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Friday, April 7, 2017

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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, April 7, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

DISPOSITION OF PRIMA FACIE QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today on a question of privilege following yesterday's proceedings concerning the question of privilege raised by the members for Milton and Beauce. As I will establish in my argument, no other government in history has treated a Speaker's finding of a prima facie case of privilege in such a reckless and cavalier manner as we saw yesterday. The way the Liberals tried to cover it, by trying to have the committee self-initiate a privilege study, could lead to unintended but very dangerous consequences.

As we know, the Speaker found a prima facie case of privilege on this matter. The hon. member for Milton then moved the appropriate motion, and a debate ensued. After question period, the hon. member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert moved that the House do now proceed to orders of the day, and the motion was adopted.

Mr. Speaker, I am now asking that you again find a prima facie case of privilege on the basis of the evidence and submissions tendered last month as well as the very relevant precedent of the Speaker's own ruling yesterday morning.

Last evening, following proceedings in the House, which I outlined, I gave notice to the Speaker, via the table, and pursuant to Standing Order 48, of my intention to rise on this question of privilege this morning when the House opened. In other words, I am raising this at the earliest opportunity.

This might seem like the movie *Groundhog Day*. I am asking that we have a do-over of yesterday. Let me explain why and why it is procedurally in order.

Page 148 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, makes it clear that motions to proceed to orders of the day are in order during debate on a privilege motion. Page 149 explains the consequences of such a motion being adopted. It states:

[Should] a motion to proceed to Orders of the Day be adopted, then the privilege motion is superseded and dropped from the *Order Paper*.

The same point is reiterated at page 541. That is why the privilege motion is not printed in today's Order Paper and is not under debate today, even though the House has not come to a decision one way or the other.

What we got yesterday from the hon. member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert was some procedural legerdemain, a magic trick. She said that her colleague filed a notice of motion to initiate a study on this issue at the procedure and House affairs committee.

Though we are not generally supposed to trouble the chair with procedural matters in committee, I will say that a point of order was raised last evening concerning the inadmissibility of that notice of motion. In short, and for the context of the House, the concern is that it goes beyond the order of reference for the procedure and House Affairs committee found in Standing Order 108(3)(a). The deputy government whip noted at committee last evening that the rule contains the words “among other matters”, which she believes gives her good authority to proceed with her notice.

In my view, that phrase captures those things that are provided for in the Standing Orders, such as the automatic referral of statutory reports under Standing Order 32, such as the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 2015 general election and the time-sensitive review of it, which has been held hostage by the government House leader's discussion paper; or by an order of reference from the House, such as bills and cases of privileges.

The chair, mere moments before midnight, informed the committee that the clerk ruled it in order. Make of that what you will, Mr. Speaker. On the strength of that so-called ruling, a majority at the procedure and House affairs committee can now, and in the future, simply decide, anytime it wishes, to study some issue and write a report leading to recommendations to find someone in contempt of Parliament, to jail people, or even to expel members. Imagine what Parliament is going to become during a minority government. As I said in my opening comments, this is an unintended but very dangerous consequence.

Privilege

Let me be very clear. The Conservative Party, Her Majesty's loyal opposition, wants to see this critical issue studied by the procedure and House affairs committee. Our main concern here is that the government not disregard the rules of this place, and we feel the need to clarify whether the committee can deal with the privilege matter without a proper reference from the House.

By reviving the question of privilege in the House, we take the opportunity to ensure that the procedure and House affairs committee can study this important issue, this question of our rights as parliamentarians, with the full confidence of a sturdy procedural footing.

● (1010)

Turning to an explanation of the procedural consequences of yesterday's manoeuvre by the government, the House did not decide for or against the merits of a committee study on this question of privilege. Therefore, the so-called "same question rule" is not triggered.

Citation 558(1) of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada*, sixth edition, states:

An old rule of Parliament reads: "That a question being once made and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again but must stand as the judgment of the House."

In re-finding a prima facie case of privilege, you would not risk contravening this ancient rule. In fact, a consequence of the motion adopted yesterday is, I would submit, to put us back to where we started. For example, if that motion was moved during concurrence debate, it would take the actual motion debated off the Order Paper, but any other motion on notice concerning the same report could be moved the very next day. The member whose motion was flushed, so to speak, could simply re-file another notice of motion and begin anew.

The same goes for motions of instruction, which can be moved during routine proceedings. That is to say, one is back where one began and can reinitiate the same identical proceeding in the usual fashion appropriate to that class of motion. In the case of concurrence and instruction motions, that, of course, would be giving 48-hours' notice by way of the Notice Paper. In the case of a privilege motion, I say it would be in raising a question of privilege asking you to find a prima facie case of privilege and moving the appropriate privilege motion.

Canvassing O'Brien and Bosc for precedent privilege debates, where the motion offered by the hon. member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert was carried, and Appendix 15 of the volume, which offers a handy table of cases between 1958 and when our current privilege procedure was set down in 2008, shows that it has never been done before. Each prima facie case of privilege catalogued from pages 1289 to 1297 shows that every privilege motion debated was either adopted or defeated by the House of Commons. Each case of privilege since 2008, again, saw the relevant motion come to a vote, with only one exception. That exception was the case of the privilege motion moved by the hon. minister of fisheries and oceans on June 18, 2013, which happened to be the last sitting day of the session. The debate had been adjourned, as governments are much more likely to propose during privilege debates. A prorogation followed before the House sat again.

Let me state clearly that never has a motion to proceed to orders of the day been before adopted during a privilege debate. This is completely unprecedented, and, I would argue, is an extremely dangerous precedent that denies members their fundamental right to vote in this place. Why is that? As a matter of logistics, I would say that it is to avoid this *Groundhog Day* atmosphere I described earlier. As a matter of principle, it is a simple acknowledgement of the importance of allowing the House to take a decision on a motion concerning the privileges of this House. These privileges are guaranteed in section 18 of the Constitution Act, 1867, often referred to by its original title, the British North America Act. The law of parliamentary privilege has been held by the Supreme Court of Canada to be a body of constitutional law, a body of law on equal footing with that of the charter.

As I said, this situation is entirely unprecedented. I think the appropriate path forward lies in the analogous situation of privilege cases that get revived following prorogation. Allow me to offer the Chair two examples.

On May 26, 2003, at page 6413 of the *Debates*, Mr. Speaker Milliken found a prima facie case of privilege initiated by Mr. Boudria, and the procedure and House affairs committee was tasked with a study. Parliament was prorogued that November, before the committee could report. On February 6, 2004, at page 243 of the *Debates*, Mr. Speaker Milliken found a prima facie case of privilege raised by Mr. Breitzkreuz, which revived the earlier case.

The Chair ruled at the time, stating:

As I indicated in the previous session, this was a bona fide question of privilege. Accordingly, in my view, the question remains a question of privilege. The committee did not completely report on the matter which it is entitled to do. Accordingly I give the hon. member leave to move his motion.

In a second incident, one I referenced a moment ago, on June 18, 2013, at page 18550 of the *Debates*, the Speaker's predecessor, the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, found a prima facie case of privilege raised by the hon. minister of fisheries and oceans. That case, in fact, had actually been raised by the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, the member whose motion has sparked the very debate going on at the procedure and House affairs committee, on the unprecedented power grab proposed by the Liberals.

● (1015)

In any event, as I mentioned earlier, prorogation followed before debate could be concluded and a vote taken, so on October 17, 2013, the member made a request to revive the case of privilege, and at page 66 of the *Debates*, the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle said:

For the same reasons given in my ruling last session, in my view, the matter remains a prima facie question of privilege, and accordingly, I now invite the hon. member...to move his motion.

These two precedent situations stand for two different propositions I want you to consider, Mr. Speaker. First, as I mentioned in introducing them, they are analogous to the situation in which we find ourselves this morning. A prima facie case of privilege had been found, a motion had been proceeded with, and some subsequent procedural interruption came along before the privilege process could come full circle.

Second, you will note that members who raised the second question of privilege to revive the matter were not the same members who raised the initial prima facie case of privilege. For that matter, in those cases, the second motion was moved by a member of an entirely different political party.

To conclude, I do not believe that the Liberal trick yesterday was procedurally appropriate, and worse, it could create a dangerous precedent if it becomes standing operating procedure around this place.

You, Mr. Speaker, are currently seized with a couple of other questions of privilege raised by my colleague on which we eagerly await rulings. However, it becomes a natural concern to me if the Liberal government's go-to move will now be quickly to move to proceed to orders of the day, killing the privilege motions, should you find prima facie cases while there is an offer of a fig leaf of a procedurally suspect notice of motion at committee.

This is not the way to handle the serious matters raised by the Speaker's ruling, serious matters which, as a prima facie case of privilege, warrant priority consideration over all other business of this House. In fact, it smacks of utter arrogance by the government against the Speaker, the guardian of the rights and privileges of members of this House as an institution. No other government in history has, as I related moments ago, treated a Speaker's finding of a prima facie case of privilege in such a reckless and cavalier manner.

If we think about it, we are in an ironic situation. We debated a motion respecting two members being denied the opportunity to vote because of the issues addressed in yesterday's ruling. The government then resorted to a too-clever-by-half manoeuvre, which attempted to deny all 338 members of this House the right to vote on the issue concerning our privileges as parliamentarians that allow us to represent our constituents. This shocking development is sadly consistent with the earlier steps we saw in Motion No. 6 last year, and now the unilateral power grab cloaked in a pleasant-sounding label of a discussion paper.

Please note that we, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, support our Speaker, and we understand the challenging role the Chair has and most certainly support the Speaker's first ruling. In fact, we supported it to the point of wanting to be absolutely certain that it receives the priority it deserves at the procedure and House affairs committee.

Mr. Speaker, assuming your assessment has not changed since yesterday morning's ruling, I am now prepared to move the appropriate motion to vindicate the Chair's established role in deciding prima facie questions of privilege so the House can make decisions on these serious topics.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate and understand the concern that the member across the way has brought forward in the form of a question of privilege. As much as I am sympathetic to the arguments presented, I do not believe that the member has a question of privilege, and I would like to expand on why I believe that to be the case.

Privilege

If you were to look at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, it states at page 149:

If a motion to adjourn the debate or the House is adopted, debate on the privilege motion resumes the following sitting day. However, should the previous question be negatived, or a motion to proceed to Orders of the Day be adopted, then the privilege motion is superseded and dropped from the Order Paper.

I would suggest that what took place yesterday was indeed very much in order.

I would like to address a couple of the concerns that the member across the way has raised.

It goes without saying that unfettered access to the House of Commons means unfettered access, not just to the House itself but to the entire parliamentary precinct. That consists of this wonderful beautiful chamber in which we are having this discussion today, and our committee rooms, whether they are on or off the Hill, and our offices. We need to have unfettered access to all of these critical working environments. In most part, that is in fact what takes place. When I say "most part", I would like to think that 99.9% of the time, we have unfettered access to these areas. However, I am aware that there are times, unfortunately, when our access has been challenged.

I have sat on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, as have members across the way. Unfortunately, I have had to deal with this issue at the committee on more than one occasion. I have heard many members talk in this chamber, and, rightfully so, about being denied access. I do not question the importance of it, and this government does not question it either. No member of the House of Commons would question the importance of our having unfettered access to this place. In fact, I was quite touched by one member of the NDP who stood in his place and pulled out his identification card. If one reads the back of the identification card, it reinforces that aspect.

I have been a parliamentarian for a number of years. One of the things I have learned over the last six years is the importance of our standing committees and the fine work they do. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has been a fairly active committee as of late. It sits twice a week, as do many other committees. Members on that committee have all sorts of things on their plate.

Yesterday, I spoke in the House about our unfettered access, and the issues raised by the member for Milton and other members. I highlighted the fact that the standing committee understands and appreciates the issue that we were debating. I suggested that at the end of the day, this committee can establish its own priorities. As a standing committee, it has the ability to do that. It could have a subcommittee look into the matter at hand to find out how to best deal with the issue.

● (1020)

It is not the first time that an access issue has occurred, and maybe it is because of the construction or other activities. I believe there are a number of reasons that have caused unfettered access to be violated.

Privilege

I would look to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to see what it might want to do. I only say this as a recommendation. The committee can maybe establish a subcommittee to try to get a general overview of this, given the number of times in recent years that there has been a violation. That might be something it wants to do. I do not want to tie its hands in any way.

No member who stood to speak yesterday during the debate said that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should not deal with the issue. I believe all members of the House recognize the value of the committee dealing with the issue. In recognizing the importance of unfettered access, we should also recognize that the procedure and House affairs committee has initiated some actions already that will deal with the question of privilege addressed yesterday by the Speaker. I believe that is very encouraging.

In fact, during the debate, a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs moved a motion. I understand there were concerns expressed last night with respect to that particular motion. However, another motion was moved, and I would like to share that motion with the House.

This motion was moved in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a), the Committee examine the subject matter of the Question of Privilege raised by the member for Milton regarding the free movement of Members within the Parliamentary precinct.

For clarification purposes, the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas gave notice of this motion yesterday, and it was ruled in order by the chair.

● (1025)

What we know for a fact is that the Speaker made a ruling yesterday and a debate ensued following that ruling. Then, according to our own rule book, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, a rule allowed us to go to orders of the day. There was no violation of our institution. We went to orders of the day and the day continued. Then, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs took it upon itself to deal with this. We should allow for the procedure and House affairs committee to do the fine work it does to address the issue.

With respect to the privilege that the member across the way raised, I understand and am sympathetic to what the member is talking about with respect to unfettered access. We, in government, agree with that. However, if the member were to look at our rules and procedures, he will find that what took place yesterday was in order. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is doing a fine job in trying to deal with this issue, and we should not attempt to usurp what the individual members of Parliament in that committee are attempting to do.

I believe the matter from yesterday will be addressed in a very timely fashion. As such, I do not believe that the member's question of privilege is valid, in the sense that the rules were followed yesterday that allowed us to go to orders of the day, and the issue that was raised yesterday is being dealt with at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

With those few thoughts, we are prepared to move forward to debate Bill C-25, if that is the desire of the House.

● (1030)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order relating to the question of privilege.

I would like to begin by thanking my—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I apologize for interrupting the member.

Comments are getting pretty long, and we are getting into time for government orders. I would ask all those who speak to be as brief as possible.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that was meant for the member who just spoke, who can be long-winded at times.

I would like to add a few points to my Conservative colleague's arguments.

[English]

Yesterday, the ruling was pretty clear on the importance of the issue. With being here for nearly six years now, it is something that has come up many times. The Speaker did say:

The importance of the matter of members' access to the precinct, particularly when there are votes for members to attend, cannot be overstated. It bears repeating that even a temporary denial of access, whether there is a vote or not, cannot be tolerated.

[Translation]

That is very important. Contrary to what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons suggested, nobody is second-guessing the committee's work. What is at issue is the fact that the government prevented the House of Commons from exercising its authority on a matter before it under the Speaker's authority.

[English]

Quickly, being mindful of the request to be sensitive to the time, I want to read from O'Brien and Bosc, page 141:

Great importance is attached to matters involving privilege. [...] The function of the Speaker is limited to deciding whether the matter is of such a character as to entitle the Member who has raised the question to move a motion which will have priority over Orders of the Day; that is, in the Speaker's opinion, there is a *prima facie* question of privilege. If there is, the House must take the matter into immediate consideration. Ultimately, it is the House which decides whether a breach of privilege or a contempt has been committed.

[Translation]

We and our Conservative colleagues believe that, by playing these procedural games, the government prevented the House from exercising its authority on this issue.

[English]

The last quote I want to read is from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 62:

Any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House, even though no breach of any specific privilege may have been committed, is referred to as a contempt of the House. Contempt may be an act or an omission.

Privilege

[*Translation*]

This is a very important issue. Considering the importance that the Speaker ascribed to this matter in his decision, considering that this is a key issue that comes up regularly, and considering that the government prevented us from proceeding with debate and prevented the House from exercising its authority, if this is not a question of privilege, it is certainly a question of contempt of the House or at least a question that has a significant impact on members' ability to do their job.

[*English*]

I will end on that. I think it is critical that the House be allowed to be seized with these matters, and in particular in the current context, where we see, as my Conservative colleague pointed out, the government attempting to unilaterally change the rules of this place. It is critical that we have the ability, as parliamentarians and as this place, to be able to be seized with this question and decide as a collective on this question, and not have the government unilaterally pushing us into its agenda that it feels we should be seized with.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that what you just heard will enable you to make an informed decision on the members' ability to do their job and move forward on an issue that the Speaker considers to be crucial. The issue of members' access to the House of Commons comes up far too often. This is a vital question of privilege.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that you would allow us to weigh in on this very important issue. I understand that your job is to manage this place and to ensure that government business is able to proceed as planned.

My concern, and why I would like to make a few comments regarding this, is that this goes to the very heart of what we as parliamentarians do and how we function in this place. It has been said previously, and it has been said more and more, that power is being centralized more and more in one office, the Prime Minister's Office. In this case, whereby the Liberals have the majority, if an edict from the Prime Minister comes down to the Liberal members of Parliament, they then can enforce the Prime Minister's wishes because they simply have the majority.

This is vital not just to our privileges, because somehow we as members of Parliament need a privilege, but we are elected by the people of Canada to uphold our democracy. It is the tools we have in the House of Commons, which we are able to use to uphold that democracy, that are at risk. If we let little things go, these little things become bigger and bigger. A lot of the discussion over the last couple of weeks has been around potential changes to the Standing Orders. We have not been talking always about the specifics of those changes. There have been some specifics, but a lot of the concern has been around the way the government is trying to ram through these changes.

What we saw happen yesterday is in that same vein. It is pretty well the same type of behaviour, and if it is let go and nothing happens, it is clear the government will do what it wants to do regardless of the process. Again, this is not about the end result. I

think we all agree that this question of privilege should be looked at at PROC. However, there is a process and the way that PROC receives this, and that is by the House being able to vote on this question of privilege.

No one can argue that the motion moved yesterday was a privilege motion. The Speaker ruled that it was a privilege motion and as such it was granted the status that it deserved. It seems to me that any member could now put the motion that flowed from the ruling yesterday on notice and that notice should would appear as a privilege motion on the Order Paper of the next day. We see this as common sense. A superseded concurrence motion goes back on the Order Paper as a concurrence motion, as would a superseded travel motion, for example. All superseded motions can return to the Order Paper with the same status as it left the Order Paper.

If the Speaker rules that the motion should go back as something else, such as a private member's motion, then I am curious to hear what the Speaker's explanation would be as to why a privilege motion would be the only type of motion that would morph into something else by virtue of the adoption of a motion to proceed to orders of the day.

What is more disturbing in that scenario is the fact that this magical metamorphosis produces inferior results. That is an insult to every member in the House. Members' privileges are just that, privileged, and they should be treated as such. Nothing else will do. The right of due process was taken away from two members who missed the vote on March 22. It is one thing for the majority to stand in its place and vote against a privilege motion, and that might happen. However, it is another for Liberals to hide behind a superseding motion where that matter has neither been decided in the affirmative or negative.

I would respectfully say that nobody can stand by and allow the rights of members to disappear into the ether. Their rights cannot be snatched away on a technical glitch, no matter how much the government would like it to be so. I know the Liberals are trying to make some case that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will be dealing with the issue. However, they are dealing with it in an unorthodox manner, and that is not the point. That is why this is so important.

The normal due process in matters of privilege has three elements. First, the matter is raised. If the Speaker finds a *prima facie* question of privilege, he invites the member to move a motion. Then we have debate in the House where the members give their opinions on the matter. If the House so chooses, it can send the matter to committee. If the House chooses to send the matter to committee, then the committee has the testimony of all those members who participated in the debate to consider.

● (1035)

The process of yesterday is missing a few parts: the House has not pronounce itself on the question; members have not concluded their remarks, since the motion has not yet been decided or adjourned; and, the committee does not have a proper reference to consider the matter and even if it pretends that it does, it is missing all the opinions of those members who wanted to speak.

Privilege

What about the fact that the two members who missed the vote were members of the opposition and their right to due process was snatched away by a majority of government members? Do we not believe and think that should be a concern to all of us and to you, Mr. Speaker? It fits right into the theme of this Parliament. Every reform idea proposed by the government attempts to strip away the rights from the opposition, from Motion No. 6 to the recent batch of Standing Orders changes and the botched attempt and approach taken by the Liberal government to process them.

I appreciate being allowed to intervene on this. It is of vital importance. I ask, Mr. Speaker, that you rule on this matter and allow the privilege motion to be decided by the House in the manner suggested by my colleague from Perth—Wellington, or by a member placing the motion back on the Order Paper, where it belongs. We need to deal with this in the proper process. We cannot allow a majority or a different unorthodox process to take this out of the House and illegitimately give it to the committee, although we agree with the result but it has to be done in the proper way. We ask that the Speaker would make that ruling.

• (1040)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find myself a bit surprised to be standing again today on another question of privilege, which is, in fact, very much related to the question of privilege to which I spoke yesterday. The accumulation of these things happening together is a signal to everybody. I hope it is particularly a signal to the Speaker that something is going very wrong in this place. It is of a matter of great importance and it is a hard thing for most normal people to understand. This has to do with centuries of history of how this place works and rules people consider to be arcane, but they are important rules. They are the foundation upon which this democracy exists and upon which it has been built for generations.

While the government said that it respected that privileges had been offended, we saw the government's double manoeuvre yesterday in choosing to vote to extinguish any effort to protect those privileges. Then through another device, it tried to mislead and pretend it was protecting them in a fashion that was entirely inappropriate and not permitted under our rules.

Questions of privilege belong to this chamber. Questions of privilege are not government legislation. They take precedence over government business on the orders of the day. They take precedence because they are profound. A question of privilege and a motion of privilege are the property not of the government but of this chamber.

Yesterday, the majority government members took a decision to reject the effort to protect those privileges. They now try through words to escape the consequences of that decision and pretend they did not reject the effort to defend members' privileges. That is exactly what they did yesterday.

The more serious question is this. Are we now going to change how privilege and the defence of privileges of members works in this place from this point going forward? Is privilege no longer a question for the House to decide? Is it now a question of government motions and government initiatives that happen at a committee level? Are we going to so diminish the question of privilege in this

place? Are we going to create that as the route through which it is done?

That is why this calls out for the intervention of the Speaker. There are rare occasions in the history of a Parliament when events begin to take a course and, for whatever reason, people get too clever by half. We get folks who think they can find ways to change rules, make new rules and make life more efficient for themselves. Some people call this campaign brain or political brain, and they get too clever by half. In a time like this, the circumstances cry out for a Speaker to say, no, that it is the duty of the Speaker to defend the rights and the privileges of members of this place. That is the most profound and important duty of the Speaker. That is what the Speaker is elected by the members to do, not to aid and abet a government effort to make its life more efficient. I would never suggest our Speaker has done that thus far. I am very pleased that has not happened. However, there comes a time when passivity is not sufficient.

When this question of privilege was raised, it raised a question of profound importance. It called out for that intervention to protect all of our rights and privileges. Let us remember what we talked about. The government is saying that we should not worry, that privilege can be taken care of by the initiative of a government member at a committee. I do not see that anywhere. I do not see it anywhere in the big green books. I do not see it anywhere in Erskine May. I do not see it anywhere in centuries of Speakers' decisions. Committees deal with questions of privilege after this place, sitting as a court, has taken a decision on them and referred them there. We are to sit in the second instance, with you, Mr. Speaker, in the first instance in making the prima facie finding. Then this place, as a court in the second instance, makes the decision on a reference. That is the proper process.

• (1045)

The government, for whatever reason, while saying it protected the privileges, took a decision yesterday to extinguish and snuff out the proper effort through the processes that belong to us to defend those privileges. Every member on that side who voted to do so took that decision that the right of a member to vote was not really important enough for them. They were going to have it drop off of the agenda of this place. Now the Liberals try, through some sleight of hand, to make the trick where they pretend they will really defend it elsewhere. It is not the process that does that, and if it does it, they are not really defending the rights and privileges of members at all. It is a profoundly troubling manoeuvre.

It comes in the context, and the context is important, of these other events that are taking place, because the Liberals are seeking to change the rules once again here. They are seeking to change the rules at a committee. They are doing so at the same time as saying, "Oh, we just want good faith discussions. Trust us." It is the same as, "Oh, this kind of motion is another good way of doing it. Just trust us."

One of the ways this House of Commons has worked, again for generations, has been through trust. Sure, we could have partisanship

Privilege

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, and I apologize to my colleague for interrupting him, but I just want to raise an issue. I think all members in this House were expecting, as you were, at the opening of the doors, a motion from the government to hear from the Prime Minister on matters of great importance.

I just want to raise in this House that while we continue to debate this critical issue of privilege, whenever the government is ready, we are also ready to hear from the Prime Minister on important matters, and we still have not heard that motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, if the member has heard something that I have not heard, that there has been full agreement, then maybe we could move ahead.

I would encourage the member opposite to work with his office and see if in fact there is an agreement, as we wait to see if there is a sense of co-operation on the issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I give the floor back to the hon. member for York—Simcoe, I would ask him to get to a conclusion of sorts. I do not want to cut it off short, but there are other members who want to speak to this and time is limited this morning. It is important to hear from as many people as possible. It is not about cutting off, but about maybe being concise. We seem to be moving into an area of debate.

We seem to have another point of order from the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the response to my point of order.

It is important to note that there was indeed agreement on our part. I would therefore appreciate it if my colleague would refrain from questioning our intentions. I will not speak for my colleagues on this side of the House, but I believe they feel the same way.

[*English*]

I think it is important to note there is agreement and I do not appreciate the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader putting into question our intentions on this side of the House, despite the debate on this important issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe the hon. opposition House leader has a point of order as well regarding this.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in relation to this, I just want to make sure that you are aware, as well as everyone else is aware, that as my NDP colleague stated, we were fully prepared to give full consent first thing at 10 o'clock for the Prime Minister to make a statement on some very important things that are going on today.

We were actually quite surprised when the government did not bring that motion forward. Our understanding is that there is unanimous consent. We would have been happy to say yes to that. The Conservatives are also in agreement.

• (1050)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I thank hon. members for their points of clarification. If possible, could they

take this into the lobby and maybe come to some kind of concise consent and then bring it forward through one member that they are unanimous and then we will put it to the room.

The hon. member for York—Simcoe will continue, please.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I was about to commence on another element of my argument. I was certainly more than ready to stand down for the period of time to allow such a statement from the Prime Minister, if the government was ever going to propose it. I certainly had been expecting it at 10:30, but in any event, pending the Liberals seeking to do so, I will continue.

Where I was heading was the context in which this is occurring, the context of rules being changed and government members asking that they be trusted on their kinds of initiatives like this. However, we keep seeing a contradiction between words and deeds. The contradictions keep piling up.

Why is this important? This is important because this place works on trust. This place works on the principle that House leaders speak to each other, which apparently the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader on this other matter has not been doing, and communications begin to break down. That trust is very important.

There is an interesting element to this that is critically important. In the United Kingdom, the mother Parliament, they refer to something called “the usual channels”. The usual channels constitute that element of the different House leaders and whips speaking to each other. Perhaps in the U.K. the whips take the more supreme role, and here it is the House leaders who take the supreme role.

There is an excellent paper that was written called “Opening Up the Usual Channels” that discusses some of this. I want to point to some of the important elements in it, and some of the quotes they provide.

The first one comes from Erskine May, 22nd edition, 1997. It states:

The efficient and smooth running of the parliamentary machine depends largely upon the Whips.... He [the Government Chief Whip] and the Chief Whip of the largest opposition party constitute the 'usual channels', through which consultations are held with other parties and Members about business arrangements and other matters of concern to the House.

That trust, that ability to negotiate, that ability to discuss together is critical to this place working, yet the effort by the government repeatedly, whether it be through Motion No. 6 some time ago, and we recall the issues that arose out of that, whether it be through the actions at the procedure and House affairs committee and the effort to push through the government's timelines unilaterally on changes to the rules of this place, again something that is out of the usual practices of this place, and now, last night's manoeuvre, are all part and parcel of the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing this ability of the parties to negotiate and to discuss together break down, and this could have very troubling consequences for the long term. We are seeing it right this very moment where that communication has broken down. The government is failing to do its job.

I am going quote again from this paper:

Statements by Members

One of the most distinctive features of the Westminster Parliament is the way in which parliamentary business is organised. The initiative in arranging the parliamentary agenda lies largely with the government of the day and the ultimate decision on what is debated, when and for how long rests with the government. However, in practice the government negotiates with the opposition parties, particularly the official opposition, through what are euphemistically known as the 'usual channels'.

It is an important mechanism, and it is part of the culture. The Speaker's staff or someone at the Clerk's table actually attends these meetings that take place in the usual channels just to speak to its importance on the practical aspects of making this place work.

If we are to allow the manoeuvre that took place at committee to stand in the context of the other things taking place at committee, the unilateral effort to change the rules, and the fact that there is a clear difference between what is said in this place and what is protested in this place by the government and then the deeds and actions that follow that are entirely contradictory to that, one can see that there is a need for the Speaker at this time to stand up and defend the rights of the members in this place, defend the rules that we have had for so many years, and send a message to the government, to all members, that this place has to work based on that kind of trust and straightforwardness.

• (1055)

In my many years as House leader, many may have taken issue with the approach that I utilized. However, one thing I do not think we will ever find anyone take issue with is that we were always straightforward, direct, told the truth, and did business in a productive and businesslike fashion. That is how it must be done. It was one where we always respected the rules and followed the rules, not one where we tried to change the rules through backdoor processes, as we are seeing right here.

Make no mistake, this is an example of the government trying to change the rules as it regards privilege in this place through a backdoor manoeuvre through this motion at committee that is being proposed. That is wholly inappropriate, wholly unacceptable, and it cries out for your intervention, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will close my comments, but underline that it is far more troubling than the case may sound for persons unfamiliar with procedure. For those of us who are familiar with this place and have been here a long, long time, the manoeuvres and actions here are very, very troubling, and the consequences for all our privileges and how privilege is dealt with here are very profound.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

I just want to remind the hon. member that we will be breaking for statements by members and will continue afterward.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I need to weigh in on this question of parliamentary privilege, but I will be concise in recognition of the time.

I do not claim to be as educated on the rules of the House as the many members who have spoken before me, so I trust you, Mr. Speaker, to make the judgment of whether or not the things that have happened are to the letter of the procedures of the House. However, I certainly do not think they are to the spirit intended for the procedures of the House.

The Speaker found a *prima facie* case of parliamentary privilege. Members' privileges were violated when they could not get here to vote. We have seen votes in the House, even in the parliamentary session since I was elected, come to a point where the Speaker had to break a tie, and there was a threat that the government would be overthrown, so voting privileges are really critical.

I was here during the debate yesterday. We talked about it, but we never came to a resolution. To have members from the governing party come in with a motion that does not represent what everyone in the House was coming to a consensus on, and to not even have a chance to have input into that is almost violating our privileges again, to be part of the decisions that happen in the House.

It is clear to me that the procedure and House affairs committee has always been the place where these things immediately go, and they immediately take precedence. I have no idea why there was so much resistance to that issue. With votes coming as early as next week, we definitely need to come to a quick resolution. This is not something we should be taking a lot of time with.

I recognize that there is construction going on and there are cars coming and going. I have personally been prevented both from leaving the House and going into the House. It did not affect my ability to vote, but it is definitely something that is going on. I really feel that the things that happened yesterday do not reflect the spirit of the House and the spirit of our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, you need to look into what happened, because if that does become a precedent and people start to think that they can just use their majority to overcome the rules of the House, the rules that are supposed to preserve our democracy, that is not what we are here to do. We are here to represent Canadians. Three hundred and thirty-eight people have the right to weigh in on this issue and not have it pulled out from under them, like a rug, and not come to a good resolution.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for hearing me on this issue. I tried to be concise, but I do not think that what occurred happened in the spirit of this House, and I look to you to see whether it did indeed meet the letter of the rules.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

PEEL ART GALLERY MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about a great place in my riding of Brampton South. Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, or PAMA, is a place that unites us all. I have been to dozens of PAMA events over the years and I am proud of the diversity on display there.

PAMA does a number of events that bring my community together. For example, it recently featured an exhibit exploring what it means to live on Turtle Island and each year it hosts celebrations for Black History Month. This month, it is celebrating Sikh Heritage Month with historical exhibits all month, including one about the journey of the *Komagata Maru* and the rich history of Sikhs.

*Statements by Members***BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE**

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 9, 1917, the bravery of Canadian soldiers led to the victory of the allied forces by capturing Vimy Ridge. In turn, this distinctly Canadian triumph helped create a new and stronger sense of national identity in our country.

Vimy success came at a heavy cost. Approximately 100,000 Canadian soldiers participated in the battle and fought valiantly to capture the ridge. There were 3,600 Canadians who lost their lives and 7,000 were injured. The battle left scars that can never be healed and should never be forgotten.

As we celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Vimy Ridge this Sunday, we must honour the soldiers and their families who served our country at Vimy Ridge and acknowledge the sacrifices they made for a more peaceful future. On this day of commemoration, we must also pay our respects to each and every veteran and serving member of the Canadian Forces who continue to serve Canada, at home and abroad, in the name of peace.

* * *

P.E.I. BURGER LOVE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it being April, it gives me great pleasure to rise today and inform the House that PEI Burger Love has returned to the island.

Every April since 2011, island restaurants have offered their own special burgers, made with 100% island beef and topped with fresh and imaginative ingredients. Last year, over 163,000 burgers were sold, more burgers than there are islanders, resulting in a whopping \$2.2 million dollars in sales in just 30 days.

The annual event is followed fanatically. Many compete to see who can try the most burgers, and restaurants vie to win the crown of best burger. With 84 participating locations this year, it is safe to say that Canada's food island is thriving, thanks to our farmers, to our chefs, to our restaurateurs, and, most of all, to islanders.

P.E.I. is all about beaches in the summer, but this month it is all Burger Love, all the time.

* * *

● (1105)

LAMBTON COLLEGE

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to congratulate Lambton College in my riding of Sarnia—Lambton as it celebrates its 50th anniversary. As the second-oldest college in Ontario, this innovative education hub has diverse programs, from firefighting to health care professionals to social justice to chemical production engineering technology. It is a pioneer in clean tech and the bio industry. It has been ranked third in the country and first in the province of Ontario for placing students in jobs.

I want to thank the hard-working team at PAMA: Marty, Annemarie, Maureen, Chuck, its advisory board, all artists, and all others involved in its great work. I invite everyone to come down to Brampton South, visit PAMA, and see the magic of art and history that bring us together.

* * *

● (1100)

[Translation]

LECLERC COOKIE COMPANY

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I congratulate the president of the Leclerc Group, Denis Leclerc, on the acquisition of a second plant in Tennessee. This purchase represents an investment of over \$50 million.

This new acquisition will allow the family-run business, which is over 100 years old and headquartered in Saint-Augustin, in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, to increase its sales by over 20%. The Leclerc Group is committed to the health of consumers, and this seventh plant will allow the company to continue to produce high-quality cookies and snack bars.

Leclerc Group is a North American leader in food production, and ranks among the 50 best-run companies in Canada. It employs more than 650 people, and its products are sold in over 20 countries. I want to acknowledge the great work of Denis Leclerc, the fourth generation of Leclercs, and his entire team, who continue to uphold the humanitarian values of the company's founder.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the founder's grandson, Denis's father, Jean-Robert Leclerc, and his mother, Suzanne Lajeunesse, who are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary this year. I extend them my sincere and heartfelt congratulations. Bravo. That company is the pride of the people of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, Quebec, and indeed, all of Canada.

* * *

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we are celebrating World Health Day. We thank organizations such as HPIC, whose mission is to increase access to medicine in vulnerable communities.

HPIC recently sent medicine to treat more than 50,000 Haitians in the aftermath of hurricane Matthew.

[English]

From a small, humble office in a strip mall in my riding, HIPC ensures that over a million people a year receive their required medications for free. They are supported by dozens of pharmaceutical companies that generously donate these medicines. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe and over 100 countries in between, HIPC, this wonderful Canadian charity, has donated more than 30 million medical treatments to people in need around the world.

I say bravo to HIPC and all such organizations on World Health Day.

Statements by Members

The Lambton College Cube launches entrepreneurial start-up businesses, and its Enactus program is recognized globally as one that helps feed the world and address poverty. Lambton College graduates leave their mark of excellence wherever they go.

I send my congratulations to all current and past students and faculty of Lambton College and wish them continued success in the years ahead.

* * *

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago this Sunday, 100,000 Canadians went over the top in our historic victory at Vimy Ridge. A rolling artillery barrage advanced in front of our troops, pinning the enemy down in their shelters until it was practically too late for them to emerge. We took Vimy Ridge, and although the casualties were horrendous, our innovative military strategy spared lives on both sides. We took 11,000 prisoners.

However, the story is not over. We have unfinished business at Vimy. There may still be 44 members of the Canadian Scottish in battlefield graves. Their descendants want to find them. They want them to be taken to their proper final rest in the Nine Elms Canadian cemetery.

Military historian Norm Christie has produced a documentary that tells the story of the 44 missing. *Searching for Vimy's Lost Soldiers* airs Sunday at 9 p.m. on the History channel. I invite everyone to tune in to see the efforts to find and honour these heroes who helped write this momentous chapter in Canadian history.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all directly or indirectly affected by mental illness. Whether a loved one, a friend, or a colleague, no one is immune.

On this World Health Day, I want to underscore the importance of organizations in La Prairie that work for the well-being of people in need day after day.

Maison du goéland, in Saint-Constant, has been providing mental health services for more than 20 years in Roussillon. L'Avant-garde, a mental health support and public education group in La Prairie improves the independence and quality of life of those affected, and Au coeur des familles agricoles is an organization that puts the health of farming families first by focusing on getting lasting results. These organizations are changing lives by helping those who are affected the most.

Together with all my colleagues, I thank them.

* * *

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the tremendous efforts of all Canadians who participated in this important First World War battle, who marked

forever the collective memory of Canadians and left a priceless legacy for Canada.

As many will recall, the battle of Vimy Ridge began at 5:30 a.m. on April 9, Easter Monday, during a particularly difficult period in 1917. Our troops secured a tremendous but costly victory, as the death toll was very high for our nation. Without our soldiers, our country would not have forged a new national identity and gained greater stature on the international stage by being a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended World War I.

The Canadian National Vimy Memorial rises above the now peaceful surrounding countryside, and we thank our veterans for the sacrifices and achievements of all those who served and continue to serve their country in times of war and in times of peace.

* * *

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April 23 to 29 is National Volunteer Week. Thousands of Canadians in my region volunteer, and I want to thank them for their gift of self and their altruism in helping their communities.

Last Saturday, the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec awarded medals to 15 people in my riding. I was at the ceremony to express my appreciation for these young people and seniors and their continuing commitment to serving their communities.

On behalf of all my constituents, I want to congratulate Jacques Larivière and Thérèse Gobeil from Nominuingue, Marie-Andrée Clermont and Gilles Pilon from Sainte-Anne-des-Lacs, Carmelle Huppé and Marguerite Paquette from Saint-Sauveur, Lucie Lanthier from my home town of Sainte-Lucie, Viviane Courte-Rathwell from Arundel, Renée Deschênes-Dubé from Mont-Laurier, Émilie Gauthier from Mont-Tremblant, Simon Gratton-Laplante from Mont-Laurier, Laurence Latour-Laitre from Sainte-Marguerite-du-Lac-Masson, Catherine Mainville from Lac-Saguay, Nicolas Gaudreau from Saint-Sauveur, and Guiliana Desrochers from Sainte-Anne-des-Lacs.

The development of our communities depends on volunteers, and we can never thank them enough.

* * *

● (1110)

[English]

JIM MYLES

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 12, Fredericton lost a dedicated educator with an unparalleled passion for teaching, enthusiasm for the arts, and joy of travel.

Jim Myles taught for over 30 years at Fredericton High School, receiving the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence in 1999.

Jim directed the FHS musical production for over 20 years. His productions were known for their high quality, inclusiveness, and camaraderie. Many FHS grads, including myself, will cite the production as the highlight of their high school career.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

Jim coached many actors who went on to star on Broadway and the Canadian theatre scene, including his son, David Myles, and Measha Brueggergosman, both of whom are Juno winners. Jim organized school trips around the world, and he continued to direct international tours after he retired.

[English]

Our thoughts are with his wife Carmel; siblings Jane, John, and David; sons Andrew, Jeremy, Sean, and David; and his many grandchildren, friends, and community members whom he so deeply impacted.

* * *

ESTEVAN SOLDIERS' TREE

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 10, 2016, the Royal Canadian Legion Estevan branch 60 dedicated the Estevan Soldiers' Tree.

I would like to recognize Les Hinzman, the man with the idea; Darren Jones, the architect, Robert Rooks, Jim “Frosty” Forrest, and all those who contributed to the funding of this project.

Mr. Jones carved this magnificent memorial from a 100-year-old cottonwood tree with a girth of 18 feet and a height of 20 feet, using only a chainsaw.

It tells the story of Canada's military contribution to the allied victories. It serves to honour those who served us in the past, those who serve in the present, and those who will serve in the future.

Tomorrow there will be a parade to the memorial, followed by a dinner to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, where over 7,000 Canadians were wounded and 3,598 made the ultimate sacrifice, including 422 from Saskatchewan.

My family, along with many veterans, legionnaires, and fellow Canadians, will pay tribute this weekend to these brave Canadians.

Their country needed them, and they answered the call. We shall not forget.

* * *

TUBERCULOSIS

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month I took part in the Berlin TB Summit of the Global TB Caucus. This initiative drew together a dedicated group of parliamentarians from the G20 countries in order to build a coordinated response to the AMR agenda at the G20 this summer and press for the inclusion of TB within broader efforts to tackle drug resistance.

[Translation]

Tuberculosis is the deadliest infectious disease in the world. Nearly 1.8 million people die of tuberculosis every year, including people in the G20 countries.

[English]

Our call for action is to ensure that TB is recognized as a priority pathogen within the AMR agenda and that all necessary efforts are devoted to tackling the disease within the G20 and across the world.

[Translation]

We need to take action now if we want to put an end to tuberculosis.

* * *

[English]

ASBESTOS

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Health Day, and this week is Global Asbestos Awareness Week.

The WHO estimates that 125 million people worldwide are exposed to asbestos. Each year over 2,000 Canadians receive the devastating news that a loved one has been diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease.

I am proud of the work done in my province of Saskatchewan. The tireless advocacy of unions and workers to raise awareness about asbestos led to the first mandatory registry of buildings containing asbestos.

The Canadian government finally made a commitment to ban asbestos, but is asking Canadians to wait another year before the ban is in place. I implore the government to ban asbestos earlier rather than later. Why make Canadians wait?

As Jesse Todd, the president of the Saskatchewan Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization, has said, the best response to this hazard is to empower citizens and governments with the best information possible so that they can take steps that will prevent exposure to asbestos.

* * *

●(1115)

[Translation]

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 100 years ago, our troops were preparing for an assault on Vimy Ridge. To avoid alerting the Kaiser's forces, thousands of Canadians hid in tunnels prior to the attack. Canadians' meticulous preparation and courage resulted in success on the battlefield, where 100,000 French soldiers had lost their lives in vain.

It was the first time that all four Canadian divisions fought together. The offensive united the whole country. Quebec City's 22nd Battalion overtook the German trenches, taking out the German soldiers with their bayonets and capturing over 500 prisoners and five machine guns in this historic attack.

It was a historic battle for Canada, but it was also the ultimate sacrifice for thousands of families. Of the 100,000 Canadians who participated in the assault, 10,600 were killed or wounded.

Oral Questions

It is our duty to remember these men who sacrificed everything in defence of freedom. This Sunday, let us spare a moment for these heroes. Lest we forget.

* * *

[English]

INCIDENT IN STOCKHOLM

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that we hear of the attack in central Stockholm.

We offer our deepest condolences to the families and friends of all the victims of this heinous attack. We wish a quick recovery to all those who were injured.

Canada stands with the people of Sweden and stands ready to support in any way that we can.

We are thinking of Sweden.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is being dangerously naive on Syria. Yesterday, he said that the United Nations Security Council needed to have a meeting, pass resolutions, and hold an investigation to find out who was originally responsible for the chemical attacks against Syrian civilians, including children. Only hours later, the United States launched missile strikes against the origins of those very chemical attacks. Why is it that the Prime Minister continues to put all of his faith in the Security Council, which has failed to confront Bashar al-Assad?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night the United States Secretary of Defense briefed Canada's Minister of National Defence in advance of the American military strike in Syria. The Minister of National Defence then immediately briefed me. This morning, I spoke with the President directly and emphasized that Canada agrees that Assad's repeated use of chemical weapons must not continue. In the face of such heinous war crimes, all civilized peoples must speak with one voice. That is why Canada fully supports the United States' limited focused action to degrade the Assad regime's ability to launch such attacks. We continue to support diplomatic efforts with our international partners to resolve the crisis in Syria.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): As does the Conservative Party support the United States' missile strikes against the Syrian regime in the aftermath of its chemical weapons attacks on its own civilians, Mr. Speaker.

That said, yesterday that was not the Prime Minister's position. At that point, he said it was not even clear who was responsible for the chemical attacks on Syrian civilians, and that the UN Security Council needed to hold another meeting, which would include a veto power by the Russian federation. When will the Prime Minister stop being so dangerously naive and confront this dictator and tyrant?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night, the U.S. Secretary of Defense briefed our Minister of National Defence in advance of the American military action in Syria.

The Minister of National Defence immediately conveyed the information to me, and I spoke with the President directly this morning. I emphasized that Assad's repeated use of chemical weapons must stop.

In the face of these war crimes, all civilized societies must speak with one voice. That is why Canada fully supports the United States' limited, focused action to degrade the Assad regime's ability to perpetrate such attacks. We continue to support diplomatic efforts with our international partners to resolve the crisis in Syria.

* * *

[English]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we now learn that only five days after the current government provided a \$372 million loan to Bombardier, executives at the company decided to pay themselves a 50% pay hike, in addition to retaining the dual share class structure, which allows the billionaire Bombardier Beaudoin family to control a majority of shares with only a minority of stocks. This Conservative Party wants to bring those executives before a parliamentary committee to answer questions about their conduct. Why will the Prime Minister not support such hearings?

• (1120)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians know, we spent many months looking at how best to support the jobs and the economic growth of Bombardier and the aerospace industry in the right way, and we determined that a loan specifically for the C Series and the Global 7000 airplanes was the best way to go. We believe in the long-term strength of the aerospace industry in Canada. We know it leads to good jobs right across the country, and economic growth, and it benefits the middle class. That is why we made that long-term loan.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every Canadian and everyone around the world was terrified to hear about the tragic events in Syria.

The Prime Minister mentioned the discussions he had. That is great, but does he realize that the sluggish approach of the United Nations Security Council is perpetuating these situations and could lead to more of the same types of crimes against humanity, which Canada and all Canadians strongly condemn?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada continues to believe in multiculturalism. We know that we must use diplomacy to create a secure and peaceful regime for the people of Syria.

Nevertheless, we recognize that the actions taken by the U.S. were necessary to degrade the Assad regime's capabilities and, as I said yesterday, to send a clear message that anyone who supports the Assad regime is partly responsible for these chemical attacks.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a different note, we know that through their government, Canadians lent hundreds of millions of dollars to Bombardier. How did the company thank them? It laid off 14,000 people and gave its executives hefty pay hikes.

We gave both the CEO of Bombardier and the Minister of Innovation the chance to explain themselves before a parliamentary committee, but, unfortunately, the Liberals voted against that in committee yesterday.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why he is against transparency and accountability?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government understands how important jobs in the aerospace industry are for middle-class Canadians and economic growth. That is why we chose to invest by lending money to Bombardier for the C Series and Global 7000 projects. These projects will create jobs and economic growth for Canadians, which will help us create new opportunities for the middle class.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order.

[English]

I want to remind hon. members that I heard the question very clearly, but I had a hard time hearing the answer. If hon. members do not mind, I would like to hear what comes up.

The hon. member for Victoria.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister tell us exactly when the government was informed of the U.S. attack?

Can he confirm that during this conversation his government offered Canada's support?

[English]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were informed about an hour before the air strikes by the American military on Syria. We emphasized that we certainly believe that the Assad regime needs to be held to account for its actions against civilians, particularly the use of chemical weapons against children and innocents. Further degrading their capacity to continue such attacks is in the interests of the entire international community and is the path to peace for Syria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the Prime Minister reveal to Canadians if this attack was part of a larger

Oral Questions

strategy, and will the government insist that Canada's support for further action is contingent on an approach of multilateralism?

[Translation]

Le très hon. Justin Trudeau (premier ministre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my conversation with the U.S. President this morning, we spoke about the effectiveness of limited and focused attacks to degrade the Assad regime's ability to continue its chemical attacks against innocent people and civilians.

We reiterated the importance of pursuing diplomatic solutions for the situation in Syria. We know that long-term solutions for Syria must be reached through diplomacy.

* * *

● (1125)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, the NDP secured all-party support to fast-track Bill C-337, put forward by the hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland, regarding sexual assault training for judges. Women rarely report sexual assault, and, when they do, sadly the justice system often fails to handle these cases properly.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Status of Women does not appear to support this idea, and it sounds like she is washing her hands of this important piece of legislation.

Could the government please tell the House whether it supports this important bill?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as people well know, this government, and I personally, supports moving against gender-based violence, moving against the discrimination that happens still within our court system, within our justice system, against survivors of sexual assault.

We know there is much more to do, and we are happy to listen to and work with all members in the House on proposals that come forward to do just that. We look forward to the committee study that will further the various ways in which we can do this, and we continue to stand firmly against sexual assault and harassment.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although I congratulate the government for its investments to help women who are victims of sexual assault, unfortunately the Prime Minister did not answer my question.

By supporting the NDP motion to refer the bill to a committee, the government agreed to support the spirit of the bill. Thus, I hope it agrees with the principle that this training is absolutely necessary.

I do not understand why the Prime Minister cannot answer a simple question.

If the government has concerns about the bill, could he explain them and perhaps propose amendments to the bill?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the important work that the committee will do on this bill, and on any bill, is an integral part of the democratic approach that we have in the House.

As everyone knows, we support the objectives intended to reduce sexual assaults, helping sexual assault survivors obtain justice, and ensuring that those responsible are prosecuted. We will work with all our colleagues to ensure this is done properly.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of people in my riding remain out of work and are struggling to make ends meet. Budget 2017 has done nothing to give these people hope or change their circumstances. This inaction is destroying families. Contrast that reality with the fact that the Prime Minister has sent taxpayers dollars directly to the Aga Khan to pay for a vacation for a government staffer.

With so many Canadians out of work and struggling, how can the Prime Minister justify sending hard-earned Canadian tax dollars to his billionaire friend?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House before, the Prime Minister, whether on personal or business travel, is given the necessary resources, as has been the case for previous prime ministers.

What is more important to note is that this government was elected on the commitment to make the investments to help grow the economy and create the jobs, the jobs that the member is referring to that Canadians need.

In the last eight months we have seen a quarter of a million jobs created, full time, good jobs for Canadians. This is the kind of growth Canadians need. These are the kinds of investments we will continue to make to support Canadians.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Peter Cleary, the Minister of Health's former senior adviser, is now a lobbyist at Santis Health, a lobbying firm that primarily lobbies her.

While the minister claims that his new employment was cleared by the Ethics Commissioner, it still does not pass the smell test. When was Mr. Cleary offered the job at Santis Health, and what files did he have access to after he was offered his new gig?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, all exempt staff hired know full well the responsibilities they must respect, both during their hiring and following their hiring. The rules are quite clear. We have no reason to doubt they will be respected, and in this case that they have been respected.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Liberal patronage

becomes standard operating procedure, one wonders if there is any end in sight.

We recently found out that the Minister of Health's former adviser, Peter Cleary, is now working for Santis Health, which lobbies the minister.

Does the minister see the conflict of interest here, and can she assure the House that neither she nor her employees have met with Peter Cleary?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Health has said in the House, the individual in question met with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and will not be lobbying this government.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first there was the appointment to the Halifax Port Authority in exchange for the Minister of Finance's cash for access donation. Then there were judicial appointments from the pool of lawyers attending Liberal fundraisers. Now we have failed Liberal candidate Jennifer Stebbing appointed to the Hamilton Port Authority without meeting the Transport Canada job criteria.

What appointments will the Liberals give their failed candidates in Calgary Midnapore and Calgary Heritage?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has adopted an appointment process that supports the recruitment and selection of high-calibre candidates, that is open and transparent, merit-based, and reflects Canada's diversity, including gender balance. These are eminently qualified individuals from legal, financial, community and academic backgrounds, and we are very pleased they have accepted these appointments.

* * *

STANDING ORDERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a long-standing tradition that any changes to the Standing Orders must require unanimous consent.

In the last parliament, I chaired an all-party committee looking at changes to the Standing Orders. In fact, the current Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was vice-chair of that committee, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the concept of unanimity. My, how times have changed.

When will the government finally admit that any changes made to the Standing Orders must be made for the benefit of all parliamentarians, and not just for the benefit of Liberals?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government was elected on a commitment to Canadians to modernize the way this place worked and to bring it into the 21st century. This government is committed to working with all members of Parliament and all sides of the House. I will continue to encourage that conversation and that discussion on ideas on how to improve the way this place works.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the unnecessary Standing Orders standoff has continued for nearly three weeks, and the Liberal House leader says that she wants to have a conversation. However, a conversation only works if she is willing to listen. All Canadians expect a voice in the House, not just the Liberal front bench.

Why are the Liberals so afraid of accountability and transparency?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said time and time again, we actually want more accountability and more transparency. That is why we want to have these conversations and these important discussions. The member knows—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We were doing so well. What happened? I would like to hear the answer from the hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the member knows, as do all members, that my door is always open. I will always be listening and wanting to have a conversation. It is important that we have a constructive conversation on some of the ideas. I welcome more ideas. I welcome the ideas in the paper. Let us get to work and have a discussion.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVACY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following revelations regarding cellphone data tracker devices hidden in Ottawa and at the Montreal airport, the RCMP has confirmed that it uses that kind of cellphone surveillance device.

The RCMP insists that all surveillance activities are consistent with Canadian laws, but we still hear reports of scandals involving journalists being wiretapped, legal action to obtain journalistic sources, and surveillance of indigenous activists.

Will the government bring in a real legal framework to govern the use of these kinds of devices in order to protect the privacy of Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the use of the devices that were the subject of media reports earlier this week are being investigated by CSIS and the RCMP. We take any allegations of unauthorized and illegal use very seriously.

Like any technical investigative tool, the use of these devices by Canadian law enforcement and intelligence agencies is governed by the law, governed by the charter, and subject to judicial control. CSIS and the RCMP assess the legal and privacy issues involved on an ongoing basis to ensure they are operating in accordance with the law.

* * *

● (1135)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Russian news sources have reported the disappearance of more than 100 gay men at the hands of local authorities in Chechnya. Faced with torture, humiliation, and abuse, it has been confirmed that three of these men have died.

Canada's international peers, including the U.S., the U.K., and the EU, are taking a clear stand against violence and discrimination toward the LGBTQ community. Canadians are waiting. When will the government add its voice to the growing list of countries that have already condemned these horrific violations?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government stands firm in its approach to supporting human rights defenders, including those within the LGBTQ community right around the world, as well as journalists and peaceful, political activists. Certainly, political imprisonment is a violation of the basic universal human right of free speech. We call on the Putin government to immediately release all peaceful protestors.

Our position on Russia will remain strong, and our support for human rights defenders around the world will as well.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians invest in their future, they expect the money will be used to do just that. They do not expect their financial planner will take the money to give him or herself a big, fat raise. This is exactly what the Liberals are doing by giving \$373 million of taxpayer money to Bombardier so it can pad its pockets with bonuses.

If the Liberals will not demand accountability from Bombardier executives, how can taxpayers believe they will demand accountability for the loan?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the long-term viability of the Canadian aerospace sector. It is for that reason we made a repayable contribution to Bombardier that would help maintain research and development. Bombardier is the research and development leader across Canada. It is important to Quebec. It includes 800 small suppliers in the supply chain, small and medium-sized businesses.

Oral Questions

We understand the disappointment. We are disappointed in that pay raise, but Bombardier has reacted to the disillusionment and we support that.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said that she was sending a quarter of a billion dollars to China to an Asian infrastructure bank, which will put Canadian taxpayers at risk for \$1.3 billion. She rattled off a list of projects to which we will never have access.

Direct funding through CETA guarantees Canadian involvement. President Obama and the former Conservative government declined to join the bank because it was not in the best interests of taxpayers. Therefore, why are the Liberals putting Canadian taxpayers at risk for \$1.3 billion?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we waited two years for that infrastructure bank to be established in order to properly assess its ability to manage funds and put the necessary systems in place to ensure rigorous oversight.

We concluded that this investment will be good for some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. For example, it has funded irrigation and drinking water systems in Indonesia and electrification projects in Bangladesh.

* * *

[English]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the oil and gas symposium held in Calgary, the main topic was the Prime Minister's unilateral five-year ban on drilling in the Arctic. The Northwest Territory premier, Bob McLeod, said that this arbitrary decision was taking away hope from northerners, the hope of making a long-term healthy living in the north.

The Liberals keep saying that they care about northerners, but their actions say otherwise. This is classic Liberal doubletalk.

How can the Liberals claim to support the north by killing the potential for these middle-class jobs?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the moratorium in the new offshore oil and gas licences in federal waters was announced in conjunction with a five-year science-based review, as well as a one year consultation on the details of that review. Territories, indigenous and northern communities, and industry will all be consulted with that process.

We are also working in partnership with indigenous, territorial and provincial partners to co-develop a new Arctic policy framework that will confront the challenges and seize the opportunities in the region, which was an important request from the territories.

• (1140)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, more than 20,000 stakeholders attended the mining conference in Toronto, and

voiced very grave concerns with Liberal policies. They know the carbon tax will cost them tens of millions of dollars a year, and many more mining projects could be abandoned.

The Liberals are burying Canada's northern communities under a made-in-Ottawa carbon tax and drilling moratorium. They are blocking resource development in some areas, and taxing it to death in others.

Does the energy minister realize that he is putting the very economic stability of Canada's north on very thin ice?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the party opposite, we understand that the environment and the economy go together. I am very pleased that the Mining Association of Canada is a member of the carbon pricing leadership coalition. It understands that putting a price on carbon pollution not only reduces emissions, but it also helps with innovation.

We are working with mining companies, including Teck Resources, to ensure we address competitiveness issues. Unfortunately, unlike business in Canada, the party opposite does not understand that the environment and the economy go together.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, almost one month ago, Senator Beyak made despicable comments about residential schools. Now she is complaining that her freedom of speech is under threat because not everyone agrees with her comments.

She said that residential schools were a good thing. Genocide will never be a good thing. This senator has shown that she does not deserve her Senate seat.

Will the government join me in asking for Senator Beyak's resignation?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the senator's recurring comments about residential schools are ill-informed, hurtful, and quite simply false.

What is even more disturbing is that she says she has nothing more to learn. Removing her from the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples was the right thing to do. It is now up to Conservative Party leadership to show its commitment to reconciliation by removing the senator from its caucus.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Words are fine, Mr. Speaker, but they are only meaningful if they are backed up with action. Will the Prime Minister join with New Democrats, first nations leaders, and Canadians calling for the resignation of Senator Beyak?

Senator Meredith has sexually targeted a 16-year-old girl by his own admission, and yet when asked to condemn this horrible act, the so-called feminist Prime Minister said, “It is not for me to weigh in.” That is simply not good enough.

Does he at least have the dignity and decency to condemn this act, and does he have one good idea to make the Senate more accountable to Canadians? Just saying “It’s not my fault” is not going to cut it.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned by the report of the Senate ethics officer. Canadians expect all parliamentarians, including senators, to be held to the highest standards of ethics. Ethics violations should be addressed and those responsible held accountable. The Senate is an independent chamber and is responsible for dealing with these serious issues. I will continue to closely follow the situation.

I remain committed to improving, strengthening, and protecting Canada’s institutions, and will continue to monitor this very closely.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that 95% of human-caused mercury deposited in Canada comes from foreign sources. The objective of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, an international agreement on mercury control, is to protect human health and the environment from human-caused emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds. The coming into force of this international agreement is important to the health of Canadians and the protection of the environment.

Would the Minister of Environment and Climate Change please advise this House on when Canada will ratify the Minamata Convention on Mercury?

• (1145)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington for his hard work on the environment committee.

I am pleased to announce that our government has ratified the Minamata Convention on Mercury, a legally binding global agreement to reduce human-generated mercury emissions. Today the ambassador and permanent representative of Canada to the United Nations deposited the instrument of ratification at the UN headquarters in New York City.

While we have reduced our own mercury emissions by over 90% in the last 40 years, more must be done to reduce global emissions that have had an impact on Canada, on our Arctic ecosystem, and on

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the health of Canadians, in particular, vulnerable Canadians and Inuit.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals talk about funding for fisheries, but they have not created a single program that fishermen can apply to. I know the Liberals would rather spend the rest of their mandate consulting, but rural communities in Atlantic Canada cannot wait. Announcements are great, but hard-working fishing families need to know. What is the money for? Who is eligible to apply? When will the programs be in place? Will anyone actually benefit, or is this more Liberal money for more Liberal friends?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to tell the House that the Atlantic fisheries innovation fund has \$325 million that will be available this year. We have had discussions with provincial governments on how we can partner and reflect their priorities as well. In fact, I will be meeting the four Atlantic premiers in Saint John, New Brunswick, next Wednesday. I have had very positive conversations with fishing groups from around Atlantic Canada and I look forward to changing the Atlantic fishery, in partnership with them, to make sure that fishermen’s incomes rise, that we do it in a sustainable way, and we take advantage of new global markets.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from a minister who has been here for so long and someone who understands it, he knows that these families deserve better. Canadians deserve a better answer than what he gave.

We know through our U.S. contacts that softwood lumber negotiations are non-existent. We are days away from a lumber trade war that will see mill closures, jobs lost, and communities decimated. British Columbia is the largest producer of softwood in the country. There are 140 communities across the province that depend on forestry.

I know it is not Wednesday, but will the Prime Minister stand in the House and answer this question? What are his plans to protect the jobs in communities for the families that depend on the forestry industry?

Oral Questions

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's forestry sector is very important to our communities, and a stable and predictable market helps promote economic development and good jobs. We are continuing to work closely with the provinces through the Federal-Provincial Task Force on Softwood Lumber to make sure we have a coordinated approach to address the needs of forestry companies and workers who may be affected. Forestry companies will be able to take full advantage of existing Government of Canada programs.

Our government is prepared for all situations as we work hard with the American government on a long-term solution.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport rose in the House in response to a question concerning aerodromes from the member for Trois-Rivières. The minister clearly stated, “decisions regarding aerodromes fall within federal jurisdiction.”

I wrote to the minister regarding the Dutton Dunwich aerodrome and the proposal to place windmills and hydro lines in the perimeter of this aerodrome. The minister advised me that this is a provincial issue.

If safety is top of mind for the minister, will he tell me right now if the installation of windmills and hydro lines near the Dutton Dunwich aerodrome is safe?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, aviation safety is an absolute key priority for the government. With a background in aviation, we know that there are challenges when one is siting aerodromes.

It is the responsibility of the federal government to look into these issues and make these decisions. These inspections are under way, and we will provide more information as it becomes available.

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[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the hours following the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic, unscrupulous individuals preyed on the families of the victims as the embers were still smouldering and made millions of dollars on their suffering.

The tragedy is still keenly felt back home and people are still waiting for a firm commitment from the government on the bypass.

Will the Ministers of Justice and Transport agree to make a firm commitment to the people of Lac-Mégantic, who have suffered enough from the tragedy and its consequences?

• (1150)

Mme Karen McCrimmon (secrétaire parlementaire du ministre des Transports, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts continue to go out to the families and loved ones of the victims of the tragedy of July 2013.

Our government is firmly committed to improving rail safety and that is an absolute priority for the minister. The study is still under way and that is why the minister met with the Premier of Quebec a few weeks ago to discuss the bypass and the next steps in the process. We hope to participate as equal partners.

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[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hidden in plain sight in this year's budget was a big lump of coal for our military. By consistently deflecting to the upcoming defence policy review, the Minister of National Defence is creating an expectation that more money will come later.

Our women and men in uniform, our veterans, and all Canadians deserve to know whether the minister will continue to starve our military. Will the minister confirm that the much needed resources are coming when the defence policy review is released?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with the member more in terms of making sure that we have the right support for our men and women in uniform, but when we look at creating a thorough plan that is going to look out into the future, we have to make sure we have a thorough analysis. That is why the Prime Minister mandated me to do a very thorough defence policy review. We have done that, and I look forward to announcing the results of the review and making sure that our men and women have all the right resources going into the future.

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FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Courtenay—Alberni, our mills have been deeply affected by layoffs, which have hammered our communities. On Vancouver Island, raw log exports have increased tenfold in the last 10 years because of bad B.C. Liberal job-killing policies that continue to fail to protect the industry.

Last week, I asked the government to immediately extend EI benefits to soften the blow for forestry workers. Will the government finally wake up to the crisis, understand our needs, and take action to support British Columbians?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians elected our government to grow the economy and create jobs of the future. Certainly, the investments we have made to date are showing some benefit. We are seeing that in the last eight months alone, a quarter of a million full-time jobs have been created in the country. That is a very positive trend. We know that Canadian businesses are seeing a great deal of confidence in the economy and are willing to make investments and are willing to create jobs.

In our last budget, budget 2017, we saw a key investment to create jobs and for Canadians who need the skills for future jobs. We continue to work on behalf of Canadian employees.

*Oral Questions***JUSTICE**

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as dozens of serious criminal cases involving murder, sexual assault, and child abuse are being thrown out of court due to delay, the Minister of Justice continues to sit on her hands when it comes to appointing judges. We have nearly 60 judicial vacancies. The minister has appointed a measly six judges this year.

With all of these cases being thrown out of court, is the minister's inaction due to incompetence or is it actually part of the Liberals' soft on crime agenda?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand again to speak about the open and transparent process for the appointment of superior court judges across the country. We have reconfigured the judicial advisory committees which are going to be providing highly recommended names for my consideration for appointments to the superior courts. This is to ensure that the individuals who sit on our benches across the country reflect the diversity of our country and are merit-based. I am very pleased to continue on an ongoing basis to announce additional appointments to the superior courts. Some are coming imminently.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, Clément Massé, president of the Barreau du Bas-Saint-Laurent-Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine expressed his concern about the lack of Quebec Superior Court judges. This situation will likely only get worse in the coming weeks because Justice Landry from Gaspé is retiring.

Given the already unacceptable delays in the court system, will the Minister of Justice get out of her bubble in Ottawa and Vancouver and quickly review the selection process to fill the empty positions in our regions, or would she rather see dangerous criminals released because of her failure to act, as we saw yesterday in Quebec?

• (1155)

[*English*]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I am very pleased to stand to speak about the appointments process that we have instituted. We are taking a careful, considered, and thoughtful approach in terms of looking at the appointments of superior court justices across the country. It is open. It is transparent. We have invited applications from across the country. I am very pleased about the superior court appointments that I have made and the additional appointments that I will continue to make to ensure that we fill the vacancies right across the country.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members that procedure dictates that when someone is speaking, most of us try to be respectful of that person. If someone is speaking, I would appreciate it if members would not shout across the floor.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government can no longer hide behind its senior officials when it comes to the Phoenix pay system fiasco. The Prime Minister himself repeated on several occasions that he wanted to solve the problems with the system as quickly as possible.

On behalf of all the families who have been adversely affected by the problems with the system, I am asking the Prime Minister to immediately cancel the bonuses for the officials involved with Phoenix.

When will the Liberals finally take responsibility for implementing a pay system that was not ready? When will they apologize to taxpayers and the families affected by this decision made in February 2016?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask my hon. colleague's indulgence for a moment before I answer his question.

[*English*]

Let me first say that our thoughts are with the Minister of Public Services and Procurement. She has done incredible work on this file and on moving this government's agenda forward. I join with my colleagues in wishing her the best and we all cannot wait to have her back in her seat right here where she belongs.

[*Translation*]

With regard to the hon. member's question, he knows that our top priority is making sure that we have a pay system that lives up to our expectations, despite what we inherited from the party opposite. We have ensured that the senior officials responsible for the system did not receive performance bonuses.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the crab fishing season began over a week ago in many areas of the St. Lawrence, the Lower St. Lawrence, and the Gaspé. This year, crab quotas have increased significantly, which should give our crab fishers a welcome boost in revenues.

Can the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard inform the House of the action our government has taken to support fishers?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We announced a 25% increase in the total allowable catch for snow crab in zone 17 this year, as the member knows, in accordance with the most recent scientific advice that has confirmed the health of that stock. This will contribute to an income boost for fisheries and first nations, since the fishery is so important to the Quebec and Gaspé economy.

Oral Questions

I look forward to working with my colleagues from the Gaspé to support the fishing industry and ensure it is set to increase its revenues in the future, as it should be.

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[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs announced that the Liberals would no longer be enforcing the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. She also promised that she would work in full partnership with first nations leaders and organizations to increase accountability and transparency. Now we have learned that the Liberals have done nothing for six months, except to consider a plan for consultation and that consultation has never taken place.

Will the minister stop betraying first nations band members like Charmaine Stick and empower these men and women in their fight for transparency?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone, including first nations governments, supports transparency and accountability. Since last summer, we have been working with indigenous organizations, including the AFN special committee and the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association, on ways to enhance mutual accountability.

The government is also reaching out to community members and leadership through comprehensive online engagement and is planning in-person sessions across the country over the coming months.

We will continue to work in full partnership with first nations to improve mutual accountability and transparency.

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SPORT

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to be present last week for the announcement that the 2021 Canada Summer Games will be held in Niagara. In four short years, our nation's next generation of elite athletes, currently in development programs throughout Canada, will converge for the largest multi-sport event held in our country.

Could the Minister of Sport please inform the House on the importance of these games and what hosting them will mean for Niagara?

• (1200)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from St. Catharines for his work on this file.

The Canada Games leave valuable legacies in host communities and lasting memories for young Canadian athletes from across the country. The Canada Games increase the volunteer capacity of communities, improve local infrastructure, and have a significant economic impact.

For many athletes, this will be the pinnacle of their athletic careers, and for others, this will be an important step along their

journeys, but they will all look back at their Canada Games experiences with pride and fondness.

[Translation]

Congratulations to all the candidate cities for 2021. I am confident that the Canada Games in Niagara will be fantastic.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in budget 2017, the Liberals plan to end tax deferral for grain farmers. Eighty-two per cent of grain farmers depend on this tax deferral to help them mitigate uncertainties in grain farming, which can change greatly from year to year. This tax deferral is an important tool that farmers use to help them manage their operations, including many in Bow River.

Why is the out-of-touch finance minister scrapping this important tool for all grain farmers?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government strongly supports the Canadian grain industry, which is a key driver of exports, jobs, and economic growth. With changes in recent years to grain marketing, the delivery of listed grains is now the responsibility of the private sector instead of the federal government.

Budget 2017 launches consultations with farmers and stakeholders on tax deferral. We want to hear from farmers before moving forward.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Marine Atlantic, a crown corporation, would rather have its vessels repaired in South Carolina than in the Gaspé municipality of Méchins just because it costs less.

Quebec has the necessary expertise. It takes 10 days to get to that shipyard and back. Are they going to send them to China for repairs next time?

Will the government make crown corporations have their vessels repaired here so that this kind of ridiculous situation does not crop up again?

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ferries, and other marine transport, are absolutely key to our future economic health. There is no doubt about it.

We have had encouraging news. We want to make more investments in trade corridors and in our transportation to make it more effective, to make it safer and more secure. That is all part of our plan. We are moving forward, and we are going to make good progress.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its report, the expert panel on environmental assessment noted something the Bloc Québécois has been saying for some time. There is a perceived lack of independence and neutrality because of the close relationship the National Energy Board, the NEB, has with the industries it regulates. The NEB works for oil companies, not for the environment.

When will the Liberals listen to reason and relieve the NEB of its responsibility for environmental assessment for projects like energy east? It is up to Quebec to decide.

For that matter, why not recognize the skills and expertise at the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement du Québec?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government committed to implementing an open, fair, inclusive, and transparent process to guide its decisions regarding large energy projects.

To respect this commitment made during the election campaign, we set up an expert panel tasked with reviewing the structure, role, and mandate of the National Energy Board.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will go back to *Canada: The Story of Us*. The “us” clearly does not include Quebeckers, Acadians, or first nations.

Two of the three founding nations are ignored. They are minor actors in this ridiculous and insulting documentary that is directed at English Canada, which is the only hero in a biased and revisionist account.

Will the Prime Minister apologize for being associated with a series that ignores the deportation of Acadians and treats the French and first nations like minor actors in the story that anglophones like to tell one another?

• (1205)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for us, the 150th anniversary of Canada is an opportunity to reflect on our past and to tell the different stories that shaped our identity.

Everyone knows that the CBC is an independent crown corporation. Out of respect for its independence, we should refrain from commenting on the content of this series.

Our government is particularly sensitive to and recognizes the important contribution of Acadians, francophones and aboriginal peoples to our history. Canadians are encouraged to keep this important conversation going.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Revenue.

[English]

To help offset the high cost of living in the north, the government increased the northern residence tax deduction, helping many in the middle class. However, many of my constituents are frustrated, because year after year they are randomly selected to prove their residency status. It is my understanding that Nunavummiut experience more than four times the national average of audits. Recently I spoke with an individual who has had to prove his residency seven years in a row. Will the minister look into this practice to ensure that the same people are not being harassed year after year?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is an important question.

Our government increased the basic amount and the additional residency amount used in the calculation of the northern residence tax deduction. That means that eligible taxpayers who live in a prescribed zone, such as Nunavut, are entitled to \$22 a day, depending on their deduction calculation.

The agency has to audit a certain number of returns every year to ensure that the taxpayers are entitled to the claims they made. I can assure the House that no one category of taxpayer is targeted during the audit selection process. We make sure that every taxpayer is treated fairly by using fair and non-discriminatory criteria.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I am requesting the unanimous consent of the House to table documents regarding the question I asked the Minister of Transport today. From the Minister of Transport I received one answer regarding jurisdiction, and both today and in question period, with the member for Trois-Rivières, a very contradictory answer.

I would like to table this so that we can get clarification on jurisdiction.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

*Routine Proceedings***WAYS AND MEANS**

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1), I have the honour to table a notice of a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2017, and other measures.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I request that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

* * *

●(1210)

SITUATION IN SYRIA

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night the U.S. Secretary of Defense briefed me in advance of the American military action in Syria. I then immediately briefed the Prime Minister. As we saw this morning, the Prime Minister spoke with the President of the United States directly and emphasized that Assad's repeated use of chemical weapons must not continue.

In the face of such heinous war crimes, all civilized people must speak with one voice. That is why Canada fully supports the United States' limited, focused action to degrade the Assad regime's ability to launch such attacks. We continue to support diplomatic efforts with our international partners to resolve the crisis in Syria.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the government for agreeing to give opposition MPs an opportunity to respond on this pressing matter. I thank the minister for his remarks.

The chemical attacks that occurred this week in northern Syria were nothing short of horrific. The images of suffocating and paralyzed children have shocked all Canadians. The story of one man who lost 25 members of his family, including his twin baby girls, is something I will never forget.

Officials from the United States, Britain, and Israel, as well as numerous witnesses on the ground, have confirmed that it was the Syrian government and its fighter jets that deployed a deadly nerve toxin on the civilian population. This is a crime against humanity, and it must not go unpunished.

[*Translation*]

We cannot allow crimes of this magnitude to go unpunished. The Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, has to be held accountable. To that end, the Conservative Party strongly supports the United States' efforts to prevent Syrian military forces from further launching chemical attacks.

The global community cannot stand idly by when deadly neurotoxins are being used on innocent civilians.

[*English*]

We cannot allow crimes of this scale to go unpunished. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must be held accountable. To that end, the Conservative Party of Canada strongly supports the United States' actions to prevent Syria's military from launching further chemical weapons attacks. The global community cannot sit by idly while deadly nerve toxins are unleashed on innocent civilians.

It must be said that the United Nations Security Council has been completely ineffective in dealing with this developing crisis. Part of the problem has been that the Russian Federation has deployed repeatedly its veto power at the UN Security Council, preventing actions to hold the Assad regime accountable. Meanwhile, our Prime Minister has said one thing yesterday and something completely different today. Just yesterday, the Prime Minister said in New York that there are "still questions to be answered around who is responsible" for these attacks. The Prime Minister also said the solution was for the Security Council to pass a resolution that would allow an investigation to "determine...who was responsible". That was after the whole world knew precisely who was responsible for these crimes.

Less than 12 hours later, however, the Prime Minister changed his position. He now says he fully supports the U.S. unilateral missile strikes against the Assad regime.

[*Translation*]

What is the position of the Government of Canada? It seems to keep changing. It is precisely this type of *laissez-faire* attitude that the Conservative Party rejects.

The Prime Minister has yet to take concrete steps to hold the Syrian government to account, as well as that of Russia, which supports Bashar al-Assad.

●(1215)

[*English*]

Just what is the position of the Government of Canada? It seems to change with the wind. That is exactly the type of "go along to get along" thinking that the Conservative Party wholeheartedly rejects. In addition, to date, the Prime Minister has done little to hold the Russian—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind the hon. member that normally what happens is that a response to a minister's statement should take about the same amount of time that the minister took. The minister took about one minute, and we are already at the four-minute mark. Actually, it is more than four minutes. I just want to remind the hon. member that if he could wrap it up, I would appreciate it.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a matter of importance that would justify this.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Very briefly on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, your comments are quite right. However, the foundation for the principle that responses are to match the length of time of the original minister's statement also rests on a foundation of the government providing to the people who are speaking from the opposition a copy of its text in advance so that we may have the capacity to calibrate the response appropriately.

While some notes were provided, they indicated only the types of topics to be discussed. The actual text was not indicated as such, and I think that some latitude should be given to the hon. member with regard to the difficult circumstances under which he has had to prepare his response.

Routine Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): That is a good point. As the hon. member notices, we went to four times the length of time that the hon. minister spoke, but I will let the hon. member wrap up.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's foreign policy must always be based on the principles of freedom—

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have a point of order from the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it might be more appropriate if we just ask for the consent on the government side to allow the member to continue to contribute to the discussion. I do believe he should be asking for consent to continue on.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent from the House to allow the hon. member to speak longer?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, what exactly is the government's position? It seems to change with the wind. It seems that the position was one thing yesterday in New York and the opposite this morning here in Ottawa.

Contrary to the Prime Minister's statements yesterday, the United Nations Security Council has proven itself woefully ineffective when it comes to resolving this dispute. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada have been completely out of the loop when it comes to the actions of our closest ally, even though the Prime Minister was in New York meeting with the Secretary General of the United Nations just yesterday.

There does come a point where action is required, and it is when diplomacy fails time and time again.

[*Translation*]

Canada's foreign policy must always be based on the principles of democracy, liberty, human rights, and the rule of law. We support the action our allies have taken to ensure that the Syrian government is made to answer for what it has done. We are calling on the Prime Minister to recognize and respect the traditional role Canada has played in facing down evil and fighting tyranny wherever they exist.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the crisis in Syria. I rise to do so on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Canada.

The chemical weapons attack against civilians this week in Syria was shocking, and is added to a tally of horror that continues to stun the world. Assad must be held accountable for these crimes.

[*Translation*]

The impact of these missile strikes on the conflict is still uncertain. The strikes are not part of a UN-sanctioned effort, and it is unclear whether they are part of a broader plan to put an end to the crisis.

The NDP still believes that, in order for a response to the Syrian crisis to be effective, it must be multilateral and in keeping with international laws.

[*English*]

Now more than ever, it is important that Canada work with our international partners to secure a lasting political solution to this crisis. Canada must also step up our efforts on the humanitarian front, particularly in the face of drastic cuts to the United Nations programs planned by the Trump administration.

What the people of Syria need now more than ever is the knowledge that the world community is united in making good on the promise to end this devastating war.

We will continue to stand with the people of Syria and support their aspirations for a peaceful and democratic future.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Repentigny on a point of order.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I would like the unanimous consent of the House to make a statement about these extremely important events.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Repentigny.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Syrian crisis just keeps getting worse. Again this week, the small northern Syrian town of Khan Sheikhunin, which is controlled by al-Assad regime rebels, was hit by a chemical air raid.

The criminal use of chemical weapons is an atrocity that is condemned by the international community. Hundreds of people, including 30 children, died in the attack. The images that we are seeing over and over again on television depict scenes that are simply inhuman. We forcefully condemn this unspeakable barbaric act.

That is why we are calling for an international investigation. We believe that it is vital that the perpetrators of this horrendous crime be convicted for crimes against humanity. It is our duty to protect the public. Yesterday, the Americans unilaterally attacked a base in response to this horrific attack. Perhaps it would have been better if the response had been the result of a collaborative effort.

Some crimes are so serious that all human beings must work together to put a stop to them. We now need to clearly identify the guilty parties and make them face the consequences of their actions.

For years now, Syria has endured civil war and occupation by a bloodthirsty terrorist group. The situation is tragic. The Bloc Québécois believes that it is our responsibility to find ways to restore peace in this part of the world plagued by turmoil.

I repeat, the use of chemical weapons is a serious war crime in international law that must not go unpunished.

*Privilege***PETITIONS**

ROAD TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present petition e-513 along with the paper version.

The five drafters of the petition are in the House today. They are Suzan Sidwell, Nicholas Fortier, and François Boubert of Quebec, Peter Bond of New Brunswick, Richard Cripps of Alberta, and Johanne Couture of Ontario.

In all, 6,258 people signed this important petition calling on the House to recognize truckers as road professionals. The petitioners are also calling for standards to apply from sea to sea, taking into account economic disparities, as regards salary, protection from American taxation, benefits, health and safety, and the quality of life for drivers and owner-operators.

I am proud to have sponsored this petition, and I thank all of the petitioners who signed it.

* * *

• (1225)

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

DISPOSITION OF PRIMA FACIE QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I see that the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston wishes to contribute to the question of privilege raised earlier today.

Before he begins, I would like to say that members have provided the Chair with substantial arguments. Of course these will be taken under advisement, and the Speaker will come back to the House with a ruling.

However, I will allow the member to make a very brief intervention before we proceed to orders of the day. I would ask the hon. member to take into consideration what has already been said, to maybe just add to it, and to be brief, so that we can get on with business.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will do my very best to take into account what has been said before. I would ask your indulgence with regard to this, for the reason that I was not present for the debate that took place here. The reason I was not present for the debate is highly germane to the subject matter of the debate. I am on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and the committee is meeting to

discuss the item that the government says takes priority over the question of privilege here. That is my reason for not being here.

One ought to try to be here for debates when one is going to comment on it, but I was not. I have tried to gather information about what has been said, including getting some of the written remarks from speakers who have addressed this before. However, that is limited information, so I have had to put together my own remarks during question period in order to be able to make them here. That is my excuse or my pleading for why I may not be as organized as I would otherwise like to be. That said, I have tried to make a tabbed list of my comments in order to make them as concisely as possible.

The overarching theme that I am trying to address is simply this. It is important for the government to respect the ability of the opposition to carry on its business. We have rules in this place, Standing Orders, that govern how we behave. We have Standing Orders that are long standing, and ours are, through their lineage, the oldest in the world. The Standing Orders of the House of Commons came from the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, and, before that, the provinces of Upper Canada and Lower Canada, which takes us back to the 1790s. Before that, they came from Westminster. They extend back to the very beginning of parliamentary history.

Even words as extensive as those cannot take into account every circumstance, and so we have developed folkways, practices, conventions as to how we should deal with matters. Those practices are then captured in books, like the one written by O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and also in the Annotated Standing Orders of the House of Commons, which provide some explanation for the background to the existing Standing Orders. I will be using both of these books, but particularly the Annotated Standing Orders in my remarks today.

I was trying to get at this point. There is an overarching theme of respect, not merely for what the Standing Orders involve, which is taking care of the Speaker's rulings, but also for the practices that have allowed us not to develop a Standing Order on this or that abuse of process which ought to be the subject of a Standing Order. Simply by exercising self-restraint, we are able to get business done here. One area that this revolves around is the issue of how we deal with motions of privilege. There is a method that has always been used. I say "always", though I do not know if it has always been used. However, certainly since the current Standing Order was put in place, it has always been followed. That has been abandoned by the government today, and that is the issue at hand.

Let me deal very briefly with the relevant history here. Number one, on March 10, the government House leader introduced a discussion paper on possible changes to the Standing Orders. Number two, later that same afternoon, the day before the break week began, the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, a great member and a great friend, introduced a motion in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It amounted to a guillotine or a closure motion on the consideration of Standing Order business, which has led members of the opposition to be afraid that the government could introduce any Standing Order change, limit debate on it, push it through at that time, and thereby cause draconian changes to the Standing Orders, including those Standing Orders that are of greatest concern to us. They are the ones that let us do our job of slowing down the business of the House long enough to draw specific issues to the public's attention.

Rather than having this or that issue vanish in the rear-view mirror before we have a chance to draw it to the attention of the public, this is the only tool available to an opposition in a majority government. It is the only thing that separates our system of checks and balances from what I would characterize as a Peronist or a Bonapartist government, in which one has the maximum leader over here, and over there are the people. There are no intermediate institutions, and every four years there is what amounts to a referendum on whether people liked the dictatorship that existed for the previous four years.

• (1230)

That is what we do. That is the point we are trying to preserve here. When the government says that it means this is only to be a discussion paper, not a draconian measure, it may actually be sincere. I do not know.

However, we are not in a position where we can risk taking the advice that Abraham Lincoln once gave. He said that if you want to find out the nature of a man, give him power. That is true. We would find out. However, we can see why we do not want to try doing this, because we may find out something we do not want to find out.

Here is the problem. We do not know what the agenda is. We do not know how we can let down our guard without potentially causing a catastrophe for Canadian procedural and parliamentary democracy. That is the issue.

The motion was moved. It went to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on March 10. We took up the business on March 21, the first day that the committee was back in session. At that time, the motion was moved by the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, and I proposed an amendment to it.

The member's motion calls for the committee to complete its study and report its findings and recommendations back to the House no later than June 2, 2017.

The amendment I proposed says that we would delete some of that wording and add in the following:

notwithstanding paragraph (d),

That is the paragraph in which the date is referred to, the June 2 date.

but consistent with the Committee's past practices, as discussed as its December 8, 2016 meeting, the Committee shall not report any recommendation for an amended Standing Order, provisional Standing Order, new Standing Order,

Privilege

Sessional Order, Special Order, or to create or revise a usual practice of the House, which is not unanimously agreed to by the Committee....

That amendment is being debated at committee. There have been a series of ongoing suspensions of the committee business, and we have returned to this. In the formalized fiction of the proceedings of that committee, it is right now March 21. We have had something in the neighbourhood of 40 or 50 hours of debate.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I do not want to take away from anything that the member across the way is saying, but there was a question of privilege that was raised today. It had more to do with the reason for why we did not have the vote take place.

I know that the member is very good at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where he presents a very strong case, but sometimes it might take him three or four hours to do so. I am wondering if the member could give some sort of indication to the House of how long he anticipates his presentation on this privilege will take, given that the Speaker made the ruling that he would like to have short and concise speeches.

I understand that the member indicated he was not here earlier today, for the good reason of being at the committee, but I do not think that is an excuse. Anyone could then make an application and say that they did not hear what was said earlier and go on indefinitely.

I want to be sympathetic to what the member is saying, but could he at least do the courtesy of providing the House with how long he believes his presentation is going to be?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Could the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston give some indication of how much time he will be? I have had someone else ask to speak as well, and this is after we have already said we were going to stop. Again, it is cutting into government business. It is not that a question of privilege is not important, but a lot of the arguments have already been made.

I am wondering how much longer the member would need.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I do not know the exact time. It would actually be hard for me to guess at that.

An hon. member: Five minutes? Five hours?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, Mr. Speaker, not that long, believe me.

However, what I have just done is laid out the background. I am now going to proceed directly to the question of privilege. I wanted to give the background to explain the relevance, because ultimately that is the issue that is referred to in the remarks by a member earlier.

At any rate, I am now going to move to these items, and I hope it will become evident quite quickly that I am moving rapidly through the materials that I have at hand.

May I continue with the main remarks, or do we have to wait to deal with the point of order first?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary was asking how much time, and I thought that was a fair request. Is there a time that would be suitable?

Privilege

I would say, start and maybe continue as briefly as possible, please.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on the point of order before you.

I find it unprecedented that somehow on a matter of privilege, which is probably the most serious thing to come before the House, a matter of dealing with a member's privileges, that there would be a limit put on the amount of time that members can speak to make the case they need to make.

I find it appalling for the Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader to suggest that there should be some kind of limit put on someone by asking this kind of question, and for the Speaker to condone it.

Is there some kind of precedent for this? To me, it seems that a member should be given an opportunity to make a case when we are talking about a breach of a member's privileges, a most serious thing. A member should have the opportunity to make the case needed for a question of privilege.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member brings up a good point, and it makes it very difficult for someone sitting in the chair to rule on this. It is a balance between how much we need to hear and how much do we need before a decision is made.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, 2009 edition, at page 144, states:

The Speaker also has the discretion to seek the advice of other Members to help him or her in determining whether there is prima facie a matter of privilege involved which would warrant giving the matter priority of consideration over other House business. When satisfied, the Speaker will terminate the discussion.

It really is at the discretion of the Speaker. It is not an easy call to make, and we are trying to give as much opportunity as possible. I am trying to be as fair as possible.

The hon. opposition House leader.

• (1240)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the House rules as you just read them. That is our point. We do not believe that a member of the government who does not want to hear about this has the right to limit the time that a member can speak. You have been listening to the points that my colleague made, Mr. Speaker. I think that up until this point there have been new points and relevant points. That is the point that we on this side are making. It is not up to the parliamentary secretary to question the amount of time that a member is speaking.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to assure the hon. member that the discussion was taking place between the table officers and me, long before the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader brought up the point.

The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, you are quite right to cite that practice. If you see me wandering away, would you point that out? Then I will promptly bring myself back to or terminate that point and move on. I am really trying to recount the narrative as a way of trying to make the point that there is a matter of privilege here.

What is going on in committee is highly germane to the discussion. The discussion has now taken some 40 hours to 50 hours on a single amendment to a single motion. Effectively, we have a complete impasse, and it seems unlikely that will be resolved in time for the actual motion to ever be acted upon by its June 2 deadline. This is a really important point. What happened in the House, the issue it is relating to, is an argument that we ought not to give the item of privilege priority over an item that is at the procedure and House affairs committee right now. That was explicitly stated in the comments made by the member who moved the motion. The result is that privilege effectively or status is being given to an item that has been the subject of what may already be a record-breaking meeting that started on March 21. Individual interventions have been, in one case, 12 hours long. Putting this off until then is itself highly problematic, just on its face.

Now let me go to the issue relating to what happened on March 22. Unrelated to what was going on in that committee, although it was the next day, was that the budget was introduced and two members, including the member for Milton, were delayed from coming to the House due to a delay of the white buses. The member for Milton raised this point. She asked the Speaker to come back with a prima facie case that her privileges had been violated, and the Speaker did that yesterday.

What followed from that was, as is required under our rules, the member for Milton then moved a motion that the question of privilege, with respect to the free movement of members within the parliamentary precinct raised on March 22, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Then the member for Beauce proposed an amendment to that motion, which is permitted under the Standing Orders. I went back and checked this. The Standing Orders allow an amendment to be made to a motion of privilege. In fact, it is quite explicit that any amendment can be made. He added the following, "and that the committee make this matter a priority over all other business including its review of the Standing Orders and Procedure of the House and its Committees."

If the amendment were allowed to go through, it would have the effect of ensuring this matter of privilege would be raised prior to any other business in the committee, including this interminable study that has been going on since March 21, which has not got past the first item of business dealing with an amendment to the original motion, and which is operating through a series of unilateral suspensions by the chair, which are certainly unprecedented. I have no way of raising this in committee, but it may even be a violation of our practices. All of this is germane.

The amendment put forward by the member for Beauce is effectively saying that we will lock ourselves in to doing something which reflects the spirit of one of our Standing Orders, the Standing Order dealing with privilege, which is Standing Order 48(1). It states, "Whenever any matter of privilege arises, it shall be taken into consideration immediately."

Privilege

●(1245)

That is a rule for the House, and the House did what it was supposed to do. It is not the case that committees can, in the absence of a Standing Order that permits it to do so, deviate from the practices of the House. That has been the long-standing practice of the committee on procedure and House affairs, a committee on which I am the ranking member. I have served for over a decade on it, both in government and opposition. It is never the practice to give a back seat to privilege matters. They have always been given first priority, sometimes with a considerable amount of frustration. That does not mean they come to a conclusion all the time. There is an outstanding matter of privilege relating to an incident last year, which we basically looked at and decided not to proceed with. However, they are put before us immediately.

This amendment was merely an attempt to ensure we would lock in, following these long-established practices.

To make the point further, I want to quote from the annotated Standing Orders, page 175, the commentary on Standing Order 48 (1), relating to a prima facie case. It states:

If the Speaker is satisfied that the necessary conditions have been met, the Member is immediately allowed to move the motion (or move it at the first opportunity if there is a question already before the House), which usually — but not always — proposes that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for study and report.

Just to be clear, the motion the member puts forward is what usually, but not always, calls for it. It is at the discretion of the individual member, and that was the practice the member for Milton followed.

It goes on to state, “The motion is immediately open to debate. Such a motion is, like any other substantive proposal, fully amendable”. Therefore, what the member for Beauce did was procedurally, from that point of view, acceptable, as was the later amendment to put this off until a later time. To that extent, both of these amendments are admissible. It goes on to state, “and it retains precedence until the House's decision is rendered.” The last part is really important.

Therefore, the precedence of the privilege motion is what is being challenged in the motion that was moved by the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert.

The government effectively cut off debate specifically for the purpose of ensuring that traditional priority given to matters of privilege under the Standing Order and the commentary on the Standing Order I just cited. There is no question that this was done explicitly and deliberately.

To make that point, I want to quote from the commentary of the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert in introducing her motion. She said, “This morning you ruled that you believe there are sufficient grounds for finding a prima facie question of privilege. “We”, and I assume she means the government, “support your findings.” She goes on to say:

The House has debated this important issue today, and I want to thank all members for their important contributions to this debate. However, I would like to draw to the attention of members what the consequences are of what the Conservatives have done with their amendment to their own motion. Their amendment seeks to direct the procedure and House affairs committee to drop

whatever else it is working on. This amendment is highly unusual, and it has one purpose: to stop the procedure and House affairs committee from continuing the debate on the important issue of how we modernize the House of Commons. Our members on the committee have been hoping to debate the substance of these ideas, and this Conservative amendment is an attempt to block this important work.

I hope you can see, Mr. Speaker, the relevance of the earlier point I was making about the length of time the committee had been discussing that amendment, my amendment, and how futile those discussions had been. That is the important work we would be stopping. We would be stopping an epic filibuster that has gone exactly nowhere, but that is pushing aside all the other business with which the committee ought to be dealing.

●(1250)

Just to be clear. On March 10, the government House leader introduced her discussion paper, and the member—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is any surprise that I am up on a point of order. It is quite obvious what the member across the way is doing.

I have seen the former Speaker, under the Harper government, demonstrate great patience in listening to what the matter of privilege is about. Then as the day proceeds, we will often find the comments are shorter.

Just so the member understands what we are talking about today, as I stated earlier, page 149, second edition, of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* is clear: “a motion to proceed to Orders of the Day be adopted, then the privilege motion is superseded and dropped from the Order Paper.”

The disposition of the question of privilege raised yesterday is in order. The issue of the free movement of members within the parliamentary precinct has been raised a number of times over the years. Given the serious nature of this matter, the Liberal members gave notice of the motion at the procedure and House affairs committee to study the subject matter of this important issue respecting the privilege of members.

What we are witnessing today is a question of privilege on a question of privilege. This is not a question of privilege. It is a question of order and as such should not take precedence over the business before the House. The member should fully understand that and be relevant. If he chooses not to be relevant, it is easy then for others to look at the member and see that he wants to filibuster on a very important issue of privilege.

I would ask the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, to be relevant and concise. I respect the fact that he might not have heard what I and other members said earlier, but he seems quite content to just continue talking more than contributing to the actual privilege. If the member gets right to the privilege, then maybe it would be more relevant to the debate we currently are having.

Mr. Blake Richards: On the same point of order, Mr. Chair, first, it is quite rich, hearing that member talk about somebody who wants to talk on and on in the House of Commons.

Privilege

On the substance of the member's point, he is trying to claim that somehow it is not a question of privilege that the member has brought here. What we are talking about is essentially all members' privileges being breached and to be able to have a debate about this issue in the House of Commons. The most serious matter that comes before Parliament is a question of privilege. The *prima facie* case has been established by the Speaker, and the ability of the House to then have a debate is something that is an important privilege for all members. That has been breached here.

The member can cite whatever he likes to try to indicate there is an ability to use those procedural tactics, but at the end of the day that is what has happened. Procedural tactics were used by the government to try to prevent members' privileges from being exercised.

This is, in fact, something the member should have the opportunity to raise, fully defend, and explain, prior to having a ruling on it. He is doing that. I hear him making substantive points about why this is a question of privilege, and it is appalling to hear the government representative, the parliamentary secretary, trying to shut that down and eliminate his opportunity. It might almost be another breach of privilege on top of a breach of privilege.

I hope the government will refrain, and the member will have the opportunity to make his case.

•(1255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to thank both hon. members for the point of order and the reply. However, I believe there was a point made about being concise and not rambling on for hours on end. We do not have a lot of time. I am looking at what is going on, and I am looking at the time. We have government business to take care of. It is important that privilege be respected, but privilege also means taking care of government business. I will go back to the member, and hopefully he will be as concise as possible and finish up in short order.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, you can see my desire to be concise from the fact that I keep jumping up at the same time as you in the hopes that I can continue and then having to sit down out of appropriate respect for your position.

What the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader just did there was try to enter into the privilege discussion and make a point which is germane to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would ask the hon. member to speak to the point rather than assessing what the other side said.

The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate so much the task that you have before you and I just would like to remind you, as I know you are aware, that your job is not to advance the government.

You said, “We have government work to get to.” Well, the government would like to get to government work. Your job—as I know you know, and you do it very well—is to protect the rights of this House, of all members.

This question of privilege supersedes the government's agenda, and that is why it is so important that this be heard. We went through this yesterday and we saw the tricks that the government is trying to play, and we are asking that our Speaker stand up for our rights as well. The government wants to advance its agenda. That is not our job in this House. Our job is to protect democracy, to protect Canadians' rights, and to be Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. That is why it is so important that this is not about the government's agenda but about this question of privilege, a very important matter that is before us now.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I thank the hon. member, and it is about Parliament's agenda moving forward. That is what we are working for.

The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. Again I ask that he be as concise as possible.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, you are right, and I ought not to have intervened and offered my commentary on the parliamentary secretary to the House leader's commentary. There is a certain sort of meta-level to there that perhaps ought to be left to one side. Let me return, then, to the motion introduced by the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert, which is the issue at hand.

That motion said that we will proceed to orders of the day, but what it would do is end the discussion on a question of privilege before that question of privilege has been voted on, thereby taking away the right of every member to vote on her or his privileges.

This privilege is not something that is unique to the members who were held up. Being delayed access to the House of Commons is an item of privilege that is absolutely integral. It is the foundational privilege we have here, along with freedom of speech. It goes back to the days when King Charles I and his thugs tried to stop members of Parliament from coming to the House so that he could engineer a majority by essentially locking people in their hotel rooms and waylaying them in the streets. That is where this comes from. It is a matter that was raised about two years ago by Yvon Godin, a New Democrat and member at the time for one of the New Brunswick ridings, who was delayed for other reasons, although they were similar. These are circumstances that are specific but relate to all of us.

The issue of delayed access keeps on changing as construction schedules change, as high-profile visitors arrive here, and as security risks go up and down. These are matters that are in need of constant adjustment and examination. Taking away the privilege for us to vote on it is taking away a fundamental right here. It is obvious that it was never intended that these matters would go to committee without a vote of the House, that they would be removed without a vote in the House.

The member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert introduced her motion after those earlier comments that I gave by pointing out that a member of the procedure and House affairs committee, the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, had given notice of a motion in committee that says:

That the committee examine the Question of Privilege raised by the Member for Milton regarding the free movement of Members within the Parliamentary precinct

thereby apparently obviating the need for a vote in the House. That is problem number one, which affects the privileges of all of us. We do not want a situation in which matters of privilege can be brought before the procedure and House affairs committee by the simple expedient of a member moving a motion in that committee.

For one thing, not every proposal for a question of privilege that has been found to be a prima facie question of privilege is necessarily going to be accepted by the House. I have never gone back and done any historical research, but there is a reason that we do not simply have the Speaker refer it without a vote in the House. The House's word on this is vital. If we want to change the Standing Orders so the Speaker can send this off to the House unilaterally without it, just by saying, "I think it is a prima facie case, so off we go; there will be no debate of the House", that would be okay. However, that standing order does not exist. The current standing order does exist.

The proposal to change to the Speaker having unilateral decision-making authority on this not only does not exist, it is also not part of the government's discussion paper and it is not part of the government's vaunted promises to change Standing Orders in its election platform. It is not anywhere. It has suddenly arisen out of thin air: We will just unilaterally abrogate the Standing Orders and therefore the privileges of every member of this House on the fly.

That is unacceptable. There is a standing order—

• (1300)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If I may, just for clarification for my own use, the issue was two members not being able to make it to the House on time. The issue is there, but now we are back into, I believe, what is going on in the procedure and House affairs committee. Am I correct? I am just trying to clarify.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I find alarming that this is the conclusion you have drawn after having heard submissions from me and from the member for Perth—Wellington.

What was made quite clear is that at issue is how that question of privilege was responded to and the fact that now there is an effort to try to rewrite the rules on how privilege in this House works through a motion at the committee. The government has said that it respects that the question of privilege needs to be dealt with and that the decision by the Speaker yesterday, the prima facie decision, would be dealt with and respected in that fashion. That is the basis of the government having voted to go to government orders, to have disposed of the prima facie decision of the Speaker yesterday. That is the privilege issue at stake. What we are facing is an effort to rewrite the Standing Orders of this place and centuries of tradition.

I appreciate that the Clerk wants to intervene and provide contrary arguments to mine at the same time I am taking the time to make a submission, but I have to take exception, because we just saw a demonstration that you had not appreciated what had been said earlier, likely because of such interruptions, Mr. Speaker.

The point being made is much more fundamental. It is not the same question of privilege as yesterday. It is entwined as part of it, absolutely. What is being objected to is that we are now seeing an effort by the government to rewrite the rules of centuries in this

Privilege

House, to rewrite the big green book, O'Brien and Bosc. It is an effort to rewrite the Standing Orders so that privilege would be dealt with in an entirely different way, diminishing privilege to a motion from a government member at a committee. That is the basis of this motion we have been discussing here. That is why everything the hon. member is saying is in order. That is why I was alarmed by your earlier intervention, Mr. Speaker, and by the interventions of others, that suggested that it might not be.

In fact, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader got up himself and spelled out that this is what has happened and has taken place at the committee. That is an important part that is intrinsic to this. It is not simply a repeat discussion of the question of privilege on which the Speaker made a prima facie finding yesterday. It is where that is leading in an effort to rewrite our rules and diminish our privileges and, in effect, extinguish the rights of this House as to privilege, and the supremacy of this House as to privilege, and to make it now depend on government motions at committees.

• (1305)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): To the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, if I may, it was more about being concise. It was not questioning, so I will let him continue, and again remind him that conciseness is something we agree on.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I actually am approaching now the conclusion of the remarks I have to make. I am looking now directly at the government motion that led to today's question of privilege. The motion was simply the apparently innocuous motion to move to orders of the day. The point is that in moving to orders of the day, the vote on the matter of privilege effectively was diverted until we do not know when. We do not know when; maybe it is never.

There is no standing order to deal with this problem. That is actually the underlying thing. No one ever contemplated that this would happen, so there is no standing order to deal with it. That is the problem. A procedural trick was used, the implication of which was not understood by those who did it. I do not see malice in this matter in this respect. I just see a problem.

Reference was made by the member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert, before she moved her motion, to a motion being made at committee. She effectively said that this is going to be dealt with, because a motion is being moved at the procedure and House affairs committee to bring this forward. There is a second problem, which is that if we allow this to go forward, motions in committee can cause questions of privilege to be dealt with. That is an issue.

The third and most substantial issue relates back to the privileges of the member for Milton, which is the matter on which a prima facie case was found yesterday by the Speaker. The issue here is this. The way the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas worded the notice of motion at committee, the way it was introduced, removed the priority, the part that was in the member for Beauce's amendment to the motion regarding privilege:

and that the committee make this matter a priority over all other business including its review of the Standing Orders and Procedure of the House...

Privilege

The point is that the member left that part out. It will be dealt with after this interminable debate. It guarantees it. Far from ensuring that the privilege will be dealt with, this is a way of killing or delaying this question of privilege to a point where it is not dealt with, because this debate will go on and on, like Jarndyce, in Dickens' novel *Bleak House*, the fictional recounting of a true court case that started in 1798 and wound up in 1915.

There is a fundamental issue here. It goes back to the endless debate in that committee, precipitated by the government's desire to unilaterally rewrite the rules, which is actually happening right now, as we speak. While that is partly a discussion about the rules of this place, and maybe is appropriately a point of order, it is relevant to bring it into our discussion on privileges, because if there is no order in this place, if the orders are to be rewritten on the fly by new ideas invented by whatever hyper-caffeinated 20-year-old in the Liberal war room has dreamed this up, then we are in a situation in which privileges are going to be violated as a matter of routine, and this is just the first example.

The fact is that the conventions of this place are being profoundly abused, I think without any malice on the part of the government members but without regard to the way this place works. We do not need malice to ruin something as delicate and organic as the pattern of folkways, the culture we have here, the practices we have, which are written down not in one place but in various places, just like our common law. They are not in one place, yet they are sacred to our liberty. Just as the common law protects the liberty of citizens, so too do our practices in this place protect us just as much as the Standing Orders, which they supplement.

My logic, my argument, is this. The privileges of everyone here were violated by this motion in two separate respects, which I will not repeat again, in the interest of brevity, and in a way that is absolutely critical to the question of privilege that was under debate yesterday. It was adjourned in an unprecedented way that was clearly in violation of the spirit of the relevant standing order, Standing Order 48(1), and probably in violation of its letter, as well.

● (1310)

The point is, Standing Order 48(1) was violated in a way which offends the privileges of the member for Milton and, although the ruling was not on his question, those of the member for Beauce, who was on the same bus that was delayed. That is relevant to the privileges of all of us who may find ourselves in similar circumstances. The same thing happened to Yvon Godin when the president of Germany was visiting. The member could not get to the House because the motorcade took priority over him crossing the street. It also occurred when President George W. Bush was here and members could not get through for security reasons. This may occur on other occasions as well.

This is a matter that needs constant revision and not one that gets pushed off until the government has figured out how it wants to deal with a filibuster. The government is not willing to consider just setting aside this matter in committee, this matter of the Standing Orders review that has been under discussion since March 21 in order to deal with the other matter of privilege. It does not mean that the government has to back off and give up on its plans. It means it has to push them aside a bit, as it ought to do anyway, given the

other things that are on the agenda of that committee, such as a review of the Elections Act, on which the Minister of Democratic Institutions asked us to act as promptly as possible and get back to her by May 19. That deadline is impossible to meet now.

My goodness, we cannot have everything pushed aside while those hypercaffeinated teenagers in the backroom try to figure out the next thing to do. Their organizational ineptitude is no reason for us to throw aside the centuries of practices and customs we have built up in this place that protect our democracy. They can grow up at their leisure, but not, surely to goodness, at the expense of every Canadian coast to coast who is defended by the people in here only so long as we actually have privileges that are respected.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go on, I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 13 minutes.

I want to remind hon. members there are others who want to speak to this. If they could be as concise and brief as possible, it would certainly be appreciated by all.

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. Obviously, I have some points to make, but I will attempt to be as brief as is feasible.

I want to speak in support of the member's question of privilege. It is centred around this idea, which seems to be a recurring theme that we are seeing from the government, that somehow it will try to twist or use the procedures in place in the House to avoid the idea of accountability. This is a corollary to that because it is avoiding being accountable to the members of this House, and therefore is breaching the privileges of the members of this House. That is what it boils down to.

I want to go back to explain how this began, because I think it is important to start from the beginning. I would remind everyone that we are talking about a breach of members' privileges that occurred. The member for Milton raised it. It was also raised by the member for Beauce. They were prevented from being able to exercise the most basic, most fundamental part of their duties as members of Parliament, which is to vote on behalf of their constituents. They were delayed and prevented from getting here to exercise that most fundamental part of their duties.

I would ask especially the government members to think about the seriousness of that. Had that been two members of the government who had been prevented from attending a vote, and had that led to the government losing a vote, that could have led to the fall of the government, which would lead to an election. That is how serious that contravention of a member's privilege can be. It can be that serious. It can mean the fall of a government. It can mean putting the Canadian people into an election. That is how serious that can be. That is the kind of privilege we are talking about.

Privilege

I remember in the last Parliament being on the procedure and House affairs committee, PROC, when a similar, almost identical, privilege motion was brought by a member of the NDP who is no longer here, Yvon Godin. That had also happened to him, and a number of other members. In that case, the Speaker found a prima facie case of privilege, and it was referred by the House to PROC, which made it its first priority and dealt with it.

That has always been what has happened. There is a reason that happens. It is a very important issue to deal with, when a members' privileges have been breached, especially when it is talking about the most fundamental part of their duties, exercising their right to vote on behalf of tens of thousands of constituents. In my case, I represent about 140,000 people in my constituency. Others have varying numbers. However, each member represents tens of thousands of constituents. It is the duty of members to exercise that right on behalf of those tens of thousands of citizens who put them in this place, who put their trust in those members, and expect them to exercise that vote. When they are prevented from doing what is the most fundamental part of their duties, it is the most fundamental breach of members' privileges.

That is why that was taken so seriously at that time, and why it should obviously be taken that seriously at this time as well. I have always seen in my time on PROC, that when those matters have been referred there, they have been dealt with as a priority for that reason. As this matter was found to be a prima facie case as well, as it should have been, it should become the most important matter before this House, and should warrant the debates that are required, and a vote to refer it to committee should happen.

• (1315)

I appreciate that the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader stood up to cite procedure which allows the government to use the motion it did to return to government orders in order to avoid this debate and this accountability, I would say. What that means is that all members of this House have had their privileges breached by that action on behalf of the government, because this is a most fundamental question before us, when we deal with a question of privilege. I talked about why it is so important that we deal with these things and that they should be the most primary thing before the House. To use that kind of a motion is a breach of the privileges of the members of this House, and that is why my colleague raised this point.

What I will say at this point is that I understand the situation that is occurring right now. There has been a situation which almost seems like a side issue, but it is not, and I will explain why. There is this matter before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Again, I believe we are starting to hear some points that have already been made. We have collected a lot of information to date. We have one more member who would like to speak to this. I would like to go to that member and then wrap it up so that we could rule on it and bring the decision back as soon as possible.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I understand your desire to move forward as expeditiously as possible, but I have some points

that are important to this that I need to make, and I would ask that you give me that opportunity.

• (1320)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If you could make those points briefly and to the point without repeating what has already been said, it would certainly be appreciated. It would allow us to move on to the next member who is waiting to speak.

Mr. Blake Richards: Understood, Mr. Speaker, and I will certainly make every effort to do so.

As I mentioned earlier, these issues are being dealt with in PROC. If you bear with me, Mr. Speaker, I will not take long to get to it, but it does come to a point, and it is this. The Liberals have this issue before PROC, which obviously they brought forward, to table drop this idea of changing the Standing Orders in the House of Commons.

It appears to me that was done in an attempt to try to ensure the Liberals had less accountability to the House of Commons, which means to the Canadian people we represent. We are here on behalf of them. Because of that, there has been a notice of motion brought forward in PROC, but we are seized by this other matter, with an amendment to the motion that has been put on the floor by a Liberal member to try to ram through the changes they want to make there.

That creates a great difficulty in order for this to be dealt with. More important, it should not be left to a committee of the House of Commons to make that decision as to how it is dealt with. That should primarily be before the House when it has been brought forward. The debate and the vote needs to occur here. That is the proper process.

It again ties back to how this is another use by the government of trying to change the way this place functions to suit its own purposes, much like the motion before PROC. It is an attempt to change the way this place functions to suit its own purposes. In that case, it is to try to ensure that the Prime Minister can avoid accountability to Canadians in question period. It is to try to take away one more day of accountability to Canadians by removing the Fridays. That is what it is about. In this case it is taking the ability for the House to deal with the most fundamental stuff we have to deal with, which is talking about privileges of members of the House of Commons, about their ability to exercise their right to vote on behalf of the constituents who have elected them to represent them in the House.

That is essentially why we have a breach of privilege on a question of privilege. That is what has happened here, and it is just staggering. It is almost hard to keep track of it, but obviously there is a need for us to look at it and deal with it.

I understand we want to keep this brief, but it is important to hear people out on this. This is a critical matter, one that if it is allowed to proceed in the way it has sets this great precedent that members of the government can change the way this place functions to suit themselves. This is the greatest breach of privilege of the members of the House of Commons and therefore the greatest breach of accountability to the Canadian people that I could ever imagine occurring.

Privilege

I do not think we should try to rush this and say that members should only speak for a couple of minutes and move on to somebody else. That is very troublesome and problematic because of the very fact that we are talking about the heart of democracy, that ability to exercise the franchise that has been entrusted to us. We are put here for that very reason, to represent our fellow citizens.

For those two members who had those abilities breeched in that way and then to have the government try to avoid having the House deal with it in a proper manner, in the way it is supposed to be dealt with, in the way it always has been dealt with and instead have a committee take those responsibilities away from members is almost in itself another breach of privilege. It is the right of all of us to enforce something so fundamental about the way Parliament works, about the privileges of members and therefore the privileges of all Canadians to have their voice heard, to have their members of Parliament stand in this place and have a voice, on behalf of their constituents, that vote whatever that vote might be, to represent their constituents.

•(1325)

From that perspective alone, this is a serious and fundamental matter.

I see you are giving me the wave-off, Mr. Speaker. I understand your desire to try to move on, but I just cannot emphasize enough how important it is that privileges of all members be respected, and the privilege of all members to deal with a motion of privilege needs to be respected. If that cannot be respected, then how can we expect someone to have their privileges upheld in this place, if they have their vote taken away and then the government tries to find ways to procedurally prevent that from being dealt with in a proper manner?

It just speaks to exactly what we are seeing over and over again with this attempt by the government that I mentioned earlier, the one in PROC. We saw it happen in this House with ways to try to avoid accountability, with ways to try to change the ways things function, but with the consent of the people—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please.

To the member, I believe we have collected enough information to come back with a response at this point.

With all due respect, we did promise that the hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill would have a few words. I would like to move on to the hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill so he can have a few words, and then we can actually bring it back so that we can have an answer for Parliament.

The hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is my right to stand and speak to a matter of privilege in the House of Commons. I understand your desire to try to keep the debate as brief as possible. However, I have points to make, and it is my right to make those points. As I have said, it is the most fundamental part of our duties, and the most fundamental thing we need to deal with is a point of privilege. I find it very troubling, Mr. Speaker, for you to tell me my time is cut off.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If the member would look at page 144 in chapter 3, it does determine that the Speaker does have the right to determine when we have enough information, and I believe the hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill has something else to bring forward.

The hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I want to address the point you just referenced, which I believe is page 144, which you had read earlier. I thought of intervening at that point, but I was hoping it would not be necessary, but it seems that it perhaps may be.

It indicates there, in the section you read, that the Speaker will hear the member and may permit others who are directly implicated in the matter to intervene. That is the first sentence in that paragraph.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, in our previous discussion about the scope of the question of privilege that this is no longer a question of privilege that simply affects two members. The issue of the effort to rewrite the rules of the House through the back door. Rendering privilege to be a matter that is raised at committee on a motion from a member of the government means that this now affects every single member of the House. Therefore, every member is implicated and has a direct interest in speaking to it.

The construction of the motion is no longer simply one of privilege for the two members, but it is privilege as it affects all of us in this House. I have certainly indicated that what we are discussing is inclusive and, bound into it, the effort to effectively amend the Standing Orders or our rules by changing the way in which privilege is dealt with by making it a government motion at committee that hinders privilege.

I could even go further in that regard. It is actually more sweeping than that, because the Constitution of Canada even addresses the questions of privileges of parliamentarians. It says at section 18 under Legislative Power in part IV:

The privileges, immunities, and powers to be held, enjoyed, and exercised by the Senate and by the House of Commons, and by the members thereof respectively, shall be such as are from time to time defined by Act of the Parliament of Canada, but so that any Act of the Parliament of Canada defining such privileges, immunities, and powers shall not confer any privileges, immunities, or powers exceeding those at the passing of such Act held, enjoyed, and exercised by the Commons House of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and by the members thereof.

My point there being that we are even getting into the realm of constitutional and statutory amendment that the Liberals are trying to do by way of a motion at committee. This is a profound, serious, and deep question.

The other point being that, of course, as I was saying, everyone who is directly involved, which is now all 338 members of this House, are directly implicated, and every one of them should have the right to speak. I say that simply because I have heard the Speaker reference that there was one more member who wished to speak. I am not sure that is the case. I think the Speaker should canvass the House completely.

If we read further:

Privilege

In instances where more than one Member is involved in a question of privilege, the Speaker may postpone discussion until all concerned Members can be present in the House.

This would suggest the Speaker should certainly continue discussion until everyone who is present has had an opportunity to have their say, and then further, if there are others who wish to have their say beyond that.

There has been much weight placed on this sentence:

The Speaker also has the discretion to seek the advice of other Members to help him or her in determining whether there is prima facie a matter of privilege involved which would warrant giving the matter priority of consideration over all other House business. When satisfied, the Speaker will terminate the discussion.

One could certainly place a construction on that, as I would, that when the Speaker is satisfied that there is a prima facie question of privilege, absolutely, there is no need to hear any further, and the Speaker may step forward and terminate the debate at that place. That is what “when satisfied” means. It does not mean, “I can presume in my mind what others are going to submit and that it is going to fail to reach the threshold necessary.” That is not what satisfied means. What satisfied means is that the Speaker has been satisfied that there is a prima facie case of privilege. That is what the debate is about. At that point, the Speaker can intervene and cut it off and say, “I need hear nothing more. We need not debate anymore. I am satisfied.”

• (1330)

I appreciate and recognize that the Speaker has every right, when he has concluded that an individual has entered into repetition and is not raising new points, having given the member enough opportunities to draw the member's points to a conclusion, to terminate those comments. That, however, is a very different question than allowing other members to make their comments. The challenge for the Speaker is that if the Speaker is doing that, notwithstanding that I believe what we see in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in the passage cited, is that when satisfied, you may terminate. That means when satisfied that there is a prima facie case.

Mr. Speaker, how can you possibly have such magical psychic powers as to be able to presume the future submissions of members who have not yet had an opportunity to stand on a question of privilege that directly and personally affects them? I do not believe that was your intention. I did not hear that as your intention, but I sense that some may have been wishing to guide you to such an intention. Having seen your conduct as Speaker before, I do not believe you would, and I just want to caution you from heading to such shoals.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The intent is to gather enough information so that a decision can be made. I believe enough information has been given so that we can come to a conclusion. That is the intent of where we are going today.

I will let the hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill continue, very briefly.

• (1335)

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for having the faith that I will bring some additional

information to this. It is important, because I will address a couple of matters that I have not heard addressed today.

First, I will start by saying that it is not often that I get up in the House to make remarks. I do not consider myself to be a parliamentary orator like my friend from York—Simcoe. I do not consider that I know that thick green book anywhere near to that of my colleague from the London area. The reality is that I do not have a university degree. I did not even finish high school. However, I do have a degree in hard knocks. I was raised in Saskatchewan and have many of those Saskatchewan values, as does my family. Those values include things like working hard, respecting the law, and respect for institutions.

What I am getting at is that those are the values of my constituents, who entrusted themselves to me for the next four years when they elected me in October of 2015. It is my job to ensure, when I stand in the House, that I represent their views, but it is also important that I represent what this institution stands for.

Today we are debating a motion and an amendment to a motion, which were moved by two of my colleagues. The motion and the amendment to the motion were moved by two colleagues who sit immediately behind me. I happened to be here on budget day when my colleagues arrived, and I can say that they were hurt. They were hurt by the fact that they were not able to be here to represent their constituents in this particular vote.

What I have seen from the other side is that some of the points that have been made need to be challenged. I refer to the debate yesterday. I happen to have the privilege—and I say “privilege”, because that is what we are talking about here today—of sitting on the finance committee, in which I have the opportunity on occasion to listen to the member for Winnipeg Centre. I was not in the House when he spoke on this particular privilege motion, but I did happen to catch him on the television in my office. I am going to quote what the hon. member said. I will not quote his entire remarks, but I must say that some of the comments he made yesterday are pertinent to what we are talking about today.

As I said, I was here on budget day, when my two colleagues could not exercise their right to vote, and I can assure everyone that they were hurt by it. What did the member for Winnipeg Centre say? He stated, “We are not supposed to dilly-dally in our offices.” What kind of response to a privilege motion is that by the member for Winnipeg Centre? That shows an attitude. What Conservatives are saying here today, and have been saying for the last several days, and have been saying in other places, is that it is a prevailing attitude that we see day after day in this House.

He further stated in his remarks that he does not think this should even be referred to a committee. This is a gentleman who is an elected member of this House, a former member of the military, by his own admission in his remarks yesterday, and an elementary school teacher. He said that he did not think this should even be referred to a committee, that we have the bureaucracy to figure this out.

Private Members' Business

● (1340)

How can a member from that government stand in this House and say that our privileges, whether they have been violated or not, should be determined by a bureaucracy? That is absolutely absurd. The problem that many of us on this side have is that we see the actions of the government on a number of fronts, and, frankly, we do not trust it. We do not trust that the government is going to do the right thing. We do not trust that it is going to fix the problem we were talking about here today. For that reason, we need to ensure that there is a ruling that is fair. As the amendment said, it not only needs to go to a committee, but it needs to have the highest priority at that committee. That is what we are talking about here today. We have seen what the current government does in terms of priority. There is only one priority that comes from the government, and it is its own priority. It does not matter what the issue is, it is what they want to do, and they are going to get it done whether they have to roll over the opposition or not.

I know that there may be other members of this House who want to speak, but I have heard what you had said, Mr. Speaker, on a couple of occasions, so I am prepared at this stage to move the following motion, seconded by my colleague from Banff—Airdrie. I move that the question of privilege regarding the free movement of members of Parliament within the parliamentary precinct, originally raised on March 22, 2017, be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is the hon. member asking for unanimous consent to move that motion?

Mr. Ron Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I am moving a motion. I do not know whether I need unanimous consent.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If not, it would be premature to be moving a motion at this point.

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I was referenced as seconding the motion, but it was my understanding that you stood a couple of times during my intervention and indicated that you felt you had all the information you needed. It sounded to me as though you were prepared to rule. Therefore, I think it would be in order for the member to move the motion to have it referred to the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): To the hon. member, I said when we had enough information to come back with a ruling, then we could bring forward a motion. In the meantime, I believe we have collected enough information. I will be presenting it to the Speaker and will be coming back with a ruling in good time.

It being 1:44, the House now proceeds to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed in today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1345)

*[English]***FORMALDEHYDE EMISSIONS**

The House resumed from February 16 consideration of the motion.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to take a personal moment. Today is my granddaughter Kwastanaya's birthday, and I am not there with her, so I would like to wish her a very happy birthday and let her know that even though I am not with her on her special day, her Ciciye loves her very much.

I am honoured to rise in the House today to speak to Motion No. 102. The motion aims to adopt regulations on formaldehyde emissions and to model these regulations on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's regulatory standards.

While we have been made aware of the toxic effects of formaldehyde for decades, countless governments have failed to take action by ensuring that regulations are enforced. I believe that passing this motion and strengthening Canada's enforcement of formaldehyde emissions will not only serve to benefit Canadian industry but will protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Formaldehyde is a colourless gas emitted mainly from household products and building materials. It can be present in homes as a result of fumes from household products and building materials used in the home.

In Canada, the presence of formaldehyde in the air poses a particularly dangerous risk, as Canadians spend the majority of their time indoors, especially during the winter months. Although there is a formaldehyde emissions standard for composite and hardwood plywood panels, this is simply a guideline. Compliance is voluntary. It is not enforced by Health Canada, and this is putting Canadians at risk.

The health impacts of exposure to formaldehyde emissions are significant. Formaldehyde is an irritant, and concentrations of the gas can cause respiratory problems and burning sensations in the eyes and throat, and in instances of high exposure, can even cause cancer. Those with asthma and children are most likely to become sick after exposure to formaldehyde.

For these reasons, formaldehyde was declared to be toxic in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. Despite this, formaldehyde can still be found in composite panels made of recycled wood. These panels have many uses, such as in the construction of furniture, shelving, cabinets, flooring, and even toys.

It is important to note that Health Canada has, in fact, established guidelines for indoor air quality, but the regulations on formaldehyde emissions fall short. As I previously mentioned, Health Canada specifies a formaldehyde emissions standard for wood composites. However, this is a voluntary standard, a favoured method of regulation in both Conservative and Liberal governments in the past. It is senseless to have standards for formaldehyde emissions unless they are made mandatory.

Voluntary guidelines have put Canadians at risk for far too long. We need a firm commitment from the government that the health and safety of Canadians will be its top priority. I believe that Canada needs to take its cue from our closest partner, the United States, and finally enforce strict regulations.

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed the homes of thousands of families in Louisiana, many people were temporarily housed in mobile homes and trailers. These temporary homes were constructed using composite wood, and numerous people living in these trailers became very ill from the formaldehyde content. This resulted in several lawsuits over many years as victims sought reparation for the damage done to their health.

In response to these events, the United States government introduced stringent regulations to eliminate formaldehyde from composite wood products in 2016. These products include everything from countertops and cabinets to flooring and plywood. In December of this year, these regulations will be fully implemented in the United States. Any foreign or domestic manufacturers that want to sell or produce wood composite products containing formaldehyde will have to comply with the new regulations in only a few months.

It is also important to note that California has adopted particularly strict measures, using a phase-out approach, to reduce public exposure to formaldehyde. These regulations require that any composite wood contained in flooring products be certified as having been manufactured using compliant wood products during production.

Of course, it is important to think about the impact strict regulations may have on Canadian businesses.

● (1350)

Currently 13 factories in six provinces produce composite panels. Many of these factories are in rural communities, like the one I represent, and these communities depend on the economic benefits they bring to the region. These factories employ 11,500 workers and have an impact of approximately \$3.4 billion for the Canadian economy. In my riding in particular, the forestry and lumber industries are key to sustaining a strong local economy.

In February, we heard from members of the House that particle panel manufacturers in their ridings would directly benefit if this motion passed.

If Canada does not harmonize its regulatory standards with those in the U.S., there will likely be a number of consequences in relation to profits and competition. As a result, we have already seen Canadian companies adopting stricter standards. Many Canadian manufacturers have adjusted their practices to comply with the regulations introduced in the United States in order to keep exporting their products across the border.

Given that just over 70% of Canada's raw panels are exported to the U.S., many Canadian companies have already changed their production standards to meet American regulations. Canadian manufacturers would be at a significant disadvantage by not adhering to these strict rules, because it would allow them to remain competitive. I am confident these new regulations will be a great

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asset, not a hindrance, to our lumber producers and will only serve to strengthen our local economies.

Since the motion was first presented in the House, I have been pleased to see that many of us on both sides of the aisle will be supporting Motion No. 102.

The government has a mandatory duty under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to take action where significant health risks pose a threat to Canadians. Health officials are well aware of the dangerous risks associated with formaldehyde, and it is time for the government to take leadership and protect the lives and well-being of Canadians. Voluntary standards are not good enough. We need to pass this motion to ensure that regulations for formaldehyde emissions will be fully enforced.

We also need to ensure that our Canadian industries remain profitable and competitive with our American counterparts, and this motion will do just that. This is why I wholeheartedly support Motion No. 102, and strongly encourage all members to do the same.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to speak to private member's Motion No. 102, which calls on the government to adopt regulations to limit formaldehyde emissions from composite wood products intended for indoor use.

[*Translation*]

I also want to thank my colleague, the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, for all his work on this file and for bringing this very important matter before the House.

[*English*]

In addition to calling on the government to take action to limit the emissions of formaldehyde in indoor air, the member's motion further asks that regulations be developed that aim to be similar to those recently published by our neighbours to the south in the United States.

[*Translation*]

Our government agrees.

[*English*]

Our government supports the motion before us today.

[*Translation*]

Adopting regulations in that regard would build on a number of efforts that have been made so far to limit exposure to formaldehyde, which is a known carcinogen. Basically, it will help better protect Canadians' health, and that is why we are here. The health implications of formaldehyde are well known, and have been for some time now.

*Private Members' Business**[English]*

The Government of Canada assessed it under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, CEPA, in 2001. Our scientists concluded that it was toxic to both human health and the environment and added it to CEPA's list of toxic substances, commonly known as schedule 1 of the act. Its toxicity is also recognized by a number of reputable sources worldwide. The International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies it as carcinogenic to humans.

Before going any further, perhaps we should answer this question. What is it? ·

- (1355)

[Translation]

Formaldehyde is a colourless substance that was commonly used as a raw material in many household consumer products and construction materials. Although the use of formaldehyde has diminished in Canada, the U.S., Europe, and Australia because of its hazardous nature, the main source of indoor exposure continues to be the release of gas from products containing formaldehyde.

[English]

This includes the composite wood products that the motion before us today is speaking to. Composite wood is used in many applications, including the manufacture of wood panels, such as particle board in countertops, decorative plywood for cabinets, laminate flooring, or finished products such as furniture. Composite wood products are created by binding wood particles together with resin or another kind of adhesive that often contains formaldehyde. It is the off-gassing of formaldehyde from these products that can contribute to increased levels of formaldehyde in indoor air.

[Translation]

As members of the House know, formaldehyde is also produced by the combustion of fuel and any other organic material. In light of that, formaldehyde emissions from motor vehicle engines and the possession of certain formaldehyde solutions have been regulated in Canada since 2003 under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999.

[English]

With respect to concerns about indoor air quality, which is where our focus lies today, the government has continued to take action.

In 2006, following a comprehensive risk assessment to determine safe limits of formaldehyde, the government published indoor air quality guidelines that are unique in North America and much of the world. Meanwhile, in the United States, a series of initiatives related to setting regulatory emission limits for formaldehyde from composite wood products was also beginning to gain steam.

[Translation]

These efforts truly began to pay off in 2007 when California adopted regulations to reduce formaldehyde emissions from composite wood.

[English]

In 2010, the United States Congress enacted the Formaldehyde Emission Standards for Composite Wood Products Act, which required the United States Environmental Protection Agency, otherwise known as the EPA, to develop national regulations. These regulations were published on December 12, 2016, and set emission limits for composite wood, similar to those in effect in California.

[Translation]

As everyone likely knows, California is a very large market and companies that sell their products there also sell their products across the United States and North America.

[English]

In order to continue selling their products in California, the major Canadian producers made investments to comply with the California standards, and are already well positioned to sell to the rest of the United States when the EPA regulation comes into force this December.

[Translation]

These measures are clearly intended for an industry that believes it would benefit these companies to align with market requirements to sell these products in Canada and the United States.

[English]

That said, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, I want to take a moment to highlight the contributions that Health Canada has made to this process in support of the mandate to protect the health of Canadians.

Between 2012 and 2015, the department carried out the testing of hundreds of different construction materials and products, so we could know which products were off-gassing formaldehyde into the homes of people. Armed with that information and data from our air quality monitoring, which indicated a need to drive down formaldehyde levels in indoor air, Health Canada then engaged the Canadian Standards Association to lead the development of a consensus-based standard that involved wide representation from industry. The standard, which is voluntary, specifies health-based emission limits for composite wood products. It was also developed to align with the regulations in the United States and California.

[Translation]

That said, it is important to determine whether the current voluntary approach will be enough once the EPA regulations come into force.

[English]

As a government, we have a responsibility to review the changing landscape, assess the possible impacts that this may have on the health of Canadians, and ask ourselves if a voluntary approach in Canada is sufficient to prevent these possibly harmful products from entering our country, and indeed our homes.

Despite actions taken to date, research confirms that formaldehyde continues to be found in the emissions from composite wood products available in the Canadian market, which includes imports from other countries and the indoor air in Canadian homes. Additionally, at times it continues to be found at levels which can adversely impact the health of Canadians, especially in newer homes.

• (1400)

[Translation]

As part of a series of indoor air quality studies, Health Canada measured the levels of formaldehyde in 500 homes between 2005 and 2015 in different cities in Canada. Every house had detectable levels of formaldehyde in its indoor air and roughly 8% of the homes exceeded Health Canada guidelines on residential indoor air quality for long-term exposure.

In other words, concentrations in excess of Health Canada guidelines may cause irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat and may worsen asthma symptoms in children. The risks to human health are real and it is time to take action.

[English]

By supporting the motion, our government is proud to indicate that we support examining taking further steps to protect Canadians, and especially our children, from the risks of formaldehyde exposure.

[Translation]

The timing of this motion is auspicious. I am pleased to inform the House that Health Canada officials have already initiated discussions with various stakeholders and, together with Environment and Climate Change Canada, have begun drafting regulations to address this issue.

[English]

As the government moves forward in the consideration of regulations, I want to assure the House that we will consult with Canadian stakeholders and any interested Canadians to develop a made-in-Canada solution that will protect Canadians from the health risks associated with formaldehyde, which is my priority, but will also protect Canadian companies and the market from products that do not meet our high North American standards.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to reiterate our government's support for this motion. It is an important and concrete way to protect Canadians' health and to support the growth and success of Canadian businesses. I understand that officials are eager move this file forward together with stakeholders and ensure that everyone is heard.

[English]

Today I have outlined the reasons why our government supports the motion. I would like to thank the member once again for bringing forward the motion. I look forward to working with all members of the House as we take action on formaldehyde emissions from composite wood products intended for indoor use.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Once again, and I believe it is worth repeating, I would specifically like to thank the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia for bringing this extremely important issue to the House. He works very hard to protect the health of Canadians, especially children.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): ×Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here on this Friday afternoon to tell my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia that we will support Motion No. 102, which reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) adopt regulations on formaldehyde emissions for composite wood products intended for indoor use that are sold, provided, or supplied for sale in Canada; and (b) ensure that these regulations are similar to US Environmental Protection Agency regulations enforcing the formaldehyde emissions standards in the US Toxic Substances Control Act Title VI in order to protect the health of Canadians who use these products.

“Formaldehyde” is not a word that you hear every day. Try saying it three times and it becomes a bit of a tongue-twister. Nevertheless, it is a very important word.

I have a lot of respect for my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, not just because he sponsored this motion, but because he works very hard for his constituents. Upon discovering a flaw in the regulations, he did the right thing and took action in Canadians' best interest by moving this motion.

Anyone can be affected by these regulations on a daily basis, and yet we all agree that most Canadians did not wake up this morning thinking about formaldehyde and its health impacts. It is our job, as parliamentarians, to take action and ensure that Canadians' quality of life is maintained and protected, and that is it always improving.

When you say the word “formaldehyde”, unless you are speaking with someone who loves science, your listener is likely to lose interest quickly. However, it is an important subject, and I am pleased to rise in the House today to support the motion.

Some people might be wondering whether Canada already has legislation to protect us from toxic substances. In fact, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 is one of the most important environmental laws in Canada governing the assessment and management of chemical substances. It is also true that the purpose of the act is to protect the environment, as well as the health and well-being of Canadians. Under the heading “Chemicals” on the Government of Canada website dealing with the act, it reads:

A major part of the Act is to sustainably prevent pollution and address the potentially dangerous chemical substances to which we might be exposed.

This law also regulates the use of formaldehyde, so what is the problem? The problem is that our standards are not as strict as those published in December 2012 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which adopted the regulation of the California Air Resources Board on composite wood products in order to harmonize the regulatory framework for all 50 American states.

Private Members' Business

Some people believe that the Conservatives do not care about the environment and would go so far as to wonder why the opposition members are choosing to support Motion No. 102. People need to stop believing that we, the Conservatives, are the enemies of the environment. I would like to remind the House that we supported the signing of the Paris agreement in December 2016.

I would also like to remind the House of some of the things that the Conservatives accomplished under the Harper government that substantiate what I just said about our commitment to protecting the environment.

First, we created the clean air regulatory agenda. Then, we established new standards to reduce car and light truck emissions, as well as new standards to reduce emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and their engines.

We also proposed regulations to align ourselves with the U.S. Tier 3 standards for vehicle emissions and sulphur in gasoline. We sought to limit hydrofluorocarbons—another word that is hard to pronounce—black carbon, and methane. We also established new rules to reduce emissions from coal-fired power plants.

Furthermore, we put in place measures to support the development of carbon capture technologies and alternative energy sources, and enhanced the government's annual report on main environmental indicators, including greenhouse gases.

That is just a brief overview of all the things that we did during the nine years that the Harper government was in power, before the Liberals took office.

● (1405)

I am proud to be the official opposition critic for the environment and climate change. I take this role very seriously. Today, I am pleased to give my support to Motion No. 102 sponsored by my colleague.

Our health, our quality of life and that of our children and grandchildren are important, and future generations have the right to a healthy environment. They also have the right not to have their future mortgaged by a huge deficit, but that is another story.

I am very proud to be a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development and to have contributed to the unanimous report tabled on March 24 in which the committee calls for a rapid increase in the number of protected areas. There is a very important word here that bears repeating and stressing, and I would like all Liberal members to listen closely: unanimous.

When we tabled this report on the environment on March 24, we were unanimous. I hope that the Liberals will give us the chance to vote unanimously on changing the rules of the House. Again, that is another story.

What are the health-related risks of formaldehyde and why should we be concerned if the Canadian Environmental Protection Act already addresses them?

Let us start with the risks. According to Health Canada, formaldehyde is an irritant, and exposure to high concentrations of this substance can cause a burning sensation in the eyes, nose, and throat. Long-term exposure to moderate concentrations, at lower

levels than those that cause irritation, can also cause respiratory symptoms and allergic reactions, especially in children.

Very high concentrations of formaldehyde can cause cancer of the nasal cavity. Therefore, we must ensure that legislation adequately regulates not just the use of formaldehyde in goods manufactured in Canada, but also its use in goods that we import.

Since I only have a few minutes remaining, I would simply like to highlight the importance of ensuring that our goods conform to U.S. standards and that we have solid legislation to prevent any product dumping made by other countries.

We know of countries that do not have the same standards and that are not as concerned about their citizens' quality of life. They allow the sale of goods containing formaldehyde, which has had negative repercussions for their youth. Therefore, we must protect ourselves.

In the riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, there are 11 businesses directly affected by the export of such products. We want to export those products, but we do not want products from other countries to enter Canada and short-circuit the economic development of these businesses in the beautiful riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Nonetheless, there is an important part of the motion that needs to be changed. Instead of providing for regulations that are similar to those of the United States, we should be seeking to harmonize our regulations with theirs and I already explained why.

We need to ensure that our homes and the buildings where we work hard to earn a living have clean air. We live in the most beautiful country in the world, but it is a country where Canadians spend a great deal of time indoors, depending on the season. We cannot forget that.

Through targeted regulations and government action we can protect Canadians.

● (1410)

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleagues from Louis-Hébert and Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier as well as my NDP colleague for their kind words.

I am fortunate to have this opportunity to close the debate in the House today on Motion No. 102, the purpose of which is to establish and adopt regulations on formaldehyde emissions for composite wood products intended for indoor use that are sold, provided, or supplied for sale in Canada.

These regulations should be similar to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations enforcing the formaldehyde emission standards in the Toxic Substances Control Act, Title VI, through a certification process to establish levels of formaldehyde in composite wood products sold or supplied for sale in Canada. As we now know, the U.S. regulations will go into force beginning December 12, 2017.

Private Members' Business

Formaldehyde is a colourless gas that is emitted into the air. As my colleague mentioned earlier, the health impacts of formaldehyde are well known, since Health Canada has been studying and documenting them for many years now.

High concentrations of formaldehyde can cause irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat; cause breathing problems; and worsen asthma symptoms in children and infants. They can even cause cancer. That is why this gas was declared toxic in the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. Formaldehyde is found in many construction materials made using composite panels, which are becoming increasingly common in the everyday lives of Canadians. Formaldehyde comes primarily from the resin that is used as an adhesive in the manufacture of composite wood panels and hardwood plywood.

As we know, Health Canada has developed general guidelines regarding indoor air quality in homes. Although there is a formaldehyde emission standard for composite wood panels and hardwood plywood, CAN/CSA-0160, it is a voluntary standard. As a result, it is not systematically enforced. Manufacturers are under no obligation to apply the standard as they would if they were required to by law or regulation.

As a result, the motion we are debating today is crucial and addresses unresolved problems that will only get worse when the American regulations take effect in December 2017. The motion seeks to protect the health of Canadians who buy or use these products. It also seeks to ensure that the composite wood panel manufacturing industry remains competitive and that Canadian consumers have access to the same quality products that American consumers do now.

Any American or foreign manufacturer of composite wood wishing to sell or supply their products to American consumers will have until December 12, 2017, to comply with the certification program and U.S. environmental requirements. Through these regulations, the United States has clearly indicated to manufacturers of composite panels that health of Americans comes first. Since the majority of Canadian manufacturers of composite panels have already made investments to modernize their operations in preparation for the coming into force of the new U.S. standards, they will be able to continue exporting their products to the United States and their operations will not be affected. However, some foreign manufacturers who have not made the necessary investments may try to liquidate their products in Canada, for example.

Having a Canadian certification process similar to that of the United States would protect our consumers and guarantee that the goods they buy have the highest possible quality standards.

In closing, I want to commend Canadian composite panel manufacturers for their leadership and for making the necessary investments to comply with the highest standards and limit Canadians' exposure to formaldehyde.

I am fortunate to have one of those companies in my riding. Uniboard employs about 200 people and actively contributes to our region's economic development.

On that note, I would like to thank my colleagues. Issues such as this provide us with an opportunity to work together to ensure Canadians' health and well-being.

• (1415)

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to an order made on Monday, April 3, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 3, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

It being 2:18 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:18 p.m.)

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