They did not even get around to the vote.

That is why my colleague from Windsor West has to once again introduce the same bill after a federal election. Furthermore, it seems that government members are going to oppose it. The work done by a previous Parliament has unfortunately been undone by an undemocratic institution.

Many stakeholders in the sports community are interested in this issue. When the various sports leagues express their views, we need to understand their interests and their motivations. Of course, they like the existing regulations. However, the regulation proposed by my colleague in this new bill does not seek to make an existing problem worse. This is not a new bill. Once again, it could have been passed before if the Senate had done its job during the 41st Parliament.

Under the existing law, a person can bet only on a single sport event. The bill proposes to increase that number to three, which would reduce the influence of organized crime on gaming in Canada. If this was not the right approach, we would not have stakeholders' support on this.

• (1830)

When we got to the Senate, we encountered a problem. We appeared before the committee and nothing was certain. Senators were asking questions. I will admit that that is understandable and that those questions needed to be asked. Senators had to be given the opportunity to understand where we stood on this issue and what action needed to be taken. They wanted to understand the existing regulations and how the bill would change them.

That is a problem because we had stakeholders who supported the bill. Members passed the bill, and we tried to present an informed position on the subject. I commend my colleague from Windsor for trying again and pushing ahead on this issue, which is supported by the municipality of Windsor. The municipality indicated that it was in favour of the bill, as did the various gaming commissions, and not just in Ontario. Other provinces, such as Saskatchewan, were on board. My colleague just talked about it. It is very important to keep all that in mind when we are considering the situation that is currently before us.

I am really disappointed that the government is now saying it will oppose this bill. Maybe it is just me, but I did not hear a lot of opposition to this from the Liberal Party during the previous Parliament. Now the Liberals seem to have changed their mind, but they cannot really explain why.

Members from a region have put forward a bill that has the support of the municipality they represent and various provincial gaming commissions that regulate gaming. As I said at the outset, this is ultimately a provincial responsibility. When all of these stakeholders have reached a consensus on the bill and understand that we need legislation to make a necessary change, we are entitled to ask some questions.

The Senate took its sweet time, and then the election was called and the bill disappeared from the order paper. The Senate did its job, and now my colleague has to introduce the same bill all over again. During the previous Parliament, the government's party did not have a lot to say. Actually, it said nothing against this bill. Now it says it will oppose the bill. I find that so disappointing.

I must admit, I am getting to know the Windsor area. I do not know as much about it as I would like, but I have had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with my colleague from Windsor West discussing this bill. I really understand the positive impact this bill can have in terms of eliminating the influence of organized crime on gambling in Canada. For that reason alone, the bill deserves our support.

I hope that the government will have the chance to reconsider its position. Finally, I would remind backbenchers that they are free to vote their conscience on private members' bills. I hope that this plea will reassure them, and that when the time comes to vote on this bill, they will not tow the party line but adopt the common sense approach proposed by my colleague from Windsor West.

I see that I am out of time. I will end there.

•(1835)

The Deputy Speaker: If the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly wishes, he will have one more minute for his speech when the House resumes debate on this motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. 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.

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 4, I rose in the House to ask why the Minister of International Trade was signing the trans-Pacific partnership agreement.

The Conservatives secretly negotiated the TPP. During the election campaign, the Liberals promised to make changes. Instead, they moved forward with the Conservatives' agreement as is. Ratifying this agreement would be harmful for many sectors and could seriously damage our economy. In Canada 60,000 good jobs are at risk.

Adjournment Proceedings

In Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. Hundreds of farmers make a living from this economy, and these people are worried because the TPP also jeopardizes the supply management system in Quebec. I am also concerned because we are already feeling the detrimental effects of this agreement.

The detrimental effects of this agreement and the uncertainty associated with its ratification have already had an impact. Last year, 257 dairy farms in Quebec shut down their operations because of this uncertainty and the breach in our supply management system. We are talking about men and women who work hard to provide high quality products.

I would remind the House that supply management guarantees Canadians access to high-quality, locally produced food at a reasonable price. It also guarantees a decent income for our dairy, egg, and poultry producers, and it generates thousands of jobs here in Canada. However, this agreement puts all of that in jeopardy.

I am calling on the government to stand in the House this evening and reassure our farmers, to commit to putting an end to the demise of family farms and to protecting supply management in its entirety. It is not enough that the government say the words; it needs to take concrete action to do so.

Since I was elected, hundreds of concerned citizens and farmers have reached out to me, whether by email, by telephone, or at my constituency office to have their say. Unfortunately, this government appears to be ignoring those people and turning its back on farmers.

Despite the fact that the TPP is being widely criticized in numerous forums, the Liberals signed it anyway. However, we have been saying for quite some time that the trans-Pacific partnership negotiated by the Conservatives and signed by the Liberals is not good for Canada. This agreement could jeopardize many of our most important industries, lower decent wages, and put the interests of large corporations ahead of everything else.

We are not alone in saying it and repeating it. People from all TPP signatory countries, and especially from Canada, are speaking out against this treaty.

At the beginning of the month, American Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner in economics, warned the Minister of International Trade that Canada should reject the TPP. He told her that it was the worst deal ever and that it would only benefit large corporations.

Not only do the Liberals insist on moving forward, but they are also reconsidering compensation for the dairy industry. There is nothing on this matter in the latest budget. This is yet another broken promise.

This government has a duty to fulfill its commitments and to fully protect supply management.

When will the Liberals listen to people's concerns and stand up for workers, employees here in Canada, and producers?

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

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[English]

Canada's economic growth as a trading nation is directly linked to international trade. The government strongly supports free trade as a way to open markets to Canadian goods and services, grow Canadian businesses, and create good-paying middle-class jobs.

The scope of the trans-Pacific partnership is significant. To restate the oft-quoted figures, the TPP encompasses 800 million people in 12 countries with a combined GDP of \$28 trillion U.S., covering nearly 40% of the world's economy. It is also an agreement that was negotiated by the previous government.

Our pledge to Canadians is to ensure they are fully consulted on the outcomes of the TPP. Our job is to carefully review the text and continue to consult with Canadians. The government wants to ensure that Canadians can have a good look at the TPP and that they can ask questions and express their views on whether the agreement is in the best interests of Canadians.

With this in mind, the Minister of International Trade is undertaking an extensive consultation process to offer Canadians the opportunity to provide their views on the agreement and Canada's participation in it before the government makes a decision on whether to ratify it.

Let me be clear: signing the TPP is only a first step and does not equal ratification, nor does it bring it into force for Canada. Signing preserves Canada's status as an originating partner in the agreement, with all the rights and powers that go with it. It also allows our government to pursue our consultations and allow parliamentarians an opportunity to discuss the impact on their regions and on the future of this country.

The Minister of International Trade is also working closely with colleagues whose portfolios are also implicated by the TPP to engage Canadian stakeholders and hear what they have to say. This is a whole-of-government effort. The Minister of Agriculture has been busy engaging with agriculture stakeholders on the TPP. The Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development is doing the same with stakeholders from his portfolio. As well, other relevant ministers are also undertaking the same kind of work. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade is also engaging Canadians.

Since November, the government has held over 250 interactions with over 400 different stakeholders to discuss the trans-Pacific partnership. The government is committed to a full and open parliamentary debate. In addition, the House Standing Committee on International Trade is currently studying the TPP and holding consultations with Canadians across the country. The committee was in Calgary today. The House committee is accepting submissions from all interested parties, and those who have views to share are encouraged to participate.

We recognize the immense value and contributions of farmers, processors, retailers, and producers who bring their products to market. As mentioned, the government supports free trade, but this government is also committed to being fully transparent and hearing the views of Canadians on the merits of the TPP. The government pledged to take a responsible approach to examining the details of the trans-Pacific partnership.

As part of this ongoing consultation, the Minister of Agriculture and Minister of International Trade have met with dairy stakeholders, including farmers and their representatives. The TPP was discussed, and we heard their views about the agreement.

Global Affairs Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officials have also met stakeholders across the dairy value chain, including unions, processors, and retailers. We are following through on that. Should Canada decide to ratify the agreement, we will work with the affected sectors.

The government's engagement with Canadians will continue in the weeks and months to come and will include businesses, labour, farmers, civil society, academics, and youth. The government's TPP engagement has already touched many areas of Canada, with recent stops in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, Edmonton, Halifax, Oakville, Windsor, Winnipeg, and Regina.

Some Canadians support the TPP, while others have concerns. The Government of Canada remains in listening mode on the TPP and welcomes views on the agreement. Members of Parliament will also have the opportunity to make their views known in this House.

• (1840)

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to represent the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Quebec's agrifood capital.

Farmers do not just want to be called upon to collaborate. They really need to be reassured. Our region is home to several hundred farm businesses and several thousand food processing jobs. It is a land use issue.

For us, jeopardizing these farms means jeopardizing the villages in my riding. I hear about it every week. Last Saturday evening, I was sitting across from a dairy producer from Saint-Dominique at the farm women gala and she was telling me how sad she was to see one dairy farm after another shutting down.

Two weeks ago, I was sitting next to Marie-Ange Lapointe, who is very proud to be the fifth generation on her family's dairy farm in Upton. She was saying how sad she was to see all of the dairy farms that have been around for such a long time shutting down, one after the other.

In the centre city of our riding, there are hardly any dairy farms left, even though there used to be several on every country road. That is what worries me. Agriculture must not be treated like any other business.

• (1845)

[English]

Ms. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the government is committed to consulting widely on the dairy industry, as well as the agricultural sector in Canada more broadly.

Adjournment Proceedings

We promised during the course of the election campaign and after that we would study the TPP, and this is precisely what we are doing.

The Minister of International Trade wrote to her colleagues in the House to ask that the trade committee carefully study the agreement. The House committee on international trade has already begun this important work, which allows parliamentarians an opportunity to discuss the impact of the TPP on their regions and on the future of the country.

As mentioned, the government supports free trade, but we are serious about wanting to consult and hear the views of Canadians

and parliamentarians on the merits of the TPP and whether this is a good agreement for Canada before determining next steps.

We look forward to giving updates to the House as these consultations progress.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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