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Friday, May 20, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 20, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from May 17 consideration of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources has eight and a half minutes remaining in her speech.

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I was saying the other day about Bill C-14, it is evident that governments, national associations, and members of the public recognize the moral and ethical struggle that health care providers could experience regarding medical assistance in dying.

Most provincial and medical regulatory bodies have already provided professional guidance around safeguarding the conscience rights of physicians. Provinces like Alberta and New Brunswick say their physicians are under no obligation to participate in assistance in dying. However, they recognize that continuity of care, especially at this most critical time in a person's life, also cannot be neglected. Patients cannot be abandoned.

The Canadian Medical Association's submission to the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying recommended that physician freedom of conscience be recognized as a key component of the federal legislative response to the Carter decision. Participants at a public town hall meeting in Mississauga, Ontario, raised concerns about the ethical dilemmas facing physicians if they chose to be involved in medical assistance in dying.

On May 10, proposed new section 241.2 was carried. In effect, this amendment clarifies that there is nothing in the legislation that would compel a person to provide or assist in providing medical assistance in dying. This amendment would contribute to public

awareness that the bill recognizes both the rights of health care providers for freedom of conscience and the needs of Canadians who wish to have access to medical assistance in dying.

It is clear that no health care provider would be required to provide medical assistance in dying. However, we must also respect the rights of people seeking this procedure to have reasonable access. We know that there are many physicians who would provide medical assistance in dying to an eligible patient under their care. We heard from them throughout the consultations leading up to Bill C-14.

In a poll of 372 physicians, the College of Family Physicians of Canada found that 65% would help a competent, consenting, dying patient end his or her life, if requested. However, as was presented to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights by Dr. Jeff Blackmer of the Canadian Medical Association, having health care practitioners willing to provide medical assistance in dying is only one part of the equation. The other very important factor is the ability to connect eligible patients with these willing practitioners.

People seeking medical assistance in dying will have already encountered many challenges. Once they have made this difficult personal choice, they do not need additional barriers, such as the lack of a provider. The government has committed to develop measures that will support access to medical assistance in dying and to work with provinces and territories toward a common approach to referrals or transfer of patient care.

Provinces and territories have also indicated that they feel that a third party referral function would be a viable option. This would respond to the access needs of patients and protect the conscience rights of health care providers who do not wish to refer patients for medical assistance in dying. To this end, we will be working with provinces and territories to develop an end-of-life care coordination system.

In its simplest form, this system would provide a registry of authorized providers willing to accept patients whose providers consciously object to this practice. It could also provide a system through which patients could self-refer to an authorized provider to seek an assessment of their eligibility. The end-of-life care coordination system could also be a source of information and resources to both patients and providers on all aspects of medical assistance in dying—eligibility criteria, safeguards, and so on—as well as information about other end-of-life options, including palliative care.

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Similar systems are used in several other countries. For example, both Belgium and the Netherlands offer specialized services that provide physicians with access to a registry of trained, independent, and impartial physicians who offer consultations on end-of-life options, including euthanasia requests.

Collaborative federal, provincial, and territorial work could consider such international examples in establishing a made-in-Canada model to provide providers and patients with access to a system that could transfer care to a physician willing to assess and administer requests for medical assistance in dying.

Additionally, the system could service medical and nurse practitioners in need of an independent consulting practitioner, for example, in rural ridings, such as the one where I live, in remote areas, and where access to a second provider is challenging.

We trust our health care providers to work hand in hand with us in helping to maintain and improve our health. When our needs change, and we look for ways to relieve suffering and avoid a long and painful end, Canadians want to be confident that these providers will not abandon them but will help them choose their own paths.

I look forward to working with my federal, provincial, and territorial colleagues to ensure that, when the time comes, compassionate care and support at the end of life will be available to Canadians without undue burden or delay.

Physicians are key to the end-of-life process. They are a critical thread that not only binds but frames this whole discussion. They are imperative to move this important debate forward. I have shared my very personal experiences on palliative care and on how critical it is.

I met this past weekend with a physician in my riding who spent years working with palliative patients. This is a man who is passionate about end-of-life care, and he expressed unequivocally to me how important this legislation is. He felt that there is a strong desire on behalf of the medical community to find the right path to ensure that we have the best care options. This legislation is a major step forward on that very important path.

This legislation has created a national conversation around end-of-life care, palliative care, and home care and how we want to be treated at the end of our lives. This has to be the most important conversation we can ever have.

This is a true legacy piece. I believe the decisions we make around this bill will reverberate positively for years to come. As I said before, I am confident the proposed legislation provides us with a balanced solution that reconciles diverse interests in medical assistance in dying and is appropriate for Canada.

●(1010)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things the member mentioned was choice in end-of-life care.

My concern is that, when Canadians were voting last fall, they knew this bill was in the pipe. Members are aware that the Liberals, when they campaigned, promised they would put \$3 billion towards palliative care and home care. Sadly, in this past budget, as members are aware, there are absolutely zero new dollars for palliative care.

We know that the Liberals are rushing this bill forward. We have seen the antics this week. People watching today should probably know that the antics this week were about shutting down debate on this very issue.

If the Liberals are truly offering a choice to Canadians, there is still enough time. Could the member talk to the health minister and the finance minister, and please have that \$3 billion put into palliative care, as the Liberals promised in their election campaign?

Ms. Kim Rudd: Madam Speaker, in budget 2016, there is indeed \$3 billion for health care. Part of that discussion with the provinces and territories is clearly around home care and palliative care.

We have made that commitment. We certainly heard it from the Minister of Health a number of times.

As we know, the provinces and territories have jurisdiction over health care. Our role is to have the conversation with our partners to make sure we have all of those supports for assistance in dying, and to make sure we are reflecting Canadians' rights to assistance in their very difficult time at the end of their life and also the rights of physicians to support Canadians.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am concerned that the death of the bill is becoming reasonably foreseeable because it is in a grievous condition, but the good news is that it is not yet irremediable.

We heard from the Alberta Court of Appeal this week that the bill already does not meet the requirements of the Supreme Court decision and that it will not be deemed constitutional. We still have time to change the bill to make that happen. Unfortunately, debate on it is going to close today after only 2.5 hours because of a time allocation motion by the government, so we need to get this debate right today. We need to try to form a consensus that we want a bill that is constitutional.

Does the member think it makes sense to charge ahead to vote on a bill that we already know is not constitutional, or ought we not make amendments to the bill to make sure it is in fact constitutional?

●(1015)

Ms. Kim Rudd: Madam Speaker, I am not a constitutional lawyer, so I will not speak to the constitutionality. There are a lot of lawyers who have looked at the bill and believe it will pass the test, but that is not the point.

The point is that we have a framework for Canadians for now. This is historic in terms of putting the bill forward, of having this very difficult conversation with Canadians, and we as a government have committed very clearly to the next steps, whether it be advance directives or other elements on which we have made a commitment to have a discussion with Canadians. I look forward to working with the members opposite to have that very important discussion.

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Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her very thoughtful speech, and I know this is a very emotional matter. I have had town hall meetings on it, and there is some confusion as to the right of conscience for doctors or nurse practitioners, etc., who may not want to do it. I would like the member to shed light on this.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Madam Speaker, as I said in my remarks and have said previously, in the bill there is protection for those medical practitioners who do not want to participate in this. I believe that the idea of having a registry or a place for patients and for physicians and other medical practitioners to go to be able to exchange those ideas and support each other is a very important step.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to say how happy I am to finally be able to exercise my rights as a member of Parliament to speak to Bill C-14. Over the last few weeks, I have been in line to speak, but have not been able to do so because of the shutting down of debate and the antics put forth by the Liberals. I am really pleased to be able to talk today for my constituents.

I think it is important, when Canadians watch the debate, that they remember the debacle this week and that this was all about a vote on Wednesday to shut down debate on Bill C-14.

As my NDP colleague just said, we only have one more day, just a little over two hours, to debate 16 amendments. I think what is really important is for Canadians listening to this debate to get in touch with their MPs. They only have one week. I want them to look at the amendments and get in touch with their MPs, especially their Liberal MPs. As members sadly know, many of the backbench Liberal MPs will not be able to speak to the bill. The reason is that their front bench does not want them to speak on it. For me, for every member in the House, and for all Canadians, this is a very personal and very important bill, and has strong views on many sides of the debate. It will change the social structure of our country.

If we look at the foundation and the founding principles of our country and the great democracies around the world, they are based upon rights for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today, we are actually debating some of the opposites of that: the opposite of life being death, the opposite of liberty being enclosure, and the opposite of pursuit of happiness basically being sadness.

I have been able to speak with, but also to listen to many of my constituents who have very diversified opinions. I think it is essential for all of us here in the House to respect these many points of view. At the extreme of one end, some were very much against the bill. Others were very much in favour of it. However, for most of the people I was able to listen to, they are somewhere in the middle.

The one thing that most of the people in Oshawa I have talked with agree on is that the act of assisted suicide should be an exception and not the rule. In other words, assisted suicide should only be made available on the rarest of occasions, and, of course, have the greatest of safeguards.

My concern, as we heard from my colleague here in the House, is that this is a flawed bill. In the rush to pass the assisted suicide bill before the deadline of June 6, the Liberal government has created confusion and despair. What have the Liberals chosen to do? They

have chosen to break their promise to Canadians. I want to bring up and emphasize my question to my colleague across the way. When the Liberals were campaigning, they promised Canadians that they would put \$3 billion into a palliative care system. I do not know where my colleague was reading it, but when I read the budget, there is absolutely no new money for health in the budget. In the first year, when the government is rushing to hit this date, there is no new money to support the other side of the equation. There is nothing. There is zero.

As far as health is concerned, this is a horrible message. It means that health care is not a priority for the Prime Minister. Canadians expect a choice between quality palliative care and this legislation. Instead, the Liberal government has chosen to support just one-half of that choice. It has put all its time and resources into assisted suicide and has not provided the promised \$3 billion to palliative care, supportive care, for Canada's most vulnerable.

That is why I called on my colleague across the way to call on the Liberal government to immediately keep its promise. It is not too late to invest in palliative care. According to the Supreme Court, and from what we have heard, Canadians have the right to choose, to choose between assisted death, or hopefully the government can give them a choice to live comfortably near the end of their lives.

● (1020)

That is where this is really important and why I am glad I am able to speak today. The constituents I have talked to feel that the Liberal government needs to be held to account. Making the choice between assisted death and good palliative care has to be made available by June 6.

This is the first time in Canadian history that our government in Canada is drafting a law that would make it legal for one person to take the life of another. The Supreme Court has said that it is not just a required service, but has determined that it is a matter of individual rights. What precedent does that set? What do the experts in palliative care say?

Madam Speaker, I would like to share with you, but also with Canadians watching this debate and with my colleagues in the House, some of the thoughts of a very special constituent of mine in Oshawa. Her name is Dr. Gillian Gilchrist.

Dr. Gilchrist is a leading expert in the field of palliative care and she has practised medicine for over 50 years. She started the palliative care system in Oshawa in 1981, which was 35 years ago. I do not know anyone in the country with more experience, more respect, and more knowledge. Recently, through an initiative with Lakeridge Health in Oshawa, and Queen's University, a research chair has been named in her honour, dedicated to palliative care. It is the first fully funded academic research chair in palliative care at a community hospital in Canada. Dr. Gilchrist said that proper palliative care cannot be done without a team, and there is a lot that palliative care can do. There needs to be more volunteers and training. Patients deserve support, and the families need support as well.

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One of the things Dr. Gilchrist said to me very strongly is that euthanasia is wrong, that doctors should not do it, and that it is not what they were trained to do. Dr. Gilchrist has treated more than 5,000 patients, and not one of those patients asked for euthanasia. She went on to say that palliative care cannot stretch across every corner in Canada, but with the assistance of the Internet, patients can obtain assistance to treatment as well as the support they need. Those individuals, at the end of their lives, can actually have a true choice. We know that experts have said that given the choice of good palliative care, 95% of patients will choose life over assisted suicide.

This affirms one of the most obvious weaknesses in the Liberal approach to this most personal and sensitive subject. How can the government rush forward so blindly toward an artificial deadline of June 6 without even providing the funds to improve palliative care options for Canadians? Have the Liberals even asked the Supreme Court for an extension?

Choice also belongs to doctors, whom the Supreme Court has said will have to perform this final irreversible act of assisted suicide. Doctors and institutions deserve the right of protection of conscience. We know that doctors have taken a Hippocratic oath that calls for them to first do no harm. The question is, why has the current Liberal government failed to adapt the legislation to provide positive protection for those doctors and institutions who cannot participate in suicide due to conscientious objections?

The legislation being presented today simply references conscience, but there is no guarantee of protection. There is a mishmash across the country. Conservatives have proposed explicit provisions for conscience protection. However, the Liberal government chose watered-down protection.

For me, it is beyond understanding how a group of nine unelected lawyers from the Supreme Court can tell physicians how they must practise medicine. We do not see medical doctors telling lawyers how to practise law, especially without guaranteeing their rights to abstain from a practice that all of them swore to reject. As Dr. Gilchrist told me, this is not why they became doctors.

I want to repeat that I have been prepared multiple times to speak to Bill C-14, and I have been able to listen to my constituents. What I think is really important for Canadians to understand is that this is not a debate about money, about technicalities, and this is not a debate about regulations. This is an unprecedented debate about the subject of one individual taking the life of another. It is a national debate. All Canadians deserve to have their voices heard.

I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank the House leaders for all they have done. This is probably one of the most important issues that I have faced as a parliamentarian in the 12 years that I have been here.

• (1025)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his passionate defence of palliative care.

I want to ensure that the hon. member is aware that at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, we added two amendments to the bill related to palliative care. We added an amendment to the bill and to the preamble, not only authorizing but mandating

the Minister of Health to work with her provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that we improve palliative care within Canada, improve care for dementia patients, and establish proper end-of-life care for aboriginal peoples that is culturally sensitive.

Also, with respect to the report that has to come back within five years that analyzes the law, we agreed, bipartisanly, to ask that there also be a report on palliative care. I completely understand and agree that the last thing anyone wants is someone to decide that they need medical assistance in dying because he or she is in too much pain. Does the member not agree that with the dangers of not having a bill or any safeguards in place as of June 6, it should at least make him consider voting in favour of the bill, flawed as he may believe it to be?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question because it shows that there is actually a lot of agreement between many people across the way and on different sides of the debate.

As he is a new member, I would like to point this out. He said that the Liberal health minister is mandated to work with the provinces and territories. Working with them is not the same as delivering an immediate \$3 billion into palliative care.

As the bill sits today, it is extremely flawed. As was brought up by my NDP colleague, why are the Liberals taking this approach? During my speech today, I asked whether the Liberals had asked for an extension from the Supreme Court. I have heard about many decisions coming from the Supreme Court, and I believe that we can ask for that. It realizes the work that we are doing.

This is not something that needs to be rushed. I think we have to do the best we can to get things right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased with the tenor of this morning's conversation on such an important subject. We seem to be embracing the propriety, elegance, and nobility of our role.

I cannot understand why the government is trying to rush this when it is such a sensitive matter. Barging around with such a sensitive issue like a bull in a china shop is a bad idea.

People are waiting for a clear decision. Ideas have changed. It has been suggested that the government request an extension from the Supreme Court. Why not do that? That is what should be done. We need time to think this through.

As a Quebecker, I find it so sad that we are fighting about this and looking after our own interests on an issue that should inspire the utmost respect. My provincial government counterparts and the people of Quebec made their decision after giving the matter a lot of thought.

My colleague says that it is about this or that, but ultimately, is this not about the suffering of the sick?

Government Orders

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, my NDP colleague who is from Quebec rightfully said that this issue was thought out through different governments, and all members in the House had time to listen to their constituents. I believe that they had six years of debate in Quebec.

This truly is a matter of life and death. It would change the social structure of our country.

The member is correct. The Supreme Court gave an artificial deadline. It came up with a date. However, the date can change.

We are doing our work in the House. Why does the government insist on rushing forward so that the voices of my constituents, my colleagues' constituents, and those of the backbench Liberal MPs, cannot be heard? Canadians deserve that their members of Parliament be heard in this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to participate in today's debate on such a core issue.

[English]

I would like to start by acknowledging the incredibly hard work and the non-partisan spirit of all of the member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I want to thank the deputy chairs, the hon. member for Provencher and the hon. member for Victoria, as well as the members of the committee, the hon. members for St. Albert—Edmonton, Niagara Falls, West Nova, St. Catharines, York South—Weston, Mississauga—Erin Mills, and Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam for their ability to work together in harmony. Even when we had an area where many people fundamentally disagreed and held true to very solid convictions, views and beliefs, we were able to work together in a non-partisan way and agree on 16 amendments to the bill before us.

It is true that not every member of our committee got everything they wanted. In fact, most of us did not get most of what we wanted, but what we did have was harmonious and agreeable debate, which should be an example to all of us in the House as to how parliamentarians should conduct themselves.

I now will talk about the bill itself, why I strongly support the adoption of the bill, and I want to put this in context. We are at a point where the Supreme Court delay is June 6. I will not attribute fault to anyone as to how we got here, but we only have a very short time to pass the bill. The hon. member previously asked why we would not ask the court for another delay. The court made it very clear, when we got our last four months delay of their original deadline, that it expected us to move forward and adopt legislation by June 6.

It does not mean that we could not ask again, but all of us should know that where the court ever grants a delay a second time, which is extremely unusual, it relates to an absolute inability of Parliament to get a law through. Therefore, I would ask everyone to consider what situation will we be in if we have no law on June 6? We will have no safeguards in place.

The current court decision that requires judicial review of an application for medically-assisted dying will expire on June 6. This will mean that no waiting period will be required. There will be no requirement for independent witnesses to somebody requesting medically-assisted death. There will be no requirement of a second opinion by a physician or a nurse practitioner that somebody meets the qualification of grievous and/or irremediable illness.

I would ask all of my colleagues on that side of the House, certainly within the Conservative Party, to consider the situation we will be in if we have no bill. It will not be a pretty situation. We will have absolutely no safeguards to ensure that those requesting medical assistance in dying truly have a grievous and/or irremediable medical condition. It is very serious.

I also want to talk about why we are here. My NDP colleague referred to the Alberta Court of Appeal. That explains to me all the more why we need safeguards and a law in place by June 6. We had a decision where a psychological patient who was not terminally ill, who had a short consultation with a psychiatrist lasting less than five minutes to evaluate her competence, was able to request medical assistance in dying and had it affirmed by the Court of Appeal. It is not true to say, as my colleague did, that it said the law was invalid. It was not looking at the current proposed law. It was looking at, and trying to interpret, the Carter decision by the Supreme Court the same way we all are.

My view is, as parliamentarians, we need to tell the court what principles we want to put forward, what safeguards we want to put forward so courts will look at the will of Parliament as opposed to doing what all of us are now trying to do and guess what the Supreme Court meant in the Carter decision.

I also want to point out that we should act cautiously here. Canada will only be the ninth jurisdiction in the world to allow medical assistance in dying. In the vast majority of these jurisdictions, the only people who can avail themselves of medical assistance in dying are people who are near the end of life, people in the U.S. who have six months to live, or people in Colombia who are near death. Only three jurisdictions in the world, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, allow people to ask for their lives to be taken when they are not terminal.

• (1035)

The Supreme Court in Carter clearly contemplated a situation where we could not quite match section 7 and have section 7 compliance if we put in an end date. As a safeguard, we said that it had to be "reasonably foreseeable". It is not perfect, but it is far better than having no requirement whatsoever that death be reasonably foreseeable.

In committee, we considered the things that were missing from the bill that we would have liked to have seen in it. By consensus, we added conscience rights for physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists. We stated that under the bill nobody would be obliged to provide physician assistance in dying. In the preamble, we referred back to section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience, to make it clear that we did not intend for anyone to be coerced into doing this.

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We also added palliative care to the bill, which is important. I referred to this in my previous question.

We also inserted protections for people who might also be associated with the act, for example, social workers and therapists.

We required that death certificates include medical assistance in dying as being the reason for death as well as the primary cause of the disease that led to that.

While everybody did not receive exactly what they wanted, we have a far better solution than what we otherwise might have had in this situation where we would have no legislation and no guidance to the courts on what Parliament truly wanted.

[*Translation*]

My NDP colleague talked about what happened in Quebec. I am a Quebec MP too. What happened in Quebec is completely different from what we are dealing with as federal legislators.

It took Quebec six years to reach a consensus on the medical side. However, our situation is different because a Supreme Court ruling tells us that a certain percentage of people have a constitutional right to suicide without state interference if they are in a particular physical condition. The federal government would be irresponsible if it did not meet the Supreme Court's deadline.

[*English*]

We do not have six years to craft this consensus. To be honest, I wish we had more time at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We tried our best. We listened to over 40 witnesses. They told us many different things, because there are so many different views in Canadian society on this bill. We spent many hours on clause-by-clause. We considered over 100 amendments. We had three full days and nights of meetings. Had we had more time to work together as colleagues of all three parties to draft legislation like we were trying to do on the fly, we possibly could have done better. That does not mean, however, that after June 6 we cannot improve the bill.

One of the things we inserted in the bill was a requirement that the Minister of Health work on these studies, especially on advance directives, and this should start within six months.

We need to be cautious with respect to advance directives. There are only three countries that allow advance directives and two of them only allow them for somebody who is in an irreversible coma. The idea that we should suddenly allow medical directives in advance for dementia patients, without any proper review or safeguards or understanding of the issue, to me is faulty. We have the opportunity in the future to correct any flaws that we see now in the bill.

I will use my last 30 seconds to try to prevail upon my colleagues in the House. I am sure many of my colleagues wished the Supreme Court had never rendered the Carter decision, which would have left the House with more latitude, but we are where we are. There is going to be medically assisted dying in Canada after June 6. The only question is whether it will be with no safeguards, with doctors and nurse practitioners trying to interpret Carter, or will it be with the clear safeguards that we have in Bill C-14. For me, the clear safeguards in Bill C-14 are the far better choice.

• (1040)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that our hon. colleague across the way has used words “on the fly” and “we have had three full days” of discussions. The House has debated the issue of pipelines longer than we are debating one of the most fundamental and important pieces of legislation of this Parliament, or those before us, and of those moving forward. We are dealing with life and death.

I am sure my hon. hon. colleague did not mean to say that good enough was good enough. When we are dealing with life and death, the government has done everything in its power to stall the debate, earlier this week and throughout the whole process. It is unacceptable.

Is good enough good enough when we are dealing with life and death?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, my hon. friend across clearly misinterpreted what I said. When I talked about bipartisanship, I meant bipartisanship, and that question was not really bipartisan. It was accusing one side.

I could just as easily stand here and say that the previous government should have acted earlier, but I will not do that because I have no way of knowing why it did not. Nor do I agree with the premise that we wanted to not have debate.

The real question is not good enough is good enough. I believe this is a good bill. Do I think it could have been more to my liking if I had drafted every word myself? Of course. I think I am a great drafter. However, what I know is that this bill is much better than having no safeguards in place as of June 6, when the Supreme Court decision in Carter comes into force. We cannot ignore that there is a court decision.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, at second reading, I was quite inclined to agree with some of the arguments members put forward on the need for a federal law. I agree that ultimately we need to have a federal law, but we need to proceed cautiously.

However, the way the bill has been handled, ultimately having a bill that we already have good reason to believe is not going to meet the constitutional test, is of great concern to me. It would be worthwhile to take the little time we have, because of time allocation, and try to make the bill better.

The member has identified two problems. One is the upcoming deadline and the other is the lack of certainty about what the Carter decision actually means. There are a number of experts who are saying that the bill does not meet this test, and I take that very seriously.

Government Orders

We have called on the government to refer the bill to the Supreme Court. That would solve both problems. It could submit the legislation to the court, ask for a review and an opinion on the bill, as well as an extension for Parliament to take that opinion of the Supreme Court back, and then continue the debate with certainty from the Supreme Court about what exactly it meant in Carter.

Why will the government not send it to the Supreme Court and ask for more time to have deliberations on this in light of the Supreme Court's opinion?

• (1045)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, this is very interesting because I see some members who are completely against medical assistance in dying to some extent agreeing with the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona. This is the real problem. To me, the court of appeal decision in Alberta is exactly the reason why we need to have a law and safeguards in place, because it allowed a psychiatric patient who was not terminal to have medical assistance in dying.

The court needs guidance from Parliament. It needs Parliament to tell the court that this is not what we want, that we need to ensure these safeguards are in place and that this is the category of people who are on a path to death who are entitled to medical assistance in dying. If Parliament does not do that, then we are simply allowing the courts to dictate to Parliament exactly what the rules are. That is not what the court even contemplated. The court told us it expected us to set out a law and said that it would give great deference to it.

Therefore, I do not agree that this law is unconstitutional. However, by us acting and making clear what our intentions are, we have a far greater chance of the Supreme Court listening to the will of Parliament.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I sit here and look up in the gallery, I notice some of our finest young Air Cadets who have just walked in, and I would like to acknowledge them today.

I will talk about four issues that I have with the process and with the current legislation. I would like to bring up the notwithstanding clause, compelling, deeming, and a free vote.

I will start with the notwithstanding clause.

I think a lot of us, especially on this side, are a little frustrated that the Supreme Court struck down the law of the land and basically said that it was not adequate to deal with this particular issue. I would argue that this House represents over 30 million Canadians. We are the ones who make the laws in this country. I think we need to remind the courts of that.

Certainly, the courts are challenged to uphold the laws that we write in this place, but when I see the wringing of hands on the other side that we are down to a deadline which is so imminent, I would like to remind those members that we are the body that makes the laws, not the Supreme Court.

I would also like to talk about “compelling”. I will read an amendment proposed by a colleague of mine:

(7.1) It is recognized that the medical practitioner, nurse practitioner, pharmacist or other health care institution care provider, or any such institution, is free to refuse to provide direct or indirect medical assistance in dying.

It sounds pretty practical to me. It goes on:

(7.2) No medical practitioner, nurse practitioner, pharmacist or other healthcare institution care provider, or any such institution, shall be deprived of any benefit, or be subject to any obligation or sanction, under any law of the Parliament of Canada solely by reason of their exercise, in respect of medical assistance in dying...

I guess what I am getting at is compelling one to cause someone else to die. This was brought up to us by a member of this chamber who is a physician. The member said that the physician is not the individual who would actually perform the action, that often it would be a nurse or some other medical staff who would have to perform the actual act taking a life. This is where I get really concerned.

I was talking with somebody while walking up to the Hill yesterday about my argument on Bill C-14 and the compelling side of things. He was actually supportive of making physicians and nurses perform the action of ending someone's life, regardless of what their moral beliefs are, regardless of what their religion is, etc., and that deeply concerns me.

As my hon. colleague in the NDP just mentioned, without bringing this issue to the Supreme Court, if we are going to put in amendments without getting the court's sign-off, my concern is that some practitioner who refused to enact an order to put somebody out of their misery and end their life would have to go before the Supreme Court. The practitioner would have to go through the legal expense and all that grief just to stand up for his or her beliefs, because the legislation does not adequately protect those individuals. It is a huge concern for me and my constituents.

I have talked about deeming before in this place, but I do not think I did a good job the first time in explaining what “deeming” really is and what it gets to.

This is on pages 12 and 13 of Bill C-14, and it is in relation to the Pension Act. I will read the actual clause:

(4) For the purposes of this Act, if a member of the forces receives medical assistance in dying, that member is deemed to have died as a result of the illness, disease or disability for which they were determined to be eligible to receive that assistance, in accordance with paragraph 241.2(3)(a) of the Criminal Code.

On the following page, there is clause 7, which references members of the forces, and it is very similar in what it is expressing.

My deep concern is that when a forces member or a veteran is somehow in tough times financially, it may become an option for the person as a way to get his or her family out of a financial burden by making the ultimate decision and ending his or her life. The fact is that it is not an option today, but this will make it an option in the future. This deeply concerns me.

• (1050)

Then, what of life insurance and what of other documents that relate to illness? What of those? Are they going to be similarly worded, that this would somehow encourage a member or a veteran to take that path?

Government Orders

Last, I would like to talk about free votes. On this side, we were asked about this a lot after the last Parliament. We were asked about how many free votes Conservatives had, and how many free votes the other parties had. When we were on that side, there were over 200 free votes, almost too many to count. We were actually given the true choice to make up our minds in this place. I think for the Liberals at that time they had around 20 free votes, roughly, because there were a few who stood to oppose different things. For the NDP, there was one.

What causes me more concern is that some of these motions have already been voted on in this House. All we have seen on the other side is one to zero in opposition of a particular motion. It concerns me that free votes are not really occurring, and that those members are being whipped into supporting a particular motion.

I say that in a challenging way. I do not say that as a way to say that the government needs to stay there. I think it is a challenge to the Liberals especially across the way to really hold free votes on this. We know there is a bunch of members on the other side with different issues of conscience with this bill. I would challenge the government to really stick to its principles of open and accountable government, sunny ways, etc., with this particular bill.

As my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George has said, this is going to be the defining piece of legislation that comes out of this Parliament. What it is going to look like in the future is going to affect us, our kids, their kids, and well into the future. It needs to be done right.

As a member from the NDP said, we need to make sure that this law is going to hold up in the Supreme Court. It would be wise to have a conversation with the Supreme Court about this particular legislation, with the amendments, and have the court come back and tell us what would hold up and what would not hold up. Short of that, this is just a simple exercise which is taking up a bunch of time, and the legislation will need to be changed all over again.

That is all I have to say. We put together some amendments. I have mentioned a few of my colleague's amendments. There is nothing strange in our amendments. There is nothing that is beyond what is expected by the Canadian public. They are about freedom of choice, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and all the rest of it.

Ultimately, we want Canadians to be free to make that decision, but we also do not want medical practitioners to be forced into making a decision that goes completely against those freedoms. I will end with this. I referred earlier to a medical practitioner in this place, and to a very compassionate argument about being forced into the position of possibly having to end someone's life against that physician's will. I do not want to see any medical doctor, nurse, anybody have to perform that action when they do not want to do it because of their beliefs.

It is a slippery slope, as many have said. I am deeply concerned about it. I hope the government side will think long and hard about pushing this legislation through without due process.

• (1055)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the notwithstanding clause. I am always a little nervous about telling someone that their

rights temporarily do not matter. It is something that I do not find terribly helpful.

The member said that he wants to make sure that anything that happens is safe from future Supreme Court decisions. I wonder why he thinks that matters, if he is willing to use the notwithstanding clause in the first place.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Speaker, it is simply two different situations.

We have a law that was sufficient all the way up until last year when the Supreme Court decided that it was not. That was the premise at the start of my conversation.

The following three points were made, that if the government is going to proceed without going through the notwithstanding clause process, then we would go through the rest.

I will just inform the member across the way that on a plane ride home from Ottawa to Vancouver, I sat next to a Supreme Court justice of the appellate court. I asked how we could have a check on them. Canadians have a check on us through elections and feedback letters. He said that there is a mechanism to check on them, and it is called the notwithstanding clause.

Clearly that is our way to check the courts, and to have our say in that body. We need to seriously consider it in this matter.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the member mentioned, I think there are grave concerns among health care professionals, not just physicians, but nurses, young residents, and others who would be compelled and quite frankly, ordered on an order paper to participate in this act.

Currently the legislation as outlined really does not provide protection for those who choose not to participate and that is not just about physicians. It is about nurses, young Canadians who have become residents, and Canadians who are participating in the health care field.

I would like the member's thoughts on how those individuals could be protected, because right now the legislation protects one group of health care professionals, but does not treat the other groups fairly.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Speaker, absolutely, as I referred to, an amendment was put forward by one of our colleagues, with respect to proposed subsections (7.1) and (7.2). Some of these positions are not protected, as the member stated. We are talking about not just medical practitioners, but we are talking about pharmacists and any kind of health institution that would allow this act to be performed within it, faith-based health care providers.

It is a wide-open door as to who can be drawn into this situation. Without sufficient protections, I am deeply concerned that all of these groups will be wrapped up into this legislation and be forced to do something against their beliefs.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about my colleague's conclusion that Parliament should use the notwithstanding clause. I come from the province of Quebec. When I was 18 years old, the province of Quebec used the notwithstanding clause to ban English from commercial signs and it enraged me and it enraged our community.

For me, no matter how passionately the hon. member feels about a subject, the use of the notwithstanding clause to tell a group of people who feel that their rights have been vindicated by the Supreme Court that suddenly they no longer have that right is not what the hon. member really should consider to be a fair and just solution.

Could the hon. member look at that in light of the experience that I lived in Quebec and please reconsider his views?

• (1100)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Speaker, I will clarify one thing. I finished with talking about a free vote from the government. That was my conclusion. The opposite side talks about open and accountable government and a new way of doing business here in Ottawa. I question whether free votes are really occurring on the other side, just by the numbers that oppose any government legislation. Usually on our side we have anywhere from one to 15 honest free votes in the House. I would challenge the other side to have a free vote on this on their side—

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are. Don't worry about it. We are.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I know there is diversity—

An hon. member: On charter rights he said you would vote as a caucus.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I stand to recognize Asian Heritage Month and the endless contributions that people of Asian descent have made to Canada's social and economic fabric. We are who we are as a nation because of those contributions. Our rich Canadian Asian heritage comes from people of Chinese, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Vietnamese, Pakistani, Tamil, and Indian heritage, and many more.

Special events can be found year round and have become a part of who we are as a nation. For example, I think of Chinese New Year, the many summer Filipino fiestas, or our fall Diwali celebrations. We should all take pride in our Asian community as it continues to grow in many ways, and in a very real way, how it has become a part of the very fabric of our society and who we are as a nation.

To quote the Prime Minister, we are stronger not in spite of our diversity but because of our diversity. Our Asian Canadian community helps make Canada one of the best countries of the world.

* * *

WESTERN HOCKEY LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to congratulate the Brandon Wheat Kings on clinching the Western Hockey League championship in game five last week in Seattle.

Statements by Members

I know all of western Manitoba is proud of its Wheat Kings as they have played with grit and determination throughout this whole season. Under the tremendous leadership of Kelly McCrimmon, these upstanding young men are role models both on and off the ice. I would also like to wish them great success in the Memorial Cup starting tonight in Red Deer, Alberta. This will be the sixth time the Wheat Kings, in their franchise history, have competed in this national championship, and I know all Manitobans will be cheering them on.

On behalf of the great constituents of Brandon—Souris, go Wheaties, go.

* * *

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand today to pay special tribute to the recently opened Richmond campus of Trinity Western University.

As many know, Trinity Western University provides a high-quality, values-based education for its students, and I am pleased that TWU has chosen Richmond as its newest location. TWU Richmond kindly invited me to attend its grand opening last September and again in March for an official visit where Professor Calvin Townsend allowed me to teach his introduction to political thinking class. I would like to thank Professor Townsend for the kind opportunity.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Trinity Western University to Richmond and to extend to its faculty and students my best wishes for success.

* * *

[Translation]

TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, as the fine weather returns, Trois-Rivières is more eager than ever to welcome tourists from across the country and around the world.

Whether they come by car, by boat, or by plane, they will get a warm welcome from our tourism partners, who have the necessary measures in place to accommodate them. We have something to offer everyone, no matter their interests.

For festival lovers, DansEncore, FestiVoix, and our blues music festival await you. Sports fans can look forward to the Trois-Rivières Grand Prix and the International Canoe Classic. Performing arts enthusiasts will be entertained by everything and everyone from Cirque du Soleil to Céline Dion, at venues like Amphithéâtre Cogeco, Salle J.-Antonio-Thompson, or the Satyre cabaret. I am sorry, but Céline Dion is sold out.

For people of faith or those seeking spirituality, Our Lady of the Cape Shrine welcomes pilgrimages and hosts the Festival of the Assumption. Trois-Rivières is also home to a wide range of museums, making it a hub of history and culture.

I hope that anyone and everyone who is passing through the heart of Quebec will come and experience the warm welcome that Trois-Rivières has to offer.

Statements by Members

[English]

WHITBY SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last month the Whitby Sports Hall of Fame welcomed its 2016 inductees: Jason Pottinger, a two-time Grey Cup winner; David Branch, the commissioner of the Ontario Hockey League; and Gavin Prout, a player with the National Lacrosse League.

I am pleased to rise today to draw attention to their outstanding contributions. We know that participation in sports helps our young people build character, improve confidence, and commit to healthy, active lifestyles. Each inductee is an example to young people in our community and across the country.

I congratulate Jason, David, and Gavin, for their outstanding achievements, both as sportsmen and community leaders. I also want to welcome the 2 VandenBos Whitby air cadets to Ottawa today. They all represent the town of Whitby in a very positive way and I thank them for their service.

* * *

• (1105)

FISHERIES CONSERVATION

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, on May 7, I was honoured to attend the Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement's annual banquet to celebrate their fisheries conservation work. I am proud to support the excellent research, education, and conservation work this organization does.

As an angler and fisheries biologist myself, I am very pleased to support those who are dedicated to the conservation of the valuable fish resources in our many beautiful water bodies. Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement works tirelessly to conserve and enhance game fish population through education, research, and conducting on-the-ground fisheries enhancement projects. However, the group truly succeeds by incorporating their own love for fishing and conservation into efforts to encourage experienced anglers, young people, and families to explore and experience what our beautiful region has to offer.

It is organizations like this all across the country that do tireless work to ensure we have sustainable fish populations. These are Canada's real environmentalists. I thank them for their efforts.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I concede in this House that Canada stands for reconciliation. The right hon. Prime Minister apologized in the House two days ago with the sincere intention of genuine reconciliation. The *Komagata Maru* incident is a symbol of exclusionary laws and racism. It is a memory that never dies down. This apology by the government and forgiveness by the community will act as a link between past, present, and future.

When the Prime Minister apologized he performed an act of healing. The wounds of history for this ethnic group, which is part of this multicultural Canada, will be healed forever.

Please accept my thanks on behalf of the community. I appreciate this opportunity.

* * *

[Translation]

MONTREAL FAMILY SUPPORT CENTRE

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to talk about an organization that is a credit to my riding, LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, and to the city of Montreal.

Founded in 1991, Station Familles supports young families by providing them with the services, education, and training they need to thrive. The organization is driven by the values of self-respect and respect for others and seeks to enhance parenting skills, while lifting each family member out of isolation.

I am pleased to announce Station Familles will celebrate its 25th anniversary on May 29. I invite everyone to mark the occasion at the big picnic being held at Campbell West Park, in Montreal.

I wish those who make Station Familles a welcoming place much success in the future.

* * *

[English]

TAMIL HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to voice my support for recognizing the month of January as "Tamil Heritage Month".

January is significant to the Tamil community because it includes Thai Pongal and the Tamil harvest festival. It provides an opportunity to showcase the Tamil community's vibrant culture, history, and traditions with fellow Canadians.

Tamil Canadians have overcome tremendous obstacles and have made significant contributions to the growth and prosperity of Canada. The Sri Lankan Tamil community is a model for any refugee community and is one that Canada can be proud of. It is only fitting that Tamil Heritage Month be dedicated to celebrating the Canadian Tamil community's unique cultural life and to recognize its contributions to Canadian society.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Wednesday, the Prime Minister of Canada stood in the House, in Parliament, to apologize for the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914. I was proud to stand with this government as we did the right thing for the South Asian community here in Canada.

For the families and the descendants who came here, this piece of Canada's history is a deeply impactful event. People showed up on Canada's doorstep in need but were refused food and water, kept on a ship for months, and then turned back. That is not the Canada we know and love.

Over the decades following, we have built a reputation as a welcoming, open, diverse country on the world stage. Sikhs in Canada thrived despite the *Komagata Maru* incident. This government showed the community the respect of standing up and apologizing for this tragedy.

I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his leadership in this. This is Canada at our best.

* * *

• (1110)

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize National Police Week, which this year runs from May 15 to 21. Throughout this week, Canadians have the opportunity to connect and engage with their police officers from coast to coast to coast.

We are blessed to live in one of the safest and most livable countries in the world. Our relative safety is a reflection of our values and Canadians' respect for the rule of law. There is perhaps no better reflection of those values than the very special relationship that exists between Canadians in every community and the dedicated men and women of our police services, who each and every day place themselves in harm's way to keep us safe.

It is worth noting this week that there is no other country in the world that has as one of its most enduring national symbols a police officer on a horse. It is a symbol that recognizes the history of the service of the RCMP and officers from police services across Canada, and the critical role they have played and continue to play in upholding the laws and values of our country.

This week, we have the opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding work of the dedicated and courageous police officers who serve us each day. I encourage all Canadians to join me in thanking them for their selfless devotion—

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

The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

* * *

CHILLIWACK VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to some of the remarkable constituents I represent.

In response to the devastating fires in Fort McMurray, Gord VanLaerhoven and others started the “Chilliwack for Fort Mac” initiative. Within 48 hours, our community had banded together to raise \$24,000 in cash and sent four semi-trailers full of donated supplies to the evacuees.

Statements by Members

In response to a rash of violent crime in the downtown core, Amber Short and Emily Sayward organized the Chilliwack Walk for Peace, taking place tonight. As they have said, “Let's remind ourselves...that Chilliwack is a place filled with incredible people who want nothing but the best for their neighbours”.

In both of these examples, people have seen a problem and have decided to take action and become a part of the solution.

I am proud to represent the people of Chilliwack—Hope in the House and salute the efforts of so many to make our communities a better place in which to live.

* * *

IRAN

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam speaker, at the age of 18, I left Iran, in pursuit of my education. I could not have imagined then that one day I would earn the honour and privilege of standing in this House. I am proud to be an Iranian. I am proud to be a Canadian. I bring a unique perspective to the House few before me have. I understand the challenges and aspirations of many Iranian Canadians.

A regime does not define its people, just as the divisive nature of our previous government did not define Canadian values. It is disappointing to witness in the House some of my colleagues' attempts to conflate legitimate questions about the Iranian regime with the proud heritage of Iranian Canadian people.

Canada is better off when engaging with the rest of the world. Indeed, the world is better off when Canada is engaged.

I urge the House to heed the calls of countless Iranian Canadians advocating for reestablishing diplomatic and commercial relationships—

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

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

[Translation]

TROIS-PISTOLES FRENCH IMMERSION SCHOOL

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, where is the oldest French immersion school in Canada? It is in the very beautiful town of Trois-Pistoles, which happens to be in my riding.

Established in 1932, the Centre d'accueil, de développement et de formation en langues de Trois-Pistoles, CADFEL, welcomes about 600 students every year who enrol in one of the many programs that provide language courses at all levels.

Today, I would like to recognize the contribution of André Beaudin, the school's director, who just received the Award of Merit from Western University, with which his school is affiliated. The award recognizes his exceptional contribution to the development of this school, his leadership, and the achievement of excellence in teaching.

Oral Questions

It is a positive experience for those youth who participate. One of the school's instructors, Nicholas Moroz, is from Ontario and is a former student. He liked the experience so much that he never left, and he now lives there with his family.

Although I have tried, the school is still not in the registry of schools that MPs and public servants can attend for French as a second language training. However, that should not stop them from having this experience—

• (1115)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (The Assistant Deputy Speaker): Order. The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

* * *

[English]

WEST KELOWNA WARRIORS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, when the riding boundaries changed and Penticton was no longer in the area I represented, some local hockey fans suggested I would never again be able to boast about a major junior hockey achievement in this place.

I am proud to announce those critics were wrong.

Not only have the West Kelowna Warriors defeated the Penticton Vees in the post-season, they have won the BCHL title, qualified for the RBC Cup national junior championships, and tomorrow will play against the Brooks Bandits in the semi-final. This is an amazing achievement for a group of young leaders who play with their hearts and refuse to quit.

I ask the House to join with me in recognizing the success of the West Kelowna Warriors, and all the teams that are competing at the RBC Cup in Lloydminster. I wish the best of success to these young athletes.

I hope all members have a safe and enjoyable long weekend, and of course, happy birthday to Victoria.

* * *

MISSISSAUGA ARTS COUNCIL AWARDS

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I present to the House today a great achievement for my city.

Yesterday, Mississauga celebrated the arts and local artists through the Mississauga Arts Council's 22nd annual MARTY Awards. Artists were awarded for visual, literary, media, and performance arts.

The Mississauga Arts Council began in 1994 as a small arts festival and has expanded this honorarium to a prestigious celebration in the community. Art is the heart and soul of any community, and Mississauga is full of heart and soul. I congratulate MAC for being that driving force and for its achievements.

I would also like to give my personal congratulations to the recipients of last night's MARTY Awards, including my constituents, selfie man Randy Persaud and watercolour queen Fatima Fasih.

I also thank Mayor Crombie and her husband, Brian, for their undying devotion to the arts community. I am proud to have such an organization in my city.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board. It relates to a situation many public servants are facing, including people from all our ridings. Thousands of employees and contractors are caught, making tough decisions for their families because they have been going for weeks, sometimes months, without a paycheque.

What is the minister doing in order to ensure these hard-working public servants and contractors are getting paid in short order?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it has been decades since the pay system was modernized. Our government is working to have a pay system that supports the hard-working members of the civil service. There are a few glitches on the way. They are being attended to as quickly as possible, and we will have a system that pays accurately and effectively in short order.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, Motion No. 6 was the most anti-democratic proposal that this Parliament has ever seen. It removed all power from the opposition to hold the government to account. The motion would have given control of the House to the cabinet, and it gave us a glimpse of what the Liberals are prepared to do when they do not get their own way. They have shown Canadians that they cannot be trusted with the power that has been given to them.

When it comes to changing the way we vote, now more than ever, Canadians need to have the final say. Will they commit to holding a referendum before they make any changes to our electoral system?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is great to see you in the chair on this wonderful Friday.

I would like to remind the House that any changes we make to the electoral system will only proceed if Canadians deem it legitimate and if we have their consent. We will work with all members of the House to ensure that the voices of those Canadians with disabilities and exceptionalities, new Canadians, indigenous persons, and those who are often marginalized are included in this important conversation.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, they just cannot bring themselves to say the word “referendum”.

Oral Questions

The right to have the final say on how we vote belongs to Canadians, not to the Liberal elite. They do not get to unilaterally choose what system of democracy we operate under.

They have already rigged the deck on the electoral reform committee, giving themselves a majority, when a majority of Canadians do not even support them. They do not have a legitimate mandate to change Canada's electoral system. Will they drop all these heavy-handed, anti-democratic tactics and assure us that Canadians will have the final say through a referendum?

• (1120)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, be assured that we will go out of our way to ensure that Canadians have the first and the final say in how we go about our electoral reform priority.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government is once again showing its arrogance by proposing that a committee stacked with Liberals analyze the electoral reform.

Why does the government want to control our democracy when a referendum on this topic is the most transparent approach?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, during the last election, we committed to bringing our democratic institutions into the 21st century. We did not intend to predetermine the outcome, as some of my hon. colleagues have. We committed to bringing together a group of elected parliamentarians from all party lines to study the options available and to make a recommendation to the House. We intend to do that. We will deliver on that promise, and I look forward to working with all members of the House to that end.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals are welcome to sing, take selfies, and make public appearances, but they need to respect Canadians' interests.

Why is a committee stacked with Liberals going to destroy democracy when a referendum on electoral reform is the way to go?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not accept the premise of that statement.

In the 21st century, we have many tools available to us that are more inclusive, and are more relevant to the realities of the people who live in this diverse nation of ours. We intend to employ those tools. We intend to reach out to those Canadians who do not normally engage in this process.

This may not be okay with the members opposite, but that is our way of ensuring that Canadians in 21st century Canada are included in this important conversation.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NEB's report on Kinder Morgan is the direct result of a

broken environmental review system. The public was shut out, cross-examinations were banned, and first nations were not consulted. Even the NEB admits that there will be significant impact from oil tankers on killer whales and indigenous rights; no kidding. Yet the Liberals are relying on the Conservatives' system with a thin coat of new paint for this process.

How is a four-month road trip supposed to make up for Conservative dismantling of environmental reviews? Why are the Liberals validating the Conservative approach?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we need to rebuild trust in our environmental assessment process, and that is what we have been doing. We have introduced interim principles where we are consulting and engaging with indigenous peoples, where we are making decisions based on facts and science, and where we are considering the impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Minister of Natural Resources announced a separate process to review this project, and we will be going forward in this manner.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): On access to information too, Madam Speaker, the Liberals are the same as the old government. The Liberal government routinely blocks requests on issues like the KPMG tax havens, and the Liberals are actually looking to give their ministers the power to block any request. That is even worse than the Conservatives. The Information Commissioner is calling the Liberal approach "a mirage".

The Liberal government has shut down debate and moved to strip the rights of MPs. It seems it has taken question period lessons from Paul Callandra.

Why are Liberals' now trying to make government secrecy even worse?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for the very first time since 1983, we are modernizing and updating access to information to ensure openness, transparency, and accountability in government. We are seeking ways to make sure information is more accessible to Canadians while balancing that with our responsibility to protect certain information in the public interest.

The committee is studying just this as part of our extensive consultations with the public on access to information, and we look forward to its report.

Oral Questions

● (1125)

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals promised major reforms to access to information. They promised to give the commissioner order-making power, namely the power to force the government to make information public.

However, the Liberals also want to give the minister veto power to say no to the commissioner's decisions. In short, nothing is going to change. The government says that it wants to be transparent. It needs to stop pretending.

Will the government give up this nonsensical idea?

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are consulting Canadians and parliamentarians on the renewal of the access to information system. The government has already eliminated the fees associated with access to information requests, except for the initial \$5 fee.

We also asked the departments to provide their answers to requests in an easy-to-use format. We look forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders and parliamentarians.

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PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is starting to look like another broken promise.

Let us now talk about another mismanaged file: medical assistance in dying. The government keeps talking about the Supreme Court's June 6 deadline as justification for limiting debate and refusing to work with the opposition. That is funny, because the government does not seem to be too concerned with abiding by the ruling itself. It is irresponsible to introduce a bill that a number of experts, and now the Alberta Court of Appeal, have deemed unconstitutional.

How can the government defend Bill C-14, when the bill does not comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to point out that the Alberta Court of Appeal did not rule on Bill C-14.

In the Carter decision, the Supreme Court of Canada stated that Parliament was in the best position to design a framework for medical assistance in dying, including a series of stringent safeguards. That is what we have done.

The decision by the Alberta Court of Appeal highlighted the need to have a law in place by June 6.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beauport—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Madam Speaker, this government does not respect what Canadians have to say.

When a government wants to change a the basic rules of democracy, everyone should have a say. All options should be on the table, and Canadians should not be denied an opportunity to say yes or no. However, the minister is refusing to listen to reason, and her answers insult the intelligence of Canadians.

Will the Minister of Democratic Institutions step out of her bubble and hold a national referendum—

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

The hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions.

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the former government decided to make significant changes to the Fair Elections Act, did it consult with Canadians? Did it consult with parliamentarians? Did it include the voices of those Canadians who would be most affected by those changes? It did not.

We will not take any lessons from the former government. We will ensure that we learn from its mistakes and bring our electoral system into the 21st century in a responsible and inclusive manner.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beauport—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Madam Speaker, our electoral system and the right to vote do not belong to this government or this Prime Minister.

No government in Canada has tried to impose a new electoral system without a referendum since the 1950s. The last time a government tried to do that, politicians manipulated the system. They paid for it, because Canadians punished them.

Will this government seek the consent of all Canadians before changing—

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

The hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions.

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it appears that the member opposite may need a reminder of historical events. In 1872, Canada adopted the secret ballot. In 1918, women began to be extended the franchise. In 1920, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer was established. In 1960, voting rights were extended to indigenous persons. In 1970, the franchise was extended to those under the age of 21.

All of these changes occurred without a referendum. It took leadership. It took a willingness of all members to work together. Let us repeat history and do this right.

● (1130)

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, every other time that Canadian governments have made changes, not just adding in little changes, they have tried to use the referendum, and it did not work at the ballot box. They used a ballot box question. Ontario, B.C. and P.E.I. have all tried it.

Oral Questions

This is fundamentally changing the system. The people of Bow River riding, and right across Canada, deserve a say in making such a crucial change to the democratic process. Can the Liberals explain why they will be making these changes unilaterally without first taking it to a referendum?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the members opposite believe that extending the right to vote to women is a little change, it appears we are on completely different pages. If the members opposite believe that extending the right to indigenous persons is a little change, we need to have a different—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I want to remind the members to keep the heckling down. When the minister has the floor, respect should be afforded to her to finish her response. We all want to hear what she has to say. If it continues, someone will end up losing a question because we are losing time.

The minister still has 16 seconds to finish, but I see that she is done.

The hon. member for Bow River.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I might see things simply. However, the constituents in my riding are very smart and intelligent. They believe that when considering change, we should evaluate current practices versus change. Can the Liberals explain why their options do not include first past the post? Why can Canadians not have this choice in a referendum?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the system we currently have was inherited from the 19th century. We currently exist in a multi-party democracy. We currently exist in a Canada—

An hon. member: We have the strongest democracy in the world.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I want to remind the member for St. Albert to pay some respect to the House. Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Speaker, during the last election, over 60% of Canadians voted for parties that were promising electoral change.

Why did Canadians choose this? Our current system is inherited from the 19th century. Canada is one of only three OECD countries that operates under the first past the post system. It is time to modernize.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, it might occur to the minister that those three OECD countries are also the oldest and most stable continuing democracies in the world.

The minister has been misleading this place by citing referendum turnouts at the provincial level. The fact is, in 1992, the last time we had a national referendum, 72% of Canadians voted, versus 63% in the last three federal elections. In Ontario and B.C., voter participation in the electoral reform referendum was higher than in the general elections.

Why has the minister been misleading this House?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us talk about the facts.

The Ontario referendum and the B.C. referendum did not include nearly half of the population of those provinces. I understand that is okay for the member opposite. I understand that the voices of half of Canadians who will be affected by these changes are not relevant to the member opposite.

That is not the way we do things. That is not what we promised Canadians. We will ensure that we embark on this process in an inclusive and responsible manner, unlike the members opposite.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, that non-answer reminds us of why Chantal Hébert characterized this minister's responses as "asinine", "disingenuous", "discredited", "farcical", and "[insulting] our intelligence".

In fact, the voter participation in those provincial referenda was higher than in the general elections. People are more prone to vote on the quasi-constitutional nature of their electoral system; 72% of Canadians voted in the Charlottetown Accord.

Why does the minister want to exclude the voices of millions and millions of Canadians?

• (1135)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, is 50% voter turnout okay?

We have a philosophical disagreement about our responsibility and the opportunities that exist for this Parliament to modernize our electoral system.

Those who do not engage traditionally in the electoral process, like young people, whose voter turnout has been dwindling for the past 20 years, with the last election being the exception, deserve to be included in this conversation.

The member opposite may not believe that, but we do.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, steel mills in Regina and across Canada have been hit by layoffs.

The Minister of Public Services and Procurement told the committee that just 19% of the steel in the new Champlain Bridge will be made in Canada. She could not tell us whether Canadian or offshore steel will be used in the Alaska Highway, the Alexandria Bridge, or other major federal infrastructure projects.

What will the government do to encourage the procurement of Canadian steel to support good jobs in our communities?

Oral Questions

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is committed to open and transparent competitions that balance the socio-economic needs of the government and the country with those of the industry that we have in this country.

We are committed to looking at that and understanding what the best balance in those procurements will be.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, steelworkers in Hamilton and other communities across Canada have suffered from the economic downturn and foreign takeovers, and also from the unfair competition with subsidized foreign steel.

This week the U.S. imposed a fivefold increase in tariffs on Chinese cold-rolled flat steel, due to unfair subsidies and dumping.

However, in Canada all we get are consultations. When will we see real action from the Liberals to stop steel dumping and protect good Canadian jobs?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very seized with the issue, and very much share these concerns about Chinese steel dumping.

I have been consulting actively, including most recently in Arequipa, Peru, where I was at the APEC trade ministers meeting. We are working hard, particularly with our EU and U.S. counterparts on this issue.

It is an urgent matter for Canadians, and we are working toward a solution.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the National Energy Board recommended the Kinder Morgan pipeline project for approval.

It is a clear statement that building pipelines in Canada is in the best interests of Canadians. The Liberals' own environmental assessment said that oil is going to be extracted somewhere, so it should be right here in Canada.

Will the Liberals accept the science-based study of the National Energy Board and approve this project, and all the economic benefits that come with the Kinder Morgan project?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we said and we promised Canadians, we would put together a ministerial panel, which is one action that our government is taking to ensure major resource projects carry the confidence of Canadians.

We have asked that the panel members travel the pipeline route to hear from and talk to indigenous peoples and local communities, and report back to the minister by November 1, for a decision on or before December—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, this panel is confusing for everyone, even the parliamentary secretary. The panel is going to reconvene with those who have already been consulted.

The evidence clearly shows that this project can go ahead safely and responsibly. How can three people be expected to have a more thorough process than a process that was going on for over three years?

What is missing from the arm's-length National Energy Board process that is causing the Liberals to delay this important job-creating project?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in January, the Premier of Alberta spoke positively about our panel and its role of consulting those who believed they were not heard, and its goal of helping to inform the process of getting our natural resources to market sustainably.

We are building bridges and relationships with our indigenous peoples, industry partners, and communities along the project. We look forward to doing that work.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals are deliberately creating instability in the energy sector. Let us hear what experts have said who spoke at the natural resources committee.

The Canadian Energy Pipeline Association said that, "right now it's not clear how they're going to get to the outcomes with the current process. ...it's a bit up in the air."

Suncor said that project delays "increase uncertainty and make investment...more problematic".

Why are the Liberals driving away investment in Canadian energy and creating more uncertainty for this struggling sector?

● (1140)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the member opposite that in addition to the panel, and to ensure that all Canadians have the opportunity to be heard, an online engagement tool will be launched when the panel begins its work in early June. Canadians have asked that their views be heard on these important decisions. We are providing them with an opportunity to do just that.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, pipelines are the safest way to transport energy, contributing \$11.5 billion to our GDP and creating more than 33,000 jobs last year.

Yesterday, the NEB approved the Kinder Morgan pipeline after a very thorough assessment. Meanwhile, the Liberals have introduced redundant review principles, adding more uncertainty to the process and undermining the credibility of Canada's regulatory institutions.

Will the Liberals accept the NEB's expert recommendation and approve the Kinder Morgan pipeline?

Oral Questions

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have received a 39,000 page report from the National Energy Board, and we will review that report. However, we have heard from Canadians that they did not have confidence in the flawed process that has been used over the past 10 years. Indeed, we have committed to ensuring that Canadians have a voice, that our indigenous peoples are consulted in communities along the proposed route.

When that report is received November 1, it will be considered, with a decision on or before December 19.

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TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, this week, we heard more stories of the appalling abuse of temporary foreign workers: people treated like slaves, paid \$2 an hour, having their health care taken away, and deported when they are injured on the job.

It is hard to believe that this is Canada in 2016. While the minister has called this exploitation unacceptable, what we have not seen from the government is a commitment to hearing from migrant workers directly and a plan of action to end the abuse.

When will the government and the minister step up and take action to end the exploitation taking place under her watch?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I share the concerns with the questioner, as does the minister. Certainly the temporary foreign worker program has been a concern. We talked about it in our platform, as did the NDP talk about undertaking a review.

We know that committees are masters of their own destiny. That is why I was surprised as a parliamentary secretary to see that the member, when she had an opportunity to convince the committee to undertake a study, led with EI and not with temporary foreign workers. I suggest that the study go back and encourage those—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Liberal government announced that it would allow the sale of genetically-modified salmon in Canada. To make matters worse, the product will not be labelled.

Ninety per cent of Canadians have said that they want genetically-modified products to be clearly labelled, and salmon producers are concerned that consumers will stop buying salmon altogether if they cannot tell which ones have been genetically modified.

Why is the government ignoring the concerns of both producers and consumers, and allowing the sale of genetically-modified salmon without clear labelling?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are committed to science-based decision making, and will continue to be.

The production of genetically-modified animals is an important issue facing Canada. That is why I have asked the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to examine the issues around genetically-modified animals.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, people often say that we must protect our environment for future generations. An important part of this is to engage with young Canadians to discuss the future of our country and how we can all contribute to lowering our carbon footprint.

Could the Minister of Environment and Climate Change please update the House on the town hall she recently hosted with young Canadians to discuss climate change issues?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, I met with more than 400 students from Magee Secondary School in Vancouver and heard great solutions about how we could reduce our carbon footprint.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Young people know that we all need to work together to protect our planet.

[*English*]

Their feedback will be posted on Canada's climate change website. I encourage all Canadians, including all parliamentarians, to share with us their ideas on how we can address climate change at letstalkclimateaction.ca.

[*Translation*]

Again, that website is www.letstalkclimateaction.ca.

* * *

[*English*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister and President Obama now said that a new softwood lumber agreement would be made within 100 days. Well, the clock is ticking. Time is running out.

Over half of Saskatchewan is forested. Forestry is northern Saskatchewan's largest industry. It generates \$1 billion in forest product sales, \$800 million in exports, and directly employs 4,000 Canadians.

What is the Minister of International Trade doing to keep forestry workers in Saskatchewan employed by securing U.S. market access?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very seized of this issue, and I am personally extremely aware of the softwood lumber issue for Saskatchewan and indeed across Canada.

Oral Questions

This week, I met for one hour with U.S. TR Mike Froman in Arequipa, Peru. I also met with Christy Clark, the premier of B.C., this morning. As we are speaking, our ambassador to the U.S. is meeting again with Ambassador Froman to discuss the issue.

I am pleased to report to the House that a U.S. negotiating team for softwood lumber is coming to Ottawa next week to continue our negotiations.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us see if we can get her to say “seized” one more time.

We are two-thirds of the way through the 100 days and no closer to bringing home a new softwood lumber agreement, regardless of what the Minister of International Trade says.

The Liberals have pitted Canada's small forestry producers against the large producers. They have left them out in the cold. These are the very same large Canadian forestry companies that are growing their U.S. operations, while moving Canadian jobs out of our country.

The Liberals are playing both sides of the border. When will the Liberals start protecting Canadian jobs and bring home a new softwood lumber agreement?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that the previous softwood lumber agreement expired under his government's watch. That is okay with us; we are used to cleaning up the economic messes the Conservatives left for us.

We are working very hard on the softwood lumber agreement. As I have explained, I personally spoke with Mike Froman this week, and negotiators are coming here next week.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, the advisory panel of the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to study northern shrimp allocation is woefully unbalanced and biased. Three of the four panel members are from Newfoundland and Labrador, including Trevor Taylor, a former member of their House of Assembly. In the assembly, he called for any allocation of shrimp in the present and in the near future to be restricted to Newfoundland and Labrador-based interests.

Why did the minister appoint someone with such a clear bias on shrimp allocation to his advisory panel?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am well aware of the importance of the shrimp fishery to those who depend on it. The Northern Shrimp Advisory Committee met on March 3, 2016, to discuss the approach to take on interim quotas and the last in, first out policy.

The ministerial advisory panel is an independent committee that provides advice to the minister on the last in, first out policy. The committee began its public consultations by meeting with stakeholders in Iqaluit on May 10, and the next meeting will be in St.

John's on May 24 and 25. Until we receive the report in June, the last in, first out policy is suspended.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, this panel appears to have been rigged by the Liberals. Where have we seen that before?

In Iqaluit, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated argued against the current northern shrimp policy. Udloriak Hanson is the chief negotiator for that organization. She is also married to Trevor Taylor, one of the panel members.

Trevor Taylor was already biased against the current shrimp policy, and now is clearly in a conflict of interest. Will the minister do the right thing and remove him from his advisory panel today?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I just said, the ministerial advisory panel is an independent panel mandated to advise the minister on the last-in, first-out policy. Once again, the panel met and will meet a number of times over the coming weeks and months.

All stakeholders in this segment of the fishery will have an opportunity to express their views. That is what we on this side of the House do: we consult stakeholders. That is what the minister has been doing from day one. We will continue to consult stakeholders in this segment of the fishery to ensure that we are making properly informed decisions.

* * *

● (1150)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, after decades of talking about pay equity, Canadian women are no closer to achieving it. When we asked if the Liberals would introduce proactive legislation needed to respect women's rights and close the gap, not one single Liberal minister said yes.

Canadian women have waited long enough for their basic rights to be respected. Will the government commit to introducing proactive pay equity legislation within the next six months, yes or no?

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Madam Speaker, having a gender wage gap in Canada in 2016 is unacceptable. Budget 2016 announced a number of important measures that would support women's labour market participation and help address the gender wage gap: the new Canada child benefit, which will be better targeted and more generous than previous benefits; the investment to support early learning and child care; a commitment to explore flexible work arrangements for federally regulated employees. We have supported the appointment of the Special Committee on Pay Equity and are looking forward to reviewing its findings when it tables its report.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, mining companies operating abroad are suspected of violating the most basic human rights of local populations.

The situation is ongoing, but the minister is studying the matter rather than taking action. However, when they were in opposition, the Liberals supported the NDP's proposal to appoint an independent ombudsman with investigative power in order to stop the illegal activities of these Canadian mining companies.

Why is the minister trying to buy time instead of taking action?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

Canadians expect Canadian businesses with operations abroad to respect human rights and workers' rights.

[English]

I am very proud of the work of our mining companies abroad. I met last week with our corporate social responsibility counsellor. We are looking into ways to strengthen protections concerning the work of our mining companies abroad. It is an issue we are concerned with, and we are working with industry and with NGOs on it.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Madam Speaker, during the election campaign, the Liberal Party solemnly promised in writing, and I have the proof in my office, to never force veterans to battle the government in court.

This government is so arrogant that it thinks it can browbeat veterans by increasing a benefit here and there, while not keeping its most important promises. The minister must keep his party's sacred promises.

When will he drop the Equitas lawsuit?

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we understand that veterans felt ignored by the previous government, but we are a brand new government. In budget 2016 we have included \$5.6 billion to increase the benefits for earnings lost, for permanent impairment and disability awards. With these changes alone, we will make tangible improvements in the daily quality of life for veterans.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I hope you will give me an extra moment today to take the time to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs across the floor for her quick response to my question on Friday. Veterans were concerned there was nothing on their website in regard to the budget. By Monday, that was taken care of. I and veterans thank the member.

The Liberal government has broken its campaign promise and forced injured veterans and their advocacy group, Equitas, back into court. However, just two years ago the Liberal member for Charlottetown said that the government must do the right—

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been long appreciative that Canada values its veterans and wants them properly supported.

The hon. member knows that I cannot comment on a specific case, let alone one that is going before the courts. However, let me assure the member that the care and the well-being of our veterans is a huge priority for this government and that the money put forward in budget 2016 is only the first step.

● (1155)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Liberals are reversing their position from two years ago and forcing veterans into court. Again, in the campaign, the Liberals promised not to fight the veterans in court. As late as two weeks ago, one of the Liberal members claimed, in reference to Equitas, that the Government of Canada over the decades had had a social covenant with all veterans and their families.

How can the Liberals justify breaking their covenant with veterans?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the previous government closed offices, laid off staff, and made access to financial benefits for veterans very difficult. We are opening offices, we are hiring staff, and we have put \$5.6 billion into improving the lives of veterans. That is what veterans want, that is what we heard at the stakeholders meetings, and that is what we will do.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, women represent close to half of the workforce in Canada. However, a gender-wage gap still exists. Could the Minister of Status of Women tell the House how this government is working toward reducing this gap and helping women to reach their full potential?

Oral Questions

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Madam Speaker, having a gender-wage gap in Canada in 2016 is unacceptable. We are committed to working with key partners, provinces, and territories to help close the gap through investments in home care and palliative care, expanding compassionate care benefits, and improving access to child care. We will work on increasing the number of women in senior leadership roles and in key growth sectors of the labour market, including the skilled trades.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, for months the Minister of Agriculture has been in discussions with the Manitoba pork producers regarding steps to stop the spread of PED. Our farmers are concerned about the changes to the emergency protocol currently in place, but the minister has refused to intervene. In fact, he has been avoiding this issue completely.

When will the minister stop ignoring our farmers and work with the Manitoba pork producers to find a solution?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is because of the disease in the U.S. that we are always committed to protecting animal health in Canada. That is exactly why CFIA is ensuring that trucks are washed before they come across the border into Canada.

We want to ensure that we can keep the diseases out of this country, with every measure possible, as long as we can.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in order to help official language minority communities continue to flourish we must give them the resources and tools they need. Enhanced access to training in French helps us ensure that people gain the necessary knowledge to take full advantage of the job opportunities that are out there.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development tell the House what the government is doing to improve access to training in their language?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle for the question.

Yesterday, the minister announced \$110,000 in financial assistance to help the Fédération des francophones de Saskatoon renovate the Rendez-vous francophone space. The renovation work has also enabled Collège Mathieu to open a new campus that includes two classrooms and two offices.

Our government promised to protect language rights in Canada for both official languages and that is exactly what we are doing.

[English]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, given the kind of week it has been, would it not be great if on the eve of a long weekend we could all kick back and share a fine Canadian beverage together? Perhaps it could be a B.C. red wine, or a Nova Scotia white, maybe a Saskatchewan craft ale, or how about an artisan spirit from Quebec? But wait; here in Ontario it is still illegal to directly ship these Canadian products.

The recent New Brunswick court ruling could open up our Canadian economy and address these archaic restrictions. Will the Liberals give Canadians a reason to raise their glasses and refer the decision to the Supreme Court?

Madam Speaker, free the beer.

● (1200)

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is supportive of more open domestic markets that promote competitiveness and growth in Canadian businesses. In recent years, the government has worked to facilitate interprovincial trade of alcohol, amending the importation act to remove restrictions on individuals bringing wine, beer, and spirits for personal consumption from one province to another.

I would like to tell the hon. member this. He has the time, I have the beer; let us get together.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada have just authorized the sale of genetically modified salmon. That is the last step before that product ends up on our plates.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which approved the product in 2015, refused to require that the product be labelled. However, we have to be informed in order to make the right choices about what goes on our plates.

How many studies does the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food need just to require the AquAdvantage salmon to be labelled?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's question. I think she is fully aware, and the House is fully aware, that this country is fully committed to science-based decision-making in this area.

That is why I have asked the committee on agriculture and agrifood to examine this issue. This is a new issue. It is important that it go before the agriculture committee and we let the committee do its work.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, many workers are worried about how they will protect their hard-earned pensions if their employer goes bankrupt.

The Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act provides for a review after five years. The former government tabled its report in September 2014 and the committee was supposed to review the act before September 2015.

When will the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act be examined and, more importantly, when will retirees be considered preferred creditors?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is very concerned about the situation of retirees who want to protect their pensions.

We are addressing this issue. We certainly appreciate the question from my hon. colleague. We are going to take a closer look at this issue.

* * *

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, the case of the woman from Manitoba known as Patient No. 2 proves that Bill C-14 needs to be amended.

The patient has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or ALS and meets the criteria set out in the bill. Nevertheless, the doctors who will be providing the care she needs are worried about being taken to court because of the vague definition of reasonably foreseeable natural death.

Will the government adopt the Bloc Québécois amendment, which would remove the threat hanging over health care workers' heads, namely the condition of reasonably foreseeable natural death? I would ask the government to give me a real answer, not just spout rhetoric.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the amendment mentioned by the member was presented in committee and rejected.

The condition of reasonable foreseeability is a very important aspect of the definition. It needs to be there to define the situation and provide assurances to the doctors providing this service.

Routine Proceedings

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the Executive Committee Meeting held in Sabah, Malaysia, from April 28 to 30, 2015.

* * *

● (1205)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on International Trade entitled “Main Estimates: 2016-17”.

[Translation]

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

The Hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion. I hope it will be supported by all members, especially those on the government side.

[English]

The government has said that it is willing to make amends for this week, and we are very appreciative of that offer. One of the things that could be changed is the perverse impact of the motion on time allocation that was adopted earlier this week. With that motion, at the end of today, which has been the only day of debate on report stage, the vote will be deferred to Monday evening, and we will not be able to have the debate that all members of Parliament want to have on Bill C-14.

The motion I am proposing would allow for a second day of debate that would not in any way delay the debate at report stage but, instead of debating other legislation on Monday, it would allow us to move to Bill C-14. Many members of Parliament want to speak to this, and it simply would not be acceptable to have one day at report stage when this is a critical stage of Bill C-14 in terms of its constitutionality and meeting the court obligations as well.

Having circulated the motion to all parties, I am hopeful that the government will support the following motion: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the time allocation order for Bill C-14 adopted on May 18, 2016, pursuant to Standing Order 78(3), be deemed amended to replace the words “not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of the report stage” of the bill with the words “not more than two further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at report stage” of the bill.

Routine Proceedings

This would allow for a second day of debate at report stage. We would still have the votes on Monday evening, but it would allow more members of Parliament to intervene on this important legislation.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is no unanimous consent.

[*English*]

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I respect the motion that the member has put forth in terms of asking for unanimous consent, and we were generous in terms of listening to the preamble leading up to it. I want to give a quick response to that.

Every member of the House does need to recognize the importance of ensuring that Parliament respects the June 6 deadline imposed by the Supreme Court of Canada. We attempted to extend the hours of debate to ensure all MPs who wanted to speak were able to do so.

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I understand you will not want this to become a debate about what has happened in the past, but perhaps members opposite do not understand what the reasonable proposal from my NDP counterpart contains.

The June 6 deadline would not be affected in any way. Right now, at the conclusion of today's debate, the vote will be held on Monday evening, which means that third reading cannot start until Tuesday. What my colleague has proposed would not affect that in any way, except that it would allow members of the House to also debate it on Monday. The vote would be held at the exact same time. Third reading debate would happen on the day that it would have happened, even under this situation. It would not affect the June 6 deadline at all. All it would do would be to allow members to participate in the debate, something that the government House leader just yesterday indicated that he wanted to help facilitate.

We are not allowed to move the same motion without some kind of intermission or some kind of interceding between, but I wonder if the House would indulge and we could try that again now that members may understand exactly what my colleague was proposing.

● (1210)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I do genuinely appreciate the gestures that are being made. In the spirit of trying to be as co-operative as possible, instead of trying to debate the issue on the floor of the House of Commons at this time, I think it would be more appropriate if the House leadership teams worked together

to see if there is room for opportunity. I do not think this is the best time to carry out this debate.

Unfortunately, at this point, we are not able to give consent to it. We would have loved to have had more members, obviously, given our past suggestions to the chamber, to have allowed more people to debate.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, the reality is that it cannot be discussed offline, though I appreciate the House leader proposing that, because the order that the government imposed on us means that the votes are deferred until Monday and we cannot have debate on Monday if that happens. Therefore, it has to be decided by the House prior to adjournment today.

I will come back to the House with the same motion shortly. I hope that the government will actually make amends for this week, which has been chaotic. Of course, it was on the Order Paper on Monday and Tuesday, and the government pulled it. All opposition members are asking for is the right to debate extraordinarily important legislation. I cannot understand why the government is resisting this.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There was no unanimous consent on the motion. I would encourage the parties to have further discussions together and, if they wish, to come back to the House with a motion that may be acceptable to all.

* * *

PETITIONS

IRAN

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present a petition following on Iran Accountability Week. The petitioners call for the Government of Canada to maintain the listing of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism pursuant to section 6.1 of the State Immunity Act for as long as the Iranian regime continues to sponsor terrorism.

I think members will agree that protecting Israel and other nations against the threat of a nuclear Iran and against the threat of Iranian regime-funded terrorism should remain a vital imperative of the Government of Canada. The petitioners make this point in the petition that I am now tabling in the House. Their names will now go down into the record of Parliament as having committed to that position.

They encourage the government to protect all Canadians and Canada's allies against this threat, which for some nations may become existential, and the petitioners ask that the Government of Canada do its part in combatting this bellicose terrorist-sponsoring regime in Iran by maintaining the listing of the regime as a state sponsor of terrorism.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 87 and 88.

Government Orders

[Text]

Question No. 87—**Hon. K. Kellie Leitch:**

With regard to the 2016-2017 Main Estimates for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), specifically the 134% increase in proposed spending on “Internal Services” as compared to the 2015-2016 Main Estimates: (a) what Budget line item will these funds be drawn from; (b) how many Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) will this increase add to the CIHR’s payroll; (c) will any added FTEs be permanent employees or contracted for a definite time period, and, if so, how many will there be in each staffing category; and (d) how many additional FTEs will be executive-level?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), Treasury Board Secretariat issued a new guideline on how to report internal services on April 1. To be compliant, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, CIHR, changed how it captures and reports internal services. The increase of 134% is a direct result of this change in reporting methodology.

In response to (b), no additional FTEs will be added to CIHR’s payroll.

In response to (c), there will be no additional FTEs.

In response to (d), there will be no additional FTEs.

Question No. 88—**Hon. Diane Finley:**

With regard to the government hiring consultants, including an American investment bank, to help analyze the feasibility of a \$1 billion (U.S.) aid package to Bombardier Inc.: (a) what was the total cost of all American consultants hired; (b) what were the criteria for hiring these consultants; (c) for each consultation in (a), (i) what organizations and individuals were consulted, (ii) what were the dates, (iii) what was the location; (d) what other consultations has the government conducted with other outside sources on this subject; and (e) for each consultation in (d), (i) what was the total cost of other outside sources hired, (ii) what organizations and individuals were consulted as a result?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development is aware of media references about specific firms involved in due diligence work related to Bombardier. Canada’s discussions with Bombardier, including related due diligence work, are covered by non-disclosure agreements due to their commercial sensitivity.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 94, 95, 102, and 110 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 94—**Mr. Andrew Scheer:**

With regard to the Finance Minister’s trip to New York, Paris, and London: (a) who were all the participants on the trip, including (i) the Minister’s staff, (ii) Members of Parliament, (iii) Senators, (iv) departmental employees, (v) other invitees; (b) for each participant identified in (a), what was the cost of the trip broken down by (i) total cost, (ii) accommodations, (iv) travel, (v) meals, (vi) all other

expenses; and (c) for all events and hospitality organized during the trip, what are the details including (i) dates, (ii) city, (iii) number of participants, (iv) total cost?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 95—**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:**

With regard to the 2016-2017 budget document tabled before the House of Commons on March 22, 2016 by the Minister of Finance titled “Growing the Middle Class”: what are the yearly income data points that were used to create Chart 1 in that document?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 102—**Mr. Andrew Scheer:**

With regard to public finances: (a) what was the government’s monthly surplus or deficit from November 2014 to January 2016, broken down by each month in that period; (b) what was the government’s surplus or deficit for the 2014-15 fiscal year; (c) what was the projected surplus or deficit for the 2015-16 fiscal year as published by the Department of Finance as of November 4, 2015; and (d) what definitions does the Department of Finance use in determining whether the government is in a surplus or deficit position, and do these definitions establish that a surplus exists when revenues exceed expenses?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 110—**Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy:**

With regard to the mandate letter to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, as it pertains to the development of a Canadian poverty reduction strategy: (a) what timelines have been set by (i) the Minister, (ii) the Department; (b) what (i) stakeholders, (ii) organizations, (iii) partners have been identified for consultation purposes; and (c) what amounts have been earmarked for implementing the Canadian poverty reduction strategy?

(Return tabled)

● (1215)

[English]

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying), as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise today to speak in support of Bill C-14, an act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other acts (medical assistance in dying).

I would like to start off by first acknowledging that medical assistance in dying is a deeply personal issue for all Canadians, which is tied to both their life experiences and personal beliefs. My background as a registered nurse in an oncology unit helped shape my thoughts and opinions on this matter.

Government Orders

Understanding that this is a very sensitive issue, with proponents on all sides of the debate, within days of this new Parliament, the now-government caucus moved swiftly to strike a joint committee to study the matter and make recommendations, which heard from many Canadians and experts on this issue. After working several days, sometimes well into the evening, the committee made its recommendations to Parliament.

Before I continue, I would like to thank all my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House, and in the Senate, who participated in the special committee and the justice committee for their contributions.

I also know that our minister has worked very hard to craft legislation that would ensure that the priorities of Canadians were met when it came to the issue of medical assistance in dying.

I strongly believe that the proposed legislation finds the perfect balance by reconciling the issue of autonomy of competent adults with the protection of vulnerable people through a thoughtful tailoring of the eligibility criteria and robust safeguards that are essential to preventing error and abuse. It also strikes the right balance by ensuring that conscience rights of physicians and nurse practitioners are protected, and commits to continuing to work with the provinces and territories regarding coordination and jurisdictional issues.

I want to assure members that our government is committed to continued discussions with the provinces and territories on a range of issues, not only related to medical assistance in dying but also to a full range of end-of-life options, including palliative care.

In various testimony given before the House committee, witnesses discussed other regimes where medical assistance in dying has been implemented. In Europe, for example, three countries have legislated access to medical assistance in dying, which is Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In the United States, four states have legislated access.

However, where Canada is unique is in the jurisdictional complexities that we face. In Canada, the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over criminal law, and health is a shared jurisdiction between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Primary responsibility for the provision and delivery of health care services rests with individual jurisdictions. This is why our government has proposed legislation that will be applied across all provinces and territories but at the same time will respect and allow flexibility for jurisdictional roles and responsibilities in the areas of health care.

This brings me to another important issue that cannot be ignored or put aside when talking about enabling access to medical assistance in dying when one is approaching end-of-life care, and that is access to quality palliative care. It is very clear that Canadians are looking to their government for leadership to advance the availability and quality of palliative care within the broader scope of how we address Canadians' needs at the end of their life.

We know that most people at the end of life wish to remain at home as long as possible, as long as they are well supported by the services they need. This is why the federal government is committed to improving palliative care as part of a new health accord, supported by a long-term investment of \$3 billion over four years.

Recently, federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of health agreed to work individually and collectively on improving home care to better meet the needs of patients closer to home. However, an agreement must still be reached on how funds will be used to strengthen and transform the health care system. We know that all jurisdictions are working diligently to meet the growing home and palliative care needs of their aging populations. However, we also know that jurisdictions are at different points. Some are well advanced in their efforts, and others are at a more moderate stage. By continuing to work with provinces, territories, and stakeholders, we will bolster each other's efforts for the benefit of all Canadians.

Another aspect that I would like to address when we talk about providing Canadians with that full range of options at the end of life is access. The government is very clear in its commitment to facilitate access to these services and to those providing it. This includes access to this new service of medical assistance in dying.

• (1220)

Our government is committed to respecting the autonomy of Canadians suffering from grievous and irremediable medical conditions. Access to medical assistance in dying would only be available for those who meet the following conditions: be a mentally competent adult who is in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability; have a serious and incurable illness, disease, or disability, and are experiencing, enduring an intolerable suffering; and whose deaths are reasonably foreseeable.

It will also remain a crime to assist a person either in dying or in causing a person's death in situations other than lawful medical assistance in dying.

With regard to Bill C-14, our government is also committed to protecting the exercise of conscience rights as the proposed legislation also provides exemptions for both physicians and nurse practitioners from having to provide medical assistance in dying. Over the course of this national dialogue, we have seen that the protection of conscience rights for these providers is clearly an issue for many Canadians. Our government has listened and made Bill C-14 more explicit on this issue, and therefore more appropriate for the diversity within Canada.

The bill now reads as follows:

For greater certainty, nothing in this section compels an individual to provide or assist in providing medical assistance in dying.

We trust that this helps to address the concerns some of members may have either personally and/or on behalf of their constituents on the issue of the protection of conscience rights.

Our government is also proposing to work with provinces and territories to create an end-of-life care coordination system. This would have a dual function. It would respect the conscience rights of health care providers, while facilitating access for Canadians to not only medical assistance in dying but a full range of end-of-life options, including palliative care.

Government Orders

The federal government would be prepared to collaborate on developing such a system should provinces and territories wish to participate, so that all Canadians have access to the care they need and deserve. We could also start on this by reviewing the information that we have on assisted dying regimes in other countries to see what they have done, and assessing their applicability to Canada.

Working in the health care field and especially in oncology, I know that health care is about connecting and helping people during their most vulnerable times. This means that we need accountable and transparent regulations to monitor and instill confidence in the appropriate implementation of medical assistance in dying.

This will protect vulnerable patients when they may not be able to do so themselves and help Canadians understand the number of requests for medical assistance in dying, the types of medical conditions that lead to requests, and whether the procedural safeguards in the law are working as intended. It will also work to ensure that high-quality, comparable Canadian data is generated so that any future discussions about changes to the medical assistance in dying system can be based on the best possible evidence.

Therefore, Bill C-14 creates legal obligations for physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists to report certain information for the purpose of monitoring. Regulations will be put in place to guide the information to be provided, to whom, and within what time frame. In the short term, Health Canada is working with our counterparts in the provinces and territories to establish an interim system should the bill be passed on June 6, until a permanent process is in place.

In closing, I would like to once again reaffirm my support for Bill C-14, which I believe is the right approach for medical assistance in dying. It will support and facilitate access for those seeking it, protect our most vulnerable, and protect conscience rights. We know that no one solution can reconcile the diverse perspectives on medical assistance in dying, but we believe we are moving forward together with a balanced approach that is appropriate for Canada at this time.

I thank the Speaker for giving me the opportunity to speak on this very important piece of legislation.

• (1225)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member a question about the deadline of June 6.

Right now, it looks like the earliest that the legislation will get to the Senate is mid-week during the week that we return. The expiration of the stay on the declaration of constitutional invalidity expires on the following Monday. It looks like it is now virtually impossible to meet the June 6 deadline.

In the face of that fact, would the hon. member agree that the Minister of Justice should apply to the Supreme Court to ask for a further extension, not a six-month extension, not a four-month extension, perhaps a one month or six-week extension, so that we can get legislation passed without there being a void in which there would be an absence of certainty and an absence of protections for vulnerable Canadians?

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question and for all his hard work on the special committee and the justice committee.

What he said, again, reinforces how important it is for us to pass the legislation by June 6. As members know, if the legislation is not in place by June 6, the court's ruling would come into effect, meaning that medical assistance in dying would be lawful where it is in accordance with the parameters set by the Carter ruling.

We know if the bill does not pass there will be a vacuum. I know this is something that my hon. colleague has said before in the House as well. People who are suffering incurable and irremediable conditions will be left with no access to medical assistance in dying because no medical practitioner will be at all comfortable assisting anyone in dying without any legal framework.

On the other side, we will be putting our most vulnerable population at risk with absolutely no safeguards, and we know how disastrous that could be.

Again, this just shows how important it is for us, as parliamentarians and as Canadians, to pass the legislation by June 6.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health for her very thoughtful remarks on the bill.

My question for her is about process. I am one of the people who did not get an opportunity to speak to the bill at second reading. Under the time allocation motion, we now, today, will have 10 amendments on the bill before us and we will have only nine speakers. We actually have more amendments than speakers on the bill.

I wonder how she feels or why she feels the government is unwilling to accept the proposal that was just made that would allow this debate to continue on Monday and allow many more members of Parliament to participate in the debate at report stage, because we are going to have less than 10% of the members of Parliament actually participating at this stage.

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, for all Canadians, this is an extremely difficult and deeply personal issue, tied to their life experiences and personal beliefs.

As we know, it is a very diversified situation. For some, medical assistance in dying would be very troubling, and for others, the legislation would not go far enough. We believe that the legislation is the best approach to ensure that dying patients who are suffering unbearable pain have the choice of a peaceful death, and that the vulnerable are protected.

The Supreme Court of Canada decided that Canadians suffering intolerably have the right to request assistance to end their suffering, and we respect that decision.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity to finally speak to the bill at report stage, although, as I just said in my previous question, I am really sad to have to do this under time allocation and knowing that many of my colleagues will not get the chance to bring the voices from their constituencies to this chamber on the bill.

Government Orders

I was prevented from speaking at second reading by the time allocation imposed by the government, but something even more peculiar happened when it did that. The abrupt change of the House schedule on May 4 with time allocation forced the second reading vote forward by five days, and for those of us who have responsibilities both here and in our ridings, it meant on that Wednesday morning, I was already flying west before the time allocation motion was introduced. It meant that I could not be here to cast my vote at second reading because I was already flying in the wrong direction.

I lost my chance to go on record as voting against Bill C-14 in principle. That is what I intended to do, not just because of my own experience and beliefs, but also because I believe it contradicts the Supreme Court's Carter decision, and most important, because the bill contradicts the opinion of virtually every person and every family in my riding that has contacted me about this issue.

I have been involved in discussions about end-of-life issues with several individuals who are facing severe debilitating and painful illnesses. I have talked to them directly. I have met with them and have heard their concerns. This reminds me to mention an important issue that is not in the bill, and that is the issue of palliative care and the need for us as a society to do a much better job with end-of-life care.

I do want to praise those who are actively already working in end-of-life care. This is not a criticism of their efforts that they make each and every day to provide better care for those who are facing end of life, but they are forced to do so too often with too few resources and in substandard situations.

I have been involved in public discussions locally on this issue, stretching back to a public forum on March 21, 2015, which was jointly sponsored by a group called Victoria Choices in Dying and Dying with Dignity. We heard from a panel of speakers, which I was privileged to be on, but we also heard from the public. We heard speaker after speaker at that forum say that they wanted the right to control end-of-life issues. They wanted the right to make decisions for themselves, and they wanted the right for their family members not to have to suffer intolerable pain for great lengths of time, but to be able to make the choice for assisted dying.

I believe, as I said, not just speaking on the basis of my own conscience, but representing the beliefs and needs of my community, that I should oppose Bill C-14, not just for what is not in the bill, like palliative care, which only gets a mention in the preamble and for which the government has, incidentally, provided no new resources and there is no reason to wait for legislation to do that, but I will oppose the bill for what is actually in the bill. I believe the bill is too restrictive and respects neither the letter nor the spirit of the Carter decision.

I think we are in this unfortunate position because the government failed to listen to the key recommendations of our own special joint committee of the House and Senate. The committee made very wise recommendations with regard to the bill, yet only a few of them were incorporated into the bill at the committee stage.

In the interests of time, I will focus on what I believe are the three key faults in Bill C-14.

The first and most important to me is the absence of a provision for advance directives.

I want to talk, if I am able to do so, about a very personal experience, the death of my mother last fall. My mother had always been very clear, even before she developed dementia, and that dementia began to take away her capacity, she did not want measures to keep her alive, lying in the bed without consciousness, with no quality of life, and especially if she were in great pain.

Her dementia was not the immediate cause of her death, so she would not have qualified under the bill because she did not have a terminal illness, but in her case, six years after the onset of the dementia, she no longer had the capacity to make decisions. Other medical conditions left her in a situation which she had feared: in great pain and unable to care for herself. Those other medical conditions did eventually take her life in conjunction with the decisions we as her children and the medical practitioner made at the time.

● (1230)

We feel very fortunate that my mother had been very clear about her wishes. Although that did not really make the decisions we had to make easy, we were confident that we were doing what she had wanted to do. My own family's experience and the experiences of other families in my constituency are why I believe so strongly that Canadians have the right to make advance directives about their care.

The second reason that I am opposing this bill is the fact that it would impose what it calls a reflection period on those at the end of life. Of course, again, those who have dementia or other similar medical conditions would not be able to have a reflection period because they would no longer have capacity. However, even for those who are competent at that point in their life, I believe that the 10 days, which the committee thankfully reduced it to, is still far too long for those who are living in intolerable pain, and far too long not just for them, but far too long to ask their families and friends to witness that suffering. If there is to be a reflection period, it needs to be even shorter than those 10 days.

My third reason for opposing this bill is the fact that it would narrow who is eligible to receive medical assistance in dying to those whose death is "reasonably foreseeable". I know that others have said that we know what that means and it is specific. However, the only way I can understand that we all know what that means is that all our deaths are reasonably foreseeable, but what it means beyond that, I have no idea. It is not a term that is used in medicine. It is not a term that is used in law. That very ambiguity raises the spectre of excluding people who need medical assistance in dying and who would have been qualified for it under the Carter decision.

Government Orders

According to the lead counsel in the Carter case, even Kay Carter, a fierce advocate for the right to assisted death for those who are suffering intolerably but from a non-fatal condition, would probably be excluded from accessing medical assistance in dying under Bill C-14 as it stands. What this would do is force people into incredibly cruel strategies like starving themselves to death to make their death imminent and allow them to qualify. I would hope that this House would not impose those kinds of restrictions on people and make them make those kinds of choices at the end of their life.

Would I rather have this bill than no bill? The answer I guess I am going to have to decide on. My decision is going to be that yes, I would rather have no bill. I prefer to go with the Carter decision. Do I think it would have been better to have a bill? Yes I do. I am not opposed to having a bill on this, but it has to respect the Carter decision, and it has to have clear provisions in it, and it needs to have a reflection period shorter than 10 days. If we do not have the bill, what happens? We do not have a legal vacuum as people are saying. We have the Carter decision, which would provide guidance. There is a legal framework.

Although I did not actually look this up, when the abortion provisions were removed from the Criminal Code, the House of Commons tried twice to create new law regulating abortions. I am sure these same arguments were made at that time, saying that practitioners would not want to perform abortions because there was no legal framework. In fact, we went with the court decision. We still exist with the court decision on abortion as our legal framework and we have not had chaos in the medical community on that; not that in any way I wish to compare abortion to medical assistance in dying, but only on this issue of whether there is a legal framework that will apply on June 6.

The failure to meet the June 6 deadline for this legislation lies with all of us. It lies with the previous government; it lies with the current government, and it lies with us as a House of Commons. We all have to take responsibility for missing that deadline.

However, I do have to say I believe the government could have managed the House time better so that all of us could have participated in the debate and that debate could have been accomplished in time to meet the deadline. All the Liberals had to do was schedule this bill as a priority in this sitting of the House, which they failed to do. That did not happen. Therefore, I will, when the time comes, stand and vote against this bill at third reading. In the meantime, I will also vote against it at report stage.

● (1235)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Charlottetown.

Oh, sorry. The House leader for the New Democratic Party is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, following on the comments of the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke on the issue of the timing of the debate, earlier I offered a unanimous consent motion that would allow us to debate this bill on Monday, which would not change in any way the time allocation vote that we have to have at the report stage of Bill C-14 on Monday evening.

Currently, in just a few minutes, we will stop debating this bill, but with this motion, if it is adopted by the government side, as opposition members are in favour, we would then have a second day of debate at report stage, which would be on Monday.

It is my hope that the government will actually work to do what is reasonable. It does not change the vote that we will have on Monday night on report stage on Bill C-14, but what it does do is it adds a second full day of debate and allows members of Parliament to speak on this important issue.

I will read the following motion for which I am seeking unanimous consent: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the time allocation order for Bill C-14 adopted on May 18, 2016, pursuant to Standing Order 78(3) be deemed amended to replace the words “not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration at report stage of the bill”, with the words “not more than two further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at report stage of the bill”.

I hope that we will get unanimous consent and allow a second day of debate on this important bill at report stage.

● (1240)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid the hon. member does not have unanimous consent.

The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I stand here a little surprised that we were turned down. I can tell you that, although you and I have very different positions on this, I think the debate is what we are all learning from, and I thank you for all your words today.

Although I am at this time supporting the bill—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind the hon. member, and I am sure she does not mean me when she is talking, that she might want to speak through me.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I really want to thank the member, because I think the biggest thing is that these debates are teaching us all. It is not just teaching us about what is happening within our own ridings, but what other Canadians are thinking. Therefore, I would really like to thank the member beside me, because those are the important discussions that we must have.

One of the questions I have is for my own personal interest. One of the concerns I have is the reduction from 15 to 10 days. I am wondering if the member can speak to that so that I have a little bit more clarity on why he believes it is important to reduce the number of days. It is just for my personal knowledge.

Government Orders

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I first have to say that I am shocked that the government again is denying members, under a very reasonable proposal that would not affect the ability to meet the June 6 deadline, the opportunity to speak in this debate because like the hon. member, I have learned very much from hearing others speak. I very much respect the level of debate in this House.

In terms of the reflection period, I firmly believe, and it is mostly on the personal experience I went through last fall, that at the very end of life when someone is suffering intolerable pain, it is not only intolerable for the person, but it is very difficult for the family members who spend most of the time in the hospital with their loved one, who have no idea how long the natural process will take, and suffer along with the person. I think that 15 days was certainly too long and 10 days is better. In my view, and given my personal experience, it is still too long.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): My apologies for the last question. I still had not left the previous motion, and somehow we moved right into the debate without me calling it. You slipped one in there. Congratulations.

I will go back to the hon. member for Charlottetown.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thank the hon. member for his thoughtful contribution to the debate, and a thoughtful contribution is what we always get from the member. We do not agree on our respective positions on the bill, but certainly his was and always is a valuable intervention.

There are two things I'd like to raise.

The member talked about the confusion, or lack of clarity, or the lack of value around the words "reasonably foreseeable". I would ask the member to read the two words in front of those two words, which are "has become". Therefore, the reasonable foreseeability in the bill is only in the context of a change in someone's conditions. Death has to have become reasonably foreseeable. I would ask for his comments with respect to the relevance or importance of those words.

Also, with respect to the June 6 deadline, he drew an analogy to the abortion debate in this country. My question for him with regard to the June 6 deadline is that, right now during the extension period up to June 6, it is possible for patients to petition a court to have medical assistance in dying; however, that process expires on June 6 and will no longer exist. Does the member see that as significant?

• (1245)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I always value hearing from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

On the question of words before "reasonably foreseeable", he has asked me to back up a couple of words, but if I do that, I want to back up to "who's natural death has become reasonably foreseeable". If we back up that far, there is even more ambiguity. What is natural death? That is what we all face. "Natural death has become reasonably foreseeable" is no clearer. I would stress again that it is not a term used in medicine and it is not a term used in law. Therefore, I am not arguing about its value; I am arguing about its certainty. At this point, it has no certainty.

On the question of what happens after June 6, I do not believe there is a legal vacuum. I know the temporary exemption process expires. When we were dealing end of life with my mother, the last thing I wanted to do was hire a lawyer and go to court. I was spending the time with her in the hospital, as was my sister, though, it was not something we would have wished to go through. Therefore, I am not certain that this expiring is a bad thing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to share a few thoughts in regard to the report stage of Bill C-14. Perhaps I can start off by picking up on a couple of the words that were just mentioned.

When we talk about the details, listening to many hours of debate in the chamber on this very important legislation, a couple of things come to mind. One is the seriousness of the debate, the sense of compassion we hear in many of the speeches. People want to identify with the legislation and best represent their constituents. It is one of the reasons it has become somewhat of a difficult issue to try to manage. To try to give a false impression would be most unfortunate. There has been a genuine, serious commitment by the Government of Canada to accommodate all members who would like to address the legislation. We have seen that on several occasions. It would have allowed all members to participate in the debate.

We all share two responsibilities. One is to recognize that the Supreme Court of Canada made a decision, and there is a void. I will provide some comment on that shortly. Second is that all political parties in the chamber have to take responsibility in the debate that has occurred on Bill C-14. Members need to ask themselves why they feel limited in their debate. On a number of occasions, the government has extended the opportunity to afford every member the opportunity to speak. I wanted to be very clear on that point.

When we talk about the issue itself, there is another thing about which we should be talking a great deal. We heard a lot of this during the second reading debate. We have far-reaching legislation that will impact, directly or indirectly, every Canadian in every region of our country. At the end of the day, we need to recognize that this is just one major step. It is a step that has been mandated because nine Supreme Court of Canada judges made the decision that we needed to get some form of framework set up to provide medical assistance in dying.

Government Orders

I believe this legislation delivers that. I recommend that members look at some of the words that have been spoken, in particular by the Minister of Health, and the Minister of Justice. They have done a phenomenal job in getting us to the stage we are at today. I would not want to underestimate the role that others have contributed. In particular, the members of the joint standing committee of the Senate and the House spent many hours in the early part of this year in consultations. I wish to recognize the many efforts of committee members, who after second reading had the opportunity to go through the legislation and look at the possibility of amendments, and number of amendments were brought forward. We saw consensus among all three political parties for some of those amendments, which is great to see.

• (1250)

It is important we recognize that some in the chamber advocate that this bill does not go far enough. Others advocate that it goes too far. I believe the legislation before us today is the best legislation we can develop, put forward, and turn into law. At the end of the day, Canadians from coast to coast to coast will be assured that it is solid legislation.

If we do not pass the legislation in a timely fashion to meet a deadline determined by the Supreme Court of Canada of June 6, there will be a void. Some have said that we can just ignore the void. They can have that opinion if they choose, but it is the responsibility of every parliamentarian to respect the Supreme Court of Canada's decision. If members do not respect that, we are putting at risk a patchwork system, depending in which part of our great nation we happen to live.

There will be additional issues in many different regions that will surface and many will have to spend, potentially, hundreds of thousands of dollars dealing with the legislation in a piecemeal fashion because we did not respect what we have been called upon to do by the Supreme Court of Canada. There is urgency.

We know that caring and compassionate Canadians in every region of the country want us to do our job. That is one of the reasons it did not matter to me if we sat until three or four o'clock in the morning or 11 o'clock at night. We wanted to ensure that members had the opportunity to express themselves. As we get closer to that deadline, we have to get the legislation into the Senate. We have many reasons to be optimistic that the Senate has taken on what I believe is a more independent outlook in terms of its responsibilities. Hopefully we will see a very productive Senate in dealing with legislation that has been passed by the elected members who sit in the House.

We have an obligation to do the best job in dealing with this issue. That means we should look at getting this bill through not only at report stage but at third reading in a timely fashion so the Senate is able to deal with it. I look at a glass as being half full, not half empty. I hope the Senate will do the same and assist us in meeting the Supreme Court of Canada's deadline.

I want to emphasize that this is step one. There are many other steps. One of them is the issue of palliative care. I and many of my Liberal caucus colleagues as well as many other members of the House are looking at this. The Government of Canada has been very clear on a solid commitment in two ways.

First is the health care accord. The best way to deliver palliative care is through agreements with the provinces, I wish the Minister of Health the very best in achieving that health care accord.

The second is the financial commitment of billions of dollars from this government to provide strong leadership going into the future, ensuring that palliative care is a top priority of this government and working with the many stakeholders that play a critical role in this so we have the best palliative care system in the world. This government, the Prime Minister, myself, and many colleagues in the House want to achieve good quality, world-class palliative care.

• (1255)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those were very nice words, but I think it is time for action from that side of the House. We are where we are today. We can all play the blame game on why more members have not been able to speak, whether we should have sat until 3 o'clock in the morning, as the member said, or until midnight, or whether or not Motion No. 6, which has been withdrawn, was the answer to get this through.

We saw yesterday, in a spirit I would say of reconciliation, after the events that happened earlier this week, the government House leader withdraw his draconian motion, Motion No. 6, and promise to work with the opposition so that more members would have the opportunity to speak on Bill C-14.

The Liberals brought this bill on a Friday, which allows two hours of debate at report stage. There has been a very reasonable amendment to the motion put on the floor of this House to allow us to debate on Monday. It would not affect the timing of the votes or this bill proceeding to the Senate.

Why is the member opposing the opportunity for more members of Parliament to speak just on Monday? It would not affect the timing, the June 6 deadline, or the business of this House. Why not bring this back on Monday for another day of debate to give more members the opportunity to express themselves?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, since 1988, when I was first elected, I have been part of a House leadership team of sorts, whether it was in the province of Manitoba or here. I would suggest to the member that opposition and government members need to recognize the value of certainty. There are certain things that government is able to do, but there are also obligations of opposition. We need certainty. Both sides need certainty. If the political will on all sides is to make sure that members get heard and the certainty of respecting the Supreme Court deadline is there, it is amazing what the House leaderships of all three parties can do if they are prepared to work together. However, it takes the three parties, and we have to work with our independents, in order to make that happen. If the respect is there, who knows? Keep in mind that we still have third reading to deal with.

I would suggest to all members, if they are genuinely concerned, that they take the time to talk to and explain the importance of goodwill and trust with the House leadership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I obviously listened carefully to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

In a number of speeches, including his, members often mention June 6 as some kind of unavoidable deadline. I admit that I am a bit less of a stickler than my colleague on this, although this date is an important objective.

Why is the government not focusing as much on the fact that the Supreme Court rendered a unanimous decision in Carter? A unanimous decision does not come around often in Canadian law. That seems just as important to me.

We must acknowledge that the Supreme Court is representative of the Canadian public, in a way. Perhaps we could move forward more quickly if the government were open to some amendments to bring the bill closer to the unanimous decision rendered by the Supreme Court.

It is very clear where we are going with this bill, and I think we could come to an agreement quickly if we put as much emphasis on the unanimous decision as on the June 6 date.

• (1300)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I respect the question. Whether it was in the comments or the response to the first question, I indicated how important it is that we do respect the Supreme Court of Canada's decision and deadline. I talked about it during second reading. I believe that we have experts around the table, constitutional experts, individuals who are maybe a bit above my pay grade but who bring a lot to the table, to make sure the constitutionality of this legislation is intact, with the potential for a charter challenge and so forth.

I am confident that the bill will do the job.

Again, I will emphasize that we still have third reading on this particular piece of legislation to have more dialogue.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am truly honoured to have the opportunity to speak on this bill.

Initially I wanted to listen to all of my colleagues within the House, because I recognize that it is important to listen to all Canadians. I recognize that the 338 parliamentarians bringing their views and the views from their constituents is just as important as listening to all the things I have as well. Giving their views, as we have seen today, is so important. I thank all of the members taking part in today's debate.

My role as a parliamentarian is to do the fact-finding, speaking to the constituents I represent, and making sure that I get the right message to make this decision and do what is right for my constituency and all Canadians. From that, I decided to do a lot of town halls. I sent letters to each and every physician in my riding. I had one-on-one meetings with many stakeholders, whether they were physicians dealing with palliative care or people who had family members with chronic illnesses. I also received many emails and letters as well as postcard campaigns.

To start, I want to share one of the letters that I received from one of the physicians. It is one of many that I received, but today I want to share this letter from Dr. Carroll Harder:

I am e-mailing in response to your letter I received requesting information on my concerns about Bill C-14. Thank you for requesting physician input. I certainly appreciate having the opportunity to weigh-in as a stakeholder in these decisions. This topic is obviously very important to me and I am trying to understand all of the implications of this for me and for my patients.

I appreciate the steps that have been put in place to provide checks and balances that will hopefully prevent abuse of this system by family or health care providers. I am concerned that many groups are calling for less restrictions than those that are currently in place dictating who applies for this and who is ineligible. I would ask that you, as our representative, continue to advocate for stringent restrictions with multiple layers of accountability to prevent abuse of this legislation.

I understand the protection that is in place for health care providers who conscientiously object to participating in Physician Assisted Dying, and again would appreciate your advocacy with medical bodies to ensure that this remains in place, even for those physicians practising in remote areas that may be pressured to provide the service when no one else who does is available in a reasonable geographic distance.

It is letters like this that I put together with all these types of information when coming to a conclusion on how I will proceed in voting as the representative for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Overall, I had many concerns when I saw this legislation. When I looked at the joint report, there were some great concerns for me on things, including eligibility to include mature minors and those with mental illness. There is the need for palliative care. One of the biggest concerns I have is on the rights of physicians. Being a mom, the issue of mature minors is something that is also very important to me.

When the bill came back, I felt it was very necessary to vote in favour to send it to committee. I had to trust my colleagues sitting on that committee, from all parties. I would like to extend great gratitude to the member for Mount Royal. I had the opportunity to sit in on some of those debates and discussions. I had the opportunity to really hear what people were saying.

The work that gets done in committee is amazing. This week, many Canadians have seen the work that does not get done here in Parliament, but it is at the committee level where we see good work being done. I would like to applaud the member for Mount Royal, as well as all of my colleagues who took part in these really important discussions.

There is something about going and listening to the people. I listened to people who were representing Dying With Dignity, which had a very far side compared to some of the people who are proactive in making sure that we do not have euthanasia. It is very different to listen to Dying With Dignity witnesses compared to listening to the Association for Community Living, for instance.

I went home and had discussions with people in my community. One of the constituents I met with was Dr. John Hofhuis. He is not only a close personal friend, but he is a well-known and respected physician in Elgin—Middlesex—London, who just recently retired. He lost his wife from liver disease. She had suffered for almost three years. I wanted to pick his brain to see what his thoughts were, not only as a physician but as a family member.

He shared with me all of the trying moments that he went through, and all the moments he went through having to see his children and his children's children suffer because of what their mother and grandmother was going through.

Government Orders

•(1305)

Another physician I reached out to was Dr. Derek Vaughan. He was a family physician, a general practitioner, in St. Thomas for a number of years, but in the last few months he has restricted his practice to palliative care only. He went from being a general doctor to doing house visits with about 10 members of the community. He visits long-term care homes as well. I spoke to him because not only is he a physician but he is suffering from MS. I really wanted to dig into his brain as well.

I also had discussions with my parents-in-law. My father-in-law should be a priest today but after three years of studying he decided to step back from that. I am fortunate and lucky because he was able to provide me with not only his religious insight but his insight as a person who used to counsel people. That was great.

One of the most important people that I can remember from all the discussions is a lady named Alice. Alice came to my town hall. She suffers from two irremediable diseases. She told me that she needs this legislation. To me, it is about listening to people like Alice. I listened to people on all sides of the issue, but when I sat down and spoke to a lady who in the next few years will lose her life, and I recognized the pain and suffering that she will go through, it is individuals like her and those discussions that really affect me.

Another part that I want to speak about, and something that is going to come up I am sure in future legislation, is the care of minors. Everybody in the House and everybody across the country has probably heard that I am the mother of five children. My children always tell me that things are different now than when I was growing up. I grew up on John Hughes films and Michael Jackson. Things were totally different back in the eighties. Those were great years.

We are now in 2016 and children are on their cellphones, iPads, or whatever all the time. They are wired 100% of the time. Whatever happens on a Friday night stays with them Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday night, Sunday morning. It is a different time. I am finding that children are now living in a much more chaotic world. As I said, they are wired in and there are all these things happening online. I could go home on a Friday night and on Monday morning face sunny skies but our children are not in that same situation. This affects the mental health of our children. Even my own children have suffered from this. We want to unplug them and help them, but unfortunately, society now is part of the issue. They become depressed and some are not able to get out of bed. We are creating grievous conditions for them as well. When it comes to mature minors, I do not want to see that happen.

Let me speak about the palliative care issue. Last month my Aunt Catherine passed away. She had been suffering from cancer and had the most tremendous end-of-life care that anyone could ask for. The last family photo we have of her is of her lying in her bed with all of her children, grandchildren, and her husband, Uncle Paul, around the bed as they ate Easter dinner together. That is one of the last family moments they had together. It was that extreme palliative care that gave her the best end-of-life situation one could ever ask for. That is why I advocate 100% for palliative care. We need to make sure that we do have a third option. There can be life; there can be assisted dying, and there must be palliative care for people who need that.

I have heard many times that this will be the law of the land. It is important as parliamentarians that we do it right. We should not do it quickly. I recognize there is a deadline of June 6. I have sat here and listened today to my NDP colleague. We are learning things from all parliamentarians as they get up and speak today, or would have spoken on Monday. It is very unfortunate those rights have been taken away from us once again, because this is how we learn. This is how parliamentarians can educate one another by sharing their stories, whether it is about my Aunt Catherine, or other things. When I am sharing my thoughts, members get a different sense of what is going on.

I am happy to be speaking today. I am concerned with what we have for amendments. I hope we can do more. I will be supporting the bill at this time, but if there are future amendments to include mature minors or those with mental illness without having the palliative care option there as well, I will not support this legislation in the future.

•(1310)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the floor obviously speaks with great sincerity and has definitely consulted with people in her constituency.

However, she did mention that June 6 was the deadline and we feel very strongly about trying to respect that deadline. I can remember well over a year ago when the Supreme Court of Canada made its judgment, wanting the government at the time to proceed in an expeditious fashion to begin the debate on this issue. Could she explain to me why her Conservative Party when it was in government did not begin the debate and why we have this very rushed schedule today?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, back in 2015, when this came out, a panel was set up by the former justice minister. However, I look at the work we have done today, and we can talk about these timelines. Let us be honest, this week we did Bill C-2, Bill C-6, Bill C-10, and Bill C-11. We had all of these things shifted off of the Order Paper.

What has happened here is this. Although it is a very important bill, unfortunately, when it came to the agenda of what we were supposed to be discussing and what we were discussing, a lot of political games were being played at that time. This took away the rights of the opposition members to debate this. We can talk about that. However, let us be honest about what happened this week. We lost hours of crucial debate because of the actions of the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London. I know her predecessor. I am not sure what they put in the water in that riding, but I do notice that both she and her predecessor demonstrated respect for the institution and its members. I thank her for her tone and the arguments she presented.

Government Orders

The only real collaboration between the government and the opposition on this extremely important issue happened while the report to the government was being written. I was present at one of the meetings. It was an exceptional instance of collaboration among senators and MPs of all stripes. Unfortunately, the bill before us is very different from the recommendations in that report. That should be cause for concern.

The government is so focused on meeting the supposedly incontrovertible June 6 deadline, failing which, it says, there will be a disastrous legal void. I do not buy that, because the Supreme Court set up a legal framework within which we can operate, at least temporarily.

Can my colleague speak to the steps available to the government to truly work collaboratively on Bill C-16 and, as in Quebec, achieve the greatest consensus possible on the issue, knowing that unanimity is not possible in any case?

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for his kind words. We just do it right in Elgin—Middlesex—London.

It is about serving the people. I have always said that this is what we are supposed to do here. When we talk about the June 6 deadline, it is important that we consult with all Canadians. Yes, the report that came from the joint committee is very different than what we see in the legislation. That is why we are here. We are supposed to be debating. You and I have different opinions on that. However, at the same time, if we would have had the respect of the government, we would have been able to get more done.

I applaud the committee for the hard work it did after the legislation was created. I know the members sat down and went through it. However, when it comes to amendments, we only have two hours of debate on amendments. That is just not enough. We need more. If we are supposed to be representing Canadians, we need 338 people representing Canadians not 188.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Just for the record, I am sure the hon. member did not mean that her and I had differences in debate. I sure she meant the other person. I just thought I would clarify that.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I know we have tried this before, but the third time is the charm. Given the importance of debate on this issue, it is important that we have another opportunity to extend it without affecting the timeline for the Supreme Court decision. Therefore, without moving the votes, we could extend debate on this.

Perhaps the government deputy House leader does not feel the same sense of urgency on this matter. He has been spearheading the movement against this motion today. He has spoken twice already, once at second reading and then at report stage, on this bill. However, other members have not spoken at all. They would

appreciate that opportunity. I hope perhaps the deputy House leader has had time to call his boss and see if we can get a different answer this time.

The motion is: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the time allocation order for Bill C-14, adopted on May 18, 2016, pursuant to Standing Order 78(3), be deemed amended to replace the words “not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of the report stage... of the bill” with the words “not more than two further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at report stage of the bill.”

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is there unanimous consent to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker: I believe it is fairly clear that we do not have unanimous consent.

[*Translation*]

It being 1:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Wednesday, May 18, 2016, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the report stage of the bill now before the House.

[*English*]

The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

The next question is on Motion No. 16. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Private Members' Business

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

Normally, at this time the House would proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at the report stage of the bill. However, pursuant to Standing Order 45, the recorded division stands deferred until Monday, May 30, 2016, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

• (1320)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I believe, if you seek it, you will find consent of the House to see the clock at 1:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the House give its consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

TAMIL HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should recognize the contributions that Tamil-Canadians have made to Canadian society, the richness of the Tamil language and culture, and the importance of educating and reflecting upon Tamil heritage for future generations by declaring January, every year, Tamil Heritage Month.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of my private member's motion, Motion No. 24, Tamil Heritage Month, celebrating the contributions of Tamil Canadians in our country.

Canada is truly enriched by the Tamil language, culture, and history. Multiculturalism is indigenous to Canada. Canada has always had a plurality of languages and peoples living here since time immemorial.

Any discussion on a settler community in Canada cannot start without first acknowledging and thanking the traditional keepers of this land. We are grateful to our indigenous peoples, and as we gathered here today on the traditional, unceded lands of the Algonquin people, let us reflect on the enormous, collective responsibility of all Canadians toward building a more equitable country, one that respects our indigenous peoples.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank the Conservative Party, the NDP, and the Green Party for supporting my motion. I want to thank our Minister of Canadian Heritage, the government, my Liberal colleagues, and our respective staff for their hard work, their constant feedback, and their support for this motion.

[*English*]

We would not be here today had it not been for the municipalities of Markham, Stouffville, Ajax, Pickering, Oshawa, Whitby, Brampton, Toronto, Ottawa, York Region, and school boards such as the Toronto District School Board, that took the lead in entrenching Tamil heritage month in their respective jurisdictions.

I want to particularly acknowledge the Province of Ontario for recognizing Tamil heritage month in 2014.

I wish to thank the many individuals and organizations in the Tamil community and many allies of the community for their hard work over the years that have allowed us to bring this to the national stage.

Except for indigenous peoples, all of us in Canada have come together in this great country from around the world. In Canada our diversity makes us stronger. In many ways, it is this diversity that unifies us and brings us closer. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ensures that no matter who people are, in Canada they have the right to be themselves, to keep their identity and culture without being any less Canadian.

Our late prime minister Pierre Trudeau established Canada's official multiculturalism policy in 1971. This bold action opened Canada's doors to the world. With this policy, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau saw multiculturalism as the most powerful tool for, "preserving human rights, developing Canadian identity, strengthening citizenship...[and] reinforcing Canadian unity". Multiculturalism was later entrenched in section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in 1988, the Multiculturalism Act went into effect.

Our Prime Minister said it best, "a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian". In Canada there is space for us all.

The Tamil language dates back 500 BC. It is considered to be one of the oldest living ancient languages in the world with a written tradition dating back to the same period. This linguistic tradition ties Tamils to a deep and unbroken cultural history that stretches generations.

The Tamil language is recognized throughout the world. It has received recognition from India as a classical language. Singapore declared it an official language. It is a national language in Sri Lanka and has been recognized as the official state language of Tamil Nadu.

Let me repeat that in Tamil.

[*Member spoke in Tamil*]

[*English*]

There is a very important proverb in classical Tamil poetry that reads, "*Yaathum Oore, Yaavarum Kelir*", meaning every country is my country and every person is my kin.

Private Members' Business

The transnational Tamil experience has meant that Tamils have moved extensively over the years. The origins of the Tamil people can be traced to South Asia, but they started to migrate all over the world, first in search of better opportunities, then as indentured labourers, and more recently, for safety and security.

Tamils initially went to the British colonies such as South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, and also to places like Mauritius. In the 20th century, Tamil migration led to significant, permanent communities being established in Europe, Australia, and the Americas.

Tamils are a diverse people. It means we can practise any faith, come from any corner of the world, and still be a proud Tamil.

● (1325)

Tamils have called Canada home since the 1940s. However, the first real community did not come together until the 1960s. Tamils initially came as students from different parts of the world, such as India, South Africa, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. Many went back to their home countries after their studies while many more ended up settling in Canada. This was followed by professionals, some of whom settled in towns across the country, from Belleville, Ontario to Dawson Creek, British Columbia and anywhere in-between.

The first recorded Tamil cultural organization in Canada was the Bharathi Kala Manram, established in 1969. This was followed by the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada in 1978. The community took shape in many urban centres, including the Greater Toronto Area, Montreal, Ottawa, Windsor, Halifax, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver. By 1983, 3,000 Tamils were living across the country.

The most significant arrival of Tamils in Canada began in 1983, as refugees from Sri Lanka sought safety from persecution. As a response to the anti-Tamil pogroms on the island of Sri Lanka and due to the hard work of the community at that time, Canada opened its doors to refugees by establishing a special measures program. It enabled Canadians to sponsor their extended family members and normalize status to refugees already in the country. Due to ongoing violence on the island, Sri Lanka became a top refugee-producing country for many years.

Tamils have taken extraordinary risks to come to Canada over the years. Like many refugees, they bet everything for the promise of a better life where they would no longer have to live in fear or be treated as second-class citizens. While waves of refugees came to Canada by boat, many more recent refugees came to Canada by conventional means with the support of their families.

In 1986, 155 Tamil refugees came to our country seeking safety off the coast of St. Shott's, Newfoundland. They were saved at sea by Captain Gus Dalton and his crew from Admiral's Beach. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the first group of Tamil refugees that arrived by boat. While it is a celebration of the success of this community, it is also an opportune time to recognize and thank the people of Newfoundland for their generosity.

The next group of Tamils that came to Canada by boat did not receive as generous a welcome.

As members are aware, on Wednesday our Prime Minister issued a moving apology on behalf of our government for Canada's failure to welcome those arriving on board the SS *Komagata Maru* in 1914.

While Canada has come a long way in the last century since that incident, from time to time our deeply buried prejudices have been allowed to surface.

As a direct result of the war in Sri Lanka, two more boats carrying Tamil refugees, the MV *Ocean Lady* in 2009 carrying 76 Tamils and MV *Sun Sea* in 2010 carrying 492 Tamils, arrived off our western coast in Victoria, British Columbia. These refugees arrived and shared their stories of being victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Thankfully, Canada did not turn these refugees away. However, we failed to understand their plight. From the moment they arrived, we treated these refugees as criminals, keeping hundreds of men, women, and even children in detention for several months. Many of these refugees continue to live in legal limbo today.

I had the opportunity to meet with most of those who arrived aboard those two boats, and their stories are heart-wrenching. Just this month, I met a young man whose parents were killed when he was 10 years old. He came to Canada on the MV *Sun Sea* at the age of 19. Today, he is 26 years old and thriving, and Canada is his home. It is this shared sense of a history of perseverance that in many ways defines the Tamil community in Canada and around the world.

● (1330)

[Translation]

Now I want to acknowledge the work that Tamil Canadians do to preserve their language and culture.

[English]

Today, we have a number of very important organizations that work on promoting the Tamil Language and Culture. The University of Toronto, under the leadership of the late Professor Chelva Kanaganayakam, and more recently, York University under the leadership of Professor Philip Kelly, and the University of Windsor, under the Poet Laureate of the Tamil community, Rudhramoorthy Cheran, have sparked a great deal of interest in advancing Tamil studies in Canada. Additional courses are continuing to be developed and annual Tamil studies conferences, lectures and symposiums have attracted many local and international academics to our great country.

The interdisciplinary study of the Tamil people, language, and culture is further supported by awards, such as the N. Sivalingam Award in Tamil Studies at York University and the Tamil Literary Garden's essay award. At a primary and secondary school level, there are many organizations that are teaching tens of thousands of students the precious Tamil language, organizations such as Arivakam, Tamil Academy, and the many school boards offering Tamil heritage language classes. There are other programs that teach *bharatanatyam*, *sangeetam*, and other fine arts. Many young people undertake extensive training in these fine arts for their *arangetrams*.

I want to acknowledge the keepers and teachers, parents and grandparents, for their hard work in instilling the love of the Tamil language, arts, and culture in our young people.

[Member spoke in Tamil]

Private Members' Business

[English]

Nothing makes me prouder than to reflect on the enormous strides made by young Canadians. We will recall the recent story of 17-year-old Prasanthan Aruchunan, who is the first Ontarian to win the NHL Thurgood Marshall scholarship, or young professionals like Anusha Aruliah, a lawyer with the Department of Justice, who moved to Nunavut to work for legal aid for a period of time, and that of the recent winners of Google's Demo Day Game Changer Award, Knowledgehook, led by Travis Ratnam.

I am equally inspired by the leadership undertaken by Tamil Canadians in giving back to our country. Geetha Moorthy founded the South Asian Autism Awareness Centre and has inspired much needed focus on autism. Devi Arasanayagam and Ravi Sreedharan help run the Fort York Food Bank, and Manjula Selvarajah is a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist. These achievements not only speak to the great contributions that Tamil Canadians currently make to our country, but give us a glimpse into the future potential of this community.

I must confess that every time I go into a restaurant in a major city, I find myself peeking into the kitchen. More often than not, I see a very tired middle-aged man in the kitchen working his second job. Inevitably, he will be Tamil, and I will end up having a long conversation about how hard his daughter is studying. I can see the father's pride, but I can also see the enormous sacrifice in his eyes.

Tamil heritage month is a very important way for us to celebrate and recognize Tamil Canadians and their contributions to our society. Tamil heritage month in Canada is as much about being Tamil as it is about being Canadian. This means not just preserving the Tamil language and culture for future generations of Tamils, but also celebrating and instilling shared Canadian values and responsibilities. I am confident that Tamil Canadians will fulfill their historical obligation, especially to repair and reset the relationship with our indigenous brothers and sisters.

From the labs of Goose Bay to the restaurants of Montreal, to the financial towers of Toronto, to the factories of Vaughan, to the innovative hubs in Waterloo, to the oil fields of Alberta, and to the truckers of British Columbia, Tamil Canadians are a proud part of this country, and today the House will ensure that their experiences will forever be recognized each and every January from coast to coast through recognizing Tamil heritage month.

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like many of my colleagues, I too congratulate the member for not only a fine speech but the diligent work he has done in bringing forward the motion in the first place. Canada is indeed a very diversified country, and as the Prime Minister has said, diversity is our strength.

The question I have for the member is whether he could tell us a little more on how it is he decided to put forward this particular motion, which will, I suspect, be supported by all sides of the House. I would also ask him to provide some details as to who he would like to say a special thanks to.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of people who have inspired the motion. It started with many community members who have worked very hard for a long period of time, many of the municipalities and school boards that have done enormous work over the last decade or so. I found a lot of friends in different parties who took this on, so credit should go to all of us in the House. It is a demonstration of how we can all work together.

I particularly want to thank the team in the research bureau: Ian Perkins, Brett Thalmann, and John Delacourt. They are the real unsung heroes of much of the work that we do. I especially want to thank them for making sure that the motion gets the respect and recognition it deserves.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, again, I am not going to say no to the opportunity to ask the member to talk about the Tamil community.

This is a community that has grown and become a very real part of Canadian society; culturally, socially, and economically. Maybe he could provide some of his thoughts in regard to that as well.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I see the Tamil community as a work in progress. What we have seen in the last 30 to 40 years is enormous strength, perseverance, and hard work, which has led to the great foundation in which we stand today.

If we look at our country in 2009, there were 30,000 Tamils outside this Parliament seeking a voice. Today, we find that we have a voice that is projected in Parliament, and not just by a Tamil member, but shared by all members here. I think that is the type of strength we are talking about. It is about using this as a great foundation and building a greater community where Tamil Canadians will play an integral role in our country going forward.

I want to emphasize the historical response that this community has toward making sure our indigenous population is supported and we absolutely ensure that we do right by them. The Tamil Canadian community will share in that responsibility and certainly contribute in any other way we can to build this country.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, food is always the icebreaker. I have about five million Tamil restaurants in my riding, from Babu Catering to many others.

Can the member provide more information to the public regarding Tamil food and what people should be expecting and looking for when they go to Tamil restaurants?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for seconding this motion. Certainly, we share a lot of restaurants.

The first thing I would recommend is to make sure the restaurant is properly ventilated, that there is sufficient air conditioning on a very warm day, and that there is lots of water.

It is one aspect of the culture. For example, Tamil Fest this year in Toronto, as it was last year, will be one of the showcase events where the food and culture will come together.

I hope members can join us in Scarborough this year for Tamil Fest once again.

Private Members' Business

● (1340)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker,*[Member spoke in Tamil]*

I rise to speak to Motion No. 24 which, if adopted, would recognize January as Tamil heritage month every year. This holiday would underline the contributions made by members of the Tamil Canadian community and provide opportunities for educational experiences and events for Tamil culture.

The month of January is significant to the timing of Tamil heritage month because it includes Thai Pongal, the Tamil harvest festival. As the president of the National Council of Canadian Tamils, Dr. Ranjan Sri Ranjan has said, Tamils all over the world celebrate Thai Pongal in the month of January to give thanks to the sun for providing the energy for a bountiful harvest. It is similar to our Thanksgiving. Many events celebrating the arts and cultural richness of the heritage are held during this festival. Any new venture is initiated with Thai Pongal making it a time for new beginnings. These new ventures are new ventures that helped build our country by Tamil Canadians.

The Conservative Party, and I think all Canadians, has a proud history of opening its arms to the Tamil community across the country. We recognize how Tamil Canadians are helping build our nation.

What is not so well known though is that a Conservative prime minister, the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney, initiated direct action to allow the resettlement of Tamils after the attempted ethnic cleansing of Tamils in Sri Lanka in 1983. This single act of generosity eventually led to the resettlement of over 300,000 Tamils here in Canada, many of whom many of us call friends—I call friends—from across the country.

As part of the last Conservative government, I fully supported and applauded our government's decision to condemn Sri Lanka, boycott the Commonwealth Summit, cut off funding to the Commonwealth for its refusal to change the venue, while denouncing the human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, and the release of the statement on the genocide in Sri Lanka, denouncing these atrocities.

Tamil Canadians are one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, boasting thousands of successful professionals in academia, lawyers, doctors, and engineers, just to name a few. In fact, the current president of the National Council of Canadian Tamils, Dr. Sri Ranjan, is an engineer himself at the University of Manitoba. He is a professor there, contributing to the education of not just Tamil Canadians but obviously a wealth of young engineers.

Additionally, the community is well known for its entrepreneurial ventures in important sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, hospitality, education, and technology.

[Translation]

Canada's Tamil community is well integrated and is made up of roughly 300,000 people. They share the Canadian values of liberty, human rights, democracy, and sharing. They arrived in Canada in the mid-1980s as refugees. They had quickly fled a very difficult situation.

[English]

Most came to our country after atrocious experiences of genocide and oppression in their own country. They deeply understand the value and importance of freedom and justice, and stand firm with our Canadian identity and our Canadian values. As the member opposite also mentioned earlier, they advocated for human rights, freedom, tolerance, and generosity.

Many arrived in Canada as refugees decades ago, and now are proudly part of the Canadian fabric. The community's success can be attributed to hard-working individuals and highly valuing education and fiscal responsibility.

The community has long-standing commitments to the arts, culture, and literature. In fact, Canadian Tamils were able to preserve one of the longest surviving classical languages, with literature spanning over 2,000 years. Tamil language studies at Canadian universities, along with their annual conferences, enrich our communities and has made Canada, and in particular Toronto, the centre for Tamil studies across all of North America.

Tamil Canadians have been and continue to be generous and supportive of many charities, including a place where I currently work, CHEO here in Ottawa. The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, as well as the Canadian Cancer Society, SickKids have been huge beneficiaries as have charities that Tamil Canadians participate in, including the ones they host individually among their community members.

● (1345)

[Translation]

The Tamil community in Canada makes an enormous contribution to our society. Tamil people are involved in charities and give their time and money to help other Canadians.

I support this motion, because it also serves to recognize this important contribution.

[English]

I join the Tamil community here in Canada and the National Council of Canadian Tamils in celebrating their vibrant heritage, which I understand has flourished for more than 2,500 years and, today, flourishes in Canada.

Nandri. Merci. I thank all members in this House and encourage them to support the motion.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to speak to the motion sponsored by the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park, which asks that the government recognize the month of January as Tamil heritage month.

The motion also calls for recognition of the contributions that Tamil-Canadians have made to Canadian society, the richness of the Tamil language and culture, and the importance of educating and reflecting upon Tamil heritage for future generations.

Private Members' Business

This is something the NDP can and will support. It is something the NDP has supported consistently over the years. In fact, the wording in this motion is almost identical to the wording of a private member's bill that was introduced by then-NDP member for Scarborough—Rouge Park and Canada's first Tamil member of Parliament in 2013. That bill unfortunately died on the Order Paper.

Passing this motion does not necessarily mean the government will take action, as we know. Motions are non-binding, and the government has no obligation to act. However, I hope the government sees fit to recognize January, every year, as Tamil heritage month.

For the past few years, a member of the NDP has risen in this chamber to recognize Tamil heritage month and to ask the government to instill that recognition in a permanent and ongoing manner. In fact, in each of 2014 and 2015, the former NDP member for Davenport rose in the House and made the following statement:

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I am pleased to recognize today as the beginning of Tamil Heritage Month. For the entire month of January, Canada's Tamil community will be celebrating its history and culture with a variety of events, including the Thai Pongal – the Tamil monsoon celebration. For more than 75 years, Tamils have enriched our country, both on the economic and socio-cultural levels. We acknowledge their contributions and are proud to recognize them. The NDP is urging the government to support our bill to officially designate the month of January Tamil Heritage Month.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that, after a number of attempts and motions were presented over the years in the Ontario legislature, and one of those by the leader of the Ontario NDP, Bill 156, which recognizes January as Tamil Heritage Month in Ontario, was finally passed on March 25, 2014.

I find the preamble to that bill very interesting. It reads:

Tamils began migrating to Ontario as early as the 1940s. Since that time, Tamil Canadians have overcome tremendous obstacles and have made significant contributions to the growth and prosperity of Ontario. January is an important month for Tamil Canadians. The Tamil Harvest Festival, Thai Pongal, as well as other Tamil artistic and cultural events, take place in January. By proclaiming the month of January as Tamil Heritage Month, the Province of Ontario recognizes the valuable contributions that Tamil Canadians have made to Ontario's social, economic, political and cultural fabric. Tamil Heritage Month is an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about the inspirational role that Tamil Canadians have played and continue to play in communities across Ontario.

It goes on to proclaim that "The month of January in each year is proclaimed as Tamil Heritage Month." Why is this important? Well, 150,000 people in Canada identify Tamil as their mother tongue. That means that the actual community, which would include those second and third generation members, is actually significantly larger.

I recently did a Google search regarding the Tamil community and was amazed at the sheer number of activities and events celebrating not only Tamil Heritage Month but other activities throughout the year. I was also impressed by the number of articles discussing the contributions of Tamils in our community.

Mr. Neethan Shan is presently a Toronto School Board Trustee, and the founder and chair of the Tamil Heritage Month initiative. I do not think I could ever truly explain the importance of the initiative, but I think Mr. Shan can and I quote from his message from the chair:

In 2009...it became more important than ever for the Tamils in the diaspora to identify ways to safeguard and promote our histories, heritage, language and unity. Consequently, I wanted to initiate a long term project that can help us, Tamils in

diaspora, to remember, promote and celebrate the histories and heritage of Tamils around the world. Having participated and learnt from both our own Tamil Language Week initiatives of the past as well as from the various Heritage Months celebrated by other communities in Canada (such as Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month, South Asian Heritage Month etc),

● (1350)

I thought it would be appropriate to have a month for the Tamils in Canada, not just to celebrate our arts and culture but, more importantly, to educate ourselves, our youth and non-Tamils about the contributions Tamils have made in social, economic, political, cultural, scientific and other spheres of life for centuries around the world. The idea became a reality in January 2010 with the incredible support of the two founding partner organizations, Arivakam Canada and Canada Tamil Academy; both of whom help many thousands of our students in their learning of the Tamil language and heritage [across Canada]. My sincere appreciation and thanks to these two organizations as well as to the other twenty plus prominent Tamil Canadian organizations for adding strength to the initiative. I am...proud to say that this initiative has been very successful in getting all of our major...organizations to work together for a common cause with mutual respect and understanding...

This year, as in the past, we...[have an] opening ceremony, over 25...events and activities across the country, closing cultural...event titled Thamizh Vizha, launch of our...website, publication of our official Tamil Heritage Month poster and the Tamil Heritage Guide and...many other media and [social media] awareness campaigns. More details of these activities will be published...through our...over twenty Tamil Canadian media partners (...tv stations, radio stations, print media and online media)....

It is important for us to celebrate our...arts and...language, but it is also important for us to celebrate and recognize the contributions of Tamils in...science, philosophy, literature, mathematics, architecture, civil administration, trade and commerce, political systems, sports and recreation, environmental protection, struggles against various oppressions etc. I am hopeful that as this initiative evolves... [our] activities and events will start to reflect the multi-dimensional contributions of Tamils to the world in the past, present and future.

We live in a multicultural society, a country that has been built by those coming here from other countries and building new lives, new communities. We are all, as Canadians, very proud of those roots and we continue to welcome the contributions of those coming from other countries to this day.

Mr. Shan is just one of the many members of the Tamil community who have made significant contributions to this country. There are incredible stories of other Tamil individuals that show how much they have given to Canada.

It is time the government gave the Tamil community the recognition it deserves. We need to join with those jurisdictions that have already recognized January, officially, as Tamil heritage month. We need to pass the motion and we need to make it binding for each and every January from here forward.

● (1355)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to have the opportunity to speak to the House today in support of Motion No. 24 introduced by my colleague and friend, the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park, which seeks to have the House recognize the Tamil community's contributions to Canada and to establish January as Tamil heritage month.

Private Members' Business

Canada has a long and proud tradition of opening its arms to newcomers from around the globe. Because of this, we have become one of the most diverse countries in the world. The presence of Tamils in Canada has made a very significant contribution to that diversity and to our success.

People come from all over the world, speaking every language, practising every faith tradition, and knowing every culture. They come to this country to live in peace, harmony, and safety. They know that they will enjoy, in Canada, a sense of belonging in our multicultural society, and each of them will play an important role in developing our economic strength and our cultural diversity.

In 1988, Canada became one of the first nations to pass a multiculturalism act. This law requires that we preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of all Canadians. It also requires that we work to ensure that all Canadians are equal in our economic, social, cultural, and political life.

Our government is committed to promoting and upholding Canadian diversity and strengthening our multicultural and pluralistic society. We know that Canada is strong, not in spite of our diversity but because of it. Parliament's support for Tamil heritage month would be consistent and in line with that recognition.

[*Translation*]

As Canadians, we celebrate the diversity of our country together. We try to learn more about our common challenges and our shared values. We are moving forward together.

Tamil Heritage Month will be an ideal opportunity to celebrate our diversity and an occasion for the Tamil community to share its culture, traditions, and history with all Canadians.

[*English*]

January is an important month in the Tamil community, with the first month of the Tamil calendar beginning in mid-January. As well, the Tamil community celebrates Thai Pongal, a harvest festival that brings together friends and family to share in a traditional meal, music, and festivities. It is a chance for reflection and to give thanks for good fortune and opportunities to come.

Tamil Heritage Month has already been declared in many communities in Ontario, for example, Mississauga, Durham, Ottawa, Toronto, Markham, and Pickering.

In 2014, the Province of Ontario proclaimed January as Tamil Heritage Month.

In 2015, the Toronto District School Board, one of the largest and most diverse school boards in Canada, unanimously passed a motion recognizing January as Tamil Heritage Month. This will allow public schools in the Toronto district to celebrate Tamil heritage, culture, language, and history, not just among Tamil students but with students from all backgrounds.

Significant migration of Tamils to Canada began in the 1940s, with most arriving as economic immigrants, and, for some, there was opportunity to be reunited with family that were already here. The 1980s, as members have heard, saw a large influx of Tamils fleeing from civil war in Sri Lanka. Canada proudly opened its doors to provide a safe haven for those citizens.

In 2011, the national household survey indicated that approximately 49,000 people in Canada reported their ethnic origin as Tamil, but, perhaps much more significantly, 180,000 reported that they speak Tamil.

Tamil heritage month would provide an opportunity for all Canadians to get to know more about this important community and how much it has contributed to Canada.

Tamils are involved in a remarkably wide range of fields: technical, skilled trades, science, medical, legal, entrepreneurial, political, and so much more. Some notable individuals who are part of the Tamil community include the writer Shyam Selvadurai, and athletes, such as table tennis player Pradeeban Peter-Paul and cricketer Sanjayan Thuraisingam.

Members of Canada's Tamil community have in the past been key players in the creation of Canadian history, identity, and society. They will continue today and in the future to shape our national story.

This acknowledgement is a personal one for me. In 2009, when tens of thousands of Tamil Canadians took to the street in demonstrations, it was a challenge to our pluralism and our values of embracing our diversity. Together, my friends and neighbours who are Tamil Canadians from Scarborough and Toronto worked with all of us to help us understand the importance of those values. The Tamil heritage has made an enormous contribution to Canadian heritage, and it needs to be recognized.

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

I hope Canadians of all backgrounds will see Tamil Heritage Month as an opportunity to appreciate and celebrate Tamil culture, while also celebrating our common Canadian identity.

Celebrating diversity also means participating. This means that we must all take part in activities to promote cross-cultural understanding and build ties between communities.

[*English*]

The Tamil community has already taken the initiative to introduce itself to the greater Toronto area through last year's Tamil Fest. This inaugural event provided an opportunity for the Tamil community to introduce its culture to the greater Toronto community. People were also able to learn more about the history of this community in Canada, through a mobile museum that was on site during the event.

I am confident that in the days ahead, with the establishment of Tamil heritage month, there will be numerous activities and festivities such as Tamil Fest across the country to showcase Tamil culture and history, and the further opportunities that the community will have to build bridges with all Canadians.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my support for the motion and highlighting that it is essential that Canadians celebrate the well-known and lesser-known communities that have helped to make Canada one of the most successful multicultural countries in the world.

I would also like to acknowledge the leadership of my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge Park for his efforts in making this possible.

Based on this, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of the member's motion.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

[Member spoke in Tamil]

I am pleased to rise today to add my voice in support of Motion No. 24, recognizing Tamil heritage month. The motion would recognize January as Tamil heritage month each and every year. Tamil heritage month would recognize the contributions made by members of Tamil Canadian communities and provide opportunities for educational events and celebration of Tamil culture.

The month of January is significant to the timing of Tamil heritage month because it includes Thai Pongal, and the Tamil harvest festival, as well as other Tamil artistic and cultural events.

Tamil heritage month would provide an opportunity to showcase and share the Tamil community's vibrant culture, traditions, and long-standing history with fellow Canadians.

While a similar commemorative month exists in May to recognize South Asian Heritage Month, this month celebrates the contribution of Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, and people of Bangladeshi descent. However, the Tamils form a distinct ethno-linguistic group in these regions with a population of 200,000 in Canada and over 77 million worldwide. The distinct culture merits a separate commemoration.

Many cities throughout the greater Toronto area have proclaimed the month of January to be Tamil heritage month, including Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, and Brampton. A similar private member's bill was proposed by a Progressive Conservative member of the provincial parliament in Ontario, which was supported by both the Liberals and NDP.

In the past, Conservative Party members have commemorated the occasion in the House of Commons. More recently, the former Conservative member of Parliament and minister of immigration read an S.O. 31 to celebrate Tamil heritage month. Clearly, cross-partisan support for Tamil heritage month is evident at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels.

With their culture rooted in the Indris Valley civilization, Tamil is one of the longest surviving classical languages, which contains enormous classical traditions and literature. Tamils began migrating to Canada as early as the 1940s. Since that time, Tamil Canadians have overcome tremendous obstacles and have made significant contributions to the growth and prosperity of Canada. The Tamil community is committed to preserving its rich heritage and has contributed greatly to Canada's cultural mosaic.

After fleeing their native Sri Lanka following the outbreak of civil war in the 1980s, many sought freedom and security in Canada. Changes in the Canadian immigration and refugee policy largely facilitated the arrival of many of post-1983 migrants. Sympathetic to their plight, Canadian policies facilitated the entrance of Tamils by allowing most Tamil asylum seekers to bypass one or more stages of

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the refugee hearing process. The Tamil asylum claims filed with the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board between 1989 and 1998 had an average acceptance rate of 85%.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, tens of thousands of Tamils arrived in Canada and settled in large metropolitan cities like Toronto and Montreal. The Sri Lankan Tamil community can rightly claim to be a model for any refugee community and one of which Canada can be proud. They were determined to succeed and prosper in a country that gave them a second life.

It is remarkable that within a relatively short span of time, Tamils have established themselves in Canada. Empowered by their high level of literacy, education, and professional competency in all walks of life, they have planted deep roots in Canada and are flourishing in the entrepreneurial sphere with numerous prosperous business establishments.

● (1405)

I wish to take this opportunity to quote a Tamil dictum proffered by a Tamil poet 2,000 years ago, reflecting the inner soul of the Tamil people as it existed then and as it does today. He said, "*Yaathum Oore, Yaavarum Kelir*," which simply means the earth belongs to all and all are equal. When expanded further, it says let there be a peaceful coexistence among the nations of the earth and let us treat others, our neighbours, as brothers and sisters. This is what the Tamils offered to the world 2,000 years ago, and continue to offer today.

Tamil verses and epithets, both in their oral and written traditions, have been maintained and preserved for over 2,600 years. They worship nature and treat the environment as the place of their worship. They follow their traditions and patronize their art and culture without causing any hindrance to others, because they believe that the earth belongs to all.

Their neighbours are their brothers and sisters, as dictated by their ancient dictum. Wherever Tamils migrate or settle, they take their culture and traditions with them, and persevere to maintain them in full to the best of their ability with no hindrance to their neighbours.

Throughout the decades in Canada, the Tamils have proved their worth with their contributions to society and respect of the law of the land. Their cultural displays and festivals have brought colour, vibrancy, and pride to Canada.

Many non-Tamil Canadians have had the pleasure of intermingling with Tamils at Tamil cultural serenades, experiencing Tamil hospitality and cultural entertainments. With their dance and music, art and theatre, language and culture, the Tamil community in Canada deserves merit for further enriching the Canadian cultural mosaic.

It is only fitting that Tamil heritage month be dedicated to celebrate the Canadian Tamil community's unique cultural life and to recognize their contribution to Canadian society.

● (1410)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in this House in support of the motion. My colleague from Hamilton Mountain also conveyed the support of the NDP on this important motion.

Private Members' Business

Certainly, as someone who is the daughter of immigrants, I understand well what it means to be both a proud Canadian and to be connected to my heritage and to my community, as one would say, here in Canada. In my case, that is the Greek community, a community to which I am proud to belong.

As I pointed out in the House before, I am also someone who understands how important it is to maintain that connection to our heritage. That is really what today's motion is about, the need to recognize that whether it is for Tamil-Canadians who immigrated to Canada, or their children or their grandchildren who were born and raised in Canada, the recognition that our Parliament would give a time to honour who they are, to honour their language, their culture, is obviously an important message.

Many of us in this House share that same sentiment vis-a-vis other communities as well, and the need to support immigrant communities, linguistic diversity, and cultural programming for ethnic communities or multicultural communities in the country.

While the federal government has played a role on this front, we have seen that in some cases there has been a penchant to go for the symbolic rather than the substantive. The resources have not always been there in terms of making sure that our language schools are supported, that our cultural programming is supported, that festivals are supported that celebrate our multicultural identity. That is something I certainly hope the government will take seriously in terms of its budgetary commitment.

As someone whose first language is neither English nor French, I know how important it is to make sure there is government funding in order for second and third-generation kids, and whoever, to learn their mother tongue. By supporting that kind of work, supporting our diverse communities on that front, we build a stronger sense of what it is to be Canadian.

As I stand here in support of Motion No. 24, I also send a message that it is important that we move from supporting only the symbolic to also recognizing that there is a government role in terms of funding commitments. There is a government role in terms of partnering, including with our provinces, our multicultural organizations, our community centres, in order to make sure we are building the diversity that we are all so very proud of.

As I pointed out, while my heritage may not be Tamil in this case, I certainly recognize the importance of the contributions of the Tamil community, the contributions of immigrant communities to Canada, the contributions of the children and the grandchildren of immigrants to our country, and that we build a stronger Canada when we support diversity, both in the case of Motion No. 24 and legislation of this kind.

It is a real honour to rise in this House and speak to this motion. Certainly I would also add that this allows for more conversations in terms of how we can be supporting communities.

Another area, I should note, that is a very important issue for many immigrant communities, many ethnic communities in Canada, is immigration. Yesterday, in fact, I was in Toronto, and I had the opportunity to visit with a number of young racialized youth, in Scarborough in particular. We had very good conversations about the challenges they face. A number of them were born and raised in

Canada to immigrant parents. Some were born overseas and grew up in Canada, and many of them shared their challenges.

● (1415)

One of the challenges that also came up in our discussions was the desire to improve our immigration system whereby families could more easily access family reunification. We know that under previous Liberal and Conservative governments there were significant cuts in the area of family sponsorship and family reunification.

I should note at this juncture that I am very proud of my home province of Manitoba. Thanks to the work of the NDP government, we were able to develop a very robust provincial nominee program that allowed for us to welcome immigrants to our province in a very sincere way. It ensured that people were supported when they came, that families could come together, and that people were able to access language programming and services, as well as job opportunities. This was at a period of time when unfortunately we saw the federal government moving further and further away from family reunification in the context of immigration.

This is a huge issue in many communities across Canada. It is an issue that, sadly, we have yet to see the government act on. While there have been important commitments and certainly important action when it comes to dealing with the refugee crisis and welcoming many Syrian families to Canada, we have also been very outspoken in the NDP that there needs to be that same kind of compassion shown when it comes to our immigration system. We hope the government will take that seriously.

In the spirit of building a more diverse country, let it not just be about the statements of support. Let it be about action, including supporting family reunification in our immigration system when it comes to language training. Also, let it be about offering support, as the federal government used to do in a much bigger way, to communities that want to ensure their languages continue and that their kids and grandkids can still be connected to who they are and their identity. Also, let it be about support for community centres.

I want to acknowledge that there have been instances where the federal government has played a key role, including contributing funds to building the Greek community centre in my province of Winnipeg, which I hold very dear. The federal government stepped up, worked with our provincial government, adding to the many charitable donations made by Greek Canadians in my province, and was able to construct a beautiful community centre of which we are all very proud.

When it comes to cultural communities, that commitment to infrastructure is critical. It is part of how we should see the need to support immigrant communities. I hope, in going forward, we look at the symbolic. However, it is also very important to look at the substantive and where the government and all of us can work with our communities to build a stronger and more diverse country of which we can all be proud.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Motion No. 24, moved by my good friend and neighbour, the hon. member Scarborough—Rouge Park.

I am pleased to support the motion, which in my opinion would do something that is very long overdue: recognize every January in Canada as Tamil heritage month.

Other jurisdictions have already led the way. In Ontario's legislature, the Tamil Heritage Month Act was passed in 2014 to proclaim every January as Tamil heritage month, a time to celebrate and educate future generations about the inspirational role Tamil Canadians have played in Canadian society.

The City of Toronto has also recognized January as Tamil heritage month for some time, and every year a wide variety of events take place across the city to celebrate the richness of Tamil arts, culture, and cuisine, and recognize outstanding Tamil Canadians. Cities across Ontario, such as Mississauga, Markham, Ottawa, Brampton, Pickering, Ajax, and Whitby have all long recognized the contributions of Tamil Canadians with Tamil heritage month celebrations.

Last January saw members from all parties come together for the first Thai Pongal on Parliament Hill, celebrating the Tamil Hindu harvest festival with dancing, music, and sweets. It was a great evening enjoyed by all who attended.

Therefore, is it not time that all Canadians recognize January as Tamil heritage month?

It is only fitting that a member from the great community of Scarborough is moving the motion to recognize the Canadian Tamil community, because in Scarborough, we are blessed to have one of the largest Tamil communities in Canada.

Private Members' Business

In Scarborough and across Canada, the Tamil community adds so much to the rich cultural diversity that makes our country great. The richness of the Tamil language and the Tamil culture is an asset to Canada, and a living example of what the Prime Minister likes to say, that we are stronger not in spite of our diversity but because of our diversity.

In fact, the Tamil language is one of the oldest and longest surviving classical languages in the world, tracing its roots back to Tamil Brahmi inscriptions that were found in an archaeological site in Tamil Nadu dated to 500 BC. This is truly a rich and diverse culture worth celebrating.

Tamil Canadians are making a difference in all walks of Canadian life. They are the business owners who are creating our jobs, the teachers who are helping to guide our children into adulthood, and the doctors and nurses who care for us when we are sick. On many weekends, I enjoy the Tamil food in Scarborough.

● (1420)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper. When the item is next before the House, the hon. member for Scarborough Centre will have seven minutes remaining.

It being 2:21 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, May 30, 2016, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:22 p.m.)

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