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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 6, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 6, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

Prayer

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, I have two documents to present to the House today. Pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 2016-2019 federal sustainable development strategy.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109 and Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the government's response to the second and unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (for the Minister of Finance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act and the Income Tax Act.

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

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled "An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda".

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

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to Bill C-226, an act to amend the Criminal Code (offences in relation to conveyances) and the Criminal Records Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

[English]

The committee has studied the bill and, pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(1), requests a 30-day extension to consider it.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1 (3)(a), a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put, and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred to Wednesday, October 19, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Orders of the Day

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions on behalf of Canadians regarding impaired driving causing death. Families for Justice is a group of Canadians who have had a loved one killed by an impaired driver. They believe that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient and want the crime to be called what it is, vehicular homicide. Canadians are calling for mandatory sentencing for vehicular homicide and for Parliament to support Bill C-226, the impaired driving act.

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to present this petition from northern Ontarians about the shortage of federal health and safety inspectors in northern Ontario. Canada cut the number of inspectors from 151 in 2006 to fewer than 67 now. Northern Ontario has a single officer covering the whole region. That person's work can be held up by just one injury, illness, or absence.

We are asking the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour to increase the number of federal health and safety inspectors in northern Ontario so that this important work can be carried out at all times without interruption.

[English]

FALUN GONG

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of signatures on a petition with respect to the Falun Gong issue.

Since July 1999, the Chinese Communist Party has launched an intensive, nationwide persecution campaign to eradicate the Falun Gong. Hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been detained in forced labour camps, brainwashing centres, and prisons, where torture and abuse are routine, and thousands have died as a result.

The petitioners are looking to the House of Commons and parliamentarians to call for the end of the persecution of the Falun Gong, in a public way.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present petitions, again today, in support of Cassie and Molly's law.

A Statistics Canada study shows that more than 60,000 pregnant women were victims of domestic violence between 2004 and 2009 in Canada.

The Native Women's Association of Canada is fully endorsing Bill C-225, which would protect pregnant women and their unborn

children, indicating that at least 18 of the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls were pregnant.

Canadians know that a national strategy combatting violence against women will need a law like this included to be comprehensive in addressing violence against women.

● (1010)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition from the constituents of Calgary Rocky Ridge, regarding the government's plan on electoral reform. Given that peer countries of Canada, such as New Zealand and the United Kingdom, as well as Canadian provinces, have all consulted the voters directly through a referendum on the question of proposed changes to the electoral system, the constituents of Calgary Rocky Ridge are concerned about this and believe that if changes to the voting system are to be made, they can only be done with the consent of Canadians through a national referendum.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[English]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am just going to start out by explaining to the public watching TV, members here, the journalists, etc. what today's debate is all about.

Basically, all the mystifying procedures that happen here, the various votes, who is on committee, and all this stuff, are handled by 159 standing orders that we as MPs create. The huge number of new MPs—probably the highest number in history, in this Parliament—may find some of these procedures very mystifying, strange, or even bizarre. Some of those come from England's House of Commons and were established before Canada was even created. Today is those members' chance to change the rules of the House. Are they most effective for doing the business of the nation?

Orders of the Day

One of the 159 standing orders is number 51, which mandates today's debate. The Right Hon. Paul Martin wanted to give backbenchers and all MPs a chance to have a kick at the can in these procedures, so he put in the standing order that says that between the 60th and 90th days of a new Parliament, everyone gets a chance to have a take-note debate on the Standing Orders, which is what we're doing today. After this debate, all this information will go to the procedure and House affairs committee of the House to do with what it will, and it can make recommendations to the government on changes to the Standing Orders.

An example is that the last time we had this debate, on February 17, 2012, one of the suggestions was electronic petitions, which are now a reality; so members can make a difference.

On this side of the House, the present Prime Minister has the same philosophy as the Right Hon. Paul Martin: that this is not for the government. Today, this is for backbenchers, for all MPs to express their ideas, so the government is not providing any input. The government has no idea what we as individual backbenchers are going to say. I think it is going to be a very fun, non-partisan, creative brainstorming day to improve Canada's house of democracy for the benefit of all Canadians.

I'm going to have to talk very quickly to get through about 14 points, just for further discussion. I am not necessarily in favour of or against them, but they are points we might discuss further. I apologize to the translators for talking quickly, but really it is just a warm-up. If they think I am bad, wait until the member for Laurentides—Labelle gets up.

A lot of members will talk about decorum in the House. They have certain concerns, and members will hear that later today.

The first of my 14 points is that the shape of Parliament can actually determine attitudes. If we were in a semi-circle like in Sweden or in Congress, we would be all focused toward the Speaker, a common problem for Canada, and we are all trying to solve it together. It is the same in the committees. Why do we have to have it as adversarial, across the board from each other?

My second point is first nations, recognizing that we are on the traditional land of the Algonquin First Nation. First nations have run successful governments in Canada for centuries, for generations. Maybe we should look at some of their successes. Some members might be interested in reading how the Six Nations Confederacy was instrumental for the designers of the American constitution and Congress.

My third point is this. If an MP of today were given another job to add to all his or her other jobs, not only the MP work but another 28 hours of work that he or she had to do, would the MP find that frustrating? For 10 years, I have had to spend 28 hours every week commuting to my riding. When members revamp the Standing Orders, I ask them to please be sensitive and gentle for those of us who have to travel a long way.

My fourth point is that it is incumbent on all of us today to think of the procedures of the House and Senate and committees as being structured in such a way that the amount of legislation that Canadians need, regardless of who is in Parliament, can be dealt with

without any draconian measures by the opposition or the government to get this work done.

My fifth point is that in Congress, if members watch it, at times there are two podiums and there is a person from each party at a podium, and they are debating back and forth for a few minutes. In this Parliament, we really get no chance to debate with each other. We get a 10-minute speech, we only get to speak once, and except for a question, there is really no ongoing debate. Ten minutes may be enough or not enough. One of the greatest speeches in history, the Gettysburg address, just took barely more than two minutes. So are the speaking limits too long or too short?

• (1015)

My sixth point is that the situation is totally different in committee. There members have unlimited chances to speak, instead of just once as in the House. Members can speak 1,000 times or for 10 hours each time they speak, as long as they maintain relevancy and avoid redundancy and repetition.

Seventh, not long ago in this place, MPs were not allowed to have papers or read a speech. There are some who would like to go back to that. I remember being here many years ago when all the MPs from one party were reading almost identical speeches, which was not very productive. I am not doing very well today because I have lots of paper here, but that is an idea some people had.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Don't look down.

Mr. Larry Bagnell: Don't look down, yes.

Mr. Speaker, eighth is why not have electronic voting for some of the more repetitious votes, or votes whose outcome we know. In Sweden, members are in a semi-circle and get five seconds to vote. They push a red or green button, and there is a big board with green and red buttons and the total is displayed automatically. Then there is another five seconds to do the next vote. They could do 300 amendments in 10 minutes, whereas it would take us a day.

The ninth point is interesting. I am a simple backbench MP. Quite often, I only leave this building by two or three o'clock in the morning. Can anyone imagine if another full-time job were added to an MP's work? That is what happens when someone becomes a minister. Obviously, there is not appropriate time to do both of those jobs. One of them will not be done well. In Sweden, ministers do not sit in the house. They are given brand new MPs to do their MP jobs, to take care of their constituencies and to give their speeches, and ministers can devote all of their time to their ministerial work.

Orders of the Day

Tenth, I want to make a point for those of us who travel. Having Fridays alone off would not give me more time in my constituency. There would have to be no votes after noon on Thursday; otherwise, I would spend all day Friday travelling and still would not get time in my constituency, because it is a 14-hour trip. I have to take three airlines.

As for my eleventh point, to be fair to all Canadians, I personally think there should be playground equipment at the new Centre Block, both inside and outside, for families.

Twelfth, senators are often assigned to delegations on trips on joint committees with the House of Commons based on their parties, but soon there will be a Senate where most of the senators will not belong to a party. I think that whole system has to be looked at.

Thirteenth, I think private members' business needs to be looked at. It could be really abused at both ends of the spectrum. I have a slot now for the first time in 11 years, and I could propose some crazy thing that could seriously affect 30 million Canadians. That could happen if MPs were allowed to do whatever they wanted. On the other hand, I have heard that in the past, a government could go to an MP and say that it did not like his or her speech, that it had a speech it wanted read, and the MP was told to read it.

With any private member's bill, whether it comes from the Senate, the House of Commons, or members, the end result is the same. It becomes the law of the land. A bill is a bill is a bill. Any of these bills should go through two screenings, one from the factual, technical, scientific, professional, knowledge-based input of technical experts who have spent their lives on a certain topic in the bureaucracy, and the second is from the point of view of the social licence of the people, which we provide as politicians.

Last, I do not know what it is like in the other ridings, but in my riding, May and June are my busiest months. It might work better for me if we were to come back earlier in September and leave earlier in the spring, so I could get to all the graduations, etc.

For those who are really excited about this topic and scintillating debate on procedure, there is an excellent paper people might want to read, called "The Good Parliament", by Professor Sarah Childs. She was commissioned to do it for Britain. That report contains 43 recommendations to ensure the diverse and inclusive equality of participation in an effectively organized House of Commons in Westminster, England.

I have three final points from members who could not participate in this debate. First, they suggest there be a maximum time in the Standing Orders for each different category of bill, a different amount of time, but with a limit. Second, they recommend that members who are not on a committee could get mailings from the clerk on important issues if their input were needed. Third, they call for MPs to have comparable staff to civil servants and the ability to pay for at least four.

I am prepared now to answer any questions on my 14 points. Members should remember that if they could not get into the debate, there are questions and comments. They do not have to ask questions. If they could not get on the speaking list today, they could make their comments in the questions and comments period.

● (1020)

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the thought that the member has put into this.

One of the things about being an older guy is that I understand what you are saying about decorum in the House. What used to happen, for example, is that there were no meals in the lobbies but these were provided for all MPs in the room next door. That specific activity allowed much greater socializing amongst the MPs from all parties. They knew where the food was and they went there. It provided for much better social interaction. I believe that when we are talking about the behaviour and decorum in the House, losing that simple thing has decreased our sociability.

I appreciate what the member is talking about. When we are sitting in this style here and in committees, it does not provide for better decorum because we are set up in opposition. Improving the social function with this piece alone would be a better solution for us.

I thank the member for bringing up those points.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go back to the hon. member for Yukon, it is clear from the outset that there will be a lot of interesting questions and comments with each of the speeches today. We are going to do our best to try to limit those interventions to no more than one minute. The hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, that is a great point.

I would just like to say that former Speaker Peter Milliken agrees, exactly, with the member, that the more social interaction we can get, the more collegiality and understanding of each other we will have.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, really quickly, with regard to the debate today, it is about the efficient use of time for me. Having raised two children since being here in Parliament, with one now becoming a teenager, it is the issue of having time well used.

Could the member expand on how electronic voting could maybe help? If we miss flights because of our inefficient voting system, it can leave us stranded in airports for two, four, six, or eight hours at a time, or even sometimes the next day. That situation could potentially be improved so we could actually get home to our constituents and our loved ones.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I will be really quick so as not to take up other people's time.

As I said, in Sweden, they can do in 10 seconds what we do in 10 minutes, just by pushing a button. Secondly, they also only have votes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, so for those who have to travel, they could structure their week around that. Then they would not get stuck there and miss a plane.

Orders of the Day

•(1025)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was one of those people who was not able to get on the list today to speak, and that is what I am interested in exploring a little and hearing my colleagues' comments on.

It was not until only about two decades ago, to my understanding, that the whips of the individual parties started to provide lists of when MPs would speak. That has created a situation wherein if I know I will be speaking at roughly 10:20 a.m., I will walk in here at 10:15 a.m., and I still know I can get to a meeting by 10:50 a.m.

It creates an environment where I am not pushed to be involved in the actual debate. I just come to the House to deliver a speech and then I leave. It is not even written anywhere that the Speaker needs to take that list, but I wonder if my colleague could expand a little on the idea of going back to the old way of doing things, where if a member wanted to speak, they rose and the Speaker would randomly go through the room and select people.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I will leave that as a comment, and let more people speak.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member for Yukon has a long way to travel. It can be very difficult travelling even for those of us who have a short distance to go.

However, I am a bit confused, because throughout his speech the member suggested having a shorter work weeks in Ottawa and taking Fridays off, and he suggested rising earlier, all so he could spend more time in his riding.

When I first came to the House in 2004, I was under the impression that we were here to represent our constituents in Ottawa, not to represent Ottawa to our constituents. How does the member feel about that?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I did not really comment on Fridays.

However, I would say that if we are going to represent our constituents in Ottawa, as the member suggests, we need to hear from them. If we cannot even be in the office one day a week, how are we going to hear from them?

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the work he has done as chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which does a lot of work on this issue, and for some of the family friendly things he has mentioned. I want to hear a bit more about question period because, despite some of the comments made, this place is inherently adversarial. There is a reason we sit two sword lengths apart. There were some highly publicized stories in the previous Parliament about the quality of answers. There are a lot of limitations on the quality of questions we ask in opposition. However, there is not very much with respect to the quality of answers. I wonder if he believes that the Standing Orders should be changed to force government to actually make its answers relevant and of a certain quality.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, if the member thinks it is bad now, he should have seen it before. I think a lot of people will comment on decorum in question period, and beyond. The last time

we had this debate was when we were in opposition, and one of the suggestions was that ministers actually answer questions.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak to the procedural rules that govern Canadian democracy. While it may not be the most exciting or controversial subject matter, these rules affect all aspects of the creation of law in this country, yet they are rarely spoken of or acknowledged in our day-to-day dealings in the House.

Since being elected, I have had the opportunity to speak on a number of diverse but incredibly important subjects, ranging from softwood lumber to assisted death, and the energy east pipeline to the suicide crisis in Attawapiskat. While I may not be a subject matter expert or a so-called procedural nerd, I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the betterment of democracy, building on the work of the many great parliamentarians who have come before me.

In preparation for today's debate, I studied some of the speeches my colleagues have made in the past. There was plenty of material to draw from, because the House is required to review its own standing orders at the beginning of the first session of any new Parliament, between the 60th and 90th days, according to Standing Order 51(1). I am confident that all my colleagues in the House know of this standing order.

Unlike some of the speeches in the past, I will spare the House the same lecture it has heard dozens of times before. However, I would like to talk about some areas I believe would lead to improvement.

Let us talk about something that I feel the standing orders sometimes fail to do. Healthy debate is a cornerstone of our society. It is the basis for democracy and is the foundation of freedom of speech. Why is it, then, here in this place, the very pinnacle of our democracy and the safe haven for true and intelligent debate, do we hear time and again regurgitated talking points and constant repetition?

Traditionally, as our hon. colleague, the member for Yukon mentioned, no member of Parliament in this place was allowed to have notes at his or her desk. This is meant to be a place for sombre thought and for ideas and opinions to flow and grow naturally from a speaker's own mind.

We were elected to represent our constituents. We were elected on the basis of our ability to convey their wishes and concerns. How can we do so when we are simply reading and re-reading the same talking points, which all of our colleagues have already read? The following is an excerpt from the House of Commons rules of debate.

Rules respecting relevance and repetition are difficult to define and enforce. The rule against repetition can be invoked by the Speaker to prevent a Member from repeating arguments already made in the debate by other Members or the same Member. The rule of relevance, on the other hand, is used to keep a Member from straying from the question before the House or committee.

I would like to see more scrutiny when it comes to debate and the speeches we hear in this place.

Orders of the Day

I am guilty as charged on this one. I think we all are. It is very easy to let the passion of debate fuel a rant or lead a member down a path that may not exactly lead to the point or be part of the topic of debate because of a button pushed or an errant comment made. It might simply be the fact that we have this beautiful venue, this beautiful soapbox, that we often take for granted and use at will.

I would like to see members encouraged to write and create their own material. I would also like to see less reading from notes while in this holy chamber. As the previous member said, and used my line before I did, I realize and understand the hypocrisy of the statement, because I'm reading from my notes as well. However, I believe the best speeches and interventions from all sides are those that are spoken from the heart, fuelled by passion and knowledge of a particular issue, not simple talking points.

I am passionate about this place, and I respect all who come through those doors. I would like to stress the fact that I feel honoured each and every day I have had the opportunity, to this point and beyond, to walk up these stairs and work with all members of the House.

I believe that the people who elected us, Canadians, deserve the very best from all of us and from the institutions we serve. Therefore, I would like to see the rules on debate improved and enforced.

Now I would like to speak about accountability. The tabling of documents is currently something that only ministers or parliamentary secretaries, acting on behalf of ministers, can do.

●(1030)

I think it would serve this place well if all members were allowed to table documents. There are safeguards already in place to prevent unnecessary documents from being tabled, but if the government, which champions itself as an open and transparent government, is truly wanting to be open, truly wanting to be transparent, it should not be afraid of any document being presented before this House.

As I am sure the House is aware, because of recent events involving a minister and a limo receipt, the Speaker of this House was unable to view the receipts before ruling, because they were not officially available. There was simply no mechanism for the opposition to put them before the House, other than unanimous consent, which of course, given the topic, was unlikely.

In that same light, and I am sure all of my colleagues feel the same, take-note debates offer the rare ability to talk about issues that are pertinent. For the Canadian people it would be beneficial to allow the official opposition to call a take-note debate twice in each session and to allow the third party to call a take-note debate once in each session. This would provide the opposition parties, and their constituents in the ridings they represent, more opportunities to debate issues of importance to them.

This could be done with little to no impact on time allocated for government orders. This would also alleviate pressure on the government to grant take-note debate requests, as it could simply tell opposition parties to use one of their allocated days.

I think we can all agree that there is a certain amount of sacrifice we make in undertaking our role as parliamentarians. We signed up

for this, knowing those demands full well. We see our families less. That is a simple fact. Some of us are lucky enough to have our families close at hand while others spend weeks on the opposite side of the country. I, like my hon. colleague from the Yukon, have one of the most difficult travel schedules. It is a great thing that I love airports and airplanes, and I make my way back every week to see my constituents.

We are away from our loved ones: husbands, wives, sons and daughters, grandchildren, and all those who are close to our hearts. That is why I have come to appreciate the new arrangement whereby some votes are taken immediately after question period instead of at the end of the day. I think this is something the House should look into making a permanent function. It is, indeed, better use of our time.

I would like to talk about the calendar. In the very same light, as I mentioned previously, I would like to suggest that we settle the House calendar for the following year in June, rather than waiting until September. Waiting until just before the House resumes causes an unnecessary rush and takes away from the process itself.

Recently I made the comparison to rushing the budget process without thorough review and consideration. The budget would likely miss something or have serious complications. How can we expect to fully comprehend or understand the implications of the calendar when we are putting it together in such a hectic and rushed way? I believe it would better serve this House, and indeed all Canadians, if we were to begin this process much earlier.

As hon. members know, our constituencies are never adjourned, and the responsibilities that come with representing our constituents are a constant and ever-beating heart. More time in advance to study our schedules would allow us to better prepare for the coming months and to ultimately better serve our constituencies.

On the same note, we are in a 24/7 business. Though our offices may close for long weekends, holidays, and special occasions, the lives and concerns of those who elected us continue every day.

The Liberals have proposed a shortened work week. I do not support this, and I believe that it sends a wrong message. The hard-working friends and families in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George expect me to work a full day and a full week to represent them to the fullest. Giving ourselves a long weekend every week, under whatever title or reason the Liberals offer, is wrong. We all signed up knowing the demands that came with this incredible opportunity. The responsibility falls on all of us to manage our time and schedules better.

Orders of the Day

In closing, I think it is clear that I have many suggestions. As a new member of Parliament, I am eager to continue developing my procedural skills in this place, and I vow to continue to speak with passion, resolve, and sincerity. I will continue to do my very best to serve the good people in my beautiful riding of Cariboo—Prince George, a region and constituents I am deeply proud of.

In closing, I would like to end with the words of someone else. One of the very best men to have stood in this place, Sir John A. Macdonald, said:

A new Member requires the experience of his first session in the House to teach him how to hang up his overcoat and take his seat in a manner befitting a gentleman.

With that, I thank hon. members.

• (1035)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am totally in agreement with the calendar being set well before what we have right now. I think June was the month the member mentioned. Considering that we spend so much time away from our families, being able to plan that much further ahead is essential. I totally agree with the member.

On the shortened work week, we work long hours Monday to Thursday, so there is an argument for a shortened work week, but I am not totally convinced that we should go to that.

The member's travel is worse than mine, because he goes all the way through British Columbia. I go to Newfoundland. Nevertheless, we both spend the same time in airports and airplanes. If we have the attitude that we all knew what we were getting into, nothing would really change.

One thing that should probably change is voting and how many hours we spend here with up-and-down voting. Most international politicians who come here are fascinated and ask why we still vote that way. It was something delivered in the 19th century, and it has not been changed.

I will leave it at that for now, but I would like to get the member's comments on some of the most important things he would change.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I am probably one of the worst ones to ask on this, because regardless of whether it is the role I have or previous roles, I am a bit of a workaholic. I am in the office at 7 a.m., and I am usually one of the last ones to turn the lights off at night. I do that whether it is a weekend or Monday to Friday. It is just the way I am wired.

I thank my hon. colleague from Yukon who brought up electronic voting. I am all for finding efficiencies and better ways of doing things. There are ways we could manage our day-to-day schedules in the House to be better and more effective for all Canadians. If electronic voting is one we would consider, I would be interested in looking at that.

• (1040)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a little concerned about a lot of the focus in the House on making it easier for parliamentarians to get home.

We do hard work, but our people send us here to be accountable. My focus today is how we can make Parliament more accountable

and more efficient so that the people we represent know they can trust what is happening here.

I read the mandate letter from the Prime Minister, and it is fantastic in terms of the role ministers must play in terms of starting to be more accountable in the House. However, I notice, with the justice minister, that there have been a series of questions that are important to have answered. For example, there are questions about sending in lawyers to overturn the ruling in favour of residential school survivors that she refuses to answer. There are questions about whether the Site C dam met the legal obligations. These are questions for the justice minister. To have a minister in such an important portfolio not bother to respond to such questions diminishes all the promises the Prime Minister is making about making the House more accountable.

What does my hon. colleague think about making sure that when we have questions and responses that those responses are actually credible on the question?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question.

One of the greatest disappointments, getting to this point, is that when, and again I am not talking about previous governments, because I was not part of that, we have hard questions for all ministers, including the Prime Minister, rather than even making eye contact at the time of the question, it is deferred to a parliamentary secretary, who then regurgitates the speaking points. Ministers stand up to speak to something important about a file they have been entrusted with, and they read talking points that have absolutely no relevance to the question being asked.

I, and I am sure most of my colleagues on this side of the House, would rather see more accountability from ministers and questions not deferred to parliamentary secretaries.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to encourage all of my colleagues to be less partisan today. This is the one day that we collectively, as colleagues, have an opportunity to ask ourselves whether the Standing Orders, the rules that conduct the operation of the House of Commons and committees, are appropriate or whether we need to make changes. This is our opportunity, as members of Parliament, individually and collectively, to put on the table the important issues of the day.

My colleague raised many important issues. I am going to get to one issue, and that is with respect to the Speaker's powers and the enforcement of the rules of debate. Would my friend be amenable to perhaps expanding those powers beyond simply, under the current system, naming a member if he or she is out of order?

Orders of the Day

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, again, while the Speaker's chair is considered to be non-partisan, it is important as we move forward that, at all times, the Speaker is impartial and non-partisan. At times it feels that maybe that is not the case, in terms of debate and the rules of debate. That comment is probably unfair, but it just feels like it on this side sometimes. However, I think there are things all of us can do, including the Speaker.

You do a great job, Mr. Speaker, so please do not take offence to this, but I think the purpose of today is find ways that all of us can better serve Canadians and better serve our constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: We're going to go to resuming debate, but before we do, I will remind hon. members that I am cognizant of the fact, and will pass it along to other chair occupants today, that many members wish to have the opportunity to speak today. However, we are going to watch the time very closely; otherwise, if we get behind, there will be members at the later part of the day who may not get the chance to have their 10 minutes. Therefore, we will observe the times very closely.

That said, we only have five minutes for questions and comments throughout the day, because of the interest in participation today. We will do our best to get everyone fit in within that five minutes. Members may notice that when only one or two members stand up, clearly, we will give them a little more latitude in terms of the time. We gauge it based on the number of people who stand when we first call questions and comments. That will be the guide that we will use.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly

• (1045)

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we are talking about changing the Standing Orders, this is one problem that could be addressed. We only have 10 minutes at the start of this debate compared with 20 minutes for others. Maybe that is something to bear in mind.

[*Translation*]

As deputy House leader for the NDP, I am pleased to rise today and talk about the discussions we have been having within the NDP team for a number of years now on changes to the Standing Orders of the House. I welcome this opportunity to talk about two aspects in particular.

We hear a lot about work-life balance. That is very important to all of us, across party lines. When we talk about the Standing Orders, despite the pleas we heard this morning from some members, primarily Liberal, there is unfortunately an element of partisanship involved, because we are also talking about democracy, accountability, and how to reform the tools at our disposal.

As I said earlier, the opposition and government benches are two sword lengths apart, and there is a reason for that. However, we can still make an effort to improve decorum and the conduct of members. At the end of the day, we need to work in an environment that Canadians can count on to get clear answers and accountability from the government, and to feel reassured that we are doing our job.

I would like to begin by mentioning a few improvements that have already been made, because our main problem here in the House of Commons is that it is 2016, but we are working in an environment

from the 20th century. Consider, for example, the fact that it was only recently, in the last decade, that a women's washroom was installed near the entrance to the members' lobby and diaper changing stations were put in the men's washrooms. These are all important details and examples that show just how far behind the times we are. We have a lot of catching up to do.

Nonetheless, some improvements have been made. For example, there is reserved parking for new parents, new mothers and new fathers, so that they can park closer to the House when there are votes or debates. As we all know, our schedule can be quite tight, so having reserved parking is very helpful. We also know that there is a family room in Centre Block now. It provides a space for new mothers to nurse their babies. That is an excellent start. That room could also be used for new parents who want to take a break with their children, their spouse, or even with a child care provider or another family member, depending on their family situation. It is very important to note that regardless of the family situation, age, or gender, all hon. members should feel welcome to use that room. That is something we could address in our discussions today.

I also want to mention some minor details that might seem trivial to the general public. Having highchairs available in the Centre Block cafeteria is appreciated. This is the type of thing we worked on with the other parties, the teams from the official opposition and the government. These are concrete measures that we were able to put in place.

We are all familiar with the experience of some female MPs. I am thinking about my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue, my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît, and, in the last Parliament, MPs such as Rosane Doré Lefebvre, who was the hon. member for Alfred-Pellan, and Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe, who was the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard. They all became new mothers while in office and remained extremely dedicated MPs. As their colleagues, we learned from their experience what measures needed to be taken to improve work-life balance in Parliament.

[*English*]

We do not need to stop there. When I heard the member for Yukon speak, who is also the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee and has helped lead the excellent work that the committee has done in getting the ball rolling on this debate, he mentioned other installations and infrastructure that could be set up as the renovations happen in Centre Block.

These are all things we need to be open to because we should not content ourselves with less; we need to do more. As I said, we are an institution that is sometimes stuck in the *Mad Men* era of the 20th century. As some would say, it is 2016 and we need to arrive at that in the way that we treat other members, our colleagues, and ourselves, which is extremely important.

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To that end, when it comes to juggling family and work, we do have certain proposals, some of which will echo the proposals made by my Conservative colleague earlier, but which also echo the recommendations that were in the report that was tabled by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which to us reflects a certain consensus that exists on some of the easy things we can do to keep this ball rolling and to keep taking these positive steps that we have begun taking.

● (1050)

First and foremost is formalizing the habit we now have of having votes immediately after question period. It is something that started in this current Parliament and has spared us some of the long, late night hours that we experienced in the previous Parliament and before that. Regardless of our personal situations, it is gruelling on us all. This is certainly something that we should include now officially in the Standing Orders, barring certain exceptions that can come up. It is something that we can easily formalize and seems to be something that already, despite being relatively informal and based on the motions that we have to adopt every single time through unanimous consent, has that consent. Why not make it formal and avoid having to do it every time?

[*Translation*]

My colleague from Yukon also raised the issue of Thursday votes. We understand that a debate must take place on Friday, but we believe that there are other solutions to be considered before we abolish it. We believe that we must be here as much as possible to hold the government to account, but we also know that some members live further away and must leave Thursday. We recognize that they must leave whether or not Friday is on the calendar.

I am lucky to live a two-hour train ride away. It is very easy for those of us who live so close, but most of my colleagues have very long and complicated trips. Knowing that there would not be a vote at inconvenient times, such as late Thursday or Friday, they would be free to plan their trips and their personal or family life, whether it was medical appointments or other things that complicate travel.

I find these things very complicated and my situation is relatively easy compared to that of my colleagues. We can therefore empathize with them and admit that we could formalize certain rules about votes to make life easier for them.

To repeat once more the comments of my Conservative colleague, we are also proposing that the calendar be adopted earlier, in June rather than in September. It would make it easier to plan our vacations. We know that winter break weeks are not the same in all provinces. Will a family go down south during the March break? We need to know when the children are in school. It would help us get organized if the calendar were officially adopted in June rather than September.

Finally, we currently accept this practice de facto, but it goes without saying that it must be officially incorporated into the Standing Orders. Let us allow children, particularly those of nursing age, in the House of Commons. It is very difficult for new mothers to nurse their child during a vote, for example. Even if no one questions the practice any more, it should still be incorporated into the Standing Orders.

[*English*]

I did say at the outset that while we talk about juggling family lives and our own personal situations, we also have to talk about accountability on the part of the government. It is unfortunate that despite wanting to be non-partisan, we have to accept the adversarial nature of this place.

As I mentioned in a question to the member for Yukon, there are some stories, such as the face palm heard around the world from my former colleague, Paul Dewar, that recall there are often answers that leave a lot to be desired. When we talk about reforming question period, we see the government House leader's mandate letter, which calls on the Prime Minister and ministers to be more accountable. If we as opposition members are going to have burdens on the questions that we ask in terms of how they relate to government business, there should be a burden placed on the answers from the government that they be relevant to the question asked and of a certain substance. I think that goes without saying and that is what Canadians would expect of question period.

It will certainly make the hour we spend here more productive, and dare I say, hopefully restore Canadians' confidence in what is the theatre of what happens here and nonetheless a rare opportunity for members to ask the important questions of the day. That also applies as well to Order Paper questions with again, stories that have come to light in the media recently. It also has to do with omnibus legislation.

● (1055)

[*Translation*]

Of course, there is also the matter of time allocation and closure motions, which were a bad habit of the previous government. The current government seems to be back on the right track. The use of these types of motions is less frequent now than it was in the spring. However, the fact remains that we need to limit or ban the use of these tools for the good of democracy.

There needs to be a better balance between work and family and between democracy and accountability. In my opinion, that would make for a better Parliament for both members and Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been thinking often about question period. I was surprised when I first came here that it is such a short question and such a short answer. I understand why the opposition is under this stress. The ministers often read their responses because they do not know the questions beforehand.

Orders of the Day

With respect to the idea from the member for Yukon that members should not be allowed to have paper in the House when providing a response, I believe that if a minister is under the gun and does not want to make a mistake, it is quite acceptable and very human to read a response that has been prepared in advance. I also believe that question period should allow longer periods for questions to be asked and for responses so that there can be greater depth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, although I usually give my speeches without any speaking notes, I do sometimes jot down a few points, so I am certainly open to my colleague's proposal.

In his question, he spoke about the time allocated for question period. Members can go on YouTube and watch the first televised question period between Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Joe Clark. In those days, questions and answers lasted between a minute and a half and two minutes. Obviously, that is a lot more time. That is exactly the type of proposal that would be worth looking into .

We want to make question period as relevant as possible. That would help restore Canadians' confidence in the process. It would be good for opposition members, and I believe it would also be good for government members and backbenchers.

It is a proposal that is worth looking into.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to my hon. colleague's remarks. His speaking style is very compelling, as were his remarks on how things should be done in the House.

I would like to talk about repetition in the House. When the same questions are asked over and over again, how does that affect the quality of debate and the substance of our work? Of course, answers should be consistent.

Does my colleague believe there is anything to be gained from repeating questions in the House?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, sometimes we repeat questions several times because it takes several attempts to get answers. That is just a fact. I am not pointing fingers.

Seriously, repetition is one thing, but relevance is another. Members often rise on points of order related to the relevance of speeches. It is a constant struggle. I do not really know what we can do about that.

For example, when the government tabled the budget, a number of members took the opportunity to talk about all kinds of issues specific to their ridings. I think that kind of flexibility is a good thing, actually. Nevertheless, we might have to tighten up some of the rules. We have to be open to changing how we do things so we can improve the quality of debate.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that frustrates opposition members the most is that very little time is dedicated to private members' business. Basically, we get only five hours a week. The person who draws the last number will never get to debate their private member's business.

In a meeting of the procedure and House affairs committee, the member for Sherbrooke proposed creating a parallel chamber, which would sit at the same time as the House of Commons.

Does my colleague think it would be a good idea to have a parallel chamber to debate private members' business, so that more members would have the opportunity to have their bills debated?

• (1100)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would be open to that. Because of the existing lottery system, not one of my bills has come before the House despite the fact that I will have been a member for eight and a half years at the end of my term.

Obviously, the system is not perfect, and we do not really have any alternatives. However, perhaps there is an alternative, as my colleague just suggested. It warrants discussion at least, because I am far from the only member who has been in the House this long in the same situation, although I did get unanimous consent.

Quite frankly, if everyone started asking for unanimous consent, it would never end. Clearly there are challenges to finding ways for all members to have their bills passed or voted on. I know the people of Chambly would love to see my bill pass. Unfortunately, I will not be so lucky.

Still, we will work hard to push the minister to make some changes. In the meantime, we need to explore solutions that will ensure that all members' voices are heard, even though there are 338 of us.

[*English*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity, today, to speak to the House regarding the debate on standing orders and procedures.

As times change, I believe so should the rules governing the functioning of one of the greatest institutions: our own Parliament of Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Fathers of Confederation recognized that the needs of the House of Commons and Parliament in general would change a great deal over time.

That is why, in their infinite wisdom, they created mechanisms for reviewing the standing orders of our Parliament and ensured that parliamentarians would have the important task of reviewing their own rules based on the needs of members of the House of Commons and Canadians.

That is the task that is before us today. We are discussing some of the issues that were raised in committee over the past few months, so that we, my esteemed colleagues and I, can provide more in-depth explanations as to why some of these standing orders need to be reviewed.

[*English*]

Today, I rise to discuss, in particular, the further study of the possibility of eliminating sittings of the House of Commons on Fridays.

Orders of the Day

While Friday sittings remain in effect today, I would like to discuss just a few of the many reasons why, in my own humble opinion, in the spirit of promoting a more family-friendly atmosphere for members and modernizing our Parliament, this is an issue that deserves much more serious attention, thought, and further consideration.

[*Translation*]

Obviously, some members may not be in favour of eliminating Friday sittings. I completely understand their concerns. I can already hear my colleagues grumbling about how this member is just trying to get out of working on the weekend, as though she is the stereotypical politician who is always trying to get out of doing work.

That is not at all the case, and I am convinced that many of my colleagues in the House agree with me. The real reason is quite the opposite. We are proposing that we carefully examine the possibility of eliminating Friday sittings precisely to give members of the House more time to spend in their ridings, travel back and forth to their ridings, and do more work there for their constituents.

For example, some members have to travel very long distances to go back to their ridings. By eliminating Friday sittings, the parliamentary calendar would be more predictable. That would give members a more flexible schedule and would benefit their constituents.

I believe that we can easily convince the Canadians who elected us to represent them that we can do a much better job if we have a little more time in our ridings to listen to their concerns and to talk to them face to face.

I just spent a wonderful summer in my riding, Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, where I had many opportunities to speak to my constituents and many community stakeholders about the issues that affect the people in our riding.

• (1105)

[*English*]

I spent countless hours this summer with my constituents. I had a marvellous time with them at barbecues, town halls, chance meetings, and farmers' markets, as well as in my constituency office, and also interacting with our region's stakeholders and hearing their concerns directly, face to face.

In doing so, I was able to secure necessary funding for vital infrastructure development and cultural projects in my riding and, also, to participate in important community discussions, mostly because I was physically available to my constituents and stakeholders and present to hear their opinion and concerns.

[*Translation*]

In my opinion, that is one of my most important responsibilities as an MP. I believe that we can do much more to free up members a little from the work in the House, so that we can focus more on our work with the constituents in our ridings.

[*English*]

For one, being present in our ridings allows us, as members of Parliament, to be far more engaged with our constituents and more

aware of the issues that concern them. It also connects us with Canadians in a much more direct way. It is democracy in action.

Even in this day and age of social media and non-stop communication with our citizens, nothing says to a Canadian more clearly that their member of Parliament is listening intently to their concerns than when they can actually meet with them face to face and have a frank exchange with them in person.

[*Translation*]

This summer, I spent more time with the people in my region because I was in my community more. However, with the arrival of fall, when the House is sitting, I have much less time to spend with the people in my riding.

[*English*]

This is not a partisan issue.

[*Translation*]

It has more to do with the very nature of the work of an MP, which is to listen to one's constituents and to faithfully represent their interests in Parliament. In my opinion, we can make our job easier by more carefully examining whether we should stop sitting on Fridays.

In that regard, I would also like to point out a significant problem that all too often goes unnoticed. Increasingly, when we remain immersed too long in our life here, in the national capital, we have a tendency of distancing ourselves somewhat from everyday life in our ridings. Consequently, we run the risk of losing sight of the importance of our constituents' everyday reality.

[*English*]

Sometimes, when we are spending too much time in Ottawa, it becomes a bit easier to lose some of the perspective of how government policies and programs directly impact the lives of Canadians, and it becomes more difficult to see the real forest for the trees.

[*Translation*]

I maintain that if we as MPs were to spend more time in our respective ridings, we would have a better idea of the complexity of what is happening on the ground back home and a better understanding of our constituents' problems.

[*English*]

Much like researchers who can draw a much more accurate picture of the situation when they are right in the thick of it, MPs can do a much better job of observing the reality in their ridings, I contend, when they are physically on the ground.

For instance, they are much better equipped to witness the impact of a particular policy or program when they have direct contact with their citizens and when they benefit from additional opportunities to see these policies and programs in action.

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[Translation]

The initiative to eliminate Friday sittings from the House calendar, unless there is a compelling reason to sit that day, is not new.

Professor Sarah Childs, from the University of Bristol in England, conducted a study on the subject of work-life balance in western parliamentary democracies. She pointed out in that study that the House of Commons in the United Kingdom sits during only 13 Fridays, set in their calendar, while the Houses of Commons in Australia and New Zealand completely eliminated Friday sittings from their schedules.

Here in Canada, eight of our 13 provincial and territorial legislatures have opted for four-day weeks, and two others sit on Fridays only in exceptional cases.

• (1110)

[English]

I put it to the House, if our colleagues at the provincial and territorial level have seen to modernize their own institutions in order to accommodate the lives of sitting members, then should we not follow suit?

I would strongly argue that a thorough study of the question of eliminating Friday sittings of the House goes a long way toward making a concerted effort to improving the work-life balance of MPs while also freeing them up to do a much better job representing their constituents' interests for all the reasons I have just mentioned.

[Translation]

In closing, I think we can all acknowledge that we have an incredible opportunity here at this time in our history to review some of the practices of the House in order to ensure that members can achieve a better balance between their parliamentary and personal responsibilities, and that this matter is highly important to how our Parliament operates.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about eliminating Friday sittings. I have a young family, and I do not support eliminating Friday sittings for the simple reason that many members are not here on Fridays anyway, because there are no votes that take place on Fridays. Friday still provides an opportunity for debate and for holding the government accountable, but at the same time, members can go to events in their ridings if there are other people here to cover for them.

Would it not be a better fix, if the member is concerned about members being able to spend time in their ridings, to reduce the number of days on which votes could occur, rather than reducing the number of days on which the House sits? Would that not more directly address the problem of members being available to go to events in their riding while still maintaining the same amount of time for debate and for holding the government accountable?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that, frankly, during the summer months I truly had an opportunity to engage with the constituents on a very regular basis. I had the opportunity to have 10 town hall meetings, for example. During those conversations, those meetings at the constituency office, we

truly had an opportunity to really sense exactly what the concerns were of our constituents.

Therefore, for me to have that additional time in the riding to really build those relationships and to hear from the constituents is truly very important. I feel that eliminating Friday sittings would absolutely allow us to do that.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that my whip found a way to free me from having to be here on Fridays. I go back home. I do the commute every weekend and, honestly, I am burnt out. I travel all day Friday, on Saturday I am exhausted from travelling and my workweek, and on Sunday I have to leave again. Sometimes I feel like crying because I have to leave so soon. Eliminating Friday sittings would not help me because I already benefit from that. It is the commuting that is so hard. Every week I lose 15 hours travelling back and forth.

Would it not be more relaxing, for example, to decide in favour of blocks of two weeks in a row and two weeks when we are not sitting? That would remove the need for everyone to do one more back-and-forth. I think that the option of eliminating Friday would not suit everyone and is definitely not an advantage for everyone. What is difficult for many people is the constant travelling back and forth, and our colleagues from British Columbia living with jet lag, for example. In fact, this has caused certain members to resign, as they could no longer manage these back-and-forths every week, in addition to enduring the effects of jet lag.

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

The suggestion that the House not sit on Fridays is not being tabled to accommodate us, but rather to accommodate our fellow citizens. In the end, they are the ones who want local access to their members of Parliament. Clearly, revising the calendar to create two-week blocks might be a very good idea as well. However, my focus was really to fully support our citizens in our ridings, to ensure that they have access to their member of Parliament. The issue of accessibility for our fellow citizens is very important.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I wanted a shorter work week, I would spend more time in Ottawa, not less. When I come here to Ottawa, we go down to 12 hours a day. That is the life we have here.

My riding is very close to Ottawa, two hours by road. There are many towns in my riding, and if I wanted to spend a day in each of them, it would take me a little more than six weeks to do the grand tour. What is more, there are 45 ridings that are even bigger than mine. In that sense, the film *Going to War with Guibord* is a pretty accurate description of my riding.

I also want to salute the work of André Barnes, an analyst for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, or PROC, who has to examine this whole debate and give us the list of all the ideas presented here.

Orders of the Day

That brings me to another point: whenever any change is made, we must think of the parliamentary assistants and support staff all over the Hill, and the effect that the schedules of parliamentary proceedings have on their families and their work. We cannot forget them.

● (1115)

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

Clearly, if we were not here on Fridays, that might also lighten the workload of the people who work in Ottawa, because they are always ready to support us.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to discuss an issue that I am truly passionate about, the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. In particular, it is worth highlighting that the way the rules work is important for our democracy. It shapes the kinds of conversations we have and our ability to do our work more, or less, effectively.

I want to discuss a number of particular suggestions I have about the Standing Orders that I think can improve the way we operate in this place. I am going to focus my comments on three points: encouraging more substantive exchanges, strengthening the role of individual members of Parliament, and increasing the family friendliness of the House of Commons.

First, on the issue of encouraging more substantive exchanges, we all have an interest in ensuring that this is a genuine, effective, deliberative chamber, in which comments on important issues are exchanged back and forth. Some discussion has happened today about whether that actually occurs in question period. There were some concerns about the reading of answers, for example, and whether ministers can be expected to provide too much detail given the time constraints and the absence of advance notice. Some have suggested removing some of the time constraints.

However, it is worth underlining that we already have a procedure in place for advance notice, in which people have more extended periods of time to pose questions and to respond. Of course, that is what we call adjournment debate or, more informally, the late show. That provides an opportunity for members to spend four minutes posing their questions; ministers have four minutes to respond; then there is a one minute for a supplementary question and one minute for the supplementary response.

We could not ask every single question in question period that way, but it is worth highlighting late shows or adjournment debates as the critical period in which we can have more substantive back and forth on substantive issues. Adjournment debate does not really get the degree of notice or attention it deserves. If we want to improve the substantiveness of debate, we can look at making reforms to question period, but I think the easiest and clearest change we could make would be to give greater attention to and focus on adjournment debate. Perhaps we would have to rename it and it would no longer be called "Adjournment Proceedings" anymore. I still would propose that we move those exchanges to a different time.

Here is what I would suggest we explore. We could move statements by members to the end of the day and have adjournment debate occur right after question period. That way, immediately after question period, while members and ministers are still here, we would have that half-hour period of substantive exchange about specific issues that may have arisen in question period. There would be more time to have that back and forth.

I would also suggest that instead of having parliamentary secretaries respond, or, as often happens, a parliamentary secretary who is not even responsible for the file reading out a pre-written response in the late show, we require that the minister responsible answer the questions in late shows. Given that there is advance notice for those questions and they are scheduled, there really shouldn't be a problem for ministers' schedules and their having to say they cannot respond in a late show on a certain day or in a certain week. It could be scheduled to a different time.

If there were a requirement for a minister to respond in the late show, or what we currently call an adjournment debate, we should set it up that way and have it at a time when members are generally already here and when the media is generally already present for question period. That would really fully leverage the potential of those late shows to ensure that substantive exchanges are happening and that the ministers responsible for the files are actually involved. I think that would be a good change.

There is no reason why statements by members could not occur at the end of the day. There is no particular reason why they have to occur at the time they currently do. Just switching those things around would give the same amount of time for government orders, and within roughly the existing time slots. Again, I think that would be a positive change.

The other thing we could do to encourage more substantive exchanges is to establish a process through questions and comments where only members of different parties pose questions during questions and comments, or there be an expectation that the period for questions and comments is an opportunity for challenging the person speaking, not just agreeing with them and asking him or her to expand on some point he or she has already made. Questions and comments are a valuable time for back and forth, for people to challenge speeches, and for there to be a response.

It is a less effective use of that time when members from one's own party or perhaps even from another party stand, thank a member for a really great speech, and ask him or her to talk more about point X or Y. It would make for better exchanges if we asked questions or made comments that challenged the person speaking during that time. I think that would leverage the opportunity for more substantive debates.

● (1120)

Moving to the question of strengthening the role of individual members of Parliament, the practice we have in the House of Commons is that each of the parties provides a list of members who are going to speak in designated party slots. Although it is not technically required, in virtually every case the Speaker works through that list. Having read the Standing Orders a couple times, as far as I can tell, that list is not even referenced in them.

Orders of the Day

In fact, the rules establish that the member who rises first should be recognized by the Speaker. That is not how it is done in practice. However, Standing Order 62 says very clearly, “When two or more Members rise to speak, the Speaker calls upon the Member who first rose in his or her place”. There is also a procedure for moving a motion that a different member be heard, but what I said is still the general practice.

I think it would be better if we did not use the list system. The advantage of not using the list system is that it would give members the opportunity to stand to speak in cases where they may have a slight difference of opinion with their party. More importantly, it would require members to be present in the House, listening to debate. They would have to take the initiative to jump up, and maybe if they do not manage to be recognized at the time they expect, then they would have to stay in the House for another 15 minutes or half-hour until they are recognized.

However, if we move to that system, it would also be important to amend that Standing Order to provide for some degree of rotation among the parties, because the current Standing Order that the next member who rises is recognized, risks our having a situation in which multiple members of the same party could speak one after another if they happened to be more proficient at getting on their feet, even if there were other members from other parties who wanted to speak.

Therefore, I would favour moving away from the list system, but at the same time changing the Standing Order to provide for some degree of rotation among parties in the midst of the process in which it is up to the Speaker to recognize a member.

Also, in terms of strengthening the role of members of Parliament, the Speaker should recognize members during questions and comments in a way that tries to get as many members involved in a given day. The Standing Orders provide that a member can only speak once to a motion, but it places no such restriction on the ability of the same member, perhaps from one party, asking questions. I think we would be better off if more members were encouraged to participate in questions and comments. There would be a way for the Speaker to do that. If the same member from one party were always rising, maybe the Speaker could not recognize that party on that go around, just to encourage more members to stand up.

I do not know of a single case in which Standing Order 53(2)(a) has been used in my time here, but it provides for the whip to decide that time will be split. Generally speaking, the practice here is that members indicate that they intend to split their time. I think we should eliminate this Standing Order. I do not think it is a reasonable use of the power. Theoretically, if a member wishes to speak for 20 minutes and then the whip tells the table they will only speak for 10 minutes, that seems to me an unreasonable restriction on the ability of the member to use the time slot they have acquired by standing up. That is one we should change as well.

Very briefly on the issue of family friendliness, we have heard some members talk about eliminating Friday sittings. Having the House sit as much as possible for a 5-day week is important for having fulsome debate. It is important for holding the government accountable. It would reduce accountability and debate if we eliminated Friday sittings.

At the same time, I understand that some members want to go back to their ridings on Friday. I often go back to my constituency on Friday. The solution is already there, however. The Standing Orders provide that votes will not take place on Friday. Therefore, if members are concerned that the current calendar does not provide them with enough time to be in their ridings, let us just add an additional day on which votes cannot take place. I suggest this because votes are the one thing we all have to be here for. If we reduced the number of days on which votes can take place, it would still provide members with a greater opportunity to go back to their ridings, but not reduce that accountability piece.

Instead of eliminating Friday sittings, if members are concerned about this we could explore the option of not allowing votes to take place on Thursdays or Mondays. That sort of change would allow members to spend more time in their constituencies without reducing the accountability piece.

● (1125)

There needs to be some clarification of the rules for non-members, in this case the children of members, being in the chamber. There has been some discussion about it. Technically it is not provided for in the Standing Orders. It is provided for in practice. Members might have different opinions on that. From my view, it is no problem if a member wishes to bring his or her infant into the chamber, but it would be worthwhile if there were some degree of clarification on that.

I have more to say, but that is my time. I appreciate the opportunity to raise these issues.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the member's speech, and I agree with him on some of the issues he brought up.

The member talked about extending question period to allow the supplementary questions, or what we call the adjournment debate. I think his intent is good. He is right on target, but I think he might be a little wide of the mark. I say that because in practice, it would just continue the way it has always been. I have been here 12 years and the member is right about adjournment debate.

One of the things I would suggest is this, and I hope the committee considers it as an idea. Extend question period, yes. Even look at the timing: 35 seconds is a bit tight. But why do we not submit the list of people who want to ask questions to the Speaker, not to the whip? The questions could be provided in advance. I used to do that when I was sitting on that side of the House. I found that the minister was ready for the question and I was able to get answers. This is a good way for MPs to have their local issues addressed, not through the whip but through you, Mr. Speaker, from a list in order to extend QP. So I want to thank the member for his thoughts.

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Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I want to underline that I made two separate suggestions with respect to adjournment debate. One was to move the time of the adjournment debate, but the other was to require that the minister responsible be there to respond to the question. The change would not have nearly the effect I would hope without that second part of it. Right now, we often have a parliamentary secretary who is not even responsible for the file reading out something written in response. By having the minister there, at least there would be some clear accountability with that minister and, I would argue, a greater degree of public and media attention.

I am not opposed to some of the potential changes to question period that the member has proposed, but the time limits for question period allow for more members to get up. If we extended the time for each question, we would either have to extend question period overall, which would cut into subsequent debate, or we would have to reduce the number of members who participate. What I am saying is that we can have that discussion with the simplest of changes.

Let us take what we already have, which is adjournment debate, and beef up its importance and our use of it, making it more substantive and drawing more attention to it.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan says a lot of interesting things. I am definitely looking forward to discussing them at the procedure and House affairs committee. They are quite fascinating.

He discussed the speaking-list procedure and the rule that the Speaker must recognize the first member who stands. That is a very interesting point. I should note, as an aside, that I once hung a framed copy of a motion that the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor be now heard in the ensuite bathroom in our office. For the purpose of anonymity, I will not mention the member's current riding.

More to the point, the galleries are virtually empty today but are full during question period. The media gallery has one intrepid member there now, and it is full in question period. Does my colleague have any ideas on how we can make the debate, the real business of this place, more interesting and relevant to the Canadian public?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting point. Our debates are broadcast, so I suspect that millions of Canadians are attentively watching our debate on the Standing Orders; but, of course, we have no idea at this point how many they are.

I will say that given that there are already so many people here for question period, let us not pretend that we can fix this issue in a day and all of a sudden have the galleries filled. Let us add that adjournment debate to the end of question period, and I think that many members of the public would see that more substantive exchange and many of the members of the media who are already here for question period would stay for that more substantive exchange. By having that substantive exchange that is related to question period happen, it would be a way of inviting people to stay and tune in a bit longer. That would be a good step in the right direction.

● (1130)

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

Mr. Speaker, I really welcome this debate. I like to consider myself, first and foremost, a parliamentarian, who truly enjoys what takes place inside this privileged institution to which we have all been elected by our wonderful constituents. It is quite a privilege.

I will start by saying that we have a wonderful opportunity before us, and I truly hope that members will take it as that. The government House leader has been very clear that there is a desire to see changes to the Standing Orders that will help facilitate and modernize the way that Parliament works and the types of things we do here throughout the day.

I am hoping that we will see a good discussion on a number of issues, many of which we have already witnessed. We have talked about private members' hour. We have talked about take-note debates. We would like to hear more about opposition days, emergency debates, unanimous consent motions, the issue of petitions, adjournment debate—about which we just heard a little more—and the need for question period reform.

How many times do we hear a member asking a question to the Prime Minister? The Prime Minister, because it is not a part of that first round, does not necessarily have the opportunity to answer. I think we lost that whole discussion. Why not have a day designated for the Prime Minister, or a portion of a day, where members know that there is a greater likelihood that the Prime Minister will be in a position to answer the question?

There is the need for question period reform. I sat in opposition for over 20 years. I come to this with nine months in government and well over 20 years in opposition. I, too, wanted questions answered, but sometimes when I asked a question, I knew it was meant to embarrass the government. However, if I had a question for which I wanted a detailed answer, I would sometimes approach the minister in advance, give him the question and tell him I hoped he could provide an answer. Giving the government that heads-up helped immensely. The issue of question period reform is very important.

On the issue of decorum, there is always a give and take. The Minister of Natural Resources will recall when we were first elected in 1988 to the Manitoba legislature, we had the clear indication that we would not be clapping but in essence trying to encourage positive decorum. It is a challenge at the best of times. There are changes that we can make to try to ensure it.

I am interested in ideas from opposition members, from all members, as to how we can encourage better decorum. One that we heard already today is having the place that members eat be a common place. We would have government members and opposition members sitting down over lunch, building those relationships. I thought it was a wonderful idea that came from the member across the way.

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Again, I want to approach this in as non-partisan way as much as possible. I hear a lot about Fridays, for example. Quite frankly, I very rarely miss a Friday. Having said that, what is more important are the number of hours we sit inside this House, the number of days we sit. To give an example, if we look at the calendar, I would rather sit for more days in January and fewer days in June. When the month of June comes around with those graduations, the demand for MPs is high. I want to be in my constituency. Compare that to January, for instance. We do not get as much love in our constituencies at times, so bring me to Ottawa in January.

When we talk about Fridays, I am more interested in the number of hours we put in. Members know that I enjoy the opportunity to speak inside the House. It is the hours. When we talk about hours of waste, it is efficiency. When we talk about time allocation, and I will get into government legislative agenda, often it means a motion has to be moved to go to orders of the day. Think about it: a half hour of the bells ringing.

• (1135)

Then we go into a question-and-answer period because of the time allocation. That is another half hour. Then we have a half hour of the bells ringing again. We are talking about an hour and a half. We have had time allocation over a hundred times in a few years. Think of the number of hours of debate that have been lost. It is about how we make our system more efficient.

With respect to private members' business, I am very sympathetic. If a member has been around for a long time and does not get the opportunity to introduce a private member's bill, yet someone who was just elected gets a private member's bill, maybe there is something that can be done in that regard. I am interested in that.

At the present, private members' business gets a couple of hours of debate. It then goes to committee and then comes back for a couple of hours of debate and comes to an end.

Are there things we can do with respect to the government legislative agenda, so that the reaction to time allocation is not quite as high?

Collectively we know that there has to be a government legislative agenda. How do we ensure there is a balance? How do we ensure that those bills that are controversial, and on which we want to have more debate, can be afforded that additional debate? For those bills that are not as controversial, maybe they could pass through more quickly. One does not have to be a genius to realize that any member can cause a lot of havoc for any government on any bill. We need that sense of co-operation.

I am very impressed with the attitude, in particular of the government House leader saying, "Let's try to work this through. We don't want to use time allocation. Let's see if we can get opposition parties and members talking about important things. If we have to sit additional hours, we'll sit additional hours. We want MPs to be engaged."

That is something for which I am a very strong advocate.

The Friday sitting days are a secondary issue. If it can be worked out so that we have that extra long weekend, so be it. I am sure that everyone of us would agree that MPs work seven days a week. If no

one believes me, ask my family members. Whether I am in Ottawa or I am in Winnipeg, I am working. If there are ways in which we can be more productive, I am okay with that. I believe that if we put the party politics to the side and focus on the functionality of this House, not only will we have more members speaking, but there are things we can do to improve the quality of debate.

I have heard members talk about written speeches and so forth. Contrary to what members might think about me standing to speak, we do not need 20 minutes to make a point. We can actually make points in five minutes, or 10 minutes. I would rather see a chamber where there is a five-minute debate and a five-minute question-and-answer period. That would then get more people engaged in the debate.

Trust me, if a debate collapses on a particular bill, it might be because there is no one who wants to talk about it.

However, I can assure members that on the real controversial bills, or the issues that people feel very passionate about, there will not be a shortage of people wanting to speak. With the the Paris agreement, there was no shortage of people who wanted to speak. If there were five-minute speeches followed by a five-minute question-and-answer period, I suspect we would see even better quality debates in this House. If we have a better quality of debates, I believe we would have more members wanting to be engaged.

We always have to be careful of what we ask for. In the Manitoba legislature, we had long questions and answers. That was a long, drawn-out process. It did not improve the quality of the answers, or, I would argue, the questions, even though I was the one asking questions back then.

At the end of the day, I think our question period is better than what we had in Manitoba. Can we have improvements? Yes. There is always room for improvements.

I would like to see members across the way make this issue non-partisan. Let us take advantage of the opportunity as much as possible. Let us try to get some substantial rule changes in our Standing Orders.

We do not have to settle for the low-hanging fruit. We can collectively, as MPs, forget the party lines, make some changes, and make this place more functional.

• (1140)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for a great speech. I love it when he talks about efficiency.

I come from a global business background where we had very complex issues with hundreds of countries. In a two-hour meeting, we would be able to hear from everybody and come with an action plan and a path forward. That is compared to the House, where we will talk about things for days. We hear the same points again and again, but only one-fifth of the members are here, or less.

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I wonder if the member would be open to some sort of model where everyone sits to discuss an issue and several people from each party bring a position. In a shorter space of time, we could perhaps come with action and a path forward.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what I appreciate is the member coming up with an idea. That is something that we challenge members to bring forward.

This is why the government House leader and I, and our House leadership team, should approach this with an open mind. We should encourage what the member just said, which is to bring an idea to the table and see how we can make it evolve. One of the best ideas I have heard so far was when the member across the way talked about having a joint meal room. That is hopefully what we will see throughout the day.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about private members' business.

For me personally, being a new MP, I think it is a shame that in a four-year term, I may never have a private member's bill come up for debate.

I think what happens is that members bring forward many private members' bills for their constituents, to have at least spoken about them in the House. With regard to all the resources that go into all those private members' bills that will never see the light of day, including all the research and reaching out to stakeholders and so on, I am wondering what he thinks about my idea that everyone, during one Parliament, should be able to have at least one private member's bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, based on my experience, I could tell the member that if the will were there to make that happen, it could happen.

Earlier I heard someone make reference to a parallel chamber. There are ways in which that could be accommodated. The most important thing is that we have to encourage ideas and not accept the naysayers. We have naysayers within the caucus, and we have them in all of our caucuses. They say they are not interested, they want the status quo. Let us not defend the status quo and instead look at the ways we can incorporate the type of changes the member has just suggested.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was canvassing for the election, some people wanted to throw me off their porch. They were fed up and frustrated, and I understand that. Their comments were with respect to what happens in the House. I appreciated that, and I know we can do better. As a new MP to this place, I have to say I am amazed at the intelligence, the wisdom, the passion, the commitment, and the dedication that I have witnessed here.

With respect to ensuring that these debates are more wholesome and focused, there have been ideas. A number of people have commented about the member who talked about sharing meals. I think that is brilliant. I actually like to see children in the House. I was pleased to see one of the toddlers in the House today in the arms of one of the members.

One of the things I have done is to start meditation before QP, and I attend the prayer breakfasts on Wednesdays. All of these things are helpful. I heard the member's speech, and it was very well delivered. What I would like to hear is how we can further encourage the development, presentation, and submission of these ideas and make them come to fruition, so that this place can really experience the level of gifts that this House holds?

• (1145)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think that there are individuals within the chamber who have been here for longer periods of time than others, and who have an active interest. For example, for any colleague who would like to explore an issue, I know there are members who are interested in particular issues in each party. I think it is taking the time to have a discussion with them and not just leaving it at that. Chances are that we all have the opportunity in our national caucus to stand up at a mike and say, "This is important to me. I really want to see the changes take place."

If the goodwill is there, and I believe it is, we can do some really good things to make Parliament that much better.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before we go to resuming debate, I want to compliment all hon. members who are participating in this debate for keeping their remarks concise. It is allowing more members to participate, and I appreciate that.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lethbridge.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this institute, the House of Commons, was passed down to us over 300 years ago. As members of Parliament, we have the opportunity to now sit here and continue forward with an age-old tradition, which is an incredible privilege. We can trace the roots back to the 1700s, when the foundation for the Westminster style of government was laid in Great Britain. The Dominion of Canada was first granted the constitutional framework for this place in 1867. This framework was the result of hundreds of years of refinement, of representative government in the settlements, colonies, and territories that were brought together into the Dominion. I say this in order to urge a bit of caution with regard to this chamber and the changes that might be proposed going forward. We have been entrusted with a magnificent legacy that is the heart of our very democracy here in Canada.

As relative newcomers, many of us in the House having been here for about a year now, it would be unreasonably bold and perhaps even arrogant to presume that we have the knowledge of the inner workings of this institution in order to inflict or request dramatic changes to how Parliament functions. Instead, I would like to advocate for some minor refinements to our existing procedures, and by extension show appreciation for the proud legacy of this place and the centuries of wisdom that steep every tradition of this House.

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With that in mind, a simple change that I would bring forward is with respect to scheduling votes after question period. This would take advantage of the fact that all members already prioritize being right here in this place each and every day for a certain period of time. It would allow us to build some predictability into our schedules, and it would help us make efficient use of our time, as one of my colleagues alluded to earlier. There of course would still be the option of allowing a vote to proceed after the collapse of debate if either the government or opposition whips decided to do so.

A second change would be to settle the House calendar for the coming year in the preceding June instead of waiting until September. With the demands on a member's schedule, affording at least a six-month period of notice for one to settle his or her calendar and make plans for the future would certainly be a reasonable expectation, and it would certainly help facilitate the schedules of members in the House.

I would further suggest that the government's musings to end the Friday sitting day is a bit too dramatic and perhaps not a change that would serve the Canadian public at large. Parliament is founded on the concept that the government is accountable to the Canadian people through the testing of its policies and actions by the opposition. Removing the Friday sitting would remove one question period from our weekly schedule. This would mean that there would be one less day per week when the government could be held accountable for its actions.

Furthermore, removing the Friday sitting would remove one day of the week when private members' business is debated, which, as another colleague of mine said earlier, is of concern to us. We already have very little time for private members' business to be brought to the floor, and we certainly do not want to cut that back any further. As private members' business is the one opportunity that opposition MPs have to advance legislative matters before the House, the removal of the Friday sitting would appear be a direct attack on the ability of opposition parties to do their duty to represent their constituents, which I would contend is a direct weakening of democracy.

Another area that I would like to talk about is with respect to the order of business in routine proceedings. I believe that this area could be made more efficient with some minor changes made to the order. The easiest change would be to move the rubric of motions to the end of routine proceedings. By doing so, we would solve two issues that affect all members of this chamber equally.

First, such a change would ensure that petitions are able to be presented each and every day in the House. As many members will attest, we often have guests in the gallery who have travelled a great distance in order to watch their petition be tabled in the House on any given day. At the moment, this is not guaranteed because if a concurrence debate is moved under the rubric of motions before the time for presenting petitions, the opportunity to present petitions is lost.

• (1150)

Second, moving the rubric of motions to the end of routine proceedings would ensure that the government is able to table any order paper questions that are required to be tabled that day. Since questions on the order paper comes after motions during routine

proceedings, if a concurrence debate was moved and if that debate stretches to the end of government business, or if the government moves to proceed to the orders of the day and thereby skips questions on the order paper, the government would have no ability to table any answers that day.

The current penalty is that any question not responded to within 45 days is automatically referred to a standing committee, and the minister is required to appear to explain why the question could not be answered. It would be rather embarrassing to the government to cause such a spectacle as a matter of procedural inattention.

With a 15-minute time limit for tabling petitions, the moving of motions will not be greatly delayed by this change. Motions with unanimous consent would still be able to be moved earlier in routine proceedings, thus allowing for most routine housekeeping matters to be resolved in a timely fashion.

Another area that could be refined relates to the specific rules governing order paper questions. First, I would recommend that we remove Standing Order 39(7), regarding the length of a question. Speaker Milliken has already ruled that there is no limit to the length of a question, as long as it is on the same general topic. Government ministers already have the option of stating that information requested "could not be provided in the time period required for an answer" in their response. Therefore, this standing order is redundant and should be eliminated.

Similarly, I would recommend that we remove Standing Order 39 (6), which allows for the Speaker to transfer lengthy order paper questions to a notice of motion. The government has the option of responding that they could not gather the data in the required 45 days. Further, this standing order infringes on the ability of individual members to best seek information from the government. As Speaker Fraser said in this place, he was:

...unable...to comply with the terms of the Standing Order in today's context without prejudicing the right of private Members to control fully their business by choosing for themselves how best to seek information....

My final recommendation on order paper questions would be to remove the requirement of the government to request, every day, that all questions be allowed to stand. Given the volume of questions on the order paper, a significant procedural hurdle could inadvertently arise. How such a scenario would play out, of course, is unknown, because it would be unprecedented as previous Speakers have forcefully reminded our parliamentary secretaries to request that all questions be allowed to stand. Given the many other autopilot rules within the Standing Orders, something of this nature should be treated accordingly.

Permit me to speak with regard to accountability. My recommendations for increasing accountability in the chamber would be as follows. First, I would propose that we allow members of the opposition to table documents under the rubric "tabling of documents". Keeping the ability to table documents to exclusively ministers and representatives of the government will continue to remove the ability of the opposition to put facts before the House in an official manner. This directly impacts the Speaker's ability to rule on these matters.

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Second, I would propose that the leader of the opposition be given the power to call two take-note debates at her discretion, each session, and allow the third party leader to call one take-note debate, once during each session. As these are take-note debates, no votes would occur. It also means that no motions could be decided. These debates would happen outside the regular sitting hours of the House, so no government business would be obstructed. Such a change would further allow the opposition to hold the government to account by bringing forward pressing issues that may not qualify for emergency debates.

Third, I would recommend that the procedure and House affairs committee overhaul the process for the production of papers. Currently the government can ignore these requests with impunity, and changing to a system that mimics the order paper questions process, but with a more generous deadline of perhaps 180 days and a limit on how many questions each member could put forward, would be a reasonable compromise.

I will bring this to a conclusion by simply saying it is a fantastic honour to serve in the House as a member of Parliament. I would hope to work with my colleagues to strengthen the traditions that have been established in this place.

• (1155)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not speak about Fridays, but I just wanted to add a couple of clarifications. There are some members from all parties who were in favour of that.

When we discussed this in PROC, just so that the member knows, the majority of the time it was not to lose any question periods or any debate time. They would be added to other days. It actually lengthens the workweek if we change it to a Monday or a Friday in the constituency, because I would usually work there until five o'clock. Tomorrow, when we are here on a Friday, it is only until two o'clock, so it would actually lengthen the workweek by doing Fridays in the constituency.

I am glad the member is here with the baby. Because Parliament has been so good at being family friendly, I think we are going to have lots more babies. We had a very colicky baby and my colicky baby would have been a disaster in votes. Some Parliaments have a way a person could vote from the lobby. We might want to consider that.

Finally, on unanimous consent, we have to be careful. We have great members of Parliament, but if we had a rogue one in the next Parliament, they could stop a lot of important things by not giving consent.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the member did not really ask a question but made more of a comment, so in a direct response I will also provide my comments.

With regard to Friday sittings, the Liberal government promised Canadians increased accountability, which means that it needs to be increasingly transparent. Unfortunately, we have not seen this to the full extent that we would like. Should Friday sittings be removed from the House? Should we be removed from the House? Doing so would actually remove accountability mechanisms.

It is here in this place that Canadians trust us to engage in debate and talk about the issues of the day. Canadians have elected us and

put their trust in us to come to Ottawa to be a voice on their behalf. If we are going to strip Canadians of their voices by taking away one day on which their voices can be heard in this chamber, then we are weakening democracy and that is a weakening of transparency and accountability.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the last 12 years I have seen this Parliament wax and wane and sometimes become extremely toxic. This Parliament has begun on a much better tone and I do thank the Prime Minister for that. There is a desire to move toward something better.

However, the question before us should not be about what makes it easier for us, but rather it should be what would make us more accountable and transparent to the people who voted for us. That to me is the fundamental question.

I know a lot of MPs do not like sitting and standing to vote and would like to get the heck out of here so they could watch Netflix or do whatever else. However, when we stand in the House, we put our faces to our votes. If there is a repetition of 12 votes on the same subject, I would be interested in perhaps finding a faster way to do it, but the fact that we stand up and make our yes mean yes, or our no mean no, is important. I have seen voting in city halls and elsewhere where serious votes went down and no one actually knew if someone was voting. It allows us to hide, when we are accountable to the people back home.

Could my hon. colleague tell me how we could make this more efficient and a little less dull? We could make our ministers a little more accountable so that they actually answer questions, but our fundamental focus should be our transparency and our accountability to the people back home.

• (1200)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised a good point with regard to accountability and making sure that we are here working on behalf of Canadians.

I was elected by the people of Lethbridge, Alberta. There are about 107,000 of them in my constituency. Each and every day I get up, walk here to Centre Block, and I feel incredibly privileged and incredibly honoured to stand in the House and represent the constituents of my riding. I consider myself incredibly honoured to be trusted with the responsibility of having a voice on their behalf.

If we are going to do anything in the chamber to take away the opportunity I as a member have to speak on their behalf, to advocate for them as a member of Parliament, then shame on us. If we are going to take away any mechanisms that we have as the official opposition or the other opposition parties to hold the government to account, that again would be a shame for democracy in Canada. We certainly do not want to go in that direction.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be able to take part in this debate today on the Standing Orders. While this topic might seem technical, it is actually the foundation upon which rests everything we do as members of Parliament.

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The rules of procedure, or Standing Orders, of this place determine whose voice gets heard, how we resolve the difficult issues facing our country today, how we balance competing interests, and whether the decisions we make truly reflect the expectations of Canadians. Therefore, I would argue that today's debate may well be one of the most important ones that we will have during this Parliament.

If we have a Parliament where MPs can bring those voices, listen to the people who are affected by government decisions, hear evidence and testimony from experts, debate ideas in an open and respectful way, and then be accountable back to Canadians for the choices we make, we will end up with better policies and a democracy where everyone feels that they have participated. Sadly, that is not always how things have been in this House. There has been for some time now an imbalance between the executive branch and the legislative. Too often, by the time bills get to committee, they are already finalized, and there is not much room for amendment.

The decorum in this House, especially during question period, is so disrespectful that teachers actually use us as an example to their students of how not to behave. Partisanship and party discipline sometimes blind us to the good ideas that might come from members of other parties. Also, Parliament is not as inclusive, modern, or efficient as it could be. If we want our democracy to work better, it begins by making this place work better.

I recently held a town hall meeting in my constituency on this topic, democratic and parliamentary reform, and some of the ideas I am proposing today actually came from that town hall.

We also do not need to reinvent the wheel. I am proposing a number of things that have been proposed before in reports over the years on how to modernize this House. Democracy is a verb, not a noun, and we have to keep on working to improve it.

[*Translation*]

I think we have to do more to improve the general atmosphere and make this place more professional. To do that, first we should improve decorum. We are the people's representatives and we have to set a better example for the country.

[*English*]

In this regard, I would like to talk about enhancing the role of the Speaker.

Right now, the Speaker, as has been mentioned before, is given lists from the whips as to who will be speaking or asking a question, but it was not always this way. It used to be that members would stand up and the Speaker would have the flexibility to choose who would ask a question or make a statement. In fact, the rules already provide for this. In this way, the Speaker could make sure that everyone had their turn, but it would also give the Speaker the ability to penalize members who are constantly disruptive by not recognizing them until their behaviour improves. It would also reduce the ability of the party whips to determine which topics are brought up and by whom. I believe this is a very interesting solution and something we should study further.

In addition, I think we should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of giving the Speaker more of a say over the

parliamentary agenda. Canada has a Parliament where the government side has more say over the agenda than almost any other legislative body. One proposal, which was first mentioned in the 1993 report on House management, is that the Speaker have more say over the use of time allocation and closure.

One possibility would be that the Speaker, with the counsel of a body such as a more transparent and reformed Board of Internal Economy, acts as the final arbiter in cases where there is no consensus on how many more hours or days of debate are needed. This would be one potential solution to balance the rights of members to speak on topics that are important to their constituents, the right of the opposition to use reasonable delay tactics to garner public support, and the need of governments to be able to see their legislation come to a vote.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

I would also like to make a number of proposals to improve our committee work. I would like the government to start sending bills to committee before second reading, so that members from all parties can speak to the measure before the measure becomes mired in party or government politics at the second reading stage.

[*English*]

The referral of bills to committee after first reading is not a new idea. In fact, it was brought up in two separate reports of the liaison committee in 1993 and 1997, and again in the democratic reform action plan in 2004.

It was also one of the suggestions at my town hall meeting. This would be one of the best ways to ensure that MPs can have real and meaningful input in debates.

With regard to how we elect committee chairs and vice-chairs, there are options we could look at to ensure that the chair has the full confidence of all committee members and that she or he presides over the committee in a truly neutral manner. In the U.K., committee chairs are elected directly by the entire House.

[*Translation*]

In the Quebec National Assembly, the chairs and vice-chairs of committees are elected by a majority of government and opposition members.

[*English*]

This could help decrease partisanship in committees. These are both ideas that I think need to be investigated further. I also note that in the 2004 democratic reform action plan, it was proposed that committees be given the power to do prior review of government appointments. This means that the committee could look at future vacancies in their subject area and request that the government submit the name of a proposed candidate for review before the appointment is finalized. Right now committees can review appointments, but only after the fact. It might make sense to pursue this idea further.

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I also believe that committees should be more transparent and accountable to the people who sent us here. Meetings should be held in public and televised as much as possible. This would allow for greater public participation and interest in our work, which engages more people in our democracy. One interesting idea from my town hall meeting is that we stop sitting with our own parties during committee meetings, that we mix it up. That would certainly be something interesting to try.

This is no longer the place it was 150 years ago, when grey-haired white men travelled by train here and deliberated among only themselves to decide what was best for the people. We now have technology that allows constant communication not only with one another but also with those we represent. Our constituents have the expectation that we will be accessible, listening and consulting with them. Yet the House functions as if it is still stuck in the 19th century. We need to provide MPs with more time in our constituencies to hear the views of those we represent and make better use of the time we spend in Parliament.

[*Translation*]

We could make the House more inclusive and favourable to family life. I would like to propose that we put an end to the Friday sittings. All of us have two or more offices. Some of us live 14 hours away from here. Personally, I am lucky to represent a nearby constituency. We must see to it that people can sit in Parliament at every time of their lives.

Some will no doubt oppose my suggestion to eliminate the Friday sittings because there would be no more Friday question period. However, we could institute a prime minister's question period, in keeping with the commitment made by our party in the last election campaign. Furthermore, we could offset the lost Fridays by establishing a parallel chamber.

[*English*]

It does not have to be Fridays. I think we can be flexible. It could be Mondays or other days, but the key is that we make our time here more efficient and spend more time listening to the constituents who sent us here.

Setting up a parallel chamber, such as Westminster Hall in the U.K., would allow MPs more time to speak without extending the hours late into the evening. Although some evening sittings were eliminated years ago, there are still exceptions, as we know. For example, the Standing Orders allow for extended hours in June, take-note debates are always in the evening, and closure motions are voted on at 8 p.m. A second debating chamber would allow for more take-note debates and members' statements.

In fact, one proposal would be to make it possible to initiate take-note debates on the request of a certain threshold of MPs, perhaps 50 from the opposition side and 50 from the government side. Regardless of which of these options we choose, we need to look carefully at ways to ensure that the hours we spend here are as productive as possible, so that we can free up more time to spend with our families and our constituents.

Making our Parliament work better for Canadians is an issue that transcends partisan boundaries, as we have seen today, and I look forward to more dialogue about some of the ideas I have proposed,

as well as ideas that other hon. members have put forth. Through this, we can make this a more inclusive chamber and one that our constituents can be proud of.

• (1210)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. I especially appreciated her comments about committees, because I was on the pay equity committee when she was the chair. She is also on the status of women committee with me. These committees are fairly harmonious, so I like the idea of referring the bills to committee after first reading so people can offer input. I wonder if she could elaborate on that idea a bit more.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Speaker, the committee the member chairs and I sit on, and vice versa, are committees that work very collaboratively. Our reports are better as a result.

We have not had legislation at our committee yet, but when there is legislation, often the government is already invested in it and there is already a stake in making sure that legislation passes. However, if legislation were to be referred after first reading there would not be that sense of finality of the legislation, and when we start to move something, at that point we would have more say and members could have more input in advance of the legislation going to second reading.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a new member to the House, I have found it interesting to watch how we work over the last year. I want to address two aspects of it.

First is the length of time for speeches. I have spent a lot of my life in communications. The principle was to never take 10 minutes to say what could be said most effectively in five minutes. I find the principle exactly the opposite here. We take 10 or sometimes 20 minutes to say what could be said more effectively in five minutes. Therefore, I would like to make a recommendation that we move to five-minute speeches.

The second aspect is on question period. I tell my constituents to watch question period if they are interested in theatre. If they are interested in actually getting information, they should probably not watch it. Therefore, my proposal is either to look at the British model, where the Speaker chooses who is going to speak, or instead go to a rotational basis for the opposition members so that all members of Parliament get the opportunity to ask their questions on behalf of their constituents on a rotational basis, which is very inclusive. Every member in the opposition would get to speak.

I am curious what my colleague thinks of those two recommendations.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member opposite for raising those issues. We do find that most of the time we do not use our 20 minutes; we are splitting it in two. Perhaps that is something that could be institutionalized.

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Depending on the bill, if it is a bill that is more technical and needs more explanation, we could have longer speeches; but on those where we want to just state our position, it could be shorter. That is a great idea.

On question period, I agree with the hon. member. There are many things we could do to make question period not only better for decorum, but more equitable in terms of who is able to stand up and ask questions.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the conversation about private member's bills earlier on gave me a new idea, which is to allow amendments by a bill's sponsor, with the consent of the seconder, between the first and second hour of debate, based on the content of debate in the first hour. The sponsor would have to justify it based on what was said. They could not just introduce some new ideas. This would fix somewhat broken but savable bills before they even get to committee and make the whole process easier and saner.

Does my colleague have any comments on that?

• (1215)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Speaker, that is the beauty of a debate like this. It sparks other ideas coming forward. The idea that the debate we have in the House would then have the ability to influence the changes to legislation is very much within the spirit of the other proposals I put in.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to discuss the Standing Orders that govern how we meet in this prestigious place.

First, let me focus on the purpose of the government, which is to come together to debate and put in place governing laws and decisions that will be in the best interests of Canadians and to provide the funding support needed for ridings and programs to keep our country great.

When the House was first formed, with its traditions, communications happened at a slower pace. Global events occurred with the ability to consider and react in a thoughtful but slower fashion. Emergency debates were put in place to address anything more urgent. However, over time, the pace of change and global impacts to our country has accelerated, and we need to ensure that our parliamentary process can adapt. Also, whereas at the time of the establishment of traditions it was considered reasonable for a parliamentarian to be away from his or her family on demand, at all hours and all times, society has now placed greater value on the contribution of the time of both parents to the raising of family, the balance of life and work, and the flexibility of workplace hours and work conditions.

[*Translation*]

First, I want to say that I have complete respect for all the parliamentary traditions of the House, and even if there is no change, I will continue to be honoured to be here, at the service of my constituency, and to take best advantage of the systems that now exist and that continue to make Canada a better country.

That said, when I was given a 1200-page book on House procedure at my swearing-in ceremony, I was told to read that book. So I read it, 100 pages per evening, until it was finished. I read that

book with the desire to embrace my new political reality, but I also read it with the eyes of a person who has chaired numerous committees, headed up international teams, and negotiated and obtained excellent results.

[*English*]

I am an engineer. It is in the nature of engineers to constantly strive to achieve efficiency, to troubleshoot problems, and to provide solutions. I have observed Parliament now for nearly a year. I am chairing the status of women committee, and I have observed other committees in their operation.

I come with 32 years of experience in global business with several companies, one of which is renowned for its productivity. I have analyzed the work flow of Parliament, and this is what I see.

The House sits from Monday to Friday from as early as 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., or later many nights, and some nights until midnight. In the past, apparently, it has sat for even more hours. Only one-fifth of the members are present on any given day other than for the one-hour question period, and certainly many fewer members are present Mondays and Fridays. Then the committees and other parliamentary meetings go on to fill up everyone's calendars. This makes it almost impossible to get time for the members and ministers to get together to talk about the support needed for ridings and programs. They can maybe get a minute or two with a minister before or after question period, but that is about it.

The current system results in a question period where questions are asked and never answered; and in a committee system where many tax dollars are spent, but partisan games are mostly played or recommendations made that are never implemented.

[*Translation*]

Furthermore, the tone of respect in the business world has changed over time. Even in the last decade, there has been great improvement in Canadian workplaces in terms of respect for individuals, respect for diversity, orderly meetings, and team facilitation.

In the world today, it is considered impolite to speak when the person designated to have the floor is still talking. Private conversations must be excluded from meetings so that the people trying to listen are not distracted. Forms of intimidation and harassment that call into question the competence of an individual or impede his or her ability to speak are considered unacceptable.

I have observed every one of these bad behaviours in the House, in all parties, and I think they have to stop so we can align our Canadian practices.

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●(1220)

[English]

Having defined many of the things that are problematic with the existing system, I think there are reasons not to be contented with the status quo. What if we could consider a change that would provide better work/life balance, keep Canadians informed about the issues, better engage committees in collecting input for legislation, and make time for ministers to discuss the needs of the ridings and programs in a more timely way? What if we had Standing Orders that caused respectful discussion with timely action?

This is my proposal after analyzing the situation. I propose that the House sit Tuesdays and Thursday from 10 to 6 with full attendance by all members. Tuesday would be government bill day, when debate on bills would be conducted by each party's choosing several representatives to bring their party's position forward, and with all, including committee members, listening to the debate and prepared to amend the legislation based on the feedback heard. All votes would be after QP on Tuesday.

Thursday would be private members' bill and opposition day, when private members would get their hour each for four bills each week, and opposition motions would be addressed by several members from each party.

On the other days, Monday to Friday, there would be question period, providing Canadians and the media with the current issues. I would prefer to see actual answers to the questions instead of vague talking points, but at least let us move in this good direction.

This would free up nearly three whole days of time in which ministers could engage with the MPs from various ridings on the projects that need support. This would accelerate approvals and a flow of money to improve our country.

Committee work would then be scheduled Monday and Wednesday, and any bill to be discussed through the week, whether government or private members' business, should be discussed and amended at committee to come back to the House. This would shorten the cycle time on legislation.

I believe that for family friendliness, committees and late sittings in the House should be the exception and not common practice.

To ensure proper respect in the workplace, members would not be allowed to speak while other members have the floor. Members should be called to order individually when they do not comply. Exceptions could be made during question period when the argument is that intelligent heckling can add to the media appeal, which is the sole purpose of that time. I would like to hear from others on that.

Voting is best done after question period, as I said, instead of in the evening, and in terms of eliminating things that are wasteful, we could get rid of the practice of asking if a question should stand when the answer is always yes.

To speed the voting process, we could use encrypted government-issued fingerprint-activated iPads, which every one of us has, to vote on motions, resulting in instantaneous count and record. This would save hours.

These changes are designed to bring the best practices of business today to improve the procedures of our government. In business, we would take one of the topics currently discussed for days in the House and in several hours we would hear the position of all on it, and come up with an action plan and move forward.

If the government is to support Canadians in the way that is needed in these times, now is the time to adjust the procedures of the House and to maximize the effectiveness of government, minimize the time wasted, and get the support resources out to communities in a timely way.

I support continued improvement, which does mean a change to the process, procedures, and traditions to fit with the new reality, to be able to be responsive in a meaningful way to the now fast-paced, complex, global environment that now exists for Canadians.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this debate reminds me somewhat of the Christmas truce, 1914, and I would really like to see this level of debate always be the case.

The idea of voting by iPad is really quite interesting, but it risks, as the member knows, people being able to vote from outside the House. It is not something we would like to do. I think we all agree on that.

The desks that we already have contain the wiring, the circuitry, to do electronic voting right here. The risk of that, of course, is that we will repeat what happens in American state legislatures in John Oliver's video on *Last Week Tonight*. It is highly entertaining, as people have voting sticks to reach across and vote for each other. There is one where someone reaches to vote and someone else reaches to vote for them too. It is absolutely hysterical.

However, it gives us an opportunity to look at technical fixes to these desks themselves, to possibly include an embedded screen. There is nothing saying we have to keep a 150-year-old desk design. I do not see the reason to do that.

We could, for example, have something akin to a flight attendant call button to get the attention of the pages, which sometimes is very easy. Other times, they are rather occupied. We could also use it to get the Speaker's attention for us to speak. That could be tracked in a database very, very quickly, so that the person who spoke the longest would be flagged to the Speaker, as opposed to the person who got up first.

There are many, many opportunities. I would like my colleague's comments on that.

●(1225)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I would love to see upgraded technology used in this place to bring about the kind of efficiencies we are talking about. Whatever safeguards could be put in place to make sure that the identity of the person and their ability to vote were protected would be great. We could even have a screen up there so we could get a Pareto chart of how people voted. That would be very good, as well.

I look forward to hearing all of these great ideas on technology and what we could do to improve efficiency.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is an old joke in Parliament that goes, “this is question period, not answer period”. That is a regrettable attitude, because it diminishes the transparency of government and the credibility of our institution.

For example, this government tends to hide the Minister of Justice when a question is asked about the government’s legal obligations to the first nations.

When a member asks a minister a clear and reasonable question, the minister should respond clearly and directly, without the prime minister’s notes and without showing off. Would my colleague agree?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

[*English*]

As we know, in business, when a person has accountability over an area, they are the person who is to provide the answers to the questions. I share my colleague’s concern. When we ask a direct question of a person who has authority over an area and they let the question get punted to someone else who then stands and reads talking points, this is not good for Canadians. It is a disservice to them. They are paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to have us here in the House. Therefore, when a question is put to the people who are accountable, they should respond with a truthful answer that addresses the issue.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague’s contribution, in particular about question period. She has a good point. I think this goes back a number of decades to the true benefit of question period. I think it started to change when we began to see the whips’ offices giving lists of who would be asking the questions. That gave the opposition the opportunity to know exactly when in question period they would be up, and the opportunity to think their question through and to know exactly how they were going to deliver it, whereas a couple of decades ago, the opposition leader usually was the first to ask a question, but then, after that, quite frankly, it was up to the Speaker to randomly select people as they stood to ask questions.

I definitely agree. I think it would be important to make sure that the responses are concise and to the point; but, at the same time, we have to take away the structured way questions are currently asked and make it more spontaneous, as well.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I think there are a lot of things we have to do to be different in question period, both in terms of how we pick the questions and in getting meaningful answers delivered in a very respectful way. I find it very distracting to have people yelling and saying mean things about other members of Parliament during question period.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to deliver my first speech in the House today, to join in this discussion on the standing orders that guide all of us in the performance of our parliamentary duties.

Before becoming an MP myself, I was the happy assistant to the Hon. Jacques Saada, who was deputy whip and government House leader. The rules and procedures of our legislative assembly have often been a topic of discussion at the constituency office, and I retain a real fascination with them.

There are a lot of little bits of “history” behind many of the standing orders we know today. It is sometimes comical to find out their origin. However that is not what concerns us now, since the idea of this day of debate is to cast a so-called contemporary eye upon precepts that in some cases date from 1867.

My colleagues have already raised many points that deserve another look. Personally, I would like to consider the standing orders that affect the House committees.

[*English*]

In the McGrath committee report of the mid-1980s, there was a recommendation for the more active use of legislative committees. In fact, the idea was to allocate to the said legislative committees the detailed scrutiny of legislation, which would allow standing committees to focus on policy matters and departmental estimates.

[*Translation*]

This recommendation seems to me quite logical, but despite my reading and rereading of the Compendium of House of Commons Procedure, there are many things that seem contradictory to me. Without making an exhaustive list of them, I would still like us to consider the purpose of legislative committees. They exist in order to study bills. The procedural framework is explicit in the Compendium.

Now, in my second term of office as member, I have still not sat on a single legislative committee that was created to do the work for which it was planned. To my knowledge, all bills are sent to the relevant standing committee, which must then drop all other studies to examine that particular bill.

The House of Commons has given itself the capacity to create committees exclusively dedicated to the review of bills. Would it not be more effective to make full use of that capacity?

Continuing on the theme of the structure and operation of House committees, I would also like to suggest that we consider the possibility of giving each standing committee its own operating budget.

At the moment, the funds we are provided by the Board of Internal Economy and the Liaison Committee are allocated in a rather arbitrary fashion, along the lines of first come, first served. That results in somewhat reactive planning, which is sometimes frankly unfair.

Of course, this may sound self-serving, in the sense that the committee I sit on was just denied the opportunity to take part in an international conference that would be extremely relevant to the functioning of that very committee.

I therefore propose that annual allocations to the committee be made more equitably. Pursuant to Standing Order 107(1)(a):

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The Chair of each standing committee...shall form a Liaison Committee, which is charged with making apportionments of funds from the block of funds authorized by the Board of Internal Economy to meet the expenses of committee activities, subject to ratification by the Board.

Pursuant to Standing Order 107(6):

The Liaison Committee shall be empowered to create subcommittees of which the membership may be drawn from among both the list of members of the Committee and the list of associate members....

Depending on your point of view, that is either perfect or utterly non-transparent, because a subcommittee on committee budgets, made up of members of the liaison committee, will end up having members that vote and speak for their own committees. This gives them an advantage over the budgets allocated to other committees. There are not really any rules to protect against this potential conflict of interest.

The last point I want to address is perhaps the most sensitive. Some of my colleagues have talked to me about whether a dress code for parliamentarians should be included in the Standing Orders. At this time, the Standing Orders do not set out a formal dress code for male or female members.

[*English*]

Speakers have established some expectations for our male colleagues, but women MPs have no such guidelines. I suggest it would be fair to look at the possibility of establishing a formal dress code recommendation. It could be a simple statement that members dress in contemporary business attire or anything else that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs may eventually judge appropriate.

[*Translation*]

Those are some of my thoughts on the matter, and I would be happy to discuss them further with my colleagues.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member on her maiden speech in this Parliament.

She focused on committees. Having sat on that side of the House and now on this side, I wonder if she would agree with me that sometimes committees meet simply because they are scheduled to meet. There are many standing committees and I would argue that if we are going to look at the committee structure, we should actually look at the number of committees. There are often four hours a week of busywork that is created when there is no legislation and committees sometimes scramble for ideas.

Important work is done in committees, do not get me wrong, but I wonder if she would agree with me that we should perhaps focus on the legislative committees and give members more time to interact with their constituents and focus on debates in the House. If we reduce the number of committees to a more concentrated number, maybe they could examine more than one departmental aim. I am wondering what she would think of that idea.

•(1235)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which I find very relevant. I would agree that it is quite

possible that some parliamentary committees are not always busy studying bills or other legislation.

That is why I think we could use our parliamentary committees much more effectively. I agree that we could reduce the number of standing committees. Some of the topics or departments dealt with by the committees do sometimes overlap and could perhaps be merged with another standing committee that would focus more on policies, rather than legislation. That is something that definitely should be debated.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I remember correctly, my colleague is a committee chair, so I would like to ask her a question about committees and compare the situation here to that in the National Assembly of Quebec.

I had a chance to talk to the speaker of the assembly, and he told me that much more work is done in committee in Quebec. They put in an impressive number of hours, and their approach is much more focused on building consensus. Does the member think committees should put in more hours?

I find it odd that committees cannot draft bills. Does my colleague think it would be a good idea for committee members to sit down and, by consensus, decide to draft a bill relating to a study they have done, instead of producing a report and hoping that the minister decides to draft a bill to fix whatever problem was identified in the report?

Does she think it would be good if committee members could draft bills and introduce them in the House of Commons for debate?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: Mr. Speaker, with respect to how much time we spend in committee and the work we do there, if committees are restructured as has been suggested, and if there are fewer committees, each responsible for more subject matter, each committee will have much more work to do.

With respect to bills, I honestly have no opinion on that just now. I should clarify that I am not a committee chair; I am a vice-chair. Nevertheless, I really like the idea of a committee focusing on policy instead of studying a bill and then making a recommendation to the government about a bill at the end of its study. That is definitely something we should consider.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this debate today.

Having given birth in the middle of the election campaign and arriving here with an infant, I am very much interested in the issues surrounding the Standing Orders. There were a number of issues regarding the Standing Orders. I worked on making some adjustments with the help of my party whip. We made things work. Many of these improvements have more to do with the administrative side of the House, but we were quite satisfied with the result.

Nonetheless, many concerns remain and I would like to take this opportunity to announce that I am going to have another baby in May. I am becoming a mother for the second time. My speech will draw on my personal experience because my circumstances will be very different from what they were last time.

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In March, I will have no choice. To travel here by car I have to cross a park where there is no cellular connection for roughly two and a half hours. I do not think it is safe to ask a woman who is several weeks into her pregnancy to travel in the dead of winter through a remote area without access to emergency obstetric care.

The other option would be to fly, but I would have to be in good physical condition and I would need a medical certificate. At a certain point in pregnancy, women are no longer allowed to even board a plane. I would then be left with no options and would be unable to travel to Ottawa. In the last four weeks of pregnancy, women have weekly check-ups. Thus, I cannot do a 15-hour return trip, come here, leave, arrive in the morning, drive six hours twice, and then a third time to return on Thursday, only to leave again.

Therefore, I find myself in a situation where I am not ill, as this is a normal and predictable condition for many women, and where I cannot exercise some of my rights as a parliamentarian, such as the right to vote and speak to bills, because there is no procedure for that.

We could easily solve the problem by giving special permission to MPs who cannot work for various reasons, which in my case is pregnancy. This could also apply to someone who cannot come to Ottawa because they are looking after a sick family member. For example, perhaps this person's father is at the end of life, and they want to see him every evening in order to spend as much time as possible with him. These are very legitimate reasons.

Sometimes people are not allowed to fly for a certain period of time because of illness or injury. If that was the case for a member from Alberta, for example, that member would not be asked to take the train home every weekend. It would be impossible. However, anyone in that situation would be able to follow the debates, because they are televised. They could therefore fully participate and have someone from their party table documents for them. However, right now that is not allowed.

It would be very easy for the Speaker to authorize members who are temporarily incapacitated to take advantage of special provisions and vote from a distance, for example from their riding, through various technological tools. One of our colleagues is an engineer. I am sure that she could describe some technological tools that we could use for that purpose.

This would allow members who are temporarily incapacitated to vote from a distance and to table documents such as briefs in lieu of spoken speeches, bills, and petitions, through their party whip.

That would make things much easier for people going through certain life events. It would also prevent them from taking health risks. I have seen that happen. Against their doctor's recommendation to keep resting even if their health is improving, some deem debates so important that they jeopardize their health and show up in person anyway.

● (1240)

That was the only way they could take part in the debates. We can do better. This is a rather simple procedure. We would just have to amend Standing Order 1.1, which states:

The Speaker may alter the application of any Standing or special Order or practice of the House in order to permit the full participation in the proceedings of the House of any Member with a disability.

We would just have to add a Standing Order 1.1.1, which would allow the Speaker to grant the same privilege to a person with an incapacity. It would be quite simple and would give the Speaker the necessary room to manoeuvre to change the rules.

In my opinion, it is important to discuss other measures. The idea of a parallel chamber was considered by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs during its study on work-life balance. With a parallel chamber devoted only to private members' business, we could triple or quadruple the number of hours dedicated to private members' business and debate more bills. Of course, the parallel chamber would not sit during oral question period at the House of Commons.

On the subject of travel time, I think we have to be aware of one thing. For instance, every time I go back and forth it takes 15 hours. Instead of sitting in the House and doing a back-and-forth every week, if I sat for 12 days in a row, I would have 15 more hours per week to serve my fellow citizens. We have to be aware of travel time, for it can make some people sick. For example, my colleague Denise Savoie had her physician tell her that all this going back and forth made no sense. That was why she resigned. We must be aware of the fact that our schedules are not necessarily suitable. If we were to reduce the number of trips we make, we might have a better quality of life.

As I mentioned earlier, I think it would be interesting for committees to be able to table bills after conducting a study. The committee members would decide by consensus to draft bills that they would be able to table in the House. Often we examine complex issues, and in the course of these studies, we can quietly see the improvements that should be made. It would be useful for the committee to do this directly, instead of trying to express this clearly in a report that will be read by another intermediary, who will in turn make recommendations to another intermediary, hoping that the minister prioritizes the report so that the bill can eventually be tabled. This involves too many uncertainties. Giving the committee this latitude could be extremely useful, on top of adding value to its work. It would clearly demonstrate to the committee members that their studies do more than just produce a report that may later be shelved. In concrete terms, the studies done by a committee can also be used to draft a bill and to correct certain deficiencies. That lends a lot more weight and seriousness to the studies that the committees do.

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Sometimes it is not that easy to find solutions, because the situation of each member is different. However, one of the things my colleagues must not lose sight of is that rural MPs are a minority in the House, but they are often the ones with the longest travel times and the fewest options. My colleague who represents the municipality of La Loche has to drive for six hours just to get to an airport. Then she has to take two different flights to get to Ottawa. Even if she were not here on Friday, she would not have time to return home on weekends. If we no longer sit on Fridays, she will be here in Ottawa for one whole day when she will not be working. These things must be taken into consideration.

I know that many members do not go back and forth to their riding in winter. Even if they did not work on Friday, they would not necessarily be going back and forth, since they do not have enough time to do it. In addition, flights are too uncertain and are sometimes cancelled.

Not all members necessarily share the same reality. Sometimes a solution that seems attractive to us is not attractive to others. I would really like my colleagues to take this into consideration and to realize the work that some MPs have to do to get here, since they do not have the opportunity to go back and forth on weekends.

• (1245)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the leadership shown by my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, in the way she forces us to look at the issue of the House's duty to accommodate for families. I think everyone here really appreciates her leadership.

Coming back to something she said about committees, the right to introduce legislation at committee is a very interesting idea. I like it, and we will discuss it at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

There is something else I would like to talk about regarding the same topic at committee. When a committee publishes a report, there is no way to ensure follow-up. For instance, at the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament during the last Parliament, a motion was moved and a study was done to ensure that all sessional papers that come from questions on the Order Paper are published for the general public and not just Parliament. There is no way to follow up to ensure that that is being done.

Would my colleague like to comment on that?

• (1250)

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I think there are ways for committees to do that. They simply need to request another study to confirm whether the recommendations have been implemented.

Committees have in the past done studies following a report that had been previously tabled to confirm whether the measures had been implemented. The committee has the flexibility to do that simply by moving a motion to re-examine the issue if it is deemed relevant.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a somewhat delicate question that I think the member is in a very good position to answer. I was very surprised when I first came here and found an infant in the House, because in 32 years of

working I had not seen that. At best, we maybe had a day care in the same building I worked in. When there is only one or two children it is not a problem. However, I was thinking about my own daughter, who was a bit more disruptive when she got to be a toddler, and then I thought about having 338 people bring all of their kids in. Therefore, at some point, there has to be some boundaries. I wonder if the member could comment on what she thinks the right boundaries are for that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, in Quebec at least, women who have jobs are entitled to parental leave. They get eight or nine months at home with their child, which is something I did not get.

When I came back, my baby was three months old, and I was determined to breastfeed. A three-month-old baby has to be nursed every two or three hours, and sometimes every half-hour. That is how it works, so I sometimes brought my baby to the House with me because I was nursing. It was complicated. I could not put my baby in a day care and leave every hour to breastfeed. Even if she had been in day care, I would have had to pump my milk and go find a place to do that. I would not really have been any further ahead.

Other members eventually got used to the idea, so I was able to breastfeed my daughter until she was 11 months old. That is why I think this is a good idea. What most women here want is accommodation during the first year of life because that is when breastfeeding is such a big part of the equation. They want to bring their children to work during that first year. After that, it is much easier to put children in day care.

I doubt that all 338 MPs will have an infant at the same time. This will probably not apply to many people, so it is unlikely to get out of control. I also believe that some women here are beyond their child-bearing years, so we should be able to keep things under control.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks. I have a lot of sympathy for her situation.

I too had children when I was working in the world of co-operatives. My daughter was about seven years old when I had my twins. When we in the banking world started having to work evenings and weekends, it helped a lot to be able to work out a schedule with my husband. He did a lot to help me so that I could work. When people are at work, they should be at work. When they are at home with their children, they should be at home with their children. It is better that way.

I am wondering whether my colleague has any other ideas about how to make members' schedules more flexible. When we are here in Ottawa, we could work on a more intensive schedule. For example, we could work seven days a week for two weeks. There would still be some flexibility and then when we finished we could go back to our ridings. That would cut down on travel.

Does the member have any comments on that?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, it would be better if we had a schedule like the one miners in the north have. Miners often have to drive six hours, so the mining companies get them to work 21 days on and 14 off or 14 days on and 14 off.

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For me, that would be easier because it would eliminate one or two trips. It would give me an extra 15 to 30 hours of free time a week. I would be less tired from all of that travelling. However, again, that is because of my situation. That might not be the best solution for others, but it would be for me.

● (1255)

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to switch to a completely different issue. I am going to talk about two-tier democracy and fair play.

Today we are debating the Standing Orders and House of Commons procedure. However, who does the House belong to? It belongs to the people. We are here as the representatives of the people. It is the voice of the people that is heard in the House of Commons. Is that not the spirit of democracy?

The Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, as well as the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, and the New Democratic Party, are the parties that have elected members to the House of Commons and are recognized by Elections Canada. However, at present, only the parties with 12 elected members or more have official party status. This standard for recognition is not set out in any law.

In the Parliament of Canada Act, the only specific reference to this threshold of 12 elected members exists to establish the additional allowances of leaders of a recognized party, and that is not what we are asking for. The threshold of 12 elected members is a tradition. Does this tradition serve the interests of democracy and the people, or does it serve obscure partisan interests detrimental to those of democracy?

Who gains anything at all from excluding MPs elected by the people from certain parliamentary activities? The consequences are many, and here they are. The members of a non-recognized party may not sit on standing committees of the House. Furthermore, they have no guarantee of being able to ask questions during oral question period. Neither have they a guarantee of being able to speak to bills before the House. In our view, all of this hampers the ability of elected members of the Bloc Québécois to participate fully as opposition members.

However, the real losers are the nearly one million Quebecers who are penalized at the ballot box by the recognized parties. As for the budgets allocated in support of the parties' parliamentary work, whether for the party leader, the House leader, the whips, research, support or IT, they are determined by the Board of Internal Economy after a general election.

In our opinion, there is nothing to prevent the Board from granting additional funds to parties that are currently deemed unrecognized. That would allow them to hire some researchers in order to better carry out their duties, just like the other MPs in the House of Commons, thereby effectively representing the citizens.

All we need is political will. Unfortunately, that will is lacking for partisan motives, to the detriment of the electors we represent.

Let us now look at Quebec. The Office of the National Assembly grants research and support budgets to all political parties that have had members elected. Under section 108 of the Act respecting the National Assembly, all political parties represented in the assembly

following the last general election receive an amount that is allocated for research and support purposes. It is the same for independent members. This money of course is used to compensate the specialized personnel engaged by the parties and to cover expenses related to the operation of research services.

Now back to the House of Commons. At the moment, the NDP, with 44 elected MPs, has an average supplementary budget of over \$90,000 per member. That is for the party leader, the House leader, the whip, caucus, research, translation, IT and even coffee during caucus meetings.

The Standing Orders discount over 8% of those who voted in the latest election. The House of Commons is discounting the 5% of Canadian voters who voted for the Bloc and the 3% who voted for the Green Party. As a result, the MPs chosen by more than 1.4 million voters do not have access to the right tools to fulfill their opposition member role. Is that a good thing for democracy, or does democracy take a back seat when it comes to how political parties are recognized in the House? The question bears asking.

It being 2016, we find it strange that so many people are represented by MPs who do not have access to the same tools as MPs who belong to parties with more than 12 members.

● (1300)

However, it is the voters who determine party recognition by choosing to elect members from the parties of their choice to Parliament. Not taking those voters into account is the same as creating a two-tiered parliamentary system with second-class representation.

Last November, the 200 new members of Parliament all gathered in the Sir John A. Macdonald building, and the Prime Minister came to greet us. He told us that his most important role was not that of Prime Minister, but rather that of the member representing the riding of Papineau. We heard his message. The role of an MP is very important. What happened to that fine sentiment?

Studying procedure is an excellent opportunity to move from rhetoric to action by recognizing that MPs from all political parties need similar tools in order to properly represent their constituents. We share the new Prime Minister's desire to enhance the legislative power and reassert the value of the work done by members beyond simple partisanship. I would remind everyone that the House belongs to the people, not the parties.

We are also appealing to the members' sense of fairness and fair play, which is what should exist among duly elected MPs, in order to make the changes needed so that we all can represent our constituents on a level playing field. Otherwise, there are two classes of legislators. The Board of Internal Economy's rule about 12 MPs elected under the same banner is arbitrary. We in the Bloc Québécois are making constructive proposals.

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If the Board of Internal Economy gives parties with at least 12 members official party status, then it only makes sense to give tent-fifths of the means to a group of parliamentarians elected under the same banner. We think that is a reasonable solution. The House has to allow every elected member to have the right to proportional means. We think it is legitimate and essential for the Bloc members to have the necessary means to carry out the mandate that their voters gave them.

The National Assembly understands that. Even though Québec Solidaire is not a recognized party and has only three members at the National Assembly, it gets \$266,900, or 11% of the total allocation given to the recognized parties for research. What is more, it participates in the work of the committees. It is a question of money, but especially of democracy. The Bloc Québécois members have been excluded from a fundamental part of their work, namely committee work. The Bloc Québécois members cannot move opposition motions even though they are opposition members. The Bloc Québécois members cannot speak to all the bills that are debated in the House. The Bloc Québécois members do not have the same resources to study the bills debated in the House.

The Canadian Parliament is the only one to deny members these rights. The Canadian Parliament continues to operate in the same way it did in the past century and even in the 19th century. Take for example, the British House of Commons. It understood this issue and it upholds the rights of the parties duly elected by the population. Contrary to the British parliamentary tradition, the House of Commons in Ottawa does not play fair. It is time for that to change. That is why we expect more from a government that wants to improve democracy through electoral reform. There are ways to improve democracy now. We do not need to wait until 2019. If the Liberals were to recognize the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party, it would show that they are willing to build a democracy that is more representative of the different political views in Canada and Quebec.

Finally, on another note, unlike my colleague, we believe that it is time to stop sitting on Fridays. That would encourage more people to participate, particularly women. It would allow members to balance their parliamentary work, social life and family life. What is more, if members were able to spend more time in their ridings, they would have a greater awareness and understanding of the challenges, hopes, and difficulties of their constituents. Members who cannot return to their ridings could always do riding work here by teleconference or email. This is the 21st century.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of sympathy in the sense that I was in a legislature for many years, but specifically between 1995 and 2010, when we did not have party status.

What is important is that the government House leader has actually made attempts to approach the Bloc to see if there are things that can be accommodated. An important aspect of changing the Standing Orders is to take into consideration independence.

I appreciate the comments, and if the member wants to add something, she is most welcome to.

● (1305)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question because it will allow me to point out that suggestions were made to the Bloc Québécois that were deemed unacceptable because they maintained these two classes composed of MPs and employees who work for the Bloc Québécois

I will give just one other example. At one point, the House of Commons research budget was increased by 20%, but the Bloc Québécois was excluded. Once again, we lost out. More than \$3 million was given to MPs, except members of the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party. Moreover, part of that 20% was allocated to the ridings, because it was recognized that doing work in the ridings was essential.

We received that portion, but at the same time we had to use some of our riding budgets to pay for the services of a bare minimum of employees to help us.

Our work is recognized, but at the same time, 11 MPs, ten from the Bloc Québécois and one from the Green Party, are still prevented from doing the same work as the other members.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am on the procedure and House affairs committee. We went through the family-friendly Parliament study, and we heard testimony from a number of sources. Unfortunately, I have to disagree with my friend about not sitting on Fridays. We examined a number of ways to make Parliament family friendly, such as access to daycare and changing the way the votes are structured, and that seemed to have all-party support on the committee.

We looked at ways of reaching out to our constituents. I know that the Board of Internal Economy is looking at ways we can introduce video conferencing. My riding is only a three-and-a-half-hour drive from here, so I do sympathize with my friends who have to travel quite a long distance to get to their ridings.

All our constituents recognize that the majority of the work is here. We work hard when we are back in our constituencies. We arrange meetings when we have constituency weeks.

When I signed up, I knew it was going to be five days a week in Ottawa. I think Canadians are working hard five days a week, sometimes more. I would like to know how the member would tell her constituents back home that she is going to be here only four days, even though we know that she will be working in her constituency.

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, this question is an opportunity for me to tell my hon. colleague that on the other days I am not at home in bed. As he said so well, I may be working for my riding or doing conference calls or videoconferences. There is work to be done to get better acquainted with the people we represent.

At the same time, I would like him to remember that that was not the gist of my speech. The gist of my speech was that we have a two-tier democracy; the gist of my speech was to point out that the decisions of the Board of Internal Economy are arbitrary; the gist of my speech was that elected officials are working here without funding and that a mandate letter given to the House leader said that everyone ought to be equal.

It is easy to have rights and principles when we are among people who think the same thing, but it is something quite different to apply our principles when we are facing people who are our political adversaries. However, that is where we see who the real democrats are.

Am I to understand that the mandate letter that was given to the House leader and the words of the Prime Minister when he came to meet with the 200 new members were nothing but hot air? I ask the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House.

I think Canadians who tune in to these debates could be forgiven for wondering just what the heck we are talking about today. Over 100,000 energy workers have lost their jobs, the economy has flatlined, growth is down, and here we are talking about the Standing Orders. We are doing that because the Standing Orders require us to do it, so we are having this debate today.

It is one of the few debates in the House that those who regularly watch will see is a free exchange of ideas from all sides, from all members. That is positive. It is unfortunate that when we get into government legislation or opposition days, we seem to stray from that and stick to similar lines, if I can put it that way.

We need to be careful, as we examine the Standing Orders, that as we propose changes, we do not do anything that would diminish the role or the relevance of Parliament to Canada. In the chamber today I have heard some members say that ideas have just popped into their heads. It is great to throw them out on the table, but this is not a brainstorming session where we just get together over a cup of coffee and change the way Parliament works. That is not what we should be doing. This needs to be carefully considered.

I want to make the point that we are members of Parliament. Parliament is not here to serve us; we are here to serve Parliament and the Canadians who sent us here. That is what the debate should be about. The question should not be how Parliament can better serve members of Parliament but how parliamentarians can better serve Canadians through this place. That is what we want to talk about today.

We are having this debate, in large part, with all these new ideas coming forward, because there are so many new MPs. There are 200

or so new MPs since the last Parliament. Some 59% of members of Parliament are new. Some are returning after some time away. That gives us some fresh eyes on the situation.

We should encourage meaningful, thoughtful conversations. However, I have heard things today that make it seem as if people are looking for Parliament to do a job that they should be doing for themselves as individuals.

I have heard people say that members of Parliament do not have to speak for 10 minutes. They can speak for five. I would encourage members of Parliament who have only five minutes of content to speak for five minutes and sit down. They do not need the Standing Orders to be amended to restrict the speeches of members who might want to speak for 10 minutes. If we are going to have five minutes, why not one minute? Why do we not just email our statements in? That would save all the trouble of having to stand here and have it translated in real time.

This is an important chamber we are in, and we should not diminish the role of members of Parliament.

Members of Parliament have great power. I have heard about re-establishing or changing the work-life balance. I have news for members. The Standing Orders will not change their work-life balance for them. Members of Parliament have to take control of their own situations. If they need more time with their families, they need to carve that time out.

Members are asking about taking Friday off, getting back to their ridings, and being here only Monday to Thursday. What would happen in most situations is that we would all go to work on Friday. We would be working in a different location, and there would be less accountability here for the government, with one fewer day for question period and one fewer day for legislation to be examined. It would do nothing for work-life balance.

When we are in our ridings, we are not at home with our feet up on the coffee table. Our constituents expect us to be out. They expect us to be at events. They expect us to be meeting with them. If members of Parliament are expecting the Standing Orders to save them from a bad work-life balance, it is not going to happen.

● (1310)

I have a unique perspective on work-life balance. Others here worked in the political system before being elected to it. My dad was a member of Parliament from 1993 to 2011. I was 15 years old when he was elected. Members could ask either one of us, and we would say that we missed a number of milestones. He missed my graduation because he had to be here in Ottawa. That was tough. We celebrated some milestones over the phone. I have had that same experience of missing milestones with my wife and young son, things that I am just not around for.

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However, no one forced my dad to run for office, and no one forced me to run for office. We knew what we were getting into when we signed up. We signed up for a job that has gruelling travel. I have heard some talk about being 15 hours away. It is about 16 or 17 hours round trip to my house in Chilliwack. I campaigned in the last election for 78 days for people to give me the privilege to serve in the House. I did not complain about the work-life balance. I campaigned vigorously against a Liberal candidate who wanted to do the same thing. Now members are saying we need the Standing Orders to save our work-life balance. That is not what this is about. This is about reducing accountability by 20%.

If we extend work hours during the week, that makes it worse for families. It makes it worse for our local families and the ones who have moved their families to Ottawa, hoping to get home after a committee or a late night vote to see their kids for a couple of hours, for supper, and before bedtime. Now there is talk of working Monday to Thursday as a compressed schedule and extending work hours. People would not see their families.

Putting aside members of Parliament, our staff are working while the House is in session. Therefore, staff would be required to stay here Monday to Thursday late into the night, not see their kids after school, not see their kids before bed. Then, on Friday, when they are supposedly improving their work-life balance, their kids are in school, so they would not see them then either. This is not a solution to the problem. I challenge anyone to ask their constituents about the need for MPs to take some time off while 100,000 energy workers have been laid off. That is a non-starter on this side of the House.

We can talk about ways to make it more efficient. I congratulate the House leaders and whips for having made this Parliament much more family friendly than the last one. How have we done that? We have done it by having votes after question period when all members are already in the House. The 200 new members of Parliament can go back to check videos or *Hansard*, and they will see that we used to vote on three and four nights a week, every week.

Now members of Parliament, if their families are here, are able to get home, have dinner with their families, and tuck the kids into bed. My family is in Chilliwack, and I do not have that luxury. However, the fact is that the House has wrapped up by seven o'clock most nights, which means that I can phone home or FaceTime my son. It allows more flexibility. There are things we have already done that have made this Parliament more family friendly. We need to make sure that we do not reduce accountability in this family-friendly language.

No one talks about the work-life balance of an oil sands worker in my riding, who leaves his family for three weeks at a time. He is home for a week and gone for three weeks. Long-haul truck drivers are gone for weeks at a time. What about our men and women in the military? My cousin served for 10 months in Afghanistan. No one talked about his work-life balance, or asked the military to change the way that things were done to accommodate that. They signed up for those jobs, and they did the work well. That is what we should be doing here as well, not looking for ways to diminish the accountability of the government.

When the Liberals were the third party in the House, they never talked about going home on Thursday night. This was never an issue

for the Liberal Party when it was the third party. Now that Liberals are in power, there is suddenly a shift away from the House. They want to diminish the importance of the House. They want to diminish our time in the House. We should not allow that to happen.

● (1315)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Chilliwack—Hope for his contribution. While I do not accept his premise on the intention of the government with respect to the possible elimination of us sitting on Friday, I think we all accept on this side of the House that when we signed on, this was a seven-day-a-week job.

The question we are framing is in terms of our accessibility to our constituents, and our ability to have more opportunities to interact with them and bring their issues and concerns to this House. Therefore, I take some exception to what I see as a clear sense of opposition from the Conservative Party with respect to this particular initiative. Again, I want to encourage members on all sides of the House that particularly with this debate, it should not be a partisan debate.

I am a member of the procedure and House affairs committee, and we all want the best ideas to come forward. We want to try to make this place more attractive to Canadians to serve in this place, and to make this a place that all Canadians can embrace. I would encourage my friend to consider that, and perhaps make a different contribution with respect to how we could better serve our constituents through some changes in the Standing Orders.

The Standing Orders are the blunt instrument by which we get things done. I am not suggesting that is the way it should be. It should ultimately come back to our practices and how we conduct ourselves with and between each other.

● (1320)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I agree. We should be talking about good ideas. We should also be disagreeing with bad ones, and it is a bad idea to cancel Friday sittings.

What is happening now, and people who tune in will know, is that on Thursday nights a lot of members of Parliament head for the exit. If one tries to find a minister on a Friday in the House, there are probably two, because they head out to the rest of the country to do their work.

I have been a parliamentary secretary. I have been here every Friday for an entire two years. That is a sacrifice that one makes when one is on that side of the House. However, if Friday is cancelled, people will start leaving on Wednesdays, and then we would have no ministers here on Thursdays. We would diminish the role of the House of Commons, and we do not want anything that would do that.

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I respect the member and people who are trying to make this place more family friendly. I would argue that we have done it. On what the member is talking about by cancelling Fridays, I was in the procedure and House affairs committee when members of the NDP brought their staff out. There were two young moms who said that if we cancelled Fridays, they would lose time with their families. They would not be there for the critical hours from after school to bedtime, from supper to bedtime. They would miss that, and then on Friday, they would have to work anyway while the member was back home. Therefore, this is bad for our staff. It would not do anything for our families, unless we, as individual people and members of Parliament, carve out that time for our families.

The divorce rate here is astronomical. It is a very tough job on families. Again, we have signed up knowing that. It is up to each one of us to take the steps to protect our family, to protect that work-life balance. The Standing Orders are not going to do that for us.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here to try to make Parliament work better, and there have been some great suggestions today.

From the point of view of my constituents, question period is not exactly a shining example of how we should be working together collaboratively in the House. In fact, the system right now is partisan questions and partisan answers, which does not inform my constituents about very much at all, other than that we can be quite partisan.

I am interested in the member's views on how we can improve question period moving forward, so that we actually have serious questions and serious answers.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I have heard some members suggest an alphabetical order or rotation.

I think it is important that the government answers the questions from the opposition every day. I know that sometimes its members might not like the format that questions are given in, and the format coming back frustrates us as well. That is part of what we do here. There is a challenge function that this side of the House provides to the government. However, whichever way question period is organized, I do not know that it will inform the member's constituents, with a 35-second question and a 35-second answer. It is very difficult to do that.

Certainly by taking away a question period, which would happen if we left Fridays out of the schedule, it would take away accountability. We want the government to be accountable, Monday to Friday, all the time. We certainly want to be able to hold the government to account here with question period, Monday to Friday.

• (1325)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to stand here today to discuss this subject.

As a new member, I arrived here some nine months ago wondering what the rules were, and found out that not only were there a lot of rules, but there were a lot of unwritten rules as well. This was difficult for me to get my head around.

When I heard that we would be spending today talking about the Standing Orders, I welcomed it. It is indeed a chance to brainstorm

all of the different ways that we could make the House conduct its business in a better way. I listened with great interest to the speeches this morning, and there are more to come later today from my fellow members about how we could do that.

For my part, I want to take things in a different direction and talk about how we can make the debate in the House much more meaningful to each other, more meaningful to the work that we do here as members of Parliament, which is to create, to review, to vote on legislation, and hold the government to account.

I want to again thank our clerks and officers of the House of Commons for the terrific support that we receive from them.

I did some research from our big green book, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Chapter 13, on the evolution of how things came to be here with respect to maintaining debate.

There were things that were of particular interest to me. I realized that I broke one of the rules very early on in the game. I learned why we have the mace on the table and why we are not to pass between the mace and the Speaker. The reason is that at different times in our history, members tried to impede debate by grabbing the mace. I do not know what they would have done with it, but they did grab it. That was certainly not my intention when I did that. That is the kind of thing that I have learned.

I also learned that in the early years, the debates were very vigorous. Members sat for long hours, and apparently it was not unknown to have some imbibing going on outside the premises. This also led to the invocation of different rules, where the Speaker was able to tell a member that he or she was being repetitive, redundant, or off topic. At that time, members did speak off the cuff and were not always to the point.

I am doing my best today to speak to the point because it does bring back stimulating and vigorous debate in the House.

I do believe in preparation. It is a good idea to do one's research and to know what one is going to talk about before speaking. Do forgive me if I resort to my notes from time to time.

When we are looking at decorum here in the House, I have to ask what the purpose is of that. It is not because we are having a tea party here. It is because we want to engage in civil and free discourse to the greatest extent possible, so we can have an exchange of ideas and constructive criticism as we debate the many important topics before us.

Orders of the Day

Apparently, it is the Speaker's job to maintain that decorum. The Speaker has a very heavy-handed tool to do that. Basically, it is in article 11, which allows the Speaker to name a member and cause that member to withdraw from the House. It is my understanding that naming a member came out of British parliamentary tradition. We are talking perhaps around 1913, and I am sure that someone will check that for me. Naming was such a shameful thing for the member in question, and the member would immediately apologize to the House. Decorum was basically kept for another 30 years after that. There is something to be said about members knowing they have crossed the line, that they have disrupted the House and are being called to account for that.

• (1330)

There is something to be said for having intermediary measures. In my own background, one of the many things I did—and I do not know how it happened—was act as the disciplinary officer for the director of a student residence at McGill University, with 750 18-year olds. If members want to see wild and disorderly conduct, they should go to a student residence on a Friday or Saturday night. They are young people who are very active. We had one rule at McGill, which was respect. However, they did not always know what that meant, so I had to spell it out for them in different ways. I did not want to use the heavy-handed tool of a formal reprimand, which could lead to suspension or expulsion, as that was too much and went too far. What I found very useful was a very timely call to a 7:00 a.m. interview, in a formal letter to the students that would be put under their bedroom door at the residence. I figured if they were going to bother me, I was going to bother them. Those interviews really led to a general calming of the waters, to the extent that when students learned that there would be consequences to their actions it became a much safer and more enjoyable place for everyone.

Coming back to the intermediary measures, I had a few ideas, and we were kicking them around a bit. I sometimes think of this place as a bit like a sports arena, so I was thinking of a penalty box at the end of the chamber. The Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities had a great idea, basically like in soccer, where yellow and red cards could be used as a warning to members who are being disruptive in the House and interrupting another member. If we were in a baseball frame of mind, it could be that members are given a first warning, a second warning, and a third warning; three strikes and they are out.

We can look to the kind of practices that we already have, whereby the Speaker has the authority to recognize or not recognize a member as he or she chooses. I believe that is something we need to get back to and perhaps also codify in the Standing Orders to make it evident to the members. Then, the Speaker could say something to the effect of "I admonish you under Standing Order x, y, or z", so that the member stands warned, because as it is now sometimes one side or the other will lose a question, but it is not normally the offending member.

Those are the kinds of things I was thinking of, because I really do believe that the best thing we can do for Canadians is to make the debate and the work we do in this House more meaningful. We need something that would bring out the best in us, rather than the worst, as we have unfortunately seen on too many occasions.

Also, I am a great believer in apologies. I have used that to great effect when I was working with students. There is something to be said about people acknowledging that their behaviour has hurt other people.

Therefore, I would call upon the procedures and the House affairs committee to think about these different measures. Let us give our Speaker the authority and the tools that he or she needs to help remind all members why we are here and what kind of behaviour and decorum we should be keeping.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have never before heard of a Liberal being a party-pooper. It sounds as if what the member did before was a tough job. I coached hockey for a long time. I have four beautiful children, aged 22 to 28. Indeed, teenagers sometimes look at us as if we have four eyes and are a bit hard to handle at times.

I want to acknowledge something today that our hon. colleague from Chilliwack mentioned, which is that the folks at home are probably having a hard time following along. As well, I want to acknowledge that our poor pages are also listening today. I am sure their eyes are rolling in the back of their heads at times as we go back and forth, and I wanted to apologize to them for the discussion.

My question for our hon. colleague is this. We have heard a lot of great partisan and non-partisan discussion today. We have heard some suggestions about bypassing long-standing traditions or procedure with respect to private members' bills. We know why we have these long-standing procedures in place, and we need to go through that proper process. I wonder if our hon. colleague would support bypassing some of those long-standing procedures, as suggested by some of the other members. I will very quickly say that I do not support that.

• (1335)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, to make it clear for the record, I am not against the thrust and parry of vigorous debate, with the occasional pithy remark or interruption. I have heard quite a few, sitting on this side of the House, and there are few that come over from that side of the House, too. That is what makes this an energetic and real place.

Talking about private members' bills, I am 87th on the list, so I have to admit it is sort of far right now. I would just like to see that be a more useful process. I understand from the stories of other members that there are some longstanding members who have never had a chance to present a private member's bill, yet somebody else just fresh out of the gate gets told that he or she is number two on the list. I do not see how that is useful. I do not see how that is productive. There are definitely things that need to be done in looking at how private members' bills come to the floor of the House.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague. In the 12 years I have been here, I have seen some deplorable, thuggish behaviour. It is up to the Speaker to handle that, and I think in this Parliament the role of the Speaker has attempted to do that.

Orders of the Day

I guess my concern is there is a tendency to infantilize this House as though we are all bad children; we use penalty box metaphors.

I came here to speak truth to power. I did not come here to belong to an august little club where we all pat each other on the back and say, "What an excellent question".

Decorum is about truth and answering.

I would suggest one of the main problems that I see, which adds a great deal of frustration, is that we have people standing in the House, reading things that were written by somebody else, and we can tell they are reading something that was handed to them five minutes ago. What are they doing here? Why not just have their staff come in?

To read repeated notes from ministers, day after day, is a debasement of debate, so yes, I get frustrated. I would suggest we return to the Standing Orders that existed, whereby we have to just speak. It might be a bit more difficult for us. We might be a little wibbly-wobbly for a while; but that would actually restore a level of accountability in the House, because what is happening under this faux decorum is that we are being run like vacuous marionettes by whatever political staffers higher up are saying, such as "This is what you are going to read today. This is what you are going to say, and in trouble, say only this".

That is not democracy.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about how we can cut those strings of the marionettes so we can actually start to speak truth to power, get proper responses, and do it in a dignified fashion.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his remarks, but I beg to differ. Order and decorum are here so that we can engage in just the kind of speaking truth to power that we are all here to do. In that regard, yes, we need to have more substantive debate, more spontaneous debate.

I thought we had to read from speeches. Now that I know we do not, members can be assured that they will be hearing more from me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very instructive to hear my hon. colleagues talk about the standing orders and decorum in the House.

As one of the cohort of new members in the House of Commons, I greatly appreciate what I have discovered upon arriving here, such as tradition and parliamentary procedure. I love being here. It is a privilege to have a seat in the House.

Then again, it must not be forgotten that this is a job for which we are very well paid. Canadians see this and they are watching us. We are very lucky, but we also have very good conditions that oblige us to work from Monday to Friday, as well as Saturday and Sunday. If we have such fine conditions, it is because Parliament has recognized that MPs have a job to do and that we ought to do that job as best we can, while taking the time to do it to the best of our abilities.

That is why all the suggestions we have heard about shortening the work week are hard for working people to understand or accept. For example, a friend of mine in my riding works a seven on, seven

off schedule. He goes seven days without seeing his family, then spends seven days with them.

People who work 21-day stretches up north work all the time. They adapt. They still have families because they do what they have to do to maintain that. I am sure we can have our families and still do the job we are here to do.

Our job is to ask the government questions and hold it to account. The government and the ministers' job is to answer our questions because we speak on behalf of Canadians who want to ask the government questions but do not have access to ministers like we do.

That access is what I want to talk about in the House today. How can we improve Canadians' access to the House of Commons? Petitions are among the few ways Canadians can send their messages directly to the House of Commons. We present petitions every day, at every opportunity. Petitions are messages from Canadians to all parliamentarians.

Unfortunately, I have a petition here that I cannot present to Parliament because it does not comply with the Standing Orders, which contain not one, but eleven requirements that someone from Lac-Drolet who never comes here must satisfy if he or she wants to be heard in the House by presenting a petition. I think that shows us an easy way to improve access to the House.

I have a concrete example. It is a petition signed by many of my constituents to get cell phone service. Since there are no cell phones in Lac-Drolet, people signed a petition to demand cell phone service, but they made a few mistakes.

First of all, the municipality that wrote the petition included its logo. Too bad. Petitions must not have any logos on them, or they cannot be presented. Second, who provides cell phone service? It is certainly not Parliament. The petition calls on Bell to provide cellular service. That was the second mistake. Petitions must be addressed only to Parliament. Third—

● (1340)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. Since we are discussing the rules of the House today, I would remind the member that the use of props is prohibited in the House. Members can read something from a device, but otherwise, props are not permitted.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, these are my notes. On the one hand, we are not supposed to read our notes, and on the other, when I read them, I am told that I am reading my notes, but anyway.

Orders of the Day

The attachment that included logos did not call on Parliament to act directly. It is important to understand that the people who draft these kinds of petitions are unfamiliar with our rules. They want to do the right thing and send a message. I would like the members here to allow non-standard petitions to be presented, like the National Assembly of Quebec does, with the members' consent. If, by chance, our constituents want to present a petition that does not meet all the requirements, we can recognize that it does not conform. However, we could simply stand up and seek our colleagues' consent to present the petition anyway, recognizing that it does not conform. Our constituents could then have the opportunity to present a petition and speak with their MP, and all MPs, and their message would be heard. They could then expect a response from Parliament. I think that small change could make a big difference in regaining the trust of Canadians.

For example, when I tell people that I cannot present their petition because there is a logo on it, they are going to say that this is more red tape and they will wonder why they were not informed and why we are making this so difficult. Please, help us. We can work on this together to make our Parliament more accessible.

There is another thing: to me, 15 minutes is 15 minutes. We have allocated speaking time. We have 10 minutes for speeches, and then five minutes to respond to questions and comments, or 20 minutes of speaking time and 10 minutes for questions and comments. However, when a member does not use the full 10 minutes, we move into a five-minute period for questions. If, for example, I speak for only seven minutes, which would surprise me a great deal, that would be followed by five minutes of questions. My intervention would therefore be two minutes shorter. It is hard for our staff to set schedules and it is hard for us to manage. Why not have a period of 15 minutes, with a maximum of 10 minutes for the speech? Then, the time that is not used for the speech would be used for questions and comments.

This would improve debate and allow us to have more discussions with our colleagues. It might prevent the problem that some people mentioned of talking for the sake of talking or to fill up the time. Instead, members could say what they have to say in seven minutes and then give everyone the chance to ask questions.

I think that would be a good thing and that it would really help parliamentarians who do not necessarily always want to speak off the cuff and who then have to consult their notes because they absolutely have to fill 10 minutes. This would allow us to take debates further. That is a suggestion that I want to make to the House.

People often wonder why question period gets so heated. It is a question period, but unfortunately it is not an answer period. Things get a bit complicated, but that is understandable. When a member asks a minister a question and the Leader of the Government decides that a different minister is going to answer, how can we expect to get a real answer? Why can the members of Parliament not ask someone, even a parliamentary secretary if need be, a question and have that person respond? Why must it be up to the discretion of the Leader of the Government?

This is a way of making ministers accountable for their files. It would allow us to get real answers from the person involved, rather than evasive answers that were prepared ahead of time. I think that

this is a constructive suggestion that would enable the opposition to do its work properly and enable the government to give real answers to Canadians. We are here for them. They want us to ask questions and they expect the government to answer them. How can we get good answers if the right person does not respond? That is another suggestion that I want to make.

I will close by commenting on the famous planted questions, as they are known. The government sometimes launches a program on Tuesday and a member on the same side of the House will ask, "Is that not a great program that you launched yesterday, Minister?" It is a little over the top, and people can make it ridiculous. That is not uncommon. At that point, it is very obvious that the House only serves as a propaganda machine for a government program.

I think that MPs in government have the right to ask the minister questions when their files are not moving forward. Instead of being told to ask a question to raise the profile of a minister who does not speak all that often, why not allocate this time to the opposition and government MPs so they can ask real questions on behalf of the people they represent, and so they, too, can get real answers about their files right here in the House? That is why we are here.

• (1345)

In question period, there are not that many questions for government members as it is. Thus, these questions should not be used to make ministers look good, but rather to advance the files of members in government.

[*English*]

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the members all recognize, standing committees are where the work happens. In here, as was mentioned earlier, a lot of times we get parliamentary theatrics. We have things that are read and sometimes, most times, comments that are made from somebody else's pen.

With that, also at standing committees, public participation happens. They open up the doors of government and include more people in the conversations and issues we are dealing with on a daily basis, within every aspect of government business.

This morning, for example, at the transportation, infrastructure, and communities committee, we were able to move forward, as the member opposite recognizes because he does sit on that committee, to establish a Canadian transportation and logistics strategy. With that said, it gave us the opportunity and gives us the opportunity once again to dive a bit deeper into those issues, and of course include the public in the dialogue we will be establishing and of course the decision that will soon be ultimately made.

Orders of the Day

When we do move forward with the possibility of changes on Fridays or even any other day of the week and any other hour of the day, does the member not agree that we should and can and would support the idea of working extended hours in our days, working extra days in a week to include a Saturday or Sunday, and ultimately to possibly even include a Friday as a day for more standing committee work, to once again get to those issues more diligently and involve more public participation?

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, that makes no sense. On the one hand, people are asking that Friday be used to enhance the work-life balance, and on the other hand, people are asking members to arrive at 7 a.m. and leave at midnight. We cannot do that. We already work long hours, and the House already has the power to extend those hours.

As things stand, members who live here do not see much of their family. Shortening the week and then adding hours of work to the other days of the week goes against the fundamental desire to improve the quality of our family life when our family lives with us in Ottawa or Gatineau.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable more.

My constituents do not get to decide to take Fridays off, and I do not think we should decide to take Fridays off. I think actually that it is deceptive to say it is more family friendly. I totally agree with him that lengthening the day is not just not family friendly for MPs. Think of the hundreds of staff who work for us in this institution and what it would do to their family lives to extend those sittings to midnight every night during the week.

Extending a Thursday night sitting for me, from Vancouver Island, means I would be here on Friday anyway. If I have to stay until midnight on Thursday night, I would be stuck in Ottawa on Friday without a sitting of the House, and I would lose a significant amount of my time as an individual member to contribute to debate and questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I suppose the member wants to know if I agree with him. I certainly do, because it makes no sense to spend more time travelling every week than we do in the House. During the week, we have to spend our time doing our work here in the House. That is what Canadians expect: a Monday to Friday work week.

When I am in my riding, I work Monday to Friday. I do not ask my staff to hold down the fort on Fridays because I do not feel like it or I had a busy week. We are here to work. I think that all Canadians expect us to work hard and make progress on their issues.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, I rise

today to speak to the Standing Orders and how we can improve this institution, and in the process, better serve our constituents.

My remarks come from the vantage point of a new member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park with one year of service in the House, but also from the perspective of a lawyer with 14 years of courtroom experience and from the lens of a 44-year-old husband and father of two young children, both of whom are under the age of six.

As a preliminary comment, I am very proud of this, our 42nd Parliament. I am proud of its composition and its diversity. Importantly, we have elected a large number of first-time members, 197 to be precise, many of whom are from a younger age demographic. I see this as an inherent good. New MPs have the benefit of bringing fresh perspectives and new ideas, which serve to improve the development of legislation in this chamber. However, with younger MPs at different stages of their lives come different challenges, particularly among members who are raising young families or considering starting a family.

[*Translation*]

My goal is to do everything I can to keep that youth momentum going so that young MPs return to the House in 2019 and other young people who want to run for the first time are encouraged to do so. I hope we all share that goal. Improving the way the House works will make it easier to achieve that goal. With that in mind, I would like to raise three points.

[*English*]

First is decorum. I will be frank. I come from the environment of the courtroom. Having spent 14 years as a litigator, I am very used to passionate debate and articulate submissions, but I have also become accustomed to control over decorum by no-nonsense judges who run strict courtrooms. What I am not used to is the inability to hear oneself think, being shouted down, being constantly interrupted, jeered, or heckled. Such behaviour is not befitting this chamber. Such behaviour is not befitting the office of a member of Parliament. Such behaviour is not respectful of the very voters who sent us to this institution.

I have heard over and over again from engaged and informed residents of my riding of Parkdale—High Park that they want, indeed they expect, an elevated tone of debate, not the cacophony that is our daily question period. This behaviour is tactical. The only strategic purpose for such behaviour is to rattle the person at the microphone to get him or her off their train of thought, rendering their oral delivery less effective. I have witnessed this used repeatedly in this Parliament, often by experienced members against newer members. In particular, I have personally observed a very disturbing trend, a pattern where outspoken male members of Parliament redouble their efforts to heckle female members. I will call this what it is. It is a form of intimidation and bullying that should never be countenanced in this institution.

This is not a basketball court. Parliament is not a forum for trash talk. It is a forum for the exchange of ideas, a form for rigorous and passionate debate, a forum where elected representatives are expected to vigorously present their views and the views of their constituents and be met by equally vigorous but disciplined opposition. I believe it can be that forum. We are certainly not there now.

How can we improve the civility and decorum in this chamber? I have a few ideas. One is the proximity of you, Mr. Speaker, to the actual orators. Many of my colleagues who have moved from seats closer to your chair to seats that are now closer to the Sergeant-at-Arms at the far end of the chamber have noted that the decline in civility as one moves further and further from the Speaker's chair is evident. To put it plainly, the further away members are from you, the easier it is to misbehave. Therein lies a simple solution. We could employ one of the deputy speakers to take up a formal seat near the Sergeant-at-Arms during question period to serve as a second set of eyes and ears down at the opposite end of the chamber. The mere presence, I believe, would have a moderating effect on members' behaviour.

My second point is the reprimands that are meted out. I understand, Mr. Speaker, you already have various options: verbal warnings, removing questions, depriving members of the ability to speak in the chamber, calling them to the bar, and even ordering them removed from the House. It is critical for you to not only have these methods of reprimand, but also to employ them, and I would respectfully ask you to do so more frequently.

My third recommendation would be to keep an active written record of MP transgressions. In this way, each member would have a report card of sorts. I would urge in this era of openness and transparency that such reports be made publicly available on the Parliament of Canada website. The same level of public scrutiny that is brought to bear on MPs' expenses, with quarterly publications online, should be applied to the behaviour of members of Parliament in this very chamber.

There is a troubling culture of impunity in the House, one that emboldens disruptive members of Parliament into being vocal. This occurs because MPs are aware that their behaviour is not only often out of the sight of you, Mr. Speaker, but out of the sight of Canadians. In this regard, I am referring to the cameras in the House of Commons, which according to our current rules may only be focused on a member who has been recognized to speak. This, in my view, would again be a simple fix.

My fourth recommendation is that if outspoken members of Parliament knew their heckling, jeering, and interventions could actually be caught on camera and beamed via CPAC to the living rooms of people around the country, it would mitigate their misbehaviour.

I propose to continue the remainder of my speech after question period is concluded.

The Speaker: I thank the member. He will have four and a half minutes left in his speech after question period.

Statements by Members

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

UNION PARK

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the opening of Union Park, a new community park in Meadowvale. I would also like to commend Councillor Pat Saito and the City of Mississauga employees who made this project possible.

In 1957, the Union Natural Gas Company of Canada constructed a gas transmission facility that was operational in the 1960s. In 2012, the City of Mississauga obtained the land from Union Gas. It is now one of the most innovative parks I have ever seen, complete with a new playground, shaded canopy, walking paths, a dog run, and a multi-sport court with basketball nets that turns into one of two hockey rinks. The fun does not stop there, as the park also includes a water feature, adult exercise stations, a tobogganing area, and a skate park with a half-pipe.

I would like to encourage all residents to get out and enjoy this park.

* * *

● (1400)

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three weeks ago I attended the breakfast kickoff for Special Olympics Saskatchewan.

Special Olympics Saskatchewan is dedicated to enriching the lives of people with intellectual disabilities through active participation in sport. It is part of Special Olympics Canada, an organization with over 40,000 special Olympians and 20,000 volunteers. The Special Olympics builds community inclusion and is good for everyone.

At the breakfast, I promised to challenge my fellow MPs to get involved with the Special Olympics across the country. To each and every member of the House, I challenge you to meet special Olympians in your riding and during their Hill Day on October 25. Have them tell you why the Special Olympics is so valuable, and post it to your Facebook and web pages. Their story of success and inclusion needs to be told. I know you will enjoy meeting these admirable Canadians as much as I did.

* * *

[Translation]

LUCIENNE RIOUX, JULIETTE THIBEAULT AND ADOLPHE LEDUC

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to send my best wishes to Lucienne Rioux, Juliette Thibeault, and Adolphe Leduc, three of my constituents who all celebrated their 100th birthday in September.

They were babies during the First World War, teenagers during the Great Depression, and young adults during the Second World War. They have watched our national identity evolve over the years.

Statements by Members

[English]

They also witnessed the ways in which our world has changed and became more connected and, most of all, Canada's ascension as a strong and respected autonomous state.

Today Canada exists because of the hard work and dedication of people like Lucienne, Juliette, and Adolphe, and all of our seniors who, for generations past, contributed immensely to Canadian society.

I thank them for their lifetime as proud, honest, hard-working Canadians, and again wish them a happy 100th birthday and many more to come.

* * *

[Translation]

MICHEL PAGEAU

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Abitibi-Témiscamingue is in mourning. It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Michel Pageau yesterday evening. Thirty years ago, this former trapper and his wife Louise founded a wildlife shelter near Amos, which remains a tourist hotspot in our region.

Still today, the mission of Refuge Pageau is to take in injured animals, care for them, and release them. The shelter also welcomes thousands of visitors annually and teaches them about local wildlife and the boreal forest. Michel Pageau had become an icon of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and one of the most famous ambassadors of Canada, even outside our borders.

The documentary, *The Man Who Talks with Wolves*, and a book about him, *J'ai entendu pleurer la forêt*, will keep alive the memory of this gentle trapper, this Santa-like figure who loved and communicated with animals.

I want to extend my deepest condolences to his wife, Louise, his children, and all their family, not to mention the wards of Refuge Pageau, who have lost their biggest champion.

* * *

[English]

OKTOBERFEST

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians of German ethnic ancestry are one of the largest ethnic groups in Canada. One out of every 10 Canadians is of German ancestry, and one out of every five people of German ancestry in Canada lives where I do in Waterloo region.

Tomorrow marks the beginning of the 48th annual Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest, a nine day celebration of German heritage, filled with food, music and festivities. Put on your lederhosen and your dirmdls, and experience the *gemütlichkeit* as you polka the night away at one of the city's seventeen festhallen.

On my own behalf and that of members for Kitchener Centre, Kitchener—Conestoga, Cambridge, and Waterloo, it gives me great pleasure to invite all members to join us tomorrow at noon at Kitchener City Hall, as the Prime Minister taps the keg at the opening ceremonies.

ORANGEVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate the Orangeville Public Library on the commencement of its Canada 150 renovation project. This \$275,000 project was approved last year with \$91,000 in federal funding under the Canada 150 community infrastructure program of our previous Conservative government.

The renovation will include an expanded children's area, quiet study space, an accessible family washroom, and electrical and lighting upgrades for new technology. The new renovations will help create a contemporary dynamic design that will emphasize openness and flexibility for the future, while preserving the library's historic charm.

Located on Mill Street in downtown Orangeville, this historic building is an important landmark for the Orangeville community. The recipient of a grant of \$12,400 from the Carnegie Foundation in 1904, this key part of our community has been providing exemplary service to the residents of Orangeville for well over a century.

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● (1405)

[Translation]

BING THOM

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of Canada's leading architects and urban designers, Bing Thom, who passed away suddenly earlier this week.

[English]

Bing was one of Canada's "starchitects", internationally renowned as an urban visionary driven by pure passion who saw architecture as a way to uplift not only the physical but also the economic and social conditions of a community.

Bing collaborated with Arthur Erickson to build the world famous Vancouver Law Courts and leaves behind a remarkable legacy, locally in the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at UBC and internationally in the Mead Center for American Theatre in Washington, D.C.

My deepest condolences to the Thom family.

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CHUNG YEUNG FESTIVAL

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and join Chinese Canadians in my riding of Willowdale, and indeed from coast to shining coast, in celebrating the upcoming Chung Yeung Festival.

Also known as the Double 9 Festival, Chung Yeung provides the cherished opportunity to gather with friends and family in celebration of this ancient holiday. A time for both reflection and festivity, the Double 9 Festival connects us to our past by allowing us to honour our ancestors and elders while also celebrating the present through picnics, hikes, food, and drink.

Statements by Members

Whether celebrating with wine or cake, I wish all those celebrating Chung Yeung a joyous and memorable weekend.

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, I held a round table discussion in my riding on the plague that is called human sex trafficking.

Alarming, Ontario has become a major hub for human trafficking, and even more alarming is that the victims are predominantly girls with an average age of 14.

Attending the round table were victims service providers; the Hamilton Police Service; and Laurie Scott, MPP, who introduced a private member's bill on this issue in the Ontario legislature. The attendees were unanimous that more resources and collaboration between all levels of government and police services was needed to combat this heinous crime.

I know the subject well. The largest human trafficking arrest and conviction in Canadian history took place not far from my home in 2012.

I ask all members of the House to work with local victims groups and police, and I call on the government to continue to make ending human trafficking a priority, as our Conservative government did in 2012 with legislation that has delivered tangible results.

Let us hope that there will be a thanksgiving in the not too distant future when no Canadian family will need to worry that their daughter has been lured into and lost to this horrible crime.

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MUSLIM CANADIANS

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, *as-salaam alaykum*.

I rise today in solidarity with Muslim Canadians and Muslim newcomers across the country. When Muslim newcomers decide to leave their country and come to Canada, they often leave behind prejudice and profiling for a better life in this country.

Mistrust and fear of newcomers are dismal aspects of our shared past. Recent outbursts of Islamophobia in Alberta reflect neither the best nor the majority of those who share Albertan and Canadian values.

Albertans have a long history of welcoming newcomers from every corner of the world to build a unique, diverse, and inclusive culture. The first mosque in Canada, the Al-Rashid Mosque, was built in 1938 in Edmonton in my riding.

[*Translation*]

Canadian Muslims are leaders in every sector. They are our friends, our neighbours, our spouses, and our colleagues.

[*English*]

In 2016, every Muslim Canadian is a Canadian.

● (1410)

AEROSPACE

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the first time a Canadian flew a NASA mission to space.

[*Translation*]

After an impressive career as a captain in the Royal Canadian Navy, on October 5, 1984, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount continued to serve Canada by becoming the first Canadian astronaut to go into space. He served on two other space missions and operated the Canadarm.

[*English*]

He later went on to become president of the Canadian Space Agency, and now serves as Canada's Minister of Transport, and works continuously to improve Canada's transportation system.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of the people of Hull—Aylmer and all Canadians, I thank the minister for his unwavering dedication and his tireless service to our country.

Congratulations.

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[*English*]

SIR ISAAC BROCK

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this day in 1769, Major General Sir Isaac Brock was born. Having built defences to keep Canada secure, Brock took command on the battlefield after the American declaration of war in 1812. His philosophy was that a strong offence was the best defence.

Brock's military genius and courage inspired the militia. Together with the brilliant Shawnee warrior leader, Tecumseh, Brock achieved a significant victory at the siege of Detroit. Brock would later fall leading a charge of his troops in his greatest victory at the Battle of Queenston Heights in October 1812. His final words, "Push on, brave York volunteers", inspired the Canadians to victory.

Today, he lies beneath the monument on the hallowed ground of that victory high above Niagara River, a visible reminder to Canadians and Americans of the sacrifices made and Canada's victory. Canada's existence owes much to Brock's strong leadership. Having defeated American manifest destiny, Canada thrives to this day as a distinct country in its own right.

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[*Translation*]

RETAIL INDUSTRY

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the work and contribution of our great retail industry.

Oral Questions

[English]

Since 1963, the Retail Council of Canada has been the voice of retail in Canada. It represents more than 45,000 storefronts of retail format across Canada, from specialty stores to discount stores, from independent shops to online merchants.

The retail sector is the largest private sector employer in Canada, employing over 2.2 million Canadians coast to coast to coast, and generates sales of over \$340 billion a year. It is an industry that touches the daily lives of Canadians in every corner of our country, while providing middle-class jobs and career opportunities, and investing in the communities it serves.

I invite members to join me in welcoming representatives of the Retail Council of Canada and retailers in Ottawa today. Let us thank them for helping us to build stronger, more prosperous, wonderful communities all across our country.

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ROSH HASHANAH

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to wish a happy new year to all those who celebrated Rosh Hashanah here in Parliament, across Canada, and around the globe.

Tonight I will be attending an event hosted by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies here on the Hill, and I encourage all members of the House to join me there. I also wish to share with my colleagues that the Tour for Humanity is parked in the east lawn laneway. All members are invited there for a group photo at 3:30 today.

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of a season of renewal. It is a time to strengthen commitments to making our communities, Canada, and our world a kinder, gentler, and more peaceful place. It has been one of the great pleasures of my tenure as an MP to come to better know the Jewish community in Victoria, proud home of Congregation Emanu-El, Canada's oldest surviving synagogue.

To my friends at home, in the House, and across the country, *Shalom and Shana Tova.*

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 14 months since the children of Alison Azer were abducted, 14 months that these children have been in harm's way, first in Kurdistan and now in Iran.

When Alison met with the Prime Minister in May, he assured her that he was preoccupied with the case. Yet, nearly five months later, Alison has received absolutely no indication that the Prime Minister has done anything to help, nor has there been any progress in the case.

As each day passes, the psychological and emotional harm to these children surely worsens. Time is of the essence. It is time for the Prime Minister to demonstrate leadership, take action, and make the return of these four Canadian children a priority.

● (1415)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of my hon. colleagues to a special family visiting us in Ottawa. I would like to welcome to Ottawa Kevin, Julia, and the Garratt family.

The Garratt family wants me to extend deep gratitude to everyone in the House, across party lines and across government, for all of their efforts in helping to bring Mr. Garratt home. They also want me to thank the determined professional consular officers who, day in and day out, look out for the interests of Canadians abroad. Mr. Garratt said to me earlier today, "I am grateful for being Canadian". What a powerful message on Thanksgiving.

On behalf of the House, I want to say how amazed we are by Kevin, Julia, Peter, Jeff, Todd, Deborah, and Ed. Their ordeal was long and tough, yet their dignity and strength never wavered.

Kevin, welcome home.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

TAXATION

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, please excuse me for being a bit emotional. That was a very touching moment.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister confirmed what everyone in the country already knew: there is a new tax. He made it quite clear yesterday that there is a new tax on carbon that will affect every Canadian family and will cost them more. The government cannot even promise Canadians that rates will not go up.

The Prime Minister is not here today. I do not know who will answer. However, since—

The Speaker: I believe the hon. member is well aware that it is improper to draw attention to a member's presence or absence in the House.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean can continue his question.

Hon. Denis Lebel: Mr. Speaker, please forgive me. I should have said that someone else would be answering.

The person who answers must confirm that there will not be any increase in prices for Canadians, not on their electricity bill and not on their grocery bill. The government must promise us that today.

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a great day, a historic day, for this Parliament and for Canada. We ratified the Paris Agreement on climate change. Regrettably, not all of it us did.

We invite members of the Conservative opposition—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

Oral Questions

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): You have refused a motion saying that there will not be a higher price for the population. You refused that.

Mr. Speaker, the new carbon tax, which is the Prime Minister's own word for it, will take more money out of Canadians' pockets. Canadians already pay their fair share of taxes and cannot afford to see the cost of living continue to rise.

I ask again, and it is an easy answer to give: Will he promise the Canadian population that the price of groceries, gas, and heating will not increase because of this new carbon tax?

The Speaker: Before the minister responds, I remind the hon. colleague that when he says “you” in this place, he is speaking to the Speaker. I do not think he meant that I was doing what he was accusing someone of doing.

We will now hear from the hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

• (1420)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was noteworthy for the historic signing of the agreement. It was also noteworthy for comments made by the member for Calgary Nose Hill, who actually took on the job creators in full force. She took on those people who are employing more than 62,000 Albertans.

There is applause that the member has taken on the very people who create employment, the very people who are making up the middle class—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said “you”, because I knew you were not voting. However, that does not change the facts.

[*Translation*]

It does not change the fact that, today, they cannot promise us that Canadians will not see an increase, and therein lies the problem. They also say the provinces will have to implement it. They are forcing the provinces to handle the unpleasant task of making people pay for the federal government's decision.

Can they promise there will be no increase for Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we care about job creation across the country, and we especially care about creating jobs in the energy industry, which is hurting because of low commodity prices, so it was astonishing for us to read that the member from Calgary was actually accusing the job creators of predatory practices in a tweet she sent out for all Canadians and all people around the world to read. We now know who really cares about creating jobs in Alberta.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House I watched as my colleague, the member for Milton, asked a very serious question about an individual and the negative consequences this carbon tax would have for this individual. I then saw the Liberals laughing and mocking my colleague, and more sadly, the individual who had been affected. Can the Liberals tell the House what they find so funny about imposing a tax on Canadians who are suffering?

To the Minister of Natural Resources, if he does not realize the suffering that is going on in Alberta, and the everyday Albertans who are suffering from job losses because of the Alberta carbon tax and this federal carbon tax, he is more out of touch than I could have imagined.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe we all witnessed the passion and compassion of a member of this assembly yesterday. We are all concerned about the difficulties some families face. We care too.

What we tried to say in the House yesterday is that the government is working very hard to strengthen the middle class and reduce poverty for all Canadian families.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, that is cold rhetoric for Canadians who are struggling. Canadians know that gas prices are going to be skyrocketing under this carbon tax.

In my riding, in rural Manitoba, there is no public transportation. People have to drive hundreds of miles, sometimes, to get to work. They do not have a choice.

While the Liberals are laughing at Canadians who are suffering, what do they have to say to rural Canadians who have to drive their cars and are going to be seeing gas prices going through the roof because of this tax?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the challenges facing Alberta families. We will continue to deliver on our commitments to invest in infrastructure to support economic growth and improve—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

It is getting too noisy in here. Members do not want to lose a question.

The hon. Minister of Transport has the floor.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, today, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is in Edmonton speaking to municipal leaders from across the province at the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association's conference.

Working with our provincial and municipal partners, we have approved 69 projects worth a total of over \$3 billion since taking office.

Under phase 1, we have already approved \$543 million in federal funding for 66 projects—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of strained federal-provincial relations, the Liberals promised to negotiate in good faith with the provinces.

On Monday, the Prime Minister surprised the provinces by unilaterally imposing an environmental policy. The Prime Minister also rejected his provincial counterparts' request to talk about health care funding now.

Should the provinces be concerned that the Prime Minister will impose his own health care policy too?

• (1425)

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health, our government is always on Canadians' side. Canadians expect us to have a collegial working relationship.

That is why my colleagues and I are meeting on October 18. I will work with all of my provincial and territorial counterparts. We will improve health care systems for Canadians.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need more than just rhetoric. The provinces need stable, predictable funding for health care.

The Prime Minister has always said that he would not do anything without consulting the provinces. However, he refuses to sit down with his counterparts immediately, which is a little too reminiscent of Stephen Harper's attitude.

As a good faith gesture, will the Prime Minister commit to deferring the cuts planned for health transfers for one year, as the provinces are calling for?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health, it is crucial that the health ministers gather to discuss what Canadians need. I am organizing such a meeting in order to improve our health care systems.

We are going to increase the Canada health transfer. Next year it will go up to \$37 billion. We will also discuss other ways to help our colleagues across the country.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, based on the Liberals' actions last week, the premiers have every right to worry.

The government promised a renewed health accord that respects the provinces, and the Prime Minister directly said he would not touch health care funding without negotiations, but all we have seen is its plan to adopt Stephen Harper's cuts to the transfers, no matter what the provinces say.

Many Canadians are starting to ask themselves this: How is a Liberal cut to health care any different from a cut by Stephen Harper?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have raised this point in the House before. The approach of this government to health is completely different from what has been seen in this country in the last 10 years.

I have been negotiating with my colleagues since the beginning of this year about how we can help them.

More money is not the answer to everything that ails the health care system in this country. It requires us working together. It requires us making new investments in home care, in making new investments to make sure Canadians will have access to mental health care. It requires collaboration, and that is exactly the approach we are taking.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to paraphrase the Prime Minister, a cut is a cut is a cut.

If the Prime Minister proceeds to cut the health care transfer, this will cause a loss of \$1 billion next year alone and \$36 billion over the next seven years. This will mean one thing: devastating cuts to patient care across our country.

The provinces have made a simple request: keep the 6% escalator for one year in order to show good faith and protect Canadians.

Will the Liberals reconsider their approach and accept the provinces' reasonable request?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure the House hears me very clearly on this. There will be no cuts to health care.

The Canada health transfer is increasing next year by more than \$1 billion, but while investments in the transfer have increased at a rate of 6% per year for the last decade, provincial health spending has not increased at that rate. It has been less than 2% and it has not helped the system.

We have a new approach. We collaborate with our colleagues. We figure out how the system needs to change. We invest in areas that need improvement, like home care. We will make sure Canadians get the health care they need.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the new tax on everything, the rural, the unemployed, and seniors on fixed interests will all suffer.

The government falsely promised to support the middle class, yet it cannot even tell us how much the carbon tax will cost Canadians. Instead of spouting the same lines over and over again about family tax cuts, could it not just acknowledge that its massive tax grab has clawed back all of that and then some?

Why does the Prime Minister not just tell Canadians exactly how much more they will be paying for electricity, for gas, and for heating?

• (1430)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member of a few facts.

Oral Questions

We are proud to support Canadians at every stage of their life. That is why the first thing we did was to reduce taxes for nine million Canadians. Then we went on to create the Canada child benefit, which is going to help 90% of families in Canada and help to raise 300,000 children out of poverty. Then we went on to enhance the Canada student loans, which is going to help 250,000 students in Canada. Then we went on to the guaranteed income supplement, which is going to make life easier for about a million Canadians. That—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Abbotsford.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberals who are out of touch with ordinary working Canadians, we understand that a massive carbon tax grab will not help the environment. It will only hurt the most vulnerable.

My friend Glen is 65-years old and cannot afford to retire. He does not know how much he will pay for his rent, for his groceries, and the heating bill as a result of this massive carbon tax grab.

So again I will ask for a straight answer. How much will this massive tax grab cost Glen and other Canadians when a carbon tax is levied of \$50 a tonne?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little confused with the member's question.

When commenting on B.C.'s revenue-neutral direct price on carbon pollution, the Conservative environment critic stated that they did the right thing. He went on to say he would not completely rule out a price on carbon as he did not want to “paint the [Conservative] party into a policy corner” while leadership candidates and members debate how to meet Canada's 2030 climate targets.

How can the member reconcile his position with the fact that his party just voted against the Paris agreement and the Vancouver declaration?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals just do not get it. We agree with the Paris agreement.

This government thinks it is going to create jobs by imposing a carbon tax. How many jobs are the Liberals going to create? None. Are there other ways to achieve the targets set out in the Paris agreement? We reduced greenhouse gas emissions and left a budget surplus. This government is not being transparent for Canadians, who get up every morning and work hard to earn a living.

Will the government finally tell Canadians how much this carbon tax is going to cost them?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that reducing our greenhouse gas emissions will make the economy more competitive and allow it to grow in a sustainable way.

Pricing carbon pollution would give Canada an edge in building a clean growth economy. It would make Canadian businesses more innovative and competitive. It would bring new and exciting job

prospects for middle-class Canadians. It would reduce the carbon pollution that threatens the future of this planet.

Job creators across Canada actually agree with us. The president of Shell Canada said, “balancing Canadian economic development while protecting the environment will be enabled by a reasonable price on carbon...”.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I repeat, we agree with the Paris agreement.

Can this government think about Canadian families? Did it think about how Canadians are going to pay for this? The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has said that Canadian taxpayers are going to pay dearly for this carbon tax.

Did this government even try to come up with other solutions that will not have such a financial impact on Canadian families? What planet is it living on? There must be smoke—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pricing of carbon pollution uses the market to drive clean investment decisions. It encourages innovation and it helps to reduce emissions.

That is why 30 Canadian companies have come out strongly in support of a price on carbon pollution; that includes energy companies such as Suncor, Enbridge, and Shell. They know that pricing carbon pollution will bring new and exciting job prospects for middle-class Canadians.

It also includes a number of leading Conservative politicians, including Ontario Conservative leader and former member of Parliament Patrick Brown, who says:

Climate change is a fact. It is a threat. It is man-made. We have to do something about it, and that something includes putting a price on carbon.

A price on carbon is coming and it's going to come everywhere—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond Centre.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals keep quoting millionaire CEOs in defence of the new carbon tax, but like their millionaire friends, the Liberals do not care about the real impact that a carbon tax will have on small business owners.

This tax would drive up costs for restaurants and retailers, and make small businesses less competitive for international markets.

The Liberals seem determined to run our small businesses into the ground. How can they justify increasing the tax burden on our small businesses again?

Oral Questions

●(1435)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has so clearly mentioned, putting a price on pollution creates predictability, and that predictability is so important for businesses, including small businesses.

That allows them the ability to innovate and come up with new clean-tech jobs. These jobs will be created from coast to coast to coast. This is the kind of initiative we want. We want to grow the economy. We want to help small businesses. We are going to put forward an innovation agenda that focuses on small businesses and clean jobs.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals love to quote from millionaire CEOs from billionaire companies as being super-supportive of a carbon tax, but they never talk about supporting the more than 100,000 energy workers who have been put out of work since they took office.

Many have exhausted their severance pay and employment insurance, if they had any, and their savings are gone. Instead of throwing them a lifeline, the government has thrown them an anvil.

How can the Prime Minister justify sending a new tax bill to out-of-work energy workers who are using the food banks and losing their homes?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very much concerned about what is going on for Canadian families.

That is why the first thing we did was to reduce taxes for nine million Canadians, and then we went on to bring in the Canada child benefit, which are measures that are helping Canadian families.

The reality is that we are helping millions of Canadian families, and we will continue to do that. That is the right thing to do. Canada's plan has been applauded around the world. I invite my colleagues to read and see what we are doing. Our programming is applauded around the world, and we are helping Canadian families.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, for no reason, the government announced it would wait two more years before introducing pay equity legislation.

The Canadian Labour Congress says:

After all the expert testimony, and with the Task Force and Committee's recommendations in hand, it's unacceptable that the government would decide to make women wait another two years for pay equity legislation.

It is a human right.

Women should not have to wait until 2018 for the government to act. Will the minister introduce proactive pay equity legislation before the end of this year?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad for the opportunity to indicate to this House that this is a government that is not going to sit on the sidelines when it comes to pay equity.

For 12 years, the previous government did nothing. We are proud to say that we are implementing proactive pay equity legislation. We are moving on it, from the day we got elected. Now we are going to be bringing in legislation to make it happen.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is 2016. Yesterday, the government told Canadian women that they would have to wait a bit longer for equality.

Pay equity is a fundamental right. Canadian women have already waited far too long for their rights to be respected. The pay equity task force released its report on this 12 years ago. Enough is enough.

Why is the Liberal government holding up justice for women? Will the government take immediate action and introduce a proactive bill on pay equity by the end of 2016?

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federally regulated industries that are included in the proactive legislation include 874,000 employees and 10,800 employers. All of them need to be consulted and worked with, a process that is complicated and will take some time. We do want to have understanding and co-operation from the private sector, and we are working hard to make this as reasonable as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have known for many months now that this government has a hard time managing public funds. Now we learn that it does not know how to count either. It is not us saying so, but Statistics Canada. For weeks and weeks, this government said that there would be far more young people working this summer in summer jobs. That was wrong since Statistics Canada told us today that the number of young people who worked this summer was the same as last year under a Conservative government.

They are champions at creating taxes, but they fall short when it comes to creating jobs.

When will they realize that their measures do not create any jobs?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the opportunity to indicate that businesses actually want young people to have some experience and to work in the real world, and that is exactly what this government provided young people this past summer, by investing and doubling the number of students. Actually, it was even more. There were 78,500 young people who had an opportunity to get valuable work experience.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem with the hon. member's argument from across the aisle is that, although these students enjoyed a summer job, they now are pressed with the task of having to find a job that will continue to put them through school, and they are finding it difficult to do so.

Why is this so? It is so because there are small businesses across this country that are having a hard time making ends meet and are cutting back on the number of employees they are hiring, which means that youth are going without meaningful employment, which means that youth are finding it hard to put themselves through school.

My question is this. Will the Liberals just simply continue to pay lip service to their desire to serve students, or will they actually—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that not only have we provided job experiences for young people, but we have provided student grants that have reduced the debt that young people will have to face and provide a more successful transition from education into the workforce.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what they provided is lip service.

Of the hundreds of campaign promises, there was not a single mention of softwood lumber in the Liberal campaign platform, not in the Speech from the Throne, not in the minister's mandate letter. It is one of the most important trade deals between Canada and the U.S. and not a single mention, zero. In six days, the current softwood agreement ends.

What will it take for the Prime Minister to acknowledge the incompetence of the trade minister and pick up the phone, call his BFF, and protect and save the 400,000 jobs in the forestry industry?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by reminding the members opposite that this accord expired under the previous government's watch.

Yesterday I was in Toronto negotiating with Mike Froman and representatives of our industry from across the country. U.S. negotiators are still in Toronto talking to my team.

Oral Questions

I would like to remind the member for Cariboo—Prince George of something he said in committee on August 18. He stated, “I can appreciate that there's been a considerable amount of work to this point done by both Global Affairs and the minister”. Thanks. We are working hard.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister should put more effort into finding a solution instead of saying any old thing. Her words are not reassuring at all.

This government has no desire to settle this matter because the Prime Minister does not want to upset the United States. That is the real story. We see that in the diafiltered milk file. It is the same thing over again.

Thousands of families, small merchants, workers, and entire communities are being threatened by the government's inaction.

How many jobs have to be lost before you do anything about it?

The Speaker: As I said earlier, when an hon. member uses the word “you” in the House, he or she is addressing the Speaker. I do not think that was the hon. member's intention in this case.

The hon. Minister of International Trade.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement expired under the previous government's watch.

We have been engaged in intense negotiations for months. The country knows that. The Conseil du patronat du Québec commended the government “for all that it has done in defence of the Quebec forestry industry”.

The Conseil de l'industrie forestière du Québec says that it is “pleased with our position on Quebec's forestry regime”. We want a good deal for Canada—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only is the Prime Minister responsible for the youth file, but I believe I heard him promise a new nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples.

Nevertheless, his government is not keeping the promise he made to indigenous youth. The new minister's briefing notes recommend that she honour that commitment, but she prefers to continue to shortchange them.

Can the minister explain once again how she justifies her decision to ignore her department's recommendation?

When will she stop saying one thing in the House and doing the opposite outside?

Oral Questions

●(1445)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, honouring the promises made to Canada's indigenous youth is very important to our government. It is very important that they have access to an education of equal quality. It is a very important issue for the Prime Minister and for me, and we will work on it.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first promise that the Prime Minister made in the election was to first nation children. Fast-forward a year, and we see the Liberals trying to stonewall the PBO, pretending that documents on the underfunding of first nation children do not exist. We find the blacked out financial documents on clawing \$800 million back from the election promise. In these documents, one of the minister's staff explains their attitude, which states, "number crunching is for suckers." No. Keeping an election promise on funding education is not about suckers; it is about children and our responsibility to them. Why the stonewalling from her department?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that our government is committed to openness and transparency. We respect the value and work done by the parliamentary budget officer and his team. Unfortunately, and I apologize for this, there was a misunderstanding between my department and the information that the PBO was seeking. Departmental officials have offered to meet with the officials from the parliamentary budget office, and we will ensure that they get all of the information they require in order to hold this government accountable.

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[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

October is Women's History Month in Canada. We are celebrating women's achievements and the obstacles that they have managed to overcome.

However, women still face many obstacles in the business community. The boards of directors of Canadian corporations are not very visibly diverse.

Given that federally regulated companies fall under the minister's jurisdiction, what does he suggest to remedy this situation?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising this important issue.

Last week, I was pleased to introduce Bill C-25, which seeks to improve corporate transparency and diversity. It will help increase the number of women on boards of directors and senior management teams.

I invite all members to support this bill.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a recent report says Chinese peacekeepers failed to protect civilians on a UN mission in Sudan. In the face of the conflict, they abandoned their weapons, leaving behind weapons and ammunition, and turned their backs on over 300 people who were killed, and thousands more were raped.

We learned this week that the Government of China wants to take control of all UN peacekeeping missions. The Prime Minister knew all of this, yet he is still naively pledging 600 Canadian troops to the UN.

Does the Prime Minister believe that the Communist dictatorship in China is qualified to command Canadian troops?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to peace operations, Canada is taking a leading role in this, hence the reason that Canada was asked by the United Nations to host next year's peacekeeping summit.

When it comes to anything where our troops go abroad, we make sure that they have the right equipment, the proper robust rules of engagement. We always maintain full command of the missions, also making sure there is a robust mandate for it, regardless of the troop contributions to any mission.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to *The Guardian*, last July, peacekeepers did nothing to help the civilians and humanitarian aid workers who were attacked, raped, and killed just a few steps away from their camp.

We learned that the Chinese peacekeepers even abandoned their post when the situation became hostile. The Liberals are pleased to see China working to become the head of the UN department of peacekeeping operations.

In light of these revelations, does the government still support China's bid?

●(1450)

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the protection of civilians, I have been very clear that Canada will ensure there is a proper mandate, make sure there is protection of civilians in that mandate, and make sure that all troop-contributing nations fulfill that mandate.

When Canada comes to its final decision, we will also do our part.

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ETHICS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the President of the Treasury Board has decided all on his own that he is above the rules.

He used to be the chair of SeaFort Capital, a major company in Atlantic Canada that is backed by powerful families in the region. When he joined cabinet, his husband replaced him on the board.

Oral Questions

Canadians will not believe that these families and this corporation have no influence on this minister.

What is stopping the President of the Treasury Board from doing the right thing and putting up a screen to end this obvious conflict?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have always worked with and been open with the commissioner's office. As a public office holder, my holdings are publicly disclosed. They are in a blind trust. I do not discuss that with my partner, in the same way that, as a cabinet minister, I do not discuss cabinet business with my partner.

The commissioner decides if a screen is necessary and, based on the facts, she has said it is not.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his spouse is the chair of the board. The family personally contributed \$50,000 to his leadership campaign. The family flew him to Mexico, Berlin, Davos, and Dublin.

Canadians are not buying that this family has no influence over the minister. How can the minister stand here with a straight face and claim that this is not a major conflict of interest?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the trips to which she is referring were fully disclosed and in fact pre-approved by the Ethics Commissioner. In each case, I was accompanying Mr. Sobey because we were both members of The Trilateral Commission and also invitees to the World Economic Forum Davos meetings.

Sponsored travel is something that all members of Parliament fully disclose. That is what I did, and I would recommend to the hon. member and her colleagues to do the same thing.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last election, the Liberals promised to restore habitat protections to the Fisheries Act gutted by the Conservatives in 2012.

So far, the government has done nothing to restore these lost protections. It is approving projects that impact fisheries habitat still using Harper's gutted version of the Fisheries Act. This week, the environment commissioner revealed that the government is failing to sustainably manage threatened fish stocks.

I ask the minister, will he make good on their promise to immediately restore the lost protections to the Fisheries Act?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows well that our commitment was to restore the lost protections that the previous government had gutted in a series of omnibus budget bills.

He will also know that we have asked the fisheries committee, on which he is a member, to immediately consult with Canadians and advise us, not simply how to cut and paste the protections that were in the previous legislation that was deleted by the Conservatives, but how we could further strengthen them to ensure that fish habitat across the country are protected in the best possible way. We look forward to working with him on that very important issue.

[Translation]

YOUTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour bragged about reducing youth unemployment thanks to the Canada summer jobs program, but young graduates need good long-term jobs to start their working lives. They need more than a three-month job. The facts speak for themselves: youth unemployment is at 13%, which is double the Canadian average for the active workforce. The Liberals promised 5,000 green jobs for youth, but have managed to create just 2,000. That is not even close.

How will the Minister of Youth create more stable jobs for young people?

[English]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a government that recognizes the challenge that young people face in today's economy, not like the previous government which chose not to address these issues.

Instead, we are providing help to go to school, providing help to find the experience that they need, and working with industries and employers from coast to coast to coast to allow them an opportunity to have more co-ops, work placements, which will ensure that young people have a successful career going forward.

* * *

• (1455)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2014, the RCMP targeted about 11,000 people suspected of fraud in obtaining Canadian citizenship by misrepresenting their residency in Canada. There are many other cases that have been flagged by immigration officers.

The minister has said he wants to amend Bill C-6 to allow those cases access to a lengthy and costly appeals process that would divert resources away from people who play by the rules.

I wonder why on earth the minister wants to do this.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely true that the Auditor General recently identified examples of citizen fraud under the previous government's watch.

We have responded by saying we would attack this fraud assiduously, diligently, and with great seriousness. Citizenship is an extraordinary privilege, and those who seek to obtain it improperly will be gone after. That is indeed what my department is doing.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, adding a lengthy and costly appeals process is not supporting those who play by the rules. In fact, adding a process like this may make cheats more incentivized to game the system. I think that actually might make immigration officers' jobs a lot more difficult.

If the minister already has discretionary powers to overturn rulings by immigration officers, why is he looking to put more support in place for those who cheat rather than encouraging support for those who play by the rules?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems not to understand that the two things are compatible.

On the one hand, we are going after, with great vigour, those who would cheat the system and obtain their citizenship fraudulently. The RCMP uncovered a ring of people doing that, and we are going after them.

That said, someone whose citizenship has been revoked should have the opportunity to appeal that decision. We have said we are open to amendments that may be suggested in the Senate to offer an appeal process.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Liberals practise a very quiet diplomacy when it comes to human rights abuse in China or with China's military expansionism in the South China Sea, but it is time for the government to stand up against China's thuggish behaviour in Canada.

It is bad enough that the Liberals did not protest when China blocked Taiwan's usual observer role at the civil aviation meeting in Montreal, but how could the government remain silent when China blocked a Canadian citizen, a journalist, from covering that meeting, in Canada?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of the question.

Clearly, the Government of Canada is not silent in China. The Government of Canada advocates the case for universal human rights in China on every occasion. We do it very strongly, and we are there. The big difference from when the opposition was the government, in fact, is that its members were staying in Canada instead of arguing the case for human rights in China.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer, the Minister of Finance reached a historic agreement in principle between the federal government and the provinces to enhance the Canada pension plan. This deal was part of the government's commitment to help middle-class Canadians at every stage of their lives by putting more money in their pockets when they retire. This week the government has moved forward with implementing the agreement.

Would the parliamentary secretary please update the House as to the work being done to enhance the Canada pension plan?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge for his excellent question.

This historic agreement in principle will help Canadians to be better off by boosting the amount they will receive from the Canada pension plan by about 50%. Currently, one in four Canadian families are not saving enough for retirement. Something has to be done.

On Tuesday we received confirmation from British Columbia that it supports a stronger CPP. Today our government tabled legislation that would make these changes law.

We are proud to support Canadians at every stage of their lives, and we will continue that as a priority.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I rose in the House before question period to call on the government to make the return of the Azer children a priority, the Minister of Foreign Affairs made rude and unparliamentary gestures. Alison Azer is in Ottawa today and witnessed as the minister gave a thumbs down as we called on the minister to make the return of her children a priority.

Will the minister stand in his place and apologize to the House and apologize to Alison Azer?

● (1500)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members are free to behave as they want, but the proof is that when we work together, we do not take cheap shots against the Prime Minister and we do not accuse him of not caring. As my colleague said—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Members want to be listened to when they speak, so it is time they listened when someone else is speaking, whether they like what they are saying or not.

Members do not want to lose a question. The member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound would not want that, so he should settle down.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, there is proof that when we work together, we get results, and we want to get results for this family. We want the children to be in the arms of their mother. For that I urge all of my colleagues to stop their politics and work together. We have the proof with us today that when we work together, we get good results for Canadians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years now, Montrealers who live or work near any CP Rail tracks in Montreal have been demanding safe pedestrian crosswalks. The tracks are an artificial barrier. They are a major obstacle for pedestrians and cyclists. The beauty of it is that everyone agrees: the city, its councillors, and federal and provincial elected officials, including my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie. Unfortunately, nothing is happening. CP refuses to listen and the minister refuses to act.

Are the Liberals serious about promoting active transportation? When are they going to take the needs of Montrealers seriously?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his passion on this issue.

As the member knows, the City of Montreal has been in contact with CP Rail. Those talks failed, and now the City of Montreal is going to request arbitration through the Canadian Transportation Agency. That is how this matter will be resolved. That is the procedure in place, and we will abide by it.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, having worked with the Codiac Regional RCMP for over 23 years, I have seen the brave women and men in the RCMP put themselves in harm's way to keep Canadian communities safe, and they deserve to be treated with respect in the workplace.

Sadly, we know that there has been a long-standing issue in our national police force involving workplace harassment. Can the Minister of Public Safety update the House on the status of the two class action lawsuits filed by the current and former women who have worked within the RCMP?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, the RCMP announced a settlement with the women involved in these cases, including an independent compensation process under the guidance of former Supreme Court Justice Bastarache. The commissioner also issued a solemn apology.

This historic moment is testament to the courage and perseverance of the women who led this effort and the deep desire of all parties to move forward to ensure that all RCMP members have the safe and respectful work environment they deserve and that Canadians expect.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is happening with Mr. Lalancette, one of our veterans? Let me tell you. He has been on a hunger strike for three days and slept outside on Parliament Hill for three nights, but he has not received a visit from either the Prime Minister or his minister.

What the parliamentary secretary said yesterday in the House should worry all members. Some ministers are said to have used a parliamentary committee as a negotiating tool. We all know very well that the committees are mandated to take action beyond the reach of the government.

Why did this government make promises when it knew very well that it did not have the authority to keep them?

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that I cannot comment on any specific individual or any specific case. I know that veterans have issues they want dealt with. We all know that. Everyone in the House knows that, and the only way we are going to get this right and make things better for our veterans is by working together.

I know it is hard to open up and ask for help, but I urge every single veteran who needs that help to do so if—

● (1505)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Repentigny.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good to ratify agreements, but we need to develop strategies that will let us keep our word and meet our targets.

In front of the entire world, Canada committed to be part of the solution in the fight against climate change. However, numbers do not lie. Half measures will not get the job done. We have to make it expensive to pollute, but profitable to be responsible.

Does the government realize that by not setting a cap it is setting itself up to fail?

[English]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc Québécois for their support of the motion last night.

We have been clear from the outset that we have a target. We have a target we are looking to achieve and to ideally do better. We are in the process of establishing a plan to ensure that we actually meet or exceed those targets. We have taken substantial steps through the budget, through the work we have done with the Americans, through the work we are doing on developing a pan-Canadian strategy, and this week, through the implementation of a price on carbon across the country. We are working very hard and we will ensure that we meet our targets and grow our economy concurrently.

Points of Order

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has just approved the Pacific NorthWest pipeline and it continues to push to advance the energy east pipeline. These two projects alone will increase greenhouse gas emissions by 40 million tonnes a year.

If I have understood correctly, the Liberal strategy to reduce emissions is to increase them.

Will the government finally get serious and shut down energy east completely?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member asks this question from time to time in the House, asking the government to make a decision on a project that is currently before a regulator. For the government to make a decision before it has gone through due process would be irresponsible, and we will not do it.

The Speaker: I have received a notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Abbotsford.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a note that we reluctantly raise in this House.

There is a lot of back and forth that takes place in this House. Most of it, as we know, is good natured. When the Speaker was on the benches here, he also engaged in that sometimes. We all do it. As long as it is good natured, of course, we accept that. It adds energy to this House.

However, today we were obviously gobsmacked when one of our members made a gesture that was offensive. Just to give some context, one of our Conservative members raised the issue of the Azer children, who were abducted by their father and taken to Iran against their will and against the will of their mother, Mrs. Azer.

Our member asked a perfectly legitimate question about what the foreign affairs minister was doing to ensure that those children are returned to their mother, Mrs. Azer, here in Canada.

Those of us on this side of the House were absolutely horrified to see the foreign affairs minister, in response to that question, use a gesture like this. We can imagine how Mrs. Azer would have reacted when she saw that gesture.

Given the fact that these children are still being held captive in Iran by their father, this is a gesture that truly was offensive, not only to this House but to this family.

My question to the minister, and a suggestion, is whether the foreign affairs minister will now stand up in this House, assure this House that he will have greater respect for you, the members of this House, and the Azer family in the future, and do the right thing and apologize for using such an inappropriate gesture.

The foreign affairs minister had the opportunity to stand up once in this House to apologize. He chose not to. In the alternative, if he does not, I would ask that you review the film and take whatever actions are appropriate to ensure that we restore order in this House.

● (1510)

The Speaker: This sounds more like a point of order than a question of privilege, because of course, usually with a question of privilege, the member talks about prima facie cases of contempt and so forth.

As the member for Abbotsford very well knows, and he said there is a lot of back and forth, there is a lot more forth than there is back. He knows that, because he is often part of it, and I would encourage him not to be.

Having said that, if the Minister of Foreign Affairs wishes to respond, I will allow him to do so.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again call on all my colleagues to work together on difficult consular cases. They want these children to be with their mother. For that reason, we should not play politics. We should not question the will of the Prime Minister to solve the situation, the way it is being done.

If I expressed my disregard of the behaviour of the member in responding, it is because I mean it.

The Speaker: I understand the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar has the usual Thursday question.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

What we just saw here in the House, on a case in a file that is so important to all Canadians, is that a minister of the crown has tainted a file. He has offended a family and offended people from across our country and in British Columbia.

I am calling on the minister to do the right thing and follow through on the request from my colleague in the front row to apologize to Mrs. Azer and her family.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. I know that in this House, sometimes it is easy to be partisan, because the cameras are on, and we want to show our constituents that we are fighting very hard on issues they care about.

That is part of our democracy. I want to ask my colleagues to think long and hard about the anguish they are causing Mrs. Azer and all those people—

The Speaker: Order. I have not heard a call on the rules on a point of order here.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has a point of order, and I hope he will tell us what rules he is speaking about.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I think the issue we are dealing with here is whether a minister of the crown poisoned an important case by making that gesture. That is the issue before us. People can make all manner of judgment—

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that, whether or not what he suggests is true, it is not a question of the Standing Orders or the rules of the House. It is a question of debate, whether the member has that debate in here or outside. If he has a point of order in relation to the rules of the House, I would ask to hear what the member's point of order is.

The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George has a point of order.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I think the comment and the point we are trying to make here is that a minister of the crown, a minister in the House, interrupted a member during the member's speech and made offensive gestures and shouted comments across the way. It was an interruption, which caused the member to sit down and not further continue that statement.

The Speaker: The member knows that there are many interruptions, unfortunately, in the House, far too many.

I have not heard a question of privilege today or a point of order. Therefore, we will go on to the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar for the usual Thursday question.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): After that, Mr. Speaker, we are all getting ready to head home for Thanksgiving and we all have a lot to be thankful for, but I think sadly in all of this there is a family that is suffering dearly. We all need to be thinking of that family right now and the effect this is having on them.

With that in mind, I want to ask my hon. colleague, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, to tell us what business the government has coming up when we get back after the Thanksgiving break.

● (1515)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start off just by saying quickly that I know on these complex consular issues emotions can run high. I also know that by working together we can make progress on consular cases, and that I will continue to advocate for decorum and respect in the House. That is part of the conversation we have been having today.

[*Translation*]

Today we will continue the debate on the Standing Orders. Tomorrow, we will discuss Bill C-4, on unions, and Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act.

[*English*]

Next week, we will all be working hard in our constituencies, and I wish everyone well and I wish them a happy Thanksgiving. Upon our return, we will have two opposition days, the first on Monday, October 17, and then on Thursday, October 20.

On Tuesday, we will commence second reading debate of Bill C-16, the gender identity legislation, and also report stage and third reading of Bill C-13, concerning the World Trade Organization, provided the bill is reported back to the House tomorrow.

Last, on Wednesday, we shall call Bills C-4 and C-24 with the hope we can dispose of the union bill that day and have it sent to the Senate.

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POINTS OF ORDER

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a little concerned over the debate that just took place over the question that was raised about the gesture by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Standing Order 18 is quite clear. It is about the words we speak in here, but at the same time you have responsibilities under Standing Orders 10, 11, and 12 of maintaining order in the House. Our rights and privileges should not be infringed upon by other members by interruption, which includes gestures. If we do not bring into order those individuals who are using the gestures such as a thumbs-down as we just saw from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I fear that other gestures will then become a common practice here, rather than speaking words.

I urge you, Mr. Speaker, in your responsibilities in maintaining order and decorum in the House, to not allow this to be sanctioned and to ensure that all of us as members in this place are respected, including when we are asking questions, and that gestures will not be used against us.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his reference to the Standing Orders. He has referred to interruptions. As I have said, there are way too many interruptions in this place. I would urge members not to interrupt when other members are speaking, and I would urge members not to use gestures that might cause offence. I appreciate the point he has raised.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

● (1520)

[*English*]

STANDING ORDERS AND PROCEDURE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe I have about five minutes left in my remarks.

The Speaker: Order, please. Just to be clear, the member has four and a half minutes, as I indicated before question period.

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

The fifth recommendation I would like to propose is that we eliminate Friday sittings of the House. Eliminating Friday sittings would permit members of Parliament who live anywhere outside of the national capital region to return to their constituencies for one additional day each week. Friday sittings are not for the full day. The sittings run from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. These four and a half hours could easily be redistributed to the portion of the week that runs from Monday to Thursday by adding one hour of time to the chamber's deliberations each of those four sitting days. The balance of the 30 minutes could be eliminated by speeding up the method of voting that we use, a subject I will return to momentarily.

The primary criticism I have heard about eliminating Friday sittings is optics. Canadians will perceive that MPs are voting themselves a four-day workweek. With respect, this argument is illogical on its face. If Canadians believe that the only time MPs are working is when the House is in session, then on that metric, we currently work for less than one out of every three days in the year. By my count, Parliament will have sat for 102 days between November 4, 2015, and November 3, 2016.

It is clear that every member of this chamber knows that our work does not stop when we leave Parliament Hill. When we return to our communities we work in our constituency offices. We meet with residents and stakeholders in our communities. We attend events in our ridings. We participate in forums and conferences. We sometimes travel with our standing committees to consult with Canadians about legislation.

The work of a member of Parliament is full time, seven days per week. I say this to underscore that when we debate the issue of Friday sittings in the chamber, we are not making a determination about how much members of Parliament ought to work but rather where they ought to conduct their work.

Eliminating Friday sittings has the advantage of permitting members of Parliament to be in more regular and direct in-person contact with their constituents, which in my view can only make them a better representative and advocate for their community. It has the advantage of permitting members of Parliament an additional evening at home with their spouses and children. Too often, as I have already learned, families are sacrificed by the demands of elected public office. Separation and divorce are unfortunately not infrequent in this vocation, in part because of the toll played by frequent travel and time spent away from family members.

Let me turn to my last and sixth recommendation, which pertains to our voting system. It is antiquated and in desperate need of reform. I recommend that we move to a system of electronic voting. The time savings from this change alone would be incredible. I personally timed our votes yesterday. To get through seven different votes it took us nearly 70 minutes to each stand up, have our names called, and sit down.

I understand there are some who would posit that standing up has some sort of salutary effect on members, forcing them to more seriously consider the gravity of their vote and how it is cast. The argument is that this adds an additional level of accountability. My response to this is straightforward. A member of Parliament is accountable based on how the member votes. It is important. The important feature is that all votes are open ballots, not secret ones,

and that a member's vote is recorded so that residents of his or her community can consult a written record to determine how their MP voted on a given issue.

Electronic voting does not impede this basic function. In fact, I would contend it enhances it. It enhances it because I have observed, with great dismay, the tendency of some members of the House to heckle, jeer, boo, and hiss at MPs during the very act of voting. When members are exercising this most basic and essential democratic function of their office, the active casting of a vote on legislation on behalf of their constituents, every member has a fundamental parliamentary right to be free from intimidation and bullying. Electronic voting would ensure that this is the case.

Today, no less than 38 other national legislatures employ electronic voting. This includes the United States Congress, which has employed it since 1995, the year I visited the House of Representatives as a Canadian parliamentary intern for this chamber. When I visited congress as an impressionable 23-year-old intern I certainly did not anticipate one day becoming an elected representative myself. Now that I am a member of Parliament I would like to think that if I had the occasion to return to Washington as part of a parliamentary delegation, I could say I learned something about improving our democracy on that trip 21 years ago.

In conclusion, it is my view that we should finally modernize the parliamentary voting system and bring it into the 21st century. This measure, along with the five other recommendations I mentioned respecting civility and sittings of the House, would significantly impact not only people's perception of our institution but also their willingness to serve.

• (1525)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the member is a parliamentary secretary, I have the occasion to talk about section 114 of the Standing Orders. I would like to know his position on the membership of standing committees.

The Prime Minister made much fanfare about parliamentary secretaries not being part of our standing committees, yet many parliamentary secretaries attend and regularly try to disrupt or control the progress of said committees, including the hon. member. Therefore, if it was the Prime Minister's pledge to not have parliamentary secretaries be part of committees under chapter XIII, and particularly section 114, of the Standing Orders, would the hon. member pledge to the House today to no longer attend committee, as per the pledge of his Prime Minister, and today pledge to make the comment of the Prime Minister that parliamentary secretaries will no longer be members of a committee and no longer interfere with the progress of a committee part of the Standing Orders?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I will respond straight to the question from the member opposite because I do not believe this is a partisan issue. The role of parliamentary secretaries at committees is something that has been a subject of considerable debate. The issue of how they were deployed by the previous government caused considerable concern both to parliamentarians and citizens of this country. What our government has committed to do with respect to parliamentary secretaries is to have them be at committees and participate at committees but not serve as official members nor have voting status. That is the role we are continuing to function in.

Orders of the Day

I agree that I participate at the immigration committee, as is my right to do. However, I take great issue with the characterization that I disrupt the proceedings.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I have a question for him on the powers of the Speaker, which could be similar to those of the Speaker of the House of Commons in Great Britain, who intervenes much more frequently when the quality of an answer to a question during question period is unsatisfactory to the Speaker.

On occasion, when a person answers a question the Speaker feels that the answer has nothing to do with the question; the Speaker then calls the member who answered the question to order, whether that member is the prime minister or another minister, and asks the member to rephrase the answer because it was unsatisfactory or had nothing to do with the question.

Does my colleague think that it would be beneficial for the Speaker of the House of Commons to have more powers and the ability to judge the quality of the answer by asking the person speaking to rephrase the answer and directly relate it to the question being asked?

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I think that is an excellent question. In my personal capacity, I am very much in favour of the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker, whoever may be presiding in this chamber, using the full host of tools in the Standing Orders to bring the House to order and enforce discipline in the House. If that means relooking at the issue of whether questions are being answered in a responsive manner, I think that is something that ought to be explored.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague about one point he raised in particular. He said that he has heard and has noticed that when a woman rises to answer a question in the House there is often more heckling and jeering that goes on. Therefore, does he feel that the conduct in the House is sometimes a barrier to women putting their names forward for public office?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the answer is a definitive yes. I believe the behaviour in this chamber, for anyone who observes it, and for anyone who participates in it at this level, standing on this floor—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Arif Virani: We have just heard yet another interruption, Mr. Speaker.

This behaviour is indicative of an environment that makes it unwelcoming and somewhat hostile for people who want to come and participate in what they thought would be a refined and elevated debate but instead find chaotic disorder. I believe that would serve as a barrier for anyone, a woman, a person who is relatively unempowered or disenfranchised, etc. It certainly does not help promote diversity in the chamber.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about a timely subject and that is decorum and etiquette in the House of Commons and committee meetings. I must admit that I am a new member. I have been in the House for a year. I was very surprised and disappointed to see how members behave in the House. I am not talking about one party or another. I am not talking about the opposition or the government. I am talking about all members. It is something that I find unacceptable and it has to change.

[*English*]

When I arrived here, I was so shocked by this bad behaviour that I would sidle up to one MP after another and ask what they thought about question period, and I would get two responses. If it were a new MP like me, the answer would be, “Oh, my gosh, it's incredible. It's unacceptable and I can't believe I'm in this environment”. If I sidled up to someone else who had been here a long time, the person would say, “Oh, Frank, it's not so bad”. They had become acclimatized. Human beings are capable of becoming acclimatized.

That happened to me at my first job. I worked at a one-storey building right beside the airport. A couple of days after I had started the job, one of the planes flew right over the building. I was talking on the phone and said that I had to go. I hung up the phone and ran out because there was such noise and the building was shaking. It was incredible. I did not know what was happening. The plane was so low, I could have thrown a rock and hit it. After six months of being in that job, I would be on the phone, ask the person to hold on a second, cover the handset, and six seconds later I would start talking again. I had become acclimatized.

During the summer break, I made a commitment to myself to refuse to become acclimatized to the behaviour in the House. What we saw today was one side claiming what the truth was. It is a fallacy that we can pretend to be true, but it is not true.

I have four ideas to improve decorum here. First, I was to support the idea of the member for Châteauguay—Lacolle, who said that we need to give more power to the Speaker, not to throw members out but to silence them, to take away an abuser's right to speak in the House of Commons. Whether that be for one sitting, two or 10, I do not know. That should be discussed, but a member should lose the right to speak due to bad behaviour.

[*Translation*]

My second point is that we are living in the age of technology. I would like to see two high-definition, wide-angle cameras installed, one facing the opposition benches and the other facing the government benches. These cameras would be strictly for the use of the Speaker of the House and they would be used in exactly the type of situation we are dealing with today and when there is a complaint. It would be a little bit like what we see in all sorts of sports, such as tennis, hockey, and football, where the referee has the right to look at the instant replay to check on something he missed. I suggest using that same approach in the House. That would mean that we would have two cameras strictly for the Speaker's use, to allow him or her to determine, when necessary, if there is an issue on which the Standing Orders must be enforced.

*Orders of the Day**[English]*

The third idea I propose would be extremely important because of what we saw today. I would like us to banish clapping during question period. That may seem funny to some members. However, we are a descendant of the House of Commons in Westminster and it is not allowed there. It is banned. The Government of Quebec, less than a year and a half ago, banned clapping in its legislature.

I actually like clapping, except that it is no longer done to support a good cause or statement. The behaviour is so inappropriate that I cannot see it being used properly. Therefore, I can only say it should be completely banned.

● (1535)

These are the three points I raise in the hope of bringing decorum to the House of Commons.

I will never allow myself to become acclimatized. If these measures do not pass this time, I will work inch by inch to make things different. As one member mentioned, this present testosterone-driven environment comes from a hundred years ago when women did not have the right to vote, when ethnic people did not have the right to vote, and it serves only one type of person. It is a tremendous deterrent to people of different cultures where rudeness is unacceptable. It is a tremendous deterrent to women and it must change.

The last point I would like to raise has to do with standing committees. I sit on the industry committee, and too many times when we have invited a guest, that guest has not been able to testify because they have been consistently interrupted by spurious motions, points of order, and no end of nonsense.

We have a precedent here in the House of Commons during question period. No one can interrupt that process for the hour. Members have the right to speak, they can move any motion afterward, they can rise on a point of order afterward. I propose out of respect, not even for ourselves but for the guests we invite and who come to committee, some of whom have travelled great distances with prepared speeches, that we owe these people the right to listen to them. It takes one hour and I am proposing that we use exactly the same rules there that we do here, that during that hour there will be no motions, no interruptions of any kind, no rising on a point of order, just as we do in question period. This is to show respect to outside guests.

Those are the four things I am proposing to try to bring a bit of decorum here.

I will end with a little anecdote. As I mentioned, I was shuffling up to people and talking to them. I would not try to gauge where they would land. I have two daughters and a son. My middle daughter will tell people what is what. They were all proud of me when I was elected, and they told me so. I would like them to come here and visit some day. But I was thinking about it. If my middle daughter had sat up there and seen me, then she would not say she was proud of me. I have made a commitment to myself that I will not accept this. If she comes and sees this horrible behaviour, I can tell her I am fighting it.

This is what happened with the guy I sidled up to, who was not a member of our party. He looked at me, his head bowed, his chest caved in, and he said “Frank, my 17-year old daughter was here two weeks ago and she walked out in disgust”. This is what we are doing. It must stop.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, toward the end of the member's speech I was quite taken aback that he feels that gestures and rudeness are inappropriate in the House and do not belong here. I am curious if the member will speak with the minister in his caucus who less than an hour ago expressed extreme rudeness to a member on this side of the House who was making a point. We were in a state of disbelief at seeing that gesture and its rudeness, and at the member's failure to apologize.

Will the member address this with the minister on his side of the House and ask that member to apologize?

Mr. Frank Baylis: Mr. Speaker, when I was elected I told myself that I was coming here for Canadians first. I am coming to be a parliamentarian for Canadians, not for the Liberal Party.

I have talked numerous times to all types of people when I have seen good behaviour and when I have seen inappropriate behaviour. I personally did not see what the member is talking about. However, I will talk to the minister, who happens to be a friend of mine. I will tell him what I say to everyone I talk to, that they should not engage in that type of behaviour. I do not care what someone else says. It is unacceptable. We are the masters of our own fate. My mother always asked me, if someone jumps off a bridge, are you going to jump off too? No. So I will talk to him about it.

● (1540)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege of representing the good people of Vancouver Kingsway in this chamber for the last eight years.

I have seen examples of excellent behaviour and poor behaviour on all sides of this House by all parties at different times. It is my distinct impression, from many conversations with constituents of mine and across this country, that Canadians do want everyone in this chamber to act with more decorum, to treat each other with more respect, and to engage in mature debate on the issues of the day that are important to people.

I would encourage and urge all of my colleagues here to clean our own side of the street, to make sure that our own behaviour is elevated to the level of conduct that I think we all know our constituents want.

Does my hon. colleague have any one particular issue or idea that he thinks would help achieve that expectation of Canadians?

Mr. Frank Baylis: Mr. Speaker, that is a wonderful statement, because it starts with every one of us.

The member is absolutely right. I cannot control my neighbour. I can only cajole, push, try to change the rules. However, if I engage in this behaviour, then I am doing nothing. As the old saying goes, I am looking at the man in the mirror. That is where it starts. It not only starts with our party, it starts with me. If I can do it, then I can work on my party, and work outwards from there.

I agree with the member that that is a perfect way to start.

Orders of the Day

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for his comments about decorum. It is a very important issue that we need to look at.

I took particular interest in the fact that he raised the question of his daughter coming to watch the debate and how she would respond. We know that in this place, women only make up 26% of the members.

Does the member see the impact of gender on the lack of decorum sometimes in this place? Does he see how we can improve the way we work so we can encourage more young women to become members of this place?

Mr. Frank Baylis: Mr. Speaker, I carry this piece of paper, this article, in my briefcase. It is about Christy Clark who makes the following statement, which I cannot say any better:

As for attracting women to politics, Ms. Clark believes changing the negative tone of Question Period would make the biggest difference.

Absolutely. This is about the negative tone. She is the longest-serving female premier. She has made it very clear. I completely agree that this tone is a barrier.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Tell your foreign affairs minister.

Mr. Frank Baylis: This is exactly what I am talking about, Mr. Speaker. I have already answered a question, and they feel privileged to interrupt me with nonsense. It is unacceptable. If I were the Speaker, he would not be sitting there anymore.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the motion that this House take note of the Standing Orders and procedure of the House and its committees.

As we all know, the Standing Orders provide us, our staff, and the House of Commons administration with many of the tools and information we need to ensure the chambers continue to run appropriately and, in all cases, in the best interests of Canadians.

I just want to go into a brief history of the Standing Orders, which will provide some insight into the very critical role that these orders have played in our history and will continue to play in the future of Canada.

According to O'Brien and Bosc in 2009, the standing orders were first adopted in 1867. They were largely based on the rules from the assemblies of Upper Canada and Lower Canada, created in 1791.

Between the 60th and 90th sitting days of the first session of each Parliament, we have this debate and are currently doing so because it must take place; so for those watching at home, this is why we are doing this, because in some viewers' minds, it might be a little confusing. They might be thinking that there are bigger orders of business going on in the world today, but this is why this has to be done.

Over the years and the plethora of debates that have taken place, believe it or not, there are still rules that go back to the late 1700s. That is another reason why it is critical that we continue to review and make suggestions on the Standing Orders to ensure that they fit with the 21st century.

I often like to reference hockey, because without the rule book for hockey, it would not be a very civil game, and sometimes even with those rules, it still is not; but the rules have changed over the years. I guarantee that the first game of hockey looked quite a bit different from the NHL games we watch today.

I realize that many of us in the chamber today are aware of the importance of the Standing Orders, but I also believe we need to understand their relevance. When the debate has ended, the matter will be referred to the procedure and House affairs committee, or PROC. As a member of PROC, I believe it is important to be here and listen to these comments that are made by my colleagues. We like to listen to the changes to the Standing Orders that are put forward, and we believe that all should be debated because most should be beneficial.

I have also found, in listening to the debate today, that the suggestions and arguments made by my colleagues are informative, and I am sure we will have quite the debate inside PROC when they come forward.

When it comes to my suggestions about the changes to the standing orders, they can be organized into three specific categories: efficiency, accountability, and family-friendliness.

On efficiency, the primary concerns I see with the current Standing Orders deal with the Order Paper questions. A general recommendation with regard to Order Paper questions would be to remove the requirement for the government to ask that all questions be allowed to stand each day. It would be significantly more efficient to have any questions without a response deemed to stand. That is according to Standing Order 33.

I believe that the order of the rubrics during routine proceedings be altered as well. I would recommend that the questions on the Order Paper should be placed immediately before tabling of documents rather than at the end of routine proceedings, as it currently stands. I believe that each change would be of benefit to both the government and the opposition. It would give the government a chance to properly respond to Order Paper questions, and it would allow the opposition to receive an answer to that question.

Alternatively, I would recommend placing motions at the end, as I mentioned, but there is always a standing order that must be changed and must be moved.

On Standing Order 106(4), I would recommend lowering the threshold to convene a committee meeting from four members to two members, and make it conditional that the two members come from different parties. This would ensure that no one party was able to call an emergency meeting unilaterally.

On Standing Order 53.1, I believe that this standing order should allow the official opposition to call a take-note debate twice during each session, and allow the third party to call a take-note debate once during each session.

Orders of the Day

We will move on to family-friendliness. This is where I think most of the debate has gone on today, and this is relatively new to the people on the PROC committee. Moving toward a modern, efficient, inclusive, and family-friendly Parliament was something we dealt with right away in our early days.

● (1545)

We looked at the numerous ways to make Parliament a more family-friendly environment. To quote from our report, and I think we will all agree:

There are few jobs with longer hours and greater stress than that of a member of a legislature. Numerous tasks and multiple roles at the legislature and in constituencies compete for a member's time. Members also frequently are called upon to travel abroad, whether with a parliamentary committee or as part of an official delegation. Meanwhile, members face high expectations on the part of the public to be constantly working on its behalf, and as such, they also deal with increasing public scrutiny.

Such circumstances can have adverse effects on a member's work-life balance, especially those with spouses and families. Members can be apart from their homes and families for long stretches of time.

Many of us in this place have families. I have one five-year-old son, but we are also all brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, sons, and daughters, and we all agree that being away from our families is very difficult, especially for long periods of time.

I missed my son's first parent-teacher interview. I missed my son's first soccer game, his first goal. As he learned to ride a bike without training wheels, I missed that too. It was extremely difficult, not easy. That feeling in my stomach really hurts.

We all admit in this place that it is not an easy job. The report issued by PROC looked at many of the concerns that we all saw with the Standing Orders in regard to creating a more family-friendly environment. We made recommendations that included the timing of votes, which we are seeing now. The whips on both sides have done a remarkable job of trying to get the votes right after question period because we are all here. That allows some of us who live close by or have our families in Ottawa to see them for dinner or for bedtime, which are probably the most important times.

Also issuing the House calendar for the following year in June instead of waiting for September allows us to better plan work in the constituency and allows us to better plan for our family time.

Also we could have more family-friendly events at Parliament. Once upon a time there was Halloween, when we could bring our families and dress up in costumes and look for candy. It was a way to bring all parliamentarians on all sides together with their families and get to know each other as people. I think that is most important because some of our times will be short here and some will be long, but it is always important to take that time to learn a little about each other, regardless of which side we sit on.

I appreciate the work of my friends on the procedure and house affairs committee and I respect them all. We do some good work. We may not always agree, but there always seems to be that willingness to try to find common ground. As a new member, I appreciate that part of it.

As I mentioned earlier, being an MP is not an easy job, but we also know that Canadians work hard to make ends meet. When we discuss not being in this place on Fridays and going back to our constituencies, we all know that we will probably be working in our

constituencies, but Canadians who work hard five, six, or seven days a week may not see it that way.

It is not just about optics either. It is also about changing the Standing Orders so that we sit longer from Monday to Thursday, which causes problems for those who have brought their families to Ottawa, those who have staff in and around the national capital region, who have to adjust their days and maybe work to midnight, but those staff have to work on Fridays, as we heard from many members from British Columbia.

Not sitting on Fridays also means that they have to travel anyway and they have to leave on Friday, so there is no net benefit for those members either. Basically taking away Fridays has no net benefit other than reducing the amount of time we are here by 20%. I think all our constituents know that the majority of the work we do is in Ottawa. We are lawmakers, but we are also advocates and in some cases social workers, but we also try to work for our constituents.

That is why we have constituency weeks and why we are back in our ridings in July and August, so there are balances to that. By knowing the calendar ahead of time, having family-friendly events, and also with access to day care, we can make it all work.

I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

● (1550)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because I had not been a regular consumer of question period before I came to this place, I have noticed as a new member that it seems we have set up a rather interesting and maybe tradition-laden practice of highly charged partisan questions along the lines of "When did you stop beating your dog?" being lobbed over the aisle to this side to people who do not know it is coming, and then people rising to give answers that may or usually may not answer the question to the satisfaction of the ordinary, right-thinking person who might have stumbled across the CPAC channel.

One thing we could explore, which I will ask the hon. member about, is whether we would actually get better and more useful exchanges in the House if opposition members supplied their questions for question period in advance so that the government would have an opportunity to come up with reasonable answers.

Orders of the Day

• (1555)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. The way we are set up is kind of adversarial. We are face to face and two sword lengths apart, whereas if we look at the United States Congress, we see members sit in a circle to encourage a more collaborative approach. Having said that, I know the British system uses that kind of tactic during prime minister's questions, so that is an option. However, I think opposition members showing their cards would not work too well on this side, though I do enjoy the bait.

The ongoing joke here is that it is question period, not answer period, and that is when the opposition members seize the opportunity. It happened when the Liberals were on this side as well. We get a bit heated because we are discussing pretty important issues, and when we feel answers were not given, we get a bit heated. That goes back to what we have said. It is on all of us to watch how we deal with things, kind of monitor our own areas, and ensure we are being respectful.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member, especially for his comments about the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, because I believe we have made every attempt to work collaboratively and bring forth these kinds of good ideas.

On the issue of constituency time, in my case, because my constituency is here in Ottawa, I benefit from being able to hear immediate reactions from my constituents on things that happen during the course of the week. Because I can go back and forth, I have the opportunity to listen and have a business day in the constituency, where people can come to see me.

Does the member not think it would be beneficial for all members to have the same opportunities every Friday or Monday to be there listening to constituents and getting real-time feedback on how we are performing in the House?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment and the work we do on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

There are new ways to work this out. I know the Board of Internal Economy is working on ways to establish video conferencing. All of our constituents recognize that the majority of the work we do is here, and that is where the constituency week comes in, when we can go back to our constituencies and meet with people.

Also, I am only a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Ottawa, so I have the ability to meet constituents on weekends as well and attend events. I know the chair of the committee is from the Yukon, so he has quite a distance to go. I believe he said in his speech today that Friday sittings would really make no difference to him. Even those from British Columbia, if the House sat until midnight on Thursday, could not leave until Friday anyway, so it is of no benefit to them. It is a couple of days of travel, so it really would not benefit them and would put additional pressure on us as MPs to work early in the morning until late at night and continue to work on Fridays, Saturdays, and in some cases Sundays if we are not travelling.

Although I appreciate the suggestion to eliminate Friday sittings, I disagree. Constituents expect us to be here in this place.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the curiously introspective S. O. 51 requires us to contemplate the Standing Orders here today. With apologies to interpretation services, I have a lot to say about them.

As a member of PROC, and as a perennial procedure geek who started watching CPAC when I started high school, I am following this debate with even more interest than my normal enthusiastic self.

I want to go over some of the changes that were already proposed by PROC in our recently tabled interim report on moving toward a modern, efficient, inclusive, and family-friendly Parliament and then discuss some other ideas.

A good deal of what we discussed in our report does not affect the Standing Orders directly. I encourage anyone interested in the workings of this place and the impact on their families and personal lives to take the time to read through the report and perhaps provide guidance to their friendly local PROC member on what direction that study should take going forward.

In PROC's 11th report, we made a number of recommendations and had a number of discussion points. Three of those recommendations and three of those discussion points are directly relevant to the Standing Orders. The first two recommendations are related to the standardization of vote times to ensure predictability and efficiency. They state:

That House Leaders continue, whenever possible, the informal practice of holding deferred recorded divisions immediately following Question Period.

That House Leaders, whenever possible, refrain from holding recorded divisions any later on Thursdays than immediately following Question Period.

The third recommendation states:

That the Speaker table the House calendar each year prior to the House's summer adjournment.

That is not always easy, but it is an aspirational goal worth pursuing.

As a committee, we also felt that it was important to look at ways of limiting the number of consecutive sitting weeks. We all know from our pleasant experiences this spring that four-plus sitting weeks in a row really sours the mood around here, especially when we are here until midnight every night. However, there is a lot of work to be done, and we are a remarkable Parliament for our inefficiency in getting through legislation. Those are not the kind of accolades I believe we are looking for on the world stage.

Orders of the Day

To get there, one of the key items we discussed at length, but did not really get anywhere with, is the concept used in other Westminster parliaments of a parallel chamber, that is, a voteless chamber where items can be pre-debated. Our upcoming move to West Block and our subsequent move back to Centre Block certainly creates an interesting opportunity to retain two fully functional chambers.

The fate of Friday sittings is also a contentious debate, and one I would like to see my colleagues soul-search on as to how we make this place more efficient so that we may spend more time in our constituencies.

The last item, of course, is decorum. While we did not come to any conclusions, I personally find the new tone of question period, with the government side, at least, generally keeping calm and constructive, to be positive, and I would invite the opposition members to follow suit, at least experimentally for a while, to see if it improves the overall tone here. I cannot be the only parliamentary enthusiast who always found question period the least, not most, enjoyable part of the day's proceedings, regardless of who was in power. Decorum is a cultural, not a regulatory, issue that is up to us to fix.

There are few of us who have ever actually read the Standing Orders from cover to cover. I have, on more than one occasion, and I find them fascinating. I may not fully grok them, but I am certainly trying to.

Standing Order 4 does not have a mechanism to deal with the acclamation of a Speaker, for example. When Bill Blaikie was dean of the House, he presided over the unprecedented acclamation of Peter Milliken. I remember watching it on television. He observed that there was no process to deal with this but that the House could do many things with unanimous consent. However, what would have happened if a disgruntled member had denied that consent? For that matter, there are several instances when unanimous consent is required for absolutely routine things that should not need to go to a question.

Standing Order 7(1.1) has some curious wording on the assumed election, but not really, of the Deputy Speaker. Standing Order 7(2) has contorted wording designed to ensure that the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, between them, speak the two official languages, and 7(3) requires a Deputy Speaker to be elected to replace one who leaves during his or her term but is inconsistent with how that person got there in the first place.

Standing Order 11 permits you, Mr. Speaker, to punt someone from this room. I would encourage you to be unshy to use that power or to become blind to disruptive members, as Speaker Milliken did, regardless of party. Those powers should perhaps be expanded on. What value is there in kicking someone out of this room into a press scrum? What more tangible recourse could perhaps be available?

Standing Order 17 requires us to speak only from our own seats. I would personally like to see, for purely practical reasons, the members of the House leadership team of each recognized party be permitted to be recognized from any seat allocated to their party during regular debate.

Standing Order 23 declares bribery a high crime to be dealt with with the utmost severity, without providing for any type of process to do so.

Standing Order 28(1) says we cannot sit on Dominion Day. Dominion Day was replaced with Canada Day back in 1982, when I was one year old.

Standing Order 37(1) permits a Speaker to punt a question deemed not urgent to the Order Paper. However, in all of my years of watching, I have never seen that actually happen.

• (1600)

Chapter VI of the Standing Orders deals with the process of debate. I think it is worth considering changing the structure of 10- and 20-minute speaking slots, with questions and comments, to 15- or 30-minute speaking slots. Up to 10 or 20 minutes would be used for speaking, and the totality of the unused portion would be left for questions and comments.

For example, if I only speak six minutes out of my 10, which for me happens more often than not, I would have up to nine minutes of questions rather than only five. This will lead to shorter and more candid speeches and better debate afterward.

Standing Order 68(3) has an ironic quirk of old English. It states that bills may not be tabled in "imperfect" form, in English, but that they may not be tabled in "incomplete" form, in French.

Standing Order 71 also has a typo, in English, stating that every bill shall receive "three several readings", rather than "three separate readings", or just "three readings", as it says in French.

Standing 87 deals with private members' bills. When a member of Parliament has been here for several elections and has never had a chance to bring a PMB forward, and another member comes and has a PMB on the Order Paper before figuring out where the washrooms in Centre Block are, the system may be somewhat broken.

I propose for discussion that the PMB lottery be rethought to become fairer. At the start of every Parliament, all re-elected MPs should retain their place on the order of precedence. Those returning MPs not on the list because of being ministers, parliamentary secretaries, or Speaker would come next. New MPs would then be added to the order of precedence in the current manner. MPs from the previous Parliament who had had an opportunity to take their bills through the process would be added to the end of the list, again, in the same process.

Finally, all MPs should be able to trade with all other MPs anywhere on that list. All MPs, then, would have an equal chance to propose a private member's bill, without the peculiar bias against people who just cannot seem to win a lottery and without throwing a new MP into a situation of having to write and table a bill before learning how this place works.

I would also like to revisit the issue of royal recommendations at some point.

Orders of the Day

Standing Order 128 allows the House to be called back at 1 p.m. on a Wednesday to deal with a report from the Standing Joint Committee on Regulations, to which I say, really?

Standing Orders 129 to 147 deal with private bills. That used to be how to get a divorce in this country. While the Senate still uses them, on the Commons side there has not been a private bill for many Parliaments. Could we not drop this altogether?

Finally, Standing Order 158 permits the Sergeant-at-Arms to detain strangers for their behaviour in the chamber or gallery and may not release them without an order from the House. I do not know if this building contains a jail, but this is certainly an interesting legacy item. What is the real world impact of this?

Getting off Standing Orders, per se, why must bills die in the Senate when the House is dissolved? Could the Senate not continue dealing with bills already before it and simply send the version it has passed back to the new Parliament for concurrence? Private members' bills, especially, would be far less prone to an untimely death.

On other topics, I believe it should be inappropriate for any member to refer to the official language spoken by another member in the House of Commons, in the same way it is inappropriate for a member to refer to the presence or absence of another in this House.

Chapter XIII already guarantees that all members can speak in either official language, but I would go further and make it against the rules to refer to the language another member actually chose.

There are quirks in procedure and practice that are not necessarily in the Standing Orders, such as the entertaining, "When shall this bill be read a second time? At the next sitting of the House", amid catcalls of, "Now" and "Never". This is an artifact from a change more than 20 years ago, and there are no doubt several of these bugs where not all consequential changes were properly made.

I suspect the need for the agreement of the House for Order Paper questions to be allowed to stand is another such artifact, and there are surely more.

I would also like to see the clock in this chamber replaced with synchronized digital clocks that can be controlled by the table and that reflect the apparent time in the House as well as the actual time so that when we "see the clock", the clock agrees.

In fact, until we have integrated information systems in our desks, which is another long-term point we should at least discuss, I might go so far as to suggest four clocks be visible to all members in the chamber. They would show the time, the perceived time, the remaining speaking time for the current speaker, and the actual time the House is expected to rise today.

While we are at it, why do some events prolong the day and others do not? Is there any rhyme or reason to it? Could we perhaps revisit what does and does not make the day end at, say, 6:48 p.m.?

Of course, I would like to see seats in the chamber that do not tear our pockets, which happened to me again last night.

Let me also take this opportunity, as a former staffer, to call for the return of the one-stop shop, which provided for a different kind of Standing Order.

Yesterday a group of around 20 people visited me from their retirement residence in Mont-Laurier. At 3 p.m., security kicked them out of the group visitors gallery above you.

As a fundamental principle, I do not believe that behaving members of the public should ever be asked to leave the gallery during a sitting. If anything, the public should be encouraged to watch our debates, rather than question period, to participate more meaningfully in our legislative process.

Standing Order 51 provides us this wonderful opportunity to get into the weeds on the Standing Orders and to remove relics, artifacts, and cruft that no longer need to be there.

I look forward to continuing to hear the thoughts of my colleagues and to discussing them back at PROC.

• (1605)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member regarding S.O. 31s.

S.O. 31s are an opportunity, under the Standing Orders, for a member to make a one-minute statement, and it is quite diverse what that statement can be about. It can be about someone reaching 100 in a member's riding, or it can be something that is very important to a member.

Today, during the 15 minutes prior to question period, those 15 minutes when S.O. 31 statements are made, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton made his statement, and it was regarding Alison Azer. She is a Canadian, and her four children were kidnapped by her husband and taken to Iran. The response from the minister was to interrupt the member and use gestures in the House.

My question to the member is whether that is appropriate. Would the member condone that, or should that be discouraged in the House?

• (1610)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I was not on that side of the House. I did not see or hear what happened. I only know that there was a subsequent debate that was, I will call it, interesting.

I think it is important that when we have a very serious debate, like the one we are having today, we keep partisanship out of it. I would appreciate all members being able to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his passion for this topic.

It is fine to talk about all these rules, but I want to talk about motions that include the words "notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House". We adopt such motions regularly.

What does the member think of today's discussion about rules in light of the fact that a simple majority can bypass the Standing Orders and procedures of the House just by adopting a motion?

Orders of the Day

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure about that. As I understand it, that can only happen if the motion receives unanimous consent. I am not sure it can be done with a motion that is subject to a recorded division. I will find out, and we can talk about it outside.

Personally, I think it is an important tool if there is unanimous consent, but I do not really think a normal vote is appropriate in such cases.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is one of the iconic places in this country. I would not like to see digital clocks put in here. When we walk in here, it is a place of history. I love the way it is situated here today. I think we can all see the clock and know what time it is.

My comment to my colleague is that he is right about the private member's bills. I was a first-time MP in October, and I won the lottery, and then all of a sudden, I had to do the work. Therefore, I agree about private member's bills. When one is here for the first time and gets an early slot, it is a little onerous.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I will try not to note too much irony in the member's comments while he is wearing an electronic earpiece, with an LED on his desk and a microphone. I should also note that this is televised, which is a technology that did not exist when this building burned down and was rebuilt.

Technology moves forward. I do not think that advancing to 1960s technology for clocks is too much to ask.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member started his speech, he described himself as geek. I thought it was a bit harsh to call himself that, but after hearing the entire speech, I think I will affectionately call him a geek.

I also had the pleasure of hiring this guy a little while ago. He is part of the reason I am standing here too.

I want to ask about some of the things the member brought forward. One that I think should be seriously looked at is the idea that we are dropped from the list, when we come back here, when it comes to private member's bills. We have heard time and again today about people wanting to put something forward on behalf of their constituents or something they feel strongly about and never being recognized. There are people who are here 20 years who never even get close to that sort of thing. Maybe the member can expand on that.

I will throw in something else, and he will tell me if I am wrong. He is so good at this that I will believe him. Instead of putting all members on the list, should we put on the ones who only have bills introduced?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That is an interesting idea from my old boss, Mr. Speaker.

The idea of members only being on the order of precedence if they already have a bill would certainly force people to think about it right from the get-go if they actually want to get involved in the process. With respect to how it would work, I am not sure how it would go. It is an idea that I am looking forward to discussing properly along with the 4,716 or so ideas we have received today.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak on this subject, but before I begin, I would like to raise a point of order.

One of the things I was planning to discuss relates to what the member for Laurentides—Labelle just talked about: the fact that the government can adopt a motion notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House.

Mr. Speaker, would you mind clarifying this so that all members have accurate information before we go on with the debate?

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the fact that the member raised this point of order.

However, it is not in my purview to provide clarification on how a standing order is perceived by a number of members. Normally, if a point of order has to do with the interpretation of a standing order, for instance, or how it is applied, that would merit consideration.

If the member would like, I can make note of his comment for review and perhaps the House can come back to it later, if necessary.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the clarification.

That being said, I believe I am correct in saying that, with a simple majority, the government can pass a motion notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House.

I wanted to begin my speech with that information, because we can discuss all the standing orders and change them as much as we like, but the fact is, a majority government often decides to use its majority to pass motions that fly in the face of the usual rules and practices of the House. This happened a lot in the last Parliament. Having this debate today is all well and good, but I wanted to clarify that information before I begin. Indeed, it might be time to review that practice, namely, that a simple majority is enough to pass a motion that overrides the usual rules and practices of the House.

Like all my colleagues, I am adding my voice to the debate regarding some of the rules currently in place that could be changed. We could also come up with new ways of doing certain things in the House that would make it easier for everyone to do the work of an MP and help us be as efficient as possible, which is what Canadians expect of us.

Private companies review their operations and try to be as effective and efficient as possible in order to make the best use of their time. As parliamentarians of the House of Commons, that is what we should be doing as well. We have to review our practices, our customs, our procedures, and our rules and see whether it is possible to improve and amend them.

In my opinion, a debate like this in the House is healthy. I hope that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will pick up on what we have discussed and go over all the proposals that are on the table, and that we will be able to work in a non-partisan way to move these ideas forward.

Orders of the Day

The first proposal I am submitting to the hon. members of the House is to formalize the appointment of deputy speakers, assistant deputy speakers, and deputy chairs of committees of the whole, like you, Mr. Speaker, in that chair. Under our Standing Orders, these positions are assigned after consultations with the various parties and there is no obligation to have representation of all the parties in the chair of the Speaker of the House.

I think it would be important to formalize this practice of consultation, but also to ensure that the positions are assigned to all the recognized parties in the House, taking into account the party that the Speaker is a member of. Then we could assign the various speaker positions based on the parties that are officially represented in the House. I believe this proposal would be easy enough to adopt.

Question period is an issue that has been raised often during this debate because it is one of our daily realities. We are here for one hour a day to listen to members' statements, another issue we could address, and then question period, the part of the day in the House that is most watched by Canadians.

There are many people in the gallery during question period. Like other members, I often wonder what I would think if I were not a member and I only came here once every 10 years, or if I were in the gallery to watch question period for the first time. I am putting myself in the shoes of those people watching question period who are not used to it because, unlike us, they do not see it every day. As one of my colleagues said earlier, we end up getting used to this environment. Elementary and secondary school students sometimes come to visit and watch us. I think that we do not come across as a very functional Parliament.

Of course many aspects of question period could be improved, including the quality of responses. I mentioned that in a question to my colleagues earlier.

We must also ensure that the Speaker can use all his powers, that answers have substance, and that there is no repetition. The Speaker must also be able to use existing powers that do not need to be tweaked in the Standing Orders, rules that already allow the Speaker to name members and to eject them.

On a few occasions, we have seen the Speaker name the ridings of members who were acting inappropriately. However, if my memory serves me well, I believe that only one member has been named recently.

• (1620)

However, I have never heard the Speaker warn a member that he was about to expel him from the House, so there are powers that already exist in the Standing Orders that could be used more often.

The quality of answers is another issue that is very important to me. When I attended question periods in Great Britain, I was impressed by the imposing presence of their Speaker. When he found that an answer from a minister or the Prime Minister himself was unsatisfactory, he asked them to respond again. That is what he did when the Prime Minister gave an answer that had nothing to do with the question that was asked. I would therefore like to see our Speaker be more active and make more use of some of the powers that are already set out in the Standing Orders.

I also wanted to talk about questions of privilege, which are raised regularly in the House. Without getting into too much detail, this sometimes leads to a Speaker's ruling. In that case, the Speaker must determine whether there was a prima facie breach of privilege. I think that people recognize that term. It is Latin.

However, after the Speaker has given his ruling, a member must move a motion and it must be adopted by the House. That comes back to what I was saying earlier. When we have a majority government, even if the Speaker finds that there was a prima facie breach of privilege, the final decision is up to the House. If there is a majority government, it is really up to the government to decide whether there was a breach of privilege or not.

I think that there is a way to change that so that a Speaker's ruling is final. If the Speaker determines that there was a breach of privilege, that must be the final decision. A majority government should not be able to use its majority to override that decision. We have seen that happen in the past and I think that it is completely unacceptable.

The Board of Internal Economy, the entity that regulates the administration of our expenses, needs to be made public. That would be the best thing to do. Without going into the details, a number of things happened at the Board of Internal Economy. Some members were not treated fairly in the opinion of many members. It would be beneficial to make it public.

There is also the matter of votes after oral question period, which ties into our desire to achieve a better work-life balance in the House.

I also quite liked the idea of having digital clocks that would show not only the time, but also how much speaking time is left. Mr. Speaker, you just indicated to me that I have two minutes left. I should have roughly 25 seconds.

If hon. members could see how much speaking time they had left, either on their desk or somewhere else, they would have a much easier time organizing their notes and keeping track when they know that their speaking time is drawing to a close.

Finally, we should reconsider the need to say prayers and to thank God at the start of each sitting of the House of Commons. Perhaps the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could address that.

• (1625)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would like to pick up on some things we discussed earlier.

I had not considered motions the way the member put it. He is right. A motion to ignore the rules of the House can be adopted, but only after debate in the House. The process can take days, and it has to come to a conclusion.

It is a good tool to have, but it should be used sparingly. That is all I have to say about it. We may agree or disagree, but I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's clarification.

Orders of the Day

If we keep that rule, it should be used appropriately and as infrequently as possible. However, what I wanted to ask all members of the House was whether they think a simple majority should suffice to adopt a motion that bypasses the usual rules and procedures of the House.

Yes, it should be used as rarely as possible, but should we set a higher threshold for the number of votes needed? Should we seek unanimous consent every time? That might be something to consider because this measure should be used only in very rare cases.

Why bother having rules if a majority in the House of Commons can simply bypass them whenever and as often as it wants?

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who is a very active member of the House. I often work closely with him. His office is next to mine. His questions are very relevant.

I have more of a comment I want to make after hearing his presentation. I have been following question period for many years. I was always fascinated by the exchanges that took place. Now that I am taking part in question period myself, I am often disappointed by the answers we get. However, I am even more disappointed when I return to my riding in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area and my constituents tell me that a certain question was excellent and very pertinent, but that they heard no clear answer and they too are disappointed. My constituents find the government's way of answering to be shocking. They are shocked to hear those kinds of answers, because they see all the hard work we are doing on various issues as MPs, including softwood lumber and diafiltered milk, for example.

I think we need new measures. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on what else we should do to have a more constructive and higher caliber question period.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I really enjoy working with her and having our offices on the same floor.

I think that what she said is quite true. I experience the same thing when I return to my riding, and people talk to me about what is happening in the House. The first thing they watch is question period and I often hear the same comments. In fact, they tell me that our questions are good, that we are holding the government to account, but that the answers are ridiculous.

I think a potential solution is to ask that the answers at least be related to the subject. Sometimes the answer has nothing to do with the subject. In that case and according to current rules, the Speaker could ask the minister, parliamentary secretary, or the person who answered to rephrase the answer. He could clarify the subject because it is irritating for Canadians listening to us to realize that the government does not seem to be listening to the opposition, and that it is giving answers that have nothing to do with the question.

We should have a Speaker who is more active and who ensures that we have a better question period using the Standing Orders already at his disposal. I believe that that is possible today, without necessarily changing the Standing Orders. However, it would be good to have more flexible Standing Orders that would allow the Speaker to judge the quality of answers. This is a delicate matter and

the Speaker may be reluctant to do it because judging the quality of an answer is very subjective. However, I think that there are already ways of doing this in order to send a message to government members that their answers will be examined and judged, and if they have nothing to do with the question, then the members will have to answer again.

• (1630)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, Indigenous Affairs; the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Consular Affairs; the hon. member for Saskatoon—University, Natural Resources.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking all my colleagues, on all sides of the aisle, for their overwhelmingly constructive comments today on the take-note debate as it relates to the Standing Orders.

I, along with a number of colleagues I see within the House, have the privilege of sitting on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I have been carefully taking notes from most of the members in terms of their ideas and suggestions. I know that our very able clerk, Mr. Andre Barnes, will summarize all those issues, so that we can review them carefully and present our recommendations back to this place in terms of changes to the Standing Orders.

I want to say again that the point and the nature of the Standing Orders is to provide us with clear rules with respect to our conduct in this place. However, when it comes to conduct and decorum, it really comes to each and every one of us in terms of how we comport ourselves when we are in this place. Again, I urge members to be mindful of that. Many members today have demonstrated that, with a significant generosity of spirit, as we have entered in this debate here today.

My mandate was quite different. I indicated that my purpose today on the government side was primarily to table items that were within the government House leader's ministerial mandate letter and our electoral platform that I had not heard already during the course of the debate. I think I have heard most of it. The items have been covered, in large part. The purpose of doing so was to allow the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with the opportunity to consider those, and whether it is necessary to make rules changes to the Standing Orders in order to give them greater effect. I will cover a few of them that have not been covered and that I have not heard yet.

Orders of the Day

I am not convinced that some of these instances within the minister's mandate letter require Standing Order changes. I think it is more of a function of the practice of Parliament and the practice of the government of the day. A lot of things we had discussed in the previous election related to our sense of the conduct that occurred or what we found offensive in previous Parliaments, or the erosion of some of the traditions and practices of this place, requiring a change to the Standing Orders. I hope that is not necessary. I hope that we can respect the traditions of the British parliamentary practice and procedures, so that we do not have to use the strong hammer of amending the Standing Orders to do so. I will cover the ones that I have not heard today, and I will leave it to my colleagues to perhaps comment on them.

One of the commitments we made in the last election was related to the creation of a Prime Minister's question period. I have not heard any commentary on that today with respect to whether that would be a good practice. It is certainly a practice that is adopted in the United Kingdom. There is a dedicated period of time where the prime minister would make himself or herself available to take questions from members. I do not know whether that would change the nature with respect to our overall perception that question period is far too theatrical and far too canned, quite frankly, in terms of the give and take that takes place.

We have heard a lot of suggestions with respect to giving much greater power to the Speaker to enforce the rules of debate, and some of the other amendments with respect to suggesting that questions be tabled in advance so that a substantive response can be given, which is the practice essentially in the British Parliament. I certainly would be supportive of us moving in that particular direction. However, I do want to table the concept of whether the Standing Orders require a change with respect to a dedicated Prime Minister's question period.

The second major item I have not heard much discussion about relates to the use of prorogation and omnibus bills. Again, this was a situation that occurred in the 39th, 40th, and 41st Parliaments, with respect to a situation of prorogation and an increasing use of omnibus bills.

● (1635)

It has been a commitment of this particular government to try to avoid using omnibus bills. The only exception to that should be the budget bill. In the presentation of the budget, it does have the inevitable effect of having significant amendments to all kinds of consequential acts to bring the budget into effect. I do not think that even the budget itself should deal with things that fall outside of budgetary measures. I am very wary of the use of omnibus bills as a standard practice to slide certain types of items through that are not relevant to the minister responsible for moving a particular bill forward. Again, there is a question as to whether that is appropriate use within the Standing Orders, but I again want to table that.

One of the other things that rose in previous Parliaments was with respect to the estimates and whether there is consistency between the estimates and public accounts. At the end of the day, parliamentarians need to have a clear mechanism to ensure that the tabled estimates are consistent with the public accounts. This is something that the President of the Treasury Board is working on. I do not think

it requires a Standing Order change, but this is something that the procedures and House affairs committee ought to consider.

Other things that go to the independence of this place, particularly as they relate to the officers of Parliament, are whether there are mechanisms and ways to ensure that officers of Parliament are properly funded, that their reports to the Speaker and ultimately to the House are appropriate, and that the government of the day does not constrain the operation of the officers of the House in doing so. I would also extend that to the parliamentary budget officer. We have seen instances in the past where that has been a challenge. We want to ensure that each of the officers of the House, and the parliamentary budget officer, have the necessary tools so that parliamentarians get the necessary information they need to keep the government to account, while by the same token providing information in a neutral manner.

I thought I heard some discussion about the disclosure of expenses. I do support the concept that the activities of the Board of Internal Economy should be more public and should be open, by default, as opposed to the current practice.

I have a couple of final points to table, and they are already incorporated within the Standing Orders. They deal with ensuring that this workplace is free of harassment and sexual violence. Again, this is something that the procedure and House affairs committee does need to periodically review, that our conduct in this place be reviewed to make sure we avoid situations we have found sometimes unfortunately in the past between members, and between members and their staff. Canadians need to have confidence that we are acting in a fashion that holds the highest standards of workplace practice and that the procedure and House affairs committee continues to review that.

We have heard a lot about family friendly. I do not have much more to contribute to that particular debate, as it has been effectively covered in broad detail. I would encourage members to constantly be open to change. The way in which we conduct ourselves here is often dealt with within historical practice, and is often ossified to a time that is long past. I appreciate that fact, for example, as it relates to the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue. Despite the fact that there is a stranger in the House, none of us has ever exercised the rule to call that matter out.

We need to continue to have that openness among us, to find new ways to accommodate and encourage more members, and a greater diversity of members, to participate and become members of the House of Commons.

I do not have much more to add. My time is up, and I am going to encourage questions and look forward to the debate as it continues today.

● (1640)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to add to the member's first opening comment a congratulations to all members of the House from all parties for being so non-partisan and constructive in this debate today. It has brought all sorts of new creative ideas for our committee to look at to improve this House, Canada's House of democracy, for all Canadians.

Orders of the Day

I just had an email from the member for Whitby, who would like us to consider changing the word “amen” after the moment of silence in the morning to the words “thank you”.

Someone has also suggested to me that S. O. 31s return to their original purpose of just commendations of people or things, and to be made totally non-partisan. What does the member think of that suggestion?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Yukon, who of course serves as chair of the procedure and House affairs committee.

I am always supportive of prospective changes to our practices, including to the prayer and the moment of reflection, that are more in keeping with the tremendous diversity of our country here today. I would be willing, but again, I would want to hear the give and take from colleagues on all sides.

With respect to S. O. 31 statements, again I would encourage members to use them as primarily an opportunity to reflect issues within their constituencies. It is primarily the tool to be congratulatory or to raise issues that are particularly relevant to where the member comes from, and to share that with members of the House of Commons as opposed to using that as a partisan tool.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on that very point on S. O. 31s, I take great pride in the fact that I illustrate many great contributions by different people, groups, and organizations in my fine riding of Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

However, I do have a concern when individual MPs are trying to say what a member of Parliament should say or not say in this place. It should ultimately be arbitrated by the voters themselves. If someone has an issue and wishes to speak on that issue, she or he should be able to do so and be held accountable by her or his voters. Does the member agree, or does he believe that really he should be censoring the constituents of my riding from being the final judges of my conduct?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, I take my friend's point with respect to his comment.

At the end of the day, the most important aspect for us, as parliamentarians, is freedom of speech in this place. I am simply encouraging members. I believe that the primacy of S. O. 31 statements should be about concerns related to our constituencies. I am not suggesting that there may not be any other issue that might arise, but I would encourage us to use it for the purpose that I think it is primarily intended. There may be instances where there can be a very charged issue, as we heard earlier today, that a particular member feels strongly about. For me, that might have been more appropriate for question period, but again it is about freedom of speech and that is our primary rule.

•(1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and suggestions.

I would like to come back to a point that I made in my speech and I would like my colleague to share his thoughts on it.

Does my colleague think that it is reasonable for the House to adopt a motion to send a matter that the Speaker found to be *prima facie* to a parliamentary committee, usually the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs? If the government has a majority, the motion to refer such a matter to committee can be rejected by the government. It simply has to use its majority and convince all of its members to vote the way cabinet wants them to.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Speaker, I take my friend's point. As I said, we have already had a number of instances when *prima facie* cases of privilege have been referred to PROC and there is a concern that the government can use its majority to, in theory, shut down debate or to create a finding that there was in fact no actual breach of privilege. Again, we do get into those instances.

I have heard in the debate today a lot about empowering the Speaker. At the end of the day, the Speaker needs to be viewed as being neutral, so there has to be some kind of mechanism to send these kinds of questions. At the end of the day, we collectively make decisions on the nature of privileges and immunities in this place. It should be governed by practice and by our history. In that sense, there can be profound differences when we make these findings at PROC, but I do not know how we can create any other mechanism, quite frankly. That is really my challenge with respect to the member's question.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great honour I rise today on the Standing Orders of this place.

I believe I speak on behalf of all members when I state that it is a great privilege to do the work that we do on behalf of the Canadians who democratically elected us to represent them. It is on behalf of those very same Canadians that I rise today to speak on a subject I believe of importance, one that I am concerned about.

Back in the spring of this year I became greatly concerned when the then government House leader was quoted as suggesting that Friday sittings in this place should be eliminated. I would like to explain why this was a point of concern for me.

Back in the spring of 2016, we were all collectively part of a newly elected Parliament. At no time during the election did any of the parties, and certainly not the governing Liberals, suggest to Canadians that when this place sits, we should shorten our workweek. To be clear, I am not implying that we do not work when we are back in our home ridings or that being back in our home ridings with our families or our constituents is not important. I believe we would all agree that it is very important. However, we must not forget one important fundamental principle in any democracy. We work for the citizens who elect us.

Orders of the Day

Perhaps it is just my own sentiments, but I believe when it comes to the subject of shortening the workweek, however well intended the motives might be for doing so, first and foremost we have an obligation to have a discussion with the citizens we work for. Canadian taxpayers deserve a level of respect and accountability from their member of Parliament. It is for that reason that back in March of this year, in one of my weekly member of Parliament reports, I asked citizens in my riding what they thought about taking Fridays off.

I am certain it will come as a shock to many of you in this place that the idea was not a popular one, and while many were respectful in passing on their thoughts on the subject, there were also those who were quite offended. Words such as “out of touch” were referenced frequently. I will remind everyone in this place that B.C. is a long way from Ottawa. When citizens there hear about \$100,000 political staff moves from Toronto to Ottawa billed to them, or that the Prime Minister is charging for not one but two nannies, after claiming that million-dollar families should not get taxpayer-supported benefits, they become disillusioned, disengaged, in fact.

I realize that in a majority government there is a mandate for that majority government to implement change. However, in this case, at no time were citizens ever told about a shorter workweek in Ottawa before we went to the polls in 2015. Thus, in my view, there is no mandate from the public in support of a shorter workweek, and yes, I recognize there is an argument that hours could be extended during the other four days. However, let us not overlook that doing so would simply take all the staff who run this place away from their families and create a greater cost to taxpayers with overtime.

I would also question the merits of productivity when working extended hours and if there would be a diminishing return with such a change. However, the bigger question is this. If we were to eliminate Fridays, then would not Thursdays become the new Fridays, with many ministers and senior government members of Parliament leaving Ottawa on Wednesday evening? If that was the case, where Thursdays become the new Fridays, it would be most unfortunate.

Getting back to my member of Parliament report that I wrote on the subject of not sitting on Fridays, some local media ran polls on the very topic. Once again, citizens in my riding were very clear that they did not support the idea.

I am not certain what plans the government has on this issue at this point. However, I believe it is important that on matters such as these, we make our positions clear and give reasons as to why. In my case, obviously I oppose these changes, and from talking to many citizens in my region, I can state they are also strongly opposed to eliminating Friday sittings in the House.

● (1650)

The fact is that the vast majority of real, middle-class Canadians do not have the luxury of having a three-day weekend unless it is a statutory holiday. Again, I am not suggesting that we are not working hard back in our ridings, but I feel that out of respect for the people who sent us here, without having a mandate for a shorter workweek, we should maintain the current five-day House schedule that we were elected under, when, of course, the House is sitting.

Let us also not forget that there are many break weeks throughout the House calendar that allow us to get back to our home ridings often. We are also provided with a generous taxpayer-financed budget to hire staff who work in those home ridings. The majority of us also take advantage of some of the latest communication tools that, in many cases, are also provided to us by the taxpayer.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to admit that, yes, this is a challenging and demanding role, even more so for our families and spouses. I believe we all are thankful and appreciative for the consideration and support we receive from our loved ones for the time-consuming work we do here. However, let us not overlook that we are generously compensated. We have the ability to fly our family members to this place. Lastly, for six years of service, we are eligible for a generous pension that most Canadians are not. Granted, some major changes were made in the last Parliament, which created a more respectful compensation pension plan for both taxpayers and members of Parliament.

In summary, yes, there is an element of sacrifice, but it is one that we are well compensated for. Let us not forget that it is called public service. I submit that we must be careful not to forget that final point, because recent expense scandals by the current government, not unlike previous governments, can ultimately undermine public trust.

While it is easy for us to understand the unique challenges of being a member of Parliament to the extent that for some it is easy to say, “Yes, we should take Fridays off”, and I am sure many people could justify a whole boatload of activities to show that they would still be offering some value to constituents, there is a perception that we are forgetting to ask the very Canadians we work for what they think of the idea.

I believe that if other members ask local citizens what they think of the idea, they will receive similar feedback to what I received. As a result, I have taken time today to speak out against this idea under the current circumstances and I want to reiterate that I mean no disrespect to those who support the idea. I understand the arguments in support of it. However, in this case, based on feedback I have received from my riding, it is important that I state for the record that I am opposed to this idea.

Before I close, I want to go back to the point I made earlier. Ever since I was first elected, first given the opportunity to serve people other than my family, elected as a city councillor in Penticton in 2008, I have always been very clear that our job is primarily to maintain the public trust. There are differences in what is in the public interest. We could all disagree on that, but I hope we would all find that we must maintain the trust that Canadians have in our institutions, the trust that their elected leaders stand for them and do not dictate to them, but instead, serve them in a way which serves their long-term needs and also hears what they are saying in the short term.

Orders of the Day

The public trust is a responsibility that each one of us has been given and I contend in this very place that if we cut Fridays off, we will undermine that public trust. If we abuse the taxpayer resources we have, we will undermine that public trust. It is not an easy thing because we can disagree with what the public interest is or what the public trust is, but I suggest that we all should try to preserve that trust.

I would like to thank all members of the House for hearing my comments and for the opportunity to stand in this place and comment on the Standing Orders, an important part of our democracy.

● (1655)

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I realize the member's comments result from gathering feedback from his constituents and voters, and that is, of course, what we are supposed to do in the House. Instead of asking his constituents if they agreed with MPs having a short workweek, I wonder if the result would have been different if he had asked his constituents if they would like him to be more accessible for an extra day every week. Does he think the result would have been the same?

On that note, I am wondering how much geography might play a role in this. Even if he were able to return to the House on Fridays, would he actually be able to? Maybe that is something we need to address in the House. If it benefits members in different parts of the country, maybe that is the angle we should be looking at as well. I want to know what his comments are on that.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I find Friday sittings to be just as important as any other days'. It is very seldom I am not here. In fact, the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper did a study and found that I was one of the five MPs that had a 100% voting record.

People in my riding in the last election appreciated that, whether they agreed with some of those votes or not, and I imagine they did not agree with all of them. They appreciate that I show up for work.

The member should canvass his constituents and ask if they want him in Ottawa standing up and holding the government to account, contributing to our democracy through public discourse, or would they like him there so he can attend important family, business, and community events, or whatnot. He should put the question to them, and give them both sides.

It has been my experience that people want to know that their MPs are doing their jobs. That job is primarily legislative. No one else can vote in our place. Staff members can make calls.

That is the one job, being here and standing in the House, that we are privileged to have. We owe a duty to the people we represent. I suggest that the member canvass his constituents to see what they have to say.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The topic of Friday sittings is compelling but also worrisome. As my colleague mentioned in his speech, if we do not sit on Fridays, would Thursday not become the new Friday? It is a question worth asking. Would ministers start leaving Ottawa Wednesday afternoon?

I am a mother myself, and we hear a lot about work-life balance. This is also about all of our employees, the Hill staff, the people who feed us. I often talk about the people who work in the cafeteria. We rely on them, but they too have families.

Accordingly, if we were to adjust the hours from Monday to Thursday and sit until midnight those days, are we really talking about work-life balance for the staff who work in the House and on the Hill? I also have to wonder about our effectiveness as MPs if we have to work, make speeches, and examine bills until midnight.

● (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's contribution to the subject, particularly in regard to Fridays.

First, she is absolutely right, it is human nature that Thursdays will become a travel day. Ministers and their parliamentary secretaries will have pressing schedules taking them elsewhere, resulting in less accountability. Just to remind people, not sitting on Fridays would result in 20% less sitting time. I struggle to see where there would be a benefit for democracy from that.

Second, I talked about sacrifice. I was not there for the birth of my youngest child; I was here in Ottawa. I was in caucus and did not have access to my phone. I am saddened by that. I am sad I could not be there for my wife, but she and I made a decision together, and my kids know that when I am here in Ottawa, I am serving them as much as I am serving the country. There is sacrifice, but that is something we run on. We should not change this place to suit us. We should change it to suit Canadians.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost a year since I had the privilege to start participating in debate in this place. I recall fondly the day of my swearing in last fall. I received a pin after I was sworn in, and I received a very large green book of over 1,000 pages of procedural rules. I have to say, like my friend for Laurentides—Labelle, I can be a bit of a geek too. I took that book home, I read and tabbed it, and I was very excited about participating in the debate.

We have had some very good moments here, but I see some spots where there can be some improvement, and I would like to discuss some of those.

Orders of the Day

Primarily I would like to talk about how we approach private member's bills, the order for private member's bills, and how we can improve debate in this place, and particularly on that point, how we can avoid some of the repetition that we have sometimes. When we look at private member's bills, we all come to this place because we are passionate about something. We want to make a difference in our community, or whatever issue we may have that motivates us and makes us want to be here to make a difference.

I was motivated by wanting to address income inequality, which I saw was growing in my community. I wanted to deal with public transit, which was crumbling in my community, and active transportation. I also wanted to deal with food policy issues that encourage that Canadians have access to healthy food.

I see that type of passion in the private member's bills that come forward here. We recently saw tabled a national cycling strategy. We voted last night on a community benefits bill. We made a change to the national anthem to make it gender neutral. These are the diverse issues that are presented by the many people here from different parts of this country.

Despite all this passion and excitement about these many issues, whether we actually have an opportunity to table and have debate on a private member's bill is governed by chance; it is by a lottery. Many of us in this place will not have an opportunity to see a private member's bill move forward to debate and to a vote. I think that we need to see some changes made to this lottery system.

The way it works right now is that we have first-time members of Parliament arriving here, and they could be tabling a private member's bill within only a few months of having been elected. This does not really give them the opportunity to reach out to their colleagues across the way to hear their ideas and perspectives. It does not give them an opportunity to adjust and learn how things work in this place, because it is a learning experience. Therefore, we are not setting people up for success. On the other hand, there is no guarantee for the people who have been here for multiple parliaments that they can ever have a private member's bill to reflect what they would like to present. There is no weighting given to that.

My suggestion is twofold. I think we should create more time for private member's bills in this place, and I also believe that we should change the way we weight the lottery.

I have heard considerable debate today about Fridays. What do we do with Friday? I have to say that I do not necessarily take issue with continuing sittings on Fridays, but I would like to see them be more efficient. I say this as a person who has a young family that I would like to get back to. However, truthfully, I do not know if family matters on this. We all have reasons to go home and be in our ridings, but for me, the hardest part is saying goodbye to my family every week. Therefore, I would not want to add more weeks of sittings.

I think there is value in taking those Fridays and finding a way that we can make more use of that time. I would suggest that we set aside Fridays for private member's bills. It would be a chance to have more opportunities for people to present their bills and to be heard. That would be my suggestion for Friday as a way to make them

more efficient. However, if we are not able to create more opportunity and more time for the hearing of private member's bills, then I would suggest we change the weighting of the system for the lottery.

However, I had not thought of the suggestion of my friend for Laurentides—Labelle, but I think he has a good idea in that perhaps we make sure, after a Parliament rises and we go into the next Parliament, that the bills on the Order Paper do not die for the returning parliamentarians. That is definitely one good idea that might help with the waiting.

● (1705)

My own suggestion, and I have been thinking about it, is that there be a system for returning parliamentarians who did not have a private member's bill in the past Parliament, so that they would go to the front of the line. There would be a lottery for those, and then for the new members. I think that would help both the returning members and the new members. It would give new members more time to get adjusted to the system, and it would give returning members an opportunity to make sure they could be heard. Those would be my suggestions in respect of private members' bills. I would also like to see us perhaps looking at using Fridays, and changing the lottery system so that we could have a better system of waiting on the dates.

On improving debate, one of the most moving and genuine debates I have witnessed in this place was the one we had on the crisis in Attawapiskat. On that evening, I heard very genuine stories from members of all parties in House. There was an authenticity to that debate. When I was listening to people, most of it was devoid of partisanship. It was a real opportunity for us to learn from one another during that debate. I thought the questions we asked and the chance for us to learn from one another was very valuable. I would like to see more of that in our debates in this place. From time to time, we can sort of lose the thread. I would really like to see a return to that.

I worry that we are often subject to a fair bit of repetition in this place. Sometimes the same ideas are repeated, which does not necessarily give us much of a chance to learn about each other's ridings and where we are coming from.

I would use question period as one example of where there is quite a bit of repetition. There has been a lot of discussion today about how we can make question period more effective. I was keeping note during question period today, just to get an idea, and I noticed that members of the same party asked 10 questions on pretty much the same issue. Actually, there was another issue as well. The four questions that followed were on pretty much the same issue. It was not a case of different variations of the same question, but pretty much the same question was asked, all by the same party.

Obviously different parties may have the same question to ask, and that cannot be changed, but I wonder if there is not a way that we could restrict members of the same party from asking the same question, or largely the same question, more than, let us say, twice. We will be generous and say that twice is good, but that 10 times seems like a lot of times to hear the same question.

Orders of the Day

It is one thing for us to be here and to be part of that debate, but another when we think of public who are watching it. I am not sure that it increases their respect, as there are multiple other issues that could be raised. I would like to see us move away from the repetition that we sometimes see.

I would also say that with respect to the course of regular debate. It would be really nice. I truly enjoy hearing and learning from all the members who are here about what is important to their communities. It gives me an opportunity to reflect and go home to my own constituency and say, "We have this perspective, but while I was in Ottawa, I heard all these other perspectives that can open our eyes to how we have different impacts."

I would like to move away from repetition and to see if there are ways we can move the debate to be closer to the kind of debate we had the evening that we debated the crisis in Attawapiskat.

I also like the suggestion of having a clock that we could watch, that would give us a rundown on the amount of time we have left. I think that would be helpful for a lot of us.

For today, my primary suggestions are about private members' bills, affording them more time, changing the wait times in the lottery, and seeing if we can avoid repetition in the course of our debate.

• (1710)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege and pleasure of working with my colleague, the brand new hon. member of the House, on the special committee. I deeply appreciate her co-operation and her knowledge of the subject. I know the member is a scholar, and it is good for all of us to have a person of this quality in the House.

I have some points that I want to talk to her about. On the same question, I have the same answer. If we have the answer, we should not ask the same question 10 times. However, it is subjective and quite difficult to identify the subject and whether or not a good answer was given. It is too difficult for the Speaker to say if the question was not answered. It would be good to see, but I am not sure that the Speaker would appreciate having to judge the quality of the answers and questions. The Speaker is doing his job well right now.

[*Translation*]

My question for my colleague is this: does she believe that it would be too difficult to judge the quality of the answers and the quality of the questions, and therefore nearly impossible to enforce the proposal, namely to limit the number of questions on a given subject to two?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for all the nice things he said.

It is true, and the question comes as no surprise. Things get a little complicated if we give the Speaker the power to decide if it is exactly the same question or if it is the correct answer or the same answer.

Earlier, we talked a bit about how we will behave in the House. It is up to us to decide. We all know when we are repeating a question or an answer. We see that. Everyone knows when it happens.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my thoughts to the debate about the quality of questions and answers.

The issue is not the quality of the question. The issue is whether the question relates to government administration. That is the only criterion that matters. It is not up to the Speaker to determine whether a question has been repeated 10 times, as long as it has to do with government administration.

Nor can we judge the quality of an answer because that would be too hard for the government. However, the Speaker can rule on whether the answer is relevant to the question. We see that kind of thing all the time. A minister or a parliamentary secretary may give an answer that has nothing to do with the question, possibly because he or she did not understand the question. Ministers and parliamentary secretaries sometimes seem to get a little distracted and misunderstand questions.

As a result, the Speaker would not necessarily have to judge the quality of the answer but instead determine whether the answer is related to the question. Those would be the two criteria for judging the question and the answer. That might be a good way to see things and it would enable the Speaker to use the powers he already has. These powers have to do with the relevance of the question and the answer. He would not have to judge the quality of the question or the answer.

It is true that, when the same question is asked 10 times, members cannot expect to keep getting a different answer. It would be a bit difficult for someone to be asked the same question 10 times and to have to come up with 10 different answers.

• (1715)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his questions and comments.

What I am trying to do is to find a way for the House to become more efficient. Perhaps it is not about the number of questions. We can discuss that. However, I do not think that Canadians want to see the same questions being asked and the same answers being given for a half an hour.

Canadians want us to have a real discussion. I am open to other comments and ideas, but I would like to make our work more efficient.

[*English*]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be speaking to Standing Order 51. Actually, I am honoured to serve in this House. Every time I am in Ottawa, walking toward the Peace Tower to come to this chamber, I am reminded of the privilege of being a member of Parliament and how rich and unique this opportunity is for each of us.

I have appreciated that there is this frank and open debate on the Standing Orders today. This is a rare occasion in which we are able to weigh in on how to have a better Parliament and be more effective on behalf of our constituents.

Orders of the Day

I am going to focus on just one element; that is, how to increase the effectiveness of Canada's members of Parliament in our primary responsibility of being the voice of our constituents here in Ottawa.

My proposal is about rebalancing the parliamentary calendar to spend more time in our constituencies, to serve the people who elected us.

There are many people here who are able to fly home for an evening in the middle of the week to attend something in their constituency and then be back in the House the next morning. Their reality is different, perhaps, from the one I will be describing.

People who are from far-flung areas of Canada simply cannot do that, and so the amount of time they can spend in their constituencies is considerably constrained.

Canada's extensive geography is one of our greatest assets, but I have to say it also presents a great challenge for Parliament and for parliamentarians for whom Ottawa is not easily accessible. Constituents do want to hear from us. They want to see us. They want to tell us about themselves. They want to tell us about their organizations, their initiatives. That takes time in the constituency. Work in the constituency is important and MPs need more time being there, doing the work.

Our job is to represent the voices and concerns of our constituents in Ottawa, more than it is to represent Ottawa back in our communities.

The members of Parliament may or may not know that for almost half the history of the Canadian Parliament, members of Parliament were in Ottawa between January or February and May or June during the year. That is when Parliament sat. That is when the business of the House was conducted in Parliament. The rest of the time, they were in their constituencies, serving those who voted for them.

That changed in 1940, during the Second World War, when the complex elements of Canada's response and Canada's involvement caused the need for much debate, for ministers' involvement, and for Parliament's decision-making. Therefore, in 1940, that shifted to more of a year-round presence here in Ottawa.

It was not until 1982 that there was a change in the Standing Orders that created seven adjournment periods, so members of Parliament had predictable, stable calendars to go back to their constituencies in the summer, over Christmas and Easter, and four other adjournment periods.

That is the last time that there was actually a substantive change to our Standing Orders with respect to the parliamentary calendar.

I want to point out that was during the 32nd Parliament, at a time when there were just 16 women members of Parliament in this House.

Constituency work matters. The myth that the work of an MP only takes place in Ottawa is just so wrong. When members in this House, in this debate, have talked about a four-day work week, or one day off a week, it is very inaccurate and very misleading, because the bulk of the work happens, actually, in our constituencies, where we have up to 100,000 people, each of whom we are serving.

Our offices do all the things that residents see when they email us, when they phone us, when they come in for meetings. They come in to talk to us about their concerns, their issues. They make requests. They want us to advocate for them. They ask for help. Constituents see that. However, there is much more that is done that is not visible. The kind of engagements we do in our constituencies is very time consuming.

● (1720)

I will just give some examples of my own. I organize monthly MP breakfast connection events with more than 100 people, to hear from key policy speakers on an issue of the day. I often do town hall meetings. I do consultations that I call "MP policy cafés", where people sit around tables to weigh in on a policy issue, and the results of those consultations go back to ministers.

There are many ways we engage with our constituents, and I do not have to tell the members in this House what they are. We all know how time consuming but how important it is, because we are the link between our constituents and the federal policies that affect them. We are their link, their voice, and that takes time.

There are special projects that we tackle in our local community where we have to find out about an issue that is concerning people, and we need to have meetings to fully understand it. We may organize ad hoc advisory groups to give us advice. We then may meet with other stakeholders to try to advocate for the involvement of our constituents or the interests of our constituents. Those special projects in the riding take a lot of time as well.

I do want to point out that it is not just Parliament in Ottawa that takes us away from our constituencies. During these seven adjournment periods, we are often away. If as a British Columbian I am commuting back and forth each week, which I largely do, that will be between 16 and 20 hours a week that I am not in my constituency because I am commuting. I take to heart the situation of my colleague from the Yukon, who spends 28 hours a week commuting, so that is time not in the constituency.

We also do international travel on behalf of Canada, like the trip I took to Zambia to attend an African Union conference on ending child marriage. It was very important to be there and I was honoured to be able to go, but those were days not in my constituency.

We travel in Canada as part of our jobs, during the adjournment periods. There are caucus meetings. We may be having a caucus meeting outside of our constituency in order to hear from stakeholders in another part of the province, such as our caucus did in Kelowna this year; or there may be national caucus meetings that are outside of our constituencies during these adjournment periods; or there are other kinds of travel, like committee travel and parliamentary secretary travel. I have had several of those trips out of the constituency during constituency periods.

Private Members' Business

All of that pares down the time that we are available to our constituents. Therefore I am recommending not only that there be one constituency day a week during sessions, but also that the length of some of the adjournment periods outlined in Standing Order 28(2) be expanded to reduce the amount of commuting and to make up for some of the time away from our constituencies that we experience due to our work.

I am going to take this last period of time to point out that this can be accomplished without reducing our effectiveness in Parliament through the many measures that have been raised already today: electronic voting, audiovisual conferencing, parallel Parliament for statements and debates to go on the public record. There are many ways that we can be both more effective in Ottawa and more effective in our constituencies with more time there.

I also want to point out that this addresses a significant barrier to women in Parliament. It will be 100 years before we have a gender-equal Parliament at the rate we are going. One of the barriers is that women do tend to be the ones who are providing care in their constituencies to elderly family members or who have more of the household responsibilities. About 66% of family caregivers are women who can do some of that work in the evenings when they are in their constituencies, but cannot do that when they are in Ottawa. This would be good for women's equality. This would be good for the constituency. It would be good for parliamentarians to have a better balance of time in their constituency working for their constituents.

So that is my pitch here, that we rebalance our calendar for the benefit of all and for our parliamentary democracy.

● (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): I would like to acknowledge my colleague from Vancouver Quadra, who is the parliamentary secretary to the president of the Treasury Board. I thank her for allowing me to speak to this important matter.

We spend a lot of time here, but we only spend 26 weeks a year in the House. There are two ways of looking at this. I knew what the conditions were before I stood for election in the beautiful riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

I am therefore having a bit of trouble agreeing with a proposed day of leave or shorter week so that we can be in our ridings. Last night, I left the House, went to my riding, and returned this morning. It is physically demanding, but it is a choice. I would call it client service because I had the privilege of meeting with people in my riding last night. Yes, we have to travel because we live in this big country called Canada. I have the privilege of being from the greater Quebec City area. There may be more flexibility, but I believe that where there is a will, there is a way.

I would like to ask the member a question. What example are we setting for workers who get up every morning and have to deal with the same problem?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I will answer with a question of my own: what example would we be setting if we did not change a 32-year-old workplace framework?

This framework was created in 1982, a time when there were no female MPs in the House of Commons. This framework is no longer acceptable. This is 2016.

We have to change working conditions in order to attract more women MPs. That is what I was talking about. Having more opportunities to be in the ridings is very important, especially for women, but also for those who commute for 20 hours, 35 hours, or 30 hours.

The hon. member has no idea what it is like for the members who live in regions that are far from Ottawa or whose commute is rather complicated. I invite him to talk to the hon. member for Yukon to get a better understanding of the challenge.

● (1730)

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am from British Columbia. My riding is between my colleague's Vancouver riding and the riding of the member for Yukon. My travel time is about 12 hours each way, so 24 hours of my time going home for the weekend is spent on planes and in airports. I do not mind that too much because I get some work done. It is a bit of downtime. However, it is time away from work and away from my wife and family. Every time I fly home, I arrive at midnight and have jet lag the next morning. If I leave on a Thursday or Friday, the next day is pretty difficult. For that reason, I tend to only go home every other weekend or so. I would rather stay here in Ottawa and catch up on valuable work that I need to do here. I am not sure whether taking Friday off would help my situation. A lot of us already leave on Thursday evenings.

The member for Vancouver Quadra mentioned at the end of her speech about the effect on women and their families. A lot of MPs have moved their families to Ottawa. I wonder if my colleague could comment on how having Friday off would affect them if they had to work more during the week.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member has a wonderful answer for that. She will have to give it to you after. Unfortunately it is 5:30.

It being 5:30 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 51(2), the matter is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from May 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-230, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (firearm—definition of variant), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in favour of Bill C-230, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding a firearm definition of “variant”, introduced by the great member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. I would like to applaud that hard-working member for his great work to clarify this difficult and arcane issue and for his continued support for law-abiding firearms owners across Canada. I consider the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound a mentor, and I have benefited greatly from his wisdom.

The previous Conservative government also implemented the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act, which enhanced the safety of our communities while ensuring safe and sensible firearms policy and cutting red tape for law-abiding firearms owners.

The Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act made common-sense changes to protect public safety, such as making firearms safety courses mandatory for all first-time licence applicants and strengthening provisions to prohibit the possession of firearms for those convicted of domestic assault. These are tangible measures to protect public safety, and I am very happy to see my colleague continuing to pursue this common-sense solution as presented in Bill C-230.

Many Canadians may not be aware of the difficulties our current firearm classification system places on businesses, hunters, sport shooters, and all gun owners in Canada. However, it is part of a larger trend in overburdening law-abiding firearms owners for no reason, simply based on stigma, not fact. Thankfully, Bill C-230 seeks to clarify what a variant is and would lead to a more transparent classification process moving forward.

I am an avid outdoorsman. I enjoy hunting and fishing and living off the land. I have had a 35-plus year career in environmental conservation. I have been using firearms safely and responsibly for as long as I can remember, and there are millions of Canadians just like me.

Far too often Canadians who enjoy hunting or sport shooting are overburdened with red tape, and even attacked for taking part in the lifestyle they enjoy, which has been part of our heritage for hundreds of years. Thankfully, the previous Conservative government consistently stood up for law-abiding firearms owners, and we continue to do that today.

I will digress from my prepared remarks to reiterate my gratitude to the members yesterday who stood up and defeated Bill C-246 from all sides of the House, particularly from our side, the Conservatives, but on the Liberal side too. That was a victory for not only law-abiding firearms owners but also legitimate animal users, and it was one of my most precious times in Parliament to see that happen.

The legislation, Bill C-230, is common sense and is needed. It is common sense because it defines a term that is used 99 times without being defined. The term “variant” is used an incredible 99 times in the regulations prescribing firearms and other weapons, but has no legal definition, which obviously leads to confusion. It is absurd that we allow something as important as this to go undefined and remain open to ever-evolving interpretations.

We have seen this far too often recently, most notably the classification decision in 2014 regarding the Swiss Arms Classic Green rifle. This decision was made through the stroke of a pen of unelected bureaucrats and led to the RCMP reclassifying the Swiss Arms as a variant of the SG 540, a prohibited firearm in Canada.

Thousands of people who were perfectly law-abiding firearms owners who held non-restricted firearms licences, and I have a non-restricted firearms licence myself, were made criminals overnight by simply possessing a firearm that they could have legally owned for more than a decade. Fortunately, our Conservative government stepped in and provided amnesty for those firearms owners and passed the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act, which allowed those rifles to be reclassified to non-restricted, as they should have been all along.

It is unacceptable to allow for such an arbitrary system to exist without the clarification needed to prevent thousands of Canadians from becoming criminals unwittingly.

Beyond that, some of the classification decisions we have seen in recent memory have thus been baffling. Take, for example, the case of the Mossberg Blaze-47. The firearm has an outer plastic shell that is bent aesthetically to look like an AK-47, which is of course prohibited, as it should be. However, the firearm is not even close to being the same. It does not have any of the same parts. It is not the same size. It is not the same calibre, and it has a different magazine capacity. The guts of the firearm, so-called, are the same as the Mossberg Blaze rifle, which is non-restricted.

● (1735)

The government of day, and all of us, actually like to talk about evidence-based policy. The way that firearms like these are classified is a perfect example of ideology trumping evidence.

Somehow the RCMP firearms program deemed that to be a prohibited firearm, since it is a variant of the AK-47. It is no such thing. This is simply false. It merely looks similar. Talk about judging a book by its cover. That is not how to classify a firearm. It must be based on facts, on function, on structure, and on operation, not by the way it looks. To use an automobile metaphor, we could take a Volkswagen bug and plunk a Corvette body on top of that bug, but it is still a Volkswagen.

Not only do we have incorrect classifications coming forward to begin with, and then classifications changing without reason, it can also take years for the classification determination to be made at all. Any member who has a firearm retailer in their riding, and I have a number of them, has undoubtedly been approached about the length of time it takes for businesses to be provided with a classification prior to importation. Most firearms in Canada are actually imported.

Private Members' Business

I have heard of it literally taking years for a decision, meaning that by the time a certain firearm is permitted, the firearm is no longer a new product. If any of us were running a business that sells firearms legally, or trying to decide what products to import for sale to our stores, we would understandably be irate if the government forced us to wait months and even years before we could move forward with importing the product. If we allowed government to delay the entry of other consumer products like this, we would just be getting the iPhone 4 this year. I hope that is correct, because I do not even know what an iPhone 4 is.

Thankfully, in 2015, the member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, when he was minister of public safety, took action on this problem, issuing a directive to the RCMP. That allowed for 180 days to evaluate a firearm, decide its classification, and issue the firearms reference table. This classification number is needed to import that model into Canada. I doubt that many would claim that 180 days to make such a decision would be particularly rushed, and it provided certainty to retailers that a decision would be made. Unfortunately, the current government has rescinded that directive, allowing for those decisions to be delayed as long as it sees fit, with no means of accountability.

The bill seeks to help the RCMP in this regard, as it would provide more structure and certainty as to what a variant is, and ultimately make it easier to classify that firearm. This is about certainty. This is about making it clear and transparent as to what the rules are. The bill is not attempting to alter the specifications of what is non-restricted, restricted, or prohibited. This is trying to clarify what we base the term “variant” on when classifying firearms within those streams. This is not about trying to get firearms.

Just because the Liberal government says this is at odds with how the RCMP have classified in the past does not mean that the RCMP have been doing it correctly. In fact, more firearms owners would argue that they have not been.

It is time to help clarify what a variant is, based on facts and on how the firearm functions, not based on anything else. I urge my colleagues to consider the flaws in the current system and get on board with this legislation to provide a definition of a firearm variant. Allow us to accurately and consistently classify firearms while ensuring we protect public safety and the rights of legitimate hunters and sport shooters.

● (1740)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support my colleague, the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, and his private member's bill, Bill C-230, which seeks to amend the Criminal Code by defining the term “variant” as it pertains to firearms. I was honoured to be a seconder of this piece of legislation. As a Canadian firearm enthusiast, this is an issue that is dear to my heart.

Currently, the word “variant” is used extensively in the schedule of regulations that lists the firearms that are prohibited, restricted, or non-restricted in Canada. However, the term “variant” is not legally defined in either the code or the Firearms Act. This lack of definition has led to numerous firearm classification errors and much confusion.

Public Safety Canada uses the term “variant” as a way to classify future firearms that are generally of the same make and type as firearms already listed in the regulations, but have slight differences such as barrel length or cartridge size. Based on this undefined term, over 4,000 firearms have been classified as variants. It is because the term is vague and possesses no clear definition that numerous firearms have been prohibited or restricted because they were named as variants of other firearms.

Members might be aware of the Mossberg Blaze and Mossberg Blaze 47 case. The Blaze is a non-restricted .22 caliber rifle. The Blaze 47 is listed as an AK-47 variant, an assault rifle that is prohibited. Yet the Blaze and the Blaze 47 are virtually identical. They are both .22 caliber rifles, which is a common caliber of rifle in our country. The .22 is one of the most widely owned firearms in Canada.

How did a .22 caliber rifle come to be listed as an assault rifle? It happened partly because there was no clear definition of what a variant actually was, and because the definition was left open to interpretation. The Blaze and the Blaze 47 are essentially identical guns, but the Blaze 47 differs in appearance because it was manufactured with a plastic stock to make it resemble an AK-47.

When the widely available Blaze 47 was reclassified, Canadian firearms owners suddenly found themselves in possession of a prohibited firearm for no other reason than it had a plastic stock that made it look like an assault rifle. The reclassification did not take into account that the fundamental parts of both firearms were identical, and that the fundamental parts belonged to the non-restricted .22 rifle, not the assault rifle.

The inconsistent firearms classifications have repercussions for law-abiding firearm owners and sellers. Based on unclear guidelines, firearms that have been legally sold for decades can suddenly be reclassified as prohibited. That reclassification essentially bans them, leaving sellers with inventory they cannot sell and owners who may be at risk of prosecution when they suddenly find themselves in unlawful possession of a newly prohibited firearm.

I am sure everyone here agrees that there are certain weapons that should be, and rightly are, restricted or prohibited. No one is arguing about that. However, it is neither fair nor scientific to prohibit or restrict a firearm when the criteria for that restriction are unclear and imprecise, and sometimes come after the fact.

Canadian firearms owners and sellers alike have the right to demand that gun classifications be based on fact. We need a classification system that is clear and consistent. In fact, when it comes to public safety, the general public has a right to demand clarity. We must have confidence in the system that classifies firearms in Canada.

Private Members' Business

The member's bill would do just that. Bill C-230 proposes to amend the Criminal Code by defining the term "variant" to mean a firearm that has an unmodified frame or receiver of another firearm. This definition makes clear exactly what the essential criteria are for consideration when a firearm is a variant of another firearm. There is no guesswork involved. A firearm would no longer be restricted or prohibited simply because it looks like a restricted or prohibited firearm.

Logically, this makes sense. We would base our gun classification system on science rather than on unspecified criteria that are open to interpretation. Had this system been in place, the recent controversy regarding the reclassification of the Swiss Arms Classic Green rifles and their variants would never have occurred.

Since 2001, these rifles have been legally imported and sold in Canada. Depending on barrel length, they are either restricted or non-restricted. In 2014, an identical looking rifle showed up in Canada. However, beyond the look, it was repainted to look like the Classic Green. The firearm was made with a different receiver that made it into a military-style weapon.

• (1745)

Rather than ban the entire class of Swiss Arms rifles, a proper classification would have allowed the Classic Green to remain as it was while a similar-looking military weapon would have been banned. Not only does improper classification create headaches for firearms sellers and owners, the resulting uproar has led to further inquiries and calls for investigations that eat up taxpayer dollars unnecessarily.

Past instances of improper classifications have led to ministerial interventions, which have ultimately resulted in orders to declare amnesty for law-abiding firearms owners. While this is one way of dealing with unclear legislation, it is certainly not the most effective way.

I have given only two examples so far of problems that have occurred due to a piece of legislation that is left too vague to be effective. In the past, classification was based on imprecise parameters that led to glaring errors in firearm classification. The member is proposing a simple, yet highly effective amendment to the Criminal Code that would clearly define exactly what a firearm variant is.

The amendment would eliminate the need for guesswork. It would allow the public to have confidence in our firearm classification process and for proper administration of the firearms program. Bill C-230 would not only streamline the classification process, it would bring transparency and effectiveness to the classification system. I urge all of my colleagues to support this much-needed piece of legislation.

I have another story that I would like to share. I was recently at my local gas station, the Fas Gas in Calmar, Alberta. It had a series of miniature firearms at the counter, which are actually cigarette lighters. I was informed by a series of letters from my riding that some of them could be considered variant firearms and could even be placed on the variant firearm list. It is a cigarette lighter.

Another area where this term "variant" can come into play is in the sport of paintball. I am not sure if members have ever played

paintball, but it is a series of training activities with rifles that feel real and shoot paint rather than live rounds. Practice scenarios can be done with them. It is a growing sport in this country. A scenario could play out that one of these paintball markers could be classified as a variant of a firearm and, therefore, become a prohibited item in Canadian law.

I strongly support the bill introduced by the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. It would clarify the law, ensure that law-abiding citizens are not suddenly found to be in possession of prohibited items, and ensure that going forward there will be clear, concise, confident laws that we can all understand.

• (1750)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues from Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa and Peace River—Westlock for their very kind comments. However, the bottom line is that what they spoke about is true. This is a non-partisan bill. I have been a proud hunter and angler, and I love the outdoors. I have been doing it all my life, just as they have been. This is something that has been a thorn in my side.

None of the opposition parties have put up any speakers tonight. I would say that speaks loud and clear to their support for my private member's bill, and I look forward to that, as this is important to law-abiding gun owners and shooters.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have hunted and fished in your riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming. It is a great place. I know many of your constituents certainly support this bill.

There are a lot of constituents in the ridings of my good friends across the way from the Yukon and from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame in Newfoundland, who also support this bill.

Therefore, I am looking forward to having the unanimous support of the House when it comes time to vote.

I consulted with many people on this to get it right. I want to thank Angelo Lombardo and Greg Farrant from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, an organization of which I have been a proud member since I was 18 or 19 years old.

I also want to thank Tony Bernardo from the Canadian Shooting Sports Association.

We have talked to other people who have had a keen interest in this. My former colleague Garry Breikreuz is a big proponent for law-abiding gun owners in Canada. He is now retired from this place but is someone for whom I have a lot of respect and who has always had good advice on this issue.

With that I want to ask everyone in the House to not make this a partisan issue. This would be helpful to all involved, and less of an irritant, which it has been. I will not blame anyone. Some things have happened because of the lack of a clear definition, which my two colleagues pointed out so eloquently.

Therefore, I look forward to this bill going forward in this place.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The 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 until Wednesday, October 19, immediately before the time provided for private member' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am always honoured to rise in the House, but tonight I am not honoured by what we will be talking about, concerning the question I asked the justice minister, but which she refused to answer. It was regarding her decision to send lawyers into the Ontario Superior Court to try to overturn an award of compensation to a survivor of rape at the residential school in Spanish, Ontario.

My proudest day in the House was when former Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood up and made that historic apology. Where I come from, there were people who cried for days after that apology because they could not believe that justice would ever be done by a Government of Canada after what had happened to them.

They trusted the process. The process was the independent assessment process, where they could come in, talk about the abuse that was done to them, and tell their story in a non-confrontational manner. However, that is not what happened. These people came into the hearings with the federal government, which was defendant and which also had the legal responsibility to provide the documents.

In the case of St. Anne's Residential School, which was a house of horrors, they suppressed thousands and thousands of pages of police testimony. They lied about it. The ministers lied. They lied in hearings. They had cases thrown out. What kind of government could do that?

In the case of the decision on the residential school at Spanish, no one argued the merits of the case that this child had been raped by a priest, but the boy could not remember when he was raped. The IAP, agreeing with the justice department, had that case thrown out. It was thrown out under two re-reviews under the independent assessment process. It was brought to Justice Perell, who called this a "perverse" misapplication of justice. What else would any person call that?

To see the justice minister deciding to go in to challenge Justice Perell's ruling is shocking. It speaks to a larger pattern that we need to have the justice minister explain.

We had the case of a seven-year-old girl raped at St. Michael's Residential School. The government argued that it was not obligated to pay compensation because she was a day scholar student, even though Indian Affairs was paying for her attendance at that school.

We had the case of a child who had their arm broken and suffered paralysis. The government had the case thrown out, saying that under the administration, these were day scholars and that they, the government, were are not responsible even though they were paying for their attendance.

In the case of St. Anne's Residential School, they lied about the access. It had the documents. It had obtained them from Ontario Superior Court in 2003, because it said it was unfair for the defendant, that is Canada, to go into these hearings without knowing all the evidence. It was ordered to share that evidence and did not share the evidence.

It had a case thrown out of a survivor who was raped by a serial pedophile, and the government sat on the evidence. It went into the hearings and said there was no merit to his case.

Why has the justice minister refused to answer a single letter about this and why is the minister using the full force of Canadian law to fight these survivors and to continue this pattern of obstruction and denial of justice, and making a mockery out of the promise that was made in the House and by this Prime Minister when he said that he would stop fighting these victims and survivors in court?

● (1755)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to respond to the question I received from the member for Timmins—James Bay earlier, first acknowledging that we are here today on traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples.

The assertion by the member across is absolutely false. The government promised a new relationship with indigenous peoples and a new way of doing things. We agreed with and accepted the ruling of the tribunal and are committed to ending the discrimination. We have made immediate additional investments in child and family services on reserve, but we are also working with first nations communities, key organizations, front-line service providers, and others to jointly overhaul the system to reduce the number of children in care.

Adjournment Proceedings

There are more indigenous children in care today than at the height of the residential schools era. This is completely unacceptable and highlights a system that is not just underfunded but fundamentally flawed in its approach. Our priority is ensuring the health and well-being of first nation children. To do that, we need to transform the system with the benefit of hearing directly from youth and incorporating lived experiences into any new approach.

As further illustrated by the B.C. child advocate's report earlier this week, the current system is broken, and we are committed to redesigning it, in partnership with first nations and other partners, to ensure it is a truly child-centred approach.

There is no question that the system has been significantly and chronically underfunded. That is why the government has also provided \$71 million in immediate relief investments to first nations child and family services agencies. We are working closely with first nations child and family services to ensure the balance of that immediate relief investment flows this fiscal year.

Budget 2016 invests nearly \$635 million over five years in new funding, and \$177 million annually in new investments on an ongoing basis. We have also announced a new approach to Jordan's principle to make sure children receive the health services they need when they need them. That is backed up by up to \$382 million over three years in new funding.

By 2018-2019, Canada will be providing a combined annual new investment of \$282.1 million for first nations children and families on reserve through the first nations child and family services program and Jordan's principle, child-first initiative. The minister will be announcing specific details of how first nations and other partners will be engaged in this joint review and reform system in the near future.

• (1800)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that was from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources. Wow, what disrespect the government shows. The Minister of Justice, who gets paid on these files, is a no-show, day after day.

That member stood up and said what I said was not true. What was not true? Was it the fact that her government is fighting in court a rape survivor from Spanish?

The Liberals think that if they just talk indigenous stuff, it will somehow cover everything. They will get up and say indigenous this, new partnership that, and nation to nation.

We are talking about the fact that they lied at the hearings. We are talking about the minister refusing to take responsibility, and the fact that they lied in this House when they said they were not fighting the survivors at Ontario's Superior Court. That is a lie.

If that member had any level of credibility or—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I have two points. One is that “lying” is not a parliamentary word. It is unparliamentary. Two, I want to remind the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay that we cannot mention the presence or lack of presence in the House of a member.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I never said that the member lied. I said the government has lied.

It is a fascinating thing that it is perfectly okay to lie in court, but—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand on behalf of our government, as this is a new promised relationship with indigenous peoples and a new way of working together. From our earliest days of government, we have clearly stated that our priority is, first and foremost, the well-being and equality of indigenous children.

We have highlighted from early on the need to overhaul the child welfare system. In fact, even before the tribunal decision was released, we began preparing to make increased investments for prevention. We have since accepted the ruling of the tribunal, and are not waiting to end this discrimination.

We have made immediate investments in child and family services on reserves, and we are working closely with first nations communities, key organizations, front-line service providers, and others to overhaul the system together and to reduce the number of children in care. We want to fix the system for the sake of children and families, and we are doing so in full collaboration and partnership.

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise again to ask the government to pursue very actively the case of Pastor Hyeon Soo Lim. He is a Canadian citizen and the pastor of a church in Mississauga, which I believe is in the parliamentary secretary's riding. He is currently in prison in North Korea. Pastor Lim was sentenced to hard labour for life for alleged crimes against the state in North Korea.

Too often, I think, the current government declines to criticize violations of human rights in other countries. Too often we hear phrases like “countries whose values are different from ours”, or “countries who do things differently than we do”. I am concerned when I hear weak and relativistic language like that. It gives us the sense that values or rule of law standards are like items in a cafeteria. Some like roast beef and some prefer noodles.

Our differences with countries like North Korea and China are not matters of mere preference. We in Canada behave according to accepted international legal standards when it comes to justice and human rights. Countries that do not adhere to these basic standards of justice, human rights, and the rule of law are doing things that are wrong, and it is okay to say so. In fact, it is right and necessary to call that out.

Adjournment Proceedings

North Korea is not just a country with different values. To be frank, it is an open-air prison where 25 million people are trapped and, for the most part, starving. Here is what Human Rights Watch has to say about North Korea:

Under the rule of Kim Jong-Un, North Korea remains among the world's most repressive countries. All basic freedoms have been severely restricted under the Kim family's political dynasty. A 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry found that abuses in North Korea were without parallel in the contemporary world. They include extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions, and other sexual violence. North Korea operates secretive prison camps where perceived opponents of the government are sent to face torture and abuse, starvation rations, and forced labour. Fear of collective punishment is used to silence dissent. There is no independent media, functioning civil society, or religious freedom.

It is so important that we in the House and the government not let up pressure on North Korea, or its enablers in the region, or on its fellow travellers in other countries.

When I asked the original question, it was at a time when an American missionary named Kenneth Bae was in town to raise awareness of Pastor Lim's case. He had himself been imprisoned in North Korea, but the Americans were able to get him out.

I do understand and appreciate that many of the conversations that occur around these cases have to occur outside the public eye and that there has to be sensitivity to that. However, at the same time, if the Americans could do it, then we should be able to make use of the same techniques and achieve similar results. Therefore, I ask the parliamentary secretary again, as much as he is able, to give us an update on this case and to assure us that the government will do all of the necessary work in this case.

As well, although this was not part of the original question, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if he is able to give us an update on the case of Huseyincan Celil, a Canadian citizen imprisoned in China, who was seized from a third country. Mr. Celil is from the Uighur Muslim community.

I was very pleased to hear of the recent release of Mr. Garratt from China, but I would like to know if the case of Mr. Celil was also raised in the same context and to the same degree. Mr. Celil has been held in China for a very long time, after being taken from Uzbekistan.

Again, I would underscore that human rights questions are not subjective matters of national preference. They are matters of basic accepted norms of the international order, and it is important that we call that out—

• (1805)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his ongoing commitment to issues of human rights and for his advocacy on issues of Canadians abroad. I respect his passion and commitment to raising these issues. I will always work with him and my colleagues in the House of Commons to ensure that obviously we do our best to help Canadians abroad and if they are in trouble, to bring them back home. We will constantly speak up for Canadian values. We are not just talking about Canadian values. We are talking about universal human rights.

We should always be consistent in our defence of universal human rights and always speak up for those rights.

Where I differ with my hon. colleague sometimes is not that we do not speak up on human rights issues, but he may want us to use a different tone or a different approach, and I respect that. A healthy discussion and a healthy debate needs to be done here in the House of Commons and in the public domain. I will always welcome that conversation and I am happy to engage him on it all the time. I welcome his input.

Let me first talk about the case of Pastor Lim. Obviously our government is gravely concerned about the well-being of Pastor Lim and his health and his rights. I have met with Pastor Lim's son and I want to take a moment to congratulate Jim on the fact that he now is a new father. It really saddens the family and all of us frankly that the grandfather is not with his son celebrating the arrival of his first grandson. The fact that the family has welcomed a new child but the grandfather is not here with them is a difficult, bittersweet moment. It only adds to the level of urgency with which we want to see Pastor Lim return home. I have also met with members of the Korean community who passionately care about the well-being of Pastor Lim and I will continue to do so.

I want to assure them and my hon. colleague that our government is approaching this with the highest degree of urgency. He is right. I wish I could publicly share with my colleague all the work that we have been doing and will continue to do. I just cannot do that for the benefit of Pastor Lim. In order to respect all of the efforts and ensure that hopefully we have some success, I need to respect the privacy and the diplomatic confidentiality of the many efforts we are putting into this case.

I want to also assure the House and my hon. colleague, and everybody who cares about this case, that we are constantly re-evaluating our approach. We are constantly assessing and reassessing what we are doing to identify creative and innovative ways to deal with this case. This is an important matter. I want to assure the member and others that we are actively engaged on this case.

To the member's other question about the case of Mr. Celil, we are obviously concerned about his well-being. Mr. Celil's deportation to China from Uzbekistan happened when I was serving as a member of Parliament in my first term in 2006. It has been almost 10 years and I cannot believe Mr. Celil is still in prison and we have not been able to get even access to him because the Chinese government is denying the fact that he has Canadian citizenship. We will continue to push for at least first consular access and then his release.

• (1810)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I do want to affirm many of the sentiments expressed by my colleague, in particular the fact that he started out by saying that we are not just talking about Canadian values, but we are talking about universal values. May I say respectfully that is a sentiment that I would like to hear from the foreign affairs minister as well as from the parliamentary secretary, because the tone is often one very different from the one we heard tonight. I want to affirm and recognize the tone at least being used by the parliamentary secretary. From him tonight we are hearing it said the right way.

When it comes to the issue of Mr. Celil, this is why it is so important that we be willing to call out the realities of the Chinese so-called justice system. My colleague is absolutely right. This is an innocent man who has been imprisoned in China for 10 years. He is a Canadian citizen and he has not been permitted consular access. How could we contemplate an extradition treaty with a country that has that kind of so-called justice system?

We need to be very clear about what is not a justice system at all in this case.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments, but I do want to assure him that what I am saying is exactly what the Minister of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly been saying. Those are universal values that we, as Canadians, hold dearly. He has never shied away from speaking up, nor has the Prime Minister, even during his visit to China.

Let me repeat that I cannot reveal some of the work, in fact much of the work, that we have been doing on Mr. Celil's case. In order for us to help Mr. Celil, which I know the hon. member wants us to do that, because that is why he is standing here today, we need to be engaged with China. We need to sit across the table from China to bring up the cases of Mr. Celil and others.

Today, we had a visitor with us, Mr. Kevin Garratt. That is a great example of how engagement can produce results.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to follow up on my remarks of June 7, when I addressed the issue of pipelines and pipeline development, in particular the steel industry. I asked the original question because of my interest in and understanding of how the Canadian economy interlinks.

Our manufacturing sector, represented by the steel manufacturers, is often related to and linked with our natural resource sector. That is very important, because the Canadian economy is linked from coast to coast.

We see this most clearly in the steel industry, the industry that I was urging the government to support. I was urging the government to support it by approving and standing up for, if not necessarily directly but at least in principle, the energy east, northern gateway, and other pipelines. I understand that the regulatory system has to go through the process but, in principle, a government can stand behind it and say, "If environmental conditions are met, we support the underlying principle".

Let me talk about and note the value of the Canadian steel industry and why we should support pipelines in order to support steel jobs.

The Canadian steel industry employs 22,000 Canadians in 19 plants in five provinces, with spinoffs in iron ore mining from Quebec; processing in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; manufacturing in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; and recycling in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. This does not even include the hundreds of jobs in Alberta and British Columbia involved in the production of metallurgical or coking coal. It is truly a national industry that we need to support.

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My home province of Saskatchewan has a big part in making pipe for Canada's oil and gas pipelines. This is the safest way to transport oil across Canada, and natural gas, as well.

The average steel industry job brings each worker \$75,000 a year. Yet, Canadians in steel industries are losing their jobs and Canadian metallurgical coal mines are being shut down.

What do we need to do?

We need to support pipelines that can be built across this country, to support steel jobs.

An employed steel industry worker can earn enough to pay for a mortgage, to support their family, and to build a life in a community. These jobs cannot be replaced by lower income jobs elsewhere.

In my home province of Saskatchewan, dozens of high-paying jobs were lost in Regina when steelworkers were laid off from the Evraz plant in Regina.

If we look at other places, like northern Ontario, these are good-paying jobs.

In the riding of Sault Ste. Marie, the steel industry, including companies like Essar Steel Algoma Inc. and Tenaris Algoma Tubes, would surely welcome more business.

Our domestic steel producers across Canada should be buying thousands of kilometres of specialized steel pipe, but they need a government that is willing to speak out for them. They need a government that is willing to say, "Once the environmental processes are taken care of, we will support pipelines across Canada, pipelines to Vancouver and pipelines to New Brunswick".

Pipelines are there. The private industry will pay for them. We in the government, we in the House of Commons, we in the opposition need to be supportive of these good jobs for hard-working Canadians.

● (1815)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government understands the importance of Canada's resources to the strength of our economy and the quality of our lives. Our government has a clear vision for how to leverage those resources. As both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources have said, we must continue to generate wealth from our abundant natural resources to fund our transition to a lower-carbon economy.

However, we also know that we will not be able to proceed with major resource projects unless the public has faith in how they are reviewed. That is something the previous government just did not understand. Perhaps that is why it did not get one kilometre of pipeline built to tidewater during its entire time in office.

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Our government has a different approach, one that listens to Canadians, respects indigenous communities and their traditional indigenous knowledge, and one that bases decisions on firm facts and sound science. That is why we have expanded consultations, including through ministerial panels, to build an environmental review process that carries the confidence of Canadians by meaningfully engaging with indigenous communities, modernizing the National Energy Board, and establishing an interim strategy with guiding principles to give proponents certainty and the process transparency.

Will all of these efforts lead to unanimity on any particular project? Of course not. We understand that there are strongly held views on all sides, which is exactly why it is so important that Canadians have the opportunity to be heard. At the end of the day, Canadians will be able to say, whether they agree with a decision or not, that the process was fair, the evidence was weighed, and their voices were heard.

We are also investing in clean technologies, energy efficiency, and renewable sources of energy. There is tremendous opportunity for Canada to lead in the lower-carbon economy of tomorrow and these investments will position us to do so. That is how to develop the consensus required to get our resources to market.

The hon. member may think differently. He may think it wise to approve a pipeline before a federal regulator has even reviewed it. We do not. As the Minister of Natural Resources said, “We think a better idea is to have a transparent process, with predictable timelines and ways in which Canadians can let government know what they think is in the national interest”.

Then our government can take all of the comments and recommendations to make the right decision, the environmentally responsible decision, the balanced decision, one that develops the resources we need while protecting the environment we all cherish.

● (1820)

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, first, let me remind my hon. colleague that pipelines did get built under the previous government, the Keystone pipeline and the Clipper pipeline being two of several examples.

I also want to remind the hon. member that the Conservative government did nothing to impede or hurt the construction and growth of these industries. The carbon tax grab just announced by the Prime Minister will do grave damage. We cannot build an economy by taxing natural resources. If we hurt natural resources, we hurt the steel industry. If we stop the steel industry from growing across Canada, people lose jobs. Because of the Liberal carbon tax grab the other day, good, hard-working Canadians in the steel industry will be unemployed.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to a future where a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand, and we are well along in this important work. We are helping to ensure Canada's vast natural resources are developed in a way that commands public confidence and respects the environment.

We are ensuring that the National Energy Board has the expertise it needs. We are engaging meaningfully with indigenous communities, taking into account indigenous traditional knowledge, respecting scientists, and listening to Canadians. Why? It is because we understand the importance of natural resources, not just to our past but to our future, a lower-carbon future where economic prosperity and environmental responsibility are not competing interests but complementary to one another.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:23 p.m.)

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