



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 26, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 26, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2017-18

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2018, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

* * *

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, in which the committee requests that the deadline in order of reference M-39, Immigration to Atlantic Canada, which was referred to the committee on November 2, 2016, be extended by one week.

[*English*]

If the House gives its consent, I move concurrence in the 13th report.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

CHILD CARE

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, child care is a key and important issue to people in my community and I am pleased to present a petition that was started by Sara Ehrhardt of Toronto East Enders for Child Care. They are seeking high quality, affordable child care and relief for middle-income families by raising the child care expenses deduction upper limit to

\$28,000 per year, which is in line with the actual child care fees in the city of Toronto. In fact, it is about \$100 a day for an infant in the city of Toronto. I would like to thank Shiralee Hudson Hill and Amanda Munday for their work and advocacy in preparing this petition.

* * *

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 Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 17

Hon. Maryam Monsef (for the Minister of Finance) moved that a ways and means motion to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled on March 22, 2017, be concurred in.

The Speaker: 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 Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

Government Orders

● (1045)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 378)***YEAS**

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baylis	Beech
Bennett	Bibeau
Bittle	Blair
Boissonnault	Bossio
Bratina	Breton
Brison	Caesar-Chavannes
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
DeCoursey	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz	Easter
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Fry	Fuhr
Garneau	Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hardie
Harvey	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Iacono	Joly
Jordan	Jowhari
Khalid	Khera
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Medicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)
Monsef	Morneau
Morrissey	Murray
Nassif	Ng
O'Connell	Oiphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Peschisolido
Peterson	Petitpas Taylor
Philpott	Picard
Poissant	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy
Rusnak	Sahota
Sajjan	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia

Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sorbara	Spengemann
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Tootoo
Vandal	Virani
Whalen	Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould	Young
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NAYS

Members

Albas	Albrecht
Anderson	Angus
Arnold	Aubin
Benzen	Bergen
Bernier	Berthold
Bezan	Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boucher
Boulerice	Brassard
Brosseau	Brown
Calkins	Cannings
Caron	Carrie
Chong	Christopherson
Clarke	Clement
Cooper	Cullen
Davies	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeshen	Dubé
Dusseau	Duvall
Eglinski	Falk
Fast	Finley
Gallant	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Hardcastle	Harder
Hoback	Jeneroux
Julian	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kwan
Lake	Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Leitch	Liepert
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacKenzie	Maguire
Masse (Windsor West)	Mathysen
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Moore	Motz
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	Paul-Hus
Paupé	Poilievre
Quach	Ramsey
Rayes	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Sansoucy	Schmale
Shields	Shiple
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Stewart
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Trost
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vecchio	Viersen
Wagantall	Warawa
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Weir
Wong	Yurdiga
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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

SALARIES ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are four motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for report stage of Bill C-24.

Motions Nos. 1 to 4 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table. I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 4 to the House.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-24 be amended by deleting Clause 1.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-24 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-24 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-24 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak to my report stage amendments on Bill C-24. There are four main amendments that would adjust this bill in a major way.

In all ways, this is a very poor bill that would have a detrimental effect not only on what we are doing here in the House of Commons, but, just as importantly, on what is happening across the country in terms of regional economic development.

I want to begin by recapping what Bill C-24 would do. Essentially, Bill C-24 would paper over the ministerial changes the Liberals made when they took office two years ago. Two years later, they are here in Parliament asking us to bless what they did.

I will remind the House what those changes are. First, the Liberals are seeking to give ministers of state full ministerial status, and full ministerial salaries to boot. Second, the bill would permanently scrap the six regional development ministerial positions. They would also add a provision to let them swear in, in the future, an additional three full-rank ministers, yet to be named. We can only imagine what they may have planned for those three additional ministers.

There are only 10 minutes, so I am going to speak briefly about one of the issues I have spoken about before, and that is the elimination of the economic regional development ministers. It is something that has not gotten a lot of media profile. For those of us who are not from Ottawa or Toronto or Toronto areas, those of us from western Canada, the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, and northern Canada, this is a huge blow to what is happening in our areas. We had ministers in previous governments, previous Conservative and Liberal governments, who were directly responsible for their

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regional economic development portfolios. That meant that they would be able to speak at the cabinet table directly to issues in their regions, and they would be in charge of their regional economic development agencies. The Prime Minister made a decision that he wanted to change that.

Let me quote what the Prime Minister said this summer in Charlottetown. He told an interviewer that his decision to appoint one minister, from Toronto, to run all the economic development agencies, such as ACOA, was “a way of reducing the kind of politics we've seen from regional development agencies.”

What a cynical slur, not just against, at that moment, Atlantic Canadians but against all the regional development areas and regions of this country. To somehow suggest that ministers from Quebec, western Canada, northern Canada, and Atlantic Canada could not advocate for their regions and bring issues and good projects forward without it becoming political shows that the Prime Minister has zero confidence in the rest of his ministers and seems to think that only one minister, from Toronto, would be able to get the balance right between representing the regions, making solid decisions, and not being political.

There is so much more to be said on this, but I will have to wait until I give my speech at third reading to talk a little more about the regional economic development minister issue.

I want to go to another part of Bill C-24. When the government House leader introduced it, she hailed it as a bill that would equalize the status of ministers. Members will recall the great fanfare about a gender-equal cabinet when the Liberals took office, “because it is 2015”, we were told. Lo and behold, the fine print was released, and it turned out that the junior ministers of state roles were all assigned to women.

The Liberals told us not to worry. Even though they were giving all the women those smaller roles, it would be okay, because they were going to pay them just as much as the full ministers. In fact, the PMO communications director is quoted in the *Toronto Star* as saying, “What needs to change, from a statute perspective is their salaries, so they get the full ministerial salaries”. Wow, thanks a lot. The ladies should not worry. They would get junior roles, but the Liberals would pay them for the full role. However, they would not actually be able to bring full ministerial memos to cabinet, they would not have deputy ministers, and they would not have full portfolios. However, they should not worry their pretty little heads, because they would be paid the full amount. Boy oh boy, what an absolute insult.

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• (1050)

Do not take my word for it. Margot Young, a law professor from the University of British Columbia, with a specialty in gender equality, appeared before the government operations committee. I will tell members a little of what she said. For starters, she said, “[T]his particular piece of legislation really doesn’t, as far as I can see, have much to do with gender equality.” To those Liberals who showed up with platitudes, the professor said, “[D]on’t describe something that is clearly not about gender equality as speaking to gender equality. That’s disingenuous”. She said, about the “because it’s 2015” quip, “[I]t loses a key leadership moment to articulate and shape opinion about what it means to actually have women in positions of equality, in positions of leadership and power.”

That is where we have seen, from the very beginning, that this Prime Minister is very good at quips and saying the right thing, but in following through on his actions on many issues, but specifically on being a feminist and treating women equally, we have seen a lot of talk but not always a lot of action and substance. The Liberals are definitely obsessed with optics. When something is presented or framed, it is of the utmost concern.

Professor Young graded their efforts on Bill C-24 by saying, “I think to frame it as a piece of legislation that speaks substantively to the issues of gender equality and cabinet composition is wrong, and it’s dangerous.” It sounds like she gave this bill an F for gender equality. That was the main point she was talking about.

As I mentioned, there are many areas where we have seen this Prime Minister fail on gender equality. As I mentioned, in this specific one, ministers were given junior portfolios but not given full responsibility. We have seen this a number of other times when the Prime Minister has had an opportunity to really stand up and take direct action that will help women.

A couple of examples come to mind, such as helping Yazidi women and girls who are tormented, persecuted, and much worse. This Prime Minister had so many opportunities to allow them refuge and safety in Canada, and he has not done it.

This is a very difficult topic, but it has to be said. Most recently, he removed female genital mutilation from our citizenship guide. A very important message to send to the world is that Canada is not a place where FGM will be tolerated or allowed, and instead of making that statement, he shied away. He got scared and worried, so he withdrew it. We saw it previously when the Liberals had an opportunity to stand up for women on reserves who did not have property rights, a basic right.

The Liberals get scared when the big bullies say not to threaten them or their power. The Liberals get scared, and the Prime Minister gets scared to stand up for women.

I believe this bill is wrong in many ways, certainly on the economic development side.

We are two years in, and I have seen some really good women cabinet ministers who maybe were given these positions because it was, as he said, 2015. I think many are growing and have grown, but we also have seen some put in positions where they were destined to fail. It has been very disappointing to see.

All of us, not just the government and the Prime Minister, need to stand up for women who truly need help, women who are systemically discriminated against and hurt. Many times, it is in other countries. Just giving lip service in Canada by saying to a woman that she can have equal pay but not equal responsibility is disingenuous and hurts the authentic feminist movement, which is really about true equality for women.

This bill is damaging, and we are disappointed to see it continue.

• (1055)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although the member is in the opposition, I commend her. She provides very strong leadership for her party in her role as opposition House leader. I am certain she did the same around the cabinet table for Stephen Harper as minister of state for social development. If she was providing that strong leadership around the cabinet table, did she not have an equal voice, and if she had an equal voice, why should she have been paid less than other cabinet ministers around the table?

• (1100)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to explain what the difference was between being a minister of state and a full minister. I did not have my own deputy minister. I had a full cabinet minister who, in a sense, was overseeing what we were doing as a team. That absolutely made sense to me. I had a voice at the cabinet table. We all had equal voices, but I did not have a full department or the ability to bring a memorandum to cabinet, unless it was given to me by the minister. Some might say that was an insult. It was not. I earned every single step I made. When one does that, one is able to stand with confidence and knowledge. That is not just with respect to women. There are men who are in junior positions who are also able to do their jobs in every sector and build their way up. However, we should not insult someone by saying, “We are going to pay you equally, even though you are not going to do the same amount of work, just because we think you cannot handle the reality of working your way up to that position.”

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. opposition House leader for explaining to the government the various tools at its disposal to build a cabinet. Part of the genesis of Bill C-24 was that the Prime Minister and the people around him did not understand all the different tools they had at their disposal to build a cabinet, how they work, and the fact that there are different positions. That is why when the bill was first tabled, we thought it might have something to do with gender equity. That was the context out of which the bill came, as the member rightly explained. The Prime Minister had screwed up, essentially, in terms of his commitment to gender parity at the cabinet table.

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If it is not about that, then the struggle is to define the relevant sense of “equal”. In our study of the bill, we have not been able to find any relevant sense that this really makes ministers more equal in a way they are not already. I am wondering if the member's study of the bill has led her to find what that relevant sense of “equal” might be.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Manitoba makes a very good point that there is nothing in this bill that makes cabinet ministers equal. If we take the gender issue out of it, what is the point? We know what the point is. The Liberals wanted to make it look like they were doing something. They touted their gender-equal cabinet, when it actually was not, and they are now trying to sugar-coat it by giving equal salaries. They are adding to it the regional economic development part and wanting additional ministers.

This is a poorly thought-out bill from the early stages of this government, when the Liberals were first elected. They have made a mistake with this bill, and now they do not really know what to do with it. I think they should scrap it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister first announced his cabinet in November 2015, something odd happened. Although I do not agree with the politics of people like the former minister of health and the justice minister, they arguably have very strong CVs and have definitely earned their place in cabinet. Rather than let those CVs speak for themselves, what did the Prime Minister do? Rather than let that gender-balanced cabinet speak for itself, he had to make it about himself with a big announcement, the day before, about gender equity. Similarly, his wife posted, on International Women's Day, a picture of her longingly looking at her husband, saying that on International Women's Day, we celebrate men.

I am wondering if my colleague can elaborate on how damaging it is when someone purports to be a feminist and instead makes it about himself.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, honestly, it is most damaging for many young women, women who are just beginning and are looking for mentors and leadership not only from other women but from men. It is very damaging to see the Prime Minister of Canada be so disingenuous. When he has opportunities to help women to make real substantive changes and act to help women, he does not. It always seems to be about the sound bite. It is most damaging for young women, frankly.

• (1105)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of Bill C-24, a bill that would formalize in statute the one-tier ministry that was sworn in on November 4, 2015, and ensure that this government and future governments have the flexibility to deliver on their commitments to Canadians.

To recap what has been explained previously about Bill C-24, the Salaries Act authorizes the payment out of the consolidated revenue fund of a ministerial salary to individuals who have been appointed to a ministerial position in the act. Currently, there are 35 ministerial positions listed in the Salaries Act, including the position of prime minister. The list of Salaries Act ministers changes from time to time to align with the priorities of the government of the day and the prime ministers' preference with respect to the composition of their

ministry. This is not new. Legislation amending the list of Salaries Act ministers was enacted in 2005, 2012, and 2013.

Canada needs a modern, agile, and flexible government that is organized in a way that is suited to delivering on its priorities and commitments. These amendments would help us do that. The bill would do away with certain administrative distinctions by adding to the Salaries Act five key ministerial posts, which are currently in the ministry, but as minister of state appointments.

Conventionally, ministers of state have been considered junior ministers because they have most often been appointed to assist other ministers with their portfolio responsibilities. However, this is not the case in the current ministry, where ministers of state have been given, by mandate letter and legal instruments, their own responsibilities and authorities specific to subject matter areas that are important to the government and Canadians.

The five new ministerial positions to be added to the act are minister of la francophonie, minister of small business and tourism, minister of science, minister of status of women, and minister of sport and persons with disabilities. Our government believes these are important positions for Canadians and for our economy and therefore merit full ministerial status. Formalizing these five appointments as ministers in full standing reflects the importance of the subject matter and the expectations placed on those individuals who occupy those ministerial positions. Once these positions are added to the Salaries Act, with the enactment of Bill C-24, the orders in council that assign these ministers to assist other ministers will be repealed.

I would now like to take a moment to address the question of whether there would be incremental costs associated with adding the eight new positions to the Salaries Act. To be clear, there are no incremental costs associated with the current ministry. The ministers currently appointed as ministers of state receive the same salaries as their cabinet colleagues and have office budgets commensurate with their responsibilities. This would not change under this legislation.

The legislation does, however, increase the number of ministerial positions that could be paid under the Salaries Act by two, from 35 to 37, including the position of prime minister. It is important to note that the current ministry comprises the Prime Minister and 30 ministers. This is a stark contrast to the ministry under Stephen Harper, which at one point comprised 40 members, the largest in Canadian history. The bill is not fundamentally aimed at growing the ministry. Its goal is simply to formalize in legislation the composition of the current ministry and to modernize the act to enable more flexible and adaptive ministries in the future.

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It has been asked why it is important that the minister of science and the minister of la francophonie do not have the legal title of minister of state for science or minister of state for la francophonie. Why not just continue with the current framework under the current act? To be clear, these ministers are not junior ministers. Our government wants to send a strong signal to Canadians that it has a one-tier cabinet, and that these new positions and their mandates are essential to delivering the commitments we made to Canadians. We want to remove distracting administrative distinctions.

However, Bill C-24 amendments are not just about addressing government priorities in the immediate term, but about ensuring that future ministries can be structured in a way that meets emerging priorities. That is why Bill C-24 also updates the Salaries Act to enable a modern, adaptive ministry. These are achieved by adding three untitled ministerial positions to provide the government with the capacity to deliver on future priorities.

• (1110)

These three positions can be filled and titled at the prime minister's discretion. They offer a degree of flexibility to the prime minister to design cabinet in response to emerging challenges and priorities without having to resort to minister of state appointments.

Furthermore, the alignment of all regional development agencies under one portfolio, especially under the minister responsible for national economic development, is another example. We would now have regional national expertise working together under one roof. By adopting this change, we allow for better synergy and provide the flexibility needed to make real impact in communities across Canada.

The regional development agencies continue their hard and valued work in each region. For example, they support small and medium-sized enterprises and help them become more innovative, productive, and export-oriented. The synergy among them will help grow the economy and allow RDAs to deliver the results that Canadians in all regions of the country expect.

I would like to emphasize that removing regional development positions from the Salaries Act does not affect the regional development agencies or eliminate the need for ministerial oversight of them. On the contrary, ministers will continue to be appointed to these positions. In this ministry, the minister of innovation, science and economic development would continue to be responsible for all regional development agencies.

Finally, the legislation also changes the legal title of the minister of infrastructure, communities and intergovernmental affairs to the minister of infrastructure and communities to reflect the fact that the Prime Minister has taken on the role of intergovernmental affairs minister.

In conclusion, these changes formalize in statute the current composition of the ministry and build a degree of flexibility in the future. These amendments address administrative constraints in the current legislation and catch it up with the structure of the ministry as it operates today.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the timing of the proposed legislation. It seems like so many other instances where the government has

responded to the concerns of Canadians. For example, the Minister of Finance is now deciding to put his assets in a blind trust. The Liberals have now decided to roll back some of the tax changes that they were fully planning to implement, which would have hurt middle-class Canadians. Also, the implementation of the small business tax reduction was in response to concerns of Canadians and of the opposition in the House.

I note that the member indicated that this is a good intention the government had. However, this was a decision made after it was realized that a number of these positions that were actually being held by women were not truly at the full cabinet level, and now the government has come up with this decision.

What I would like to know from the member is this. When did the Liberals suddenly come to the realization that they needed these positions to move into a position of full cabinet?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for talking about the small business tax credit, which is a promise we delivered on. However, I will address the main part of her question, which is on the timing.

The ministry was appointed a month and a half before Parliament even sat. The Prime Minister's intention was always to have equal voices at the cabinet table, and this legislation reflects the Prime Minister's intention and his commitment to Canadians to have an equal cabinet and an equal ministry.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his remarks, the member for St. Catharines said that one of the effects of Bill C-24 would be to do away with administrative distinctions between ministers. Of course, Bill C-24 would actually establish a new kind of minister. Instead of having ministers simpliciter, we would also have ministers for whom a department is designated. If the difference between a minister and a minister for whom a department is designated is not administrative, what is the difference?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat my answer to the previous question.

This is about our commitment to Canadians, and what the Prime Minister stood for was a cabinet that was equal and balanced and wherein all voices at the cabinet table were equal in being brought forth. The ministry, and the legislation that reflects the ministry, should reflect the commitments and the priorities of Canadians, and should allow for more flexibility for this Prime Minister and future prime ministers, as priorities change and issues come up. This will allow greater flexibility and agility in future ministries as well.

• (1115)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never miss an opportunity to hear a speech in the House by the member for St. Catharines. He does such an eloquent job of delivering them.

Following on the prior comments made by the Conservative member who talked about the government responding to Canadians, is that not the whole point of a government, to respond to Canadians, to consult with Canadians, to fully understand the impacts their comments might have, and then to make sure its legislation fits in line with that?

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Could the member for St. Catharines comment on the importance of consulting with Canadians as we develop this legislation or any legislation for that matter?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I have noticed in my two years here that, depending on the issue, we get criticized by the opposition for consulting Canadians on one hand, and then on the other hand when there is significant consultation, we get criticized for not consulting enough. That is interesting considering we followed a government that did not really consult at all.

This issue is of fundamental importance to this government. The Prime Minister made a commitment to Canadians that the ministry will be equal, that the voices around the table will have an equal voice, and that it will be more flexible.

I hear some laughter from Conservative members, and I appreciate that they may not see portfolios such as minister responsible for the status of women or minister of sport and persons with disabilities as being important, but they are for this government, and this legislation reflects that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke of equal voices in cabinet.

However, an MP who is not a minister may, at the Prime Minister's invitation, attend cabinet to discuss specific issues, and his or her voice will be equal to that of any other elected official around the table, minister or not.

The member said that, unlike in Mr. Harper's government, today's ministers of state have been given by mandate letter their own specific legal responsibilities.

I would like to ask him if that difference has any real impact on the ground. Will there be a cabinet? Will there be a deputy minister? Will there be documents that the government can bring to cabinet? Will there be a department with an actual physical building? Will there be public servants to oversee? If none of those things are in place, then this bill will not really change anything.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that the ministers around the cabinet table provide equal voices. There are issues of significant importance to this government. The work that the current Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour did when she was the minister responsible for the status of women to raise the issue of gender-based violence was incredible. The work of the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie has been incredible on the world stage. The work of the Minister of Science to bring back the importance of science after 10 years of darkness is incredible. These are important issues. These are important ministers. These are important voices at the table.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I suppose that the government deserves to be congratulated for having achieved something truly unique with Bill C-24. Typically when a government presents legislation, a member of the opposition party will either find something to vehemently oppose or support. There is something at stake in the legislation and opposition parties can expect that after the legislation passes, it will be a difference in Canadian law that matters.

Usually, government legislation makes a difference. However, the government has found a way to produce a bill that, even if it passes, virtually everything will stay the same. Never has this government, and perhaps any government, unless some past government has achieved something similar, managed to creatively waste the time of Parliament in the way this government has done with this bill. I suppose that is an achievement of sorts, yet not the kind that Canadians expect. Nonetheless, it is a form of achievement, and I would like to recognize it for what it is, so congratulations are due. They might not want to put that in their householders, though.

The reason this bill is ultimately a colossal waste of time, after reflection and study on our part anyway, is that it does not manage to achieve any of the objectives the government has set out for the bill. What are some of those objectives?

I will not harp too much on this point because we have heard it already in some of the speeches in the House. We thought this bill might have to do with the Prime Minister's commitment to gender parity in cabinet, but we have Liberals on record at committee categorically denying this bill has anything to do with gender parity. It is not about that, they said. Okay, fine. I am not quite sure what it is about.

However, the press release issued when the bill was presented talked about making all ministers equal and establishing a one-tier ministry. What does that mean? A one-tier ministry in which all ministers are equal, I guess, means that they are all called "minister". Of course, that is happening already. We have ministers who are technically ministers of state under the act, but who have been installed as ministers, and so we do not need this legislation to be able to call them "ministers".

One might say they will be paid the same, but, again, those ministers who are technically ministers of state are already paid the same. Whether they should be is an open question. They do have different administrative responsibilities. It is not abnormal to pay people based on the level of their administrative responsibility within an organization. The legislation is not needed to do that, and it is not clear that it should be done in the first place.

What other sense of equality can there be? We have heard from the Liberals that this is about taking ministers seriously at the cabinet table. That causes one to wonder at the superficiality of the Prime Minister who has to introduce legislation to call his ministers of state "ministers", just to help him take them seriously at the cabinet table. That is really weird.

Parliamentarians are always happy to help the Prime Minister do his job better. However, this seems like an excessive burden on Parliament just to have the Prime Minister take the very people he named to cabinet seriously at the cabinet table. That is not a great reason for us to be here today discussing this bill.

Government Orders

Administrative responsibility, I suppose, is another sense of equality that remains. This act does not change the fact that, in a myriad of ways, different ministers have different levels of administrative responsibility. Essentially, ministers of state will migrate over to a new category that has been created, one that is called ministers for “whom a department is designated”. A characteristic feature of a minister for whom a department is designated is that the resources they use for their job are carved out of the department of another minister. They do not have their own department. Rather, that is decided by another minister. That that more or less sounds a lot like what goes on already with ministers of state.

For instance, there are departments with ministers that answer to other ministers, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs where the Minister of Foreign Affairs is the top minister. It is very clear in the legislation that the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of International Development answer to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. They are unable to do whatever it is they would like to do in their capacity of minister without the concurrence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

• (1120)

This legislation does not speak to that at all, and they would continue to have a two-tier ministry in terms of administrative responsibility and having ministers answering to other ministers. This would not create an equal cabinet in that sense. That is okay. That is not an issue of principle. No one except the Liberals has come up with the idea that it is somehow wrong in principle to have an organizational structure in which some ministers answer to other ministers, because it makes sense in the context of a department. By the time they run that whole circuit, they have pretty much exhausted the senses of equality that they could address within legislation, and even some they cannot. This bill would do nothing.

What it would do is cause some collateral damage, which in itself is interesting given the arguments of the government, because it would prevent future governments from establishing separate regional economic development ministries. We believe there is value in doing that; the Liberals do not. That is fine, because there are different ways of doing things. On balance, we think that the Liberals have chosen an inferior way, but that is their right as a government. Canadians can judge them accordingly. Why they would want to tie the hands of future governments and deny them the ability to adopt a model with separate regional economic development ministries I do not know. That would be one negative consequence of this bill and one that we do not support.

However, that is passing strange because when I asked the government House leader at committee why the Liberals were getting rid of governments' ability to have separate regional economic development ministries, she said that a goal of the legislation was to update the legal framework to reflect the current practices of government. It is the current practice of government that it got rid of all the separate regional economic development ministries. When I put to her the question of why, if that is the goal of the legislation, the Liberals did not eliminate as an option the position of ministers of state, the government House leader had no answer.

If the goal of the legislation is to reflect the current practices of government, and if the current government has principled objection to the use of ministers of state because that establishes a two-tier ministry, their failure to eliminate that position does not make sense for all the reasons I have just enunciated, particularly the two-tier aspects of the ministry that would persist past Bill C-24. Nevertheless, that is an argument of the government. By the logic of that argument, the Liberals ought to be deleting the provisions for ministers of state, because that is what it would take to have the legislation reflect the current practices of the government. However, they are not doing so. I find that strange. Never mind that the legislation establishes a whole other legal mechanism for what is a minister of state, essentially by another name.

Consequently, the Liberals are not succeeding in establishing a one-tier ministry in all sorts of ways. They are not succeeding in updating the legislation to reflect the current practices of government, despite that being the stated objective of the bill. To the extent there are some other senses of equality in terms of pay and title, the Liberals have not demonstrated that the changes contemplated in the bill are necessary. If we take the time to consider this bill seriously, which is something I recommend to the government—I do not think it has tried that yet—it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that it is a poor bill that would not meet its stated objectives.

Its real objectives are not legal objectives, but political objectives responding to the mistake of the Prime Minister, who initially failed to understand how to compose a cabinet with gender parity. That is the real thing about this bill, but we are not talking about that in this place. From a legal perspective, this bill is a complete waste of time. There are just no two ways about it.

• (1125)

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

Mr. Speaker, the thing about the New Democrats, and also the Conservatives but more so the New Democrats, is that their position is really somewhat disappointing. To subject things to a reality check, shortly after the last federal election, the Prime Minister said that in Canada we want to have a one-tier cabinet. That meant that when members sat around the cabinet table, their voice would be equal. We did not want to have a 40-member cabinet, like Stephen Harper's. We wanted to have a 30-member cabinet.

The good news was that for the first time in the history of Canada we have gender parity. We have just as many females as males within cabinet. That is good news. The first thing that New Democrats do is to look at ways they can be critical of a gender-neutral cabinet. Shame on them. We recognize it for what it is, and this is a very positive, progressive move forward. This is a good thing.

Do my colleagues across the way not believe in gender equality? Have they abandoned that principle because they see a Prime Minister who has acted on it? What have they got against equality among those sitting at the cabinet table? It is a good news story. Why are they opposing it?

Government Orders

• (1130)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that deserves a response, but the member for Winnipeg North is no stranger to wasting time in the House. It is understandable why he is so passionate about the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which was very interesting.

I would like to ask him the following question.

Does he think that the Liberal government's weakness is to blame for the fact that they now feel obliged to bolster cabinet with more ministers?

They say they want everyone to have an equal voice. When we ask questions here in the House, maybe they should just be allowed to answer them. Then they would have a voice.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

I find it a little strange that the member for Winnipeg North wants to talk about the issue of equal voices at the cabinet table. Some of our Liberal colleagues said in committee that this bill has nothing to do with equal voices at the cabinet table. Let us just say that I found his remarks a little odd. I would remind him that if the Prime Minister were really serious about wanting equal voices at the cabinet table, all he had to do was appoint an equal number of women and men to cabinet as both ministers and ministers of state. The problem is that he decided to appoint only women as ministers of state.

We have reached a point where the government needs to waste our time in Parliament in an attempt to cover up the Prime Minister's mistakes. It is sad to see the government displaying this kind of attitude towards Parliament. The Prime Minister could have corrected his mistake by adjusting his cabinet appointments. We could have spent more time on other bills that, even the Liberals agree, are greater priorities. They have said themselves that they never have enough time in the House to debate their bills.

Now, we are here debating something that is unnecessary and that does not meet its own objectives. Why? I do not know.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to speak to Bill C-24, which, we believe, is not a good bill because it goes directly after two specific things: it gets rid of regional ministers, who, in our view, are very important; and it creates a type of subclass of ministers, who are no longer paid less than ministers, but who are less effective and have fewer work tools. I will come back to that.

First, I will address the issue of regional ministers. On this side of the House, we believe that it is always important to consider Canada as one large entity. Naturally, we are all Canadians. However, as magnificent as it is, our country is made up of vast regions, and each one is unique. All these regions have their own distinctive characteristics. That is why, on this side of the House, we believe that each one of these regions needs to have and retain strong

ministers who are responsible for the economic development of Canada's six major regions.

This is nothing new. We are just continuing with what the Right Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King established in 1921 when he decided that the minister responsible for Quebec would be the Hon. Ernest Lapointe.

The current Liberal government is undoing something meaningful that one of its predecessors put in place. We have to give credit where credit is due. This is just another example of the Prime Minister's bad attitude toward certain situations.

Let us not forget that this summer we called him on this and told him it was a bad idea to do away with regional ministers who are responsible for economic development. He said this was a way of curbing the type of politics that have always plagued the regional development agencies.

What does he mean by this type of politics? Could the Prime Minister have been more specific about the type of politics? Does that mean that his predecessors, like the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, or the Right Hon. Paul Martin, were doing things wrong with this "type of politics", to use the current Prime Minister's words? Does that mean that those Liberal governments were engaging in petty favouritism? With all due respect to his position, who is he to say that?

This high-handed, pretentious, arrogant attitude is what makes people in the regions lose confidence and feel insulted. With all due respect to the Minister of Economic Development, he is a guy from Toronto. That is not a flaw. If he were from Quebec City, I would say the same thing. If he were from Victoria, I would say the same thing. If he were from Flin Flon, I would say the same thing. It is only natural that someone's outlook would be more focused on the region they come from. That is less about politics and more about having to represent the people who elected us. However, someone with a national mandate has to think on a national scale.

I will give an example. Whoever comes up with the economic development plan is naturally going to favour his or her own people. It is not a flaw or a virtue. It is just a fact. Here is my example. A year and a half ago, Bombardier begged for a public handout. It asked for \$1.3 billion of Canadian taxpayers' money from the federal government and \$1.3 billion of Quebec taxpayers' money from the provincial government. The provincial government made a decision, as was its duty to do. The federal government, on the other hand, waited. Rather than giving in and giving Bombardier \$1.3 billion, what did the minister from Toronto who is responsible for economic development do? He gave Bombardier a \$135-million loan for the C series and, lo and behold, he also gave the company a \$250-million loan for another one of its aircraft, the Global 7000. The surprising thing is that Bombardier's initial request made no mention of the Global 7000.

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What is the difference? The difference is that the C Series is manufactured in Montreal while the Global 7000 happens to be manufactured in the Toronto area. The minister allocated twice as much money to Toronto as he did to Montreal, even though the company did not ask for anything for Toronto and wanted the money for Montreal. That is the reality. When there are no regional ministers who will stand up for the interests of Quebec just as they will for the interests of Ontario, western Canada, and the Maritimes—which is only natural—everything inevitably will revolve around the office of the minister responsible.

• (1135)

The scales will always tip one way. It is only natural that the minister focus on his own affairs before thinking of others. That is why we need strong ministers. Unfortunately, by eliminating the position of minister responsible for regional development, the government is weakening Canada.

One of the ministers I highly respect and personally like is the member for Québec, the Minister of Families. Yesterday, he and the Minister of Transport said that they should not meddle with Quebec's Bill 62, which is a brave and responsible position to take. As an aside, I would like to commend the member for Québec, the Minister of Families, and the Minister of Transport, both experienced government ministers, who said that this concerned Quebec and not Ottawa. That is what we Conservatives have been saying all along. However, I have to say that this is an important distinction in light of what the Prime Minister said yesterday about how this law makes no sense and so forth. However, oddly enough, a week earlier, before the by-election in Lac-Saint-Jean, he was saying that the provinces' jurisdictions had to be respected. I will now get back to the matter at hand.

The member for Québec and Minister of Families said in an interview that the Prime Minister had told him to just focus on families and not worry about Quebec, because he is not the minister for the Quebec region. This is outrageous. He may not be minister for the Quebec region, but he is their MP. Who will stand up for the Quebec region and the province of Quebec at the cabinet table, if the member for Québec is on the record as saying that the Prime Minister told him that is not his job and to just focus on families?

What is wrong with this government? This is an outrage. It is an insult to the memory of William Lyon Mackenzie King and Ernest Lapointe, who was the first-ever minister responsible for Quebec. In an interview, Régis Labeaume, the outgoing mayor of Quebec City, called this comment disgraceful. He said that back in the day, whenever there was a problem, he would call Denis, and they would fix it. I am referring to the Hon. Denis Lebel, who until recently was the member for Lac-Saint-Jean. What used to happen in such situations? It is normal for someone to have a contact in the federal cabinet. We did not always agree, but at least when people called us, we gave them an answer right away.

While I greatly respect the Minister of Economic Development, who is from Toronto, it is hard to be familiar with all the particularities of each region. You would need to know Quebec like the back of your hand to grasp all the differences between Trois-Rivières and Sherbrooke. If I were asked to describe the difference between Milton and Barrie, I would have no idea, since I am not

from that area. It takes someone from the region to explain things and make the right choices. That is why it is important to have regional development ministers. Unfortunately, the government's arrogant approach, which sees everyone the same, is misguided.

On top of that, the Liberals want to give junior ministers the same salary as senior ministers, without giving them the responsibilities that go along with the position. Coincidentally, this directly affects women. It is unfortunate because this approach, which is being presented as an improvement, is really all about image. The fact is, this changes absolutely nothing.

As Conservatives, we are very proud of our record regarding women's participation in public administration. Members may recall that, back in the 1950s, it was our party that got the first woman, a Hamiltonian by the name of Ellen Fairclough, elected to the House of Commons. She was also the first female minister in Canadian government under the Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker, and she took on important portfolios, such as citizenship and immigration. She died at the age of 99, and we are very proud of her.

Another Conservative government, this time under the Right Hon. Joe Clark, was the first to appoint a female minister of external affairs, the Hon. Flora MacDonald. She had to deal with one of the most serious international relations crises in Canadian history: the Iran hostage crisis. When the U.S. was prevented from getting its people out, it was under the Hon. Flora MacDonald, Conservative minister of external affairs, that Canada harboured American diplomats in the Canadian embassy and helped evacuate them from a country in the grip of war, a country grappling with a severe social crisis.

We were the first party to have a female Prime Minister, the first party to have a female leader of the opposition, the Hon. Rona Ambrose, and I believe we are the first party to have a woman serve as House Leader of the Official Opposition, a very effective one at that.

My time is up. I will gladly take my colleague's questions.

• (1140)

I also believe we are the first party to have a woman serve as House Leader of the Official Opposition, a very effective one at that.

[English]

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member keeps referring to the minister from Toronto. I believe he is referring to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. I think his constituents would disagree with that title, because it is a completely different city. I am not sure why he is referring Toronto in the pejorative. Perhaps that is why the Conservatives did not win any seats in that city, but that is beside the point.

We have regional development agencies. I am sure the hon. member knows that the Canadian economy works in concert. Therefore, why should there not be one minister working with developing parts of the country, one voice, one strategy to work together with perspectives from caucus and from the agencies that will remain? Why is this not a better strategy?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, it is quite important to have a local voice to speak about local investment.

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Speaking, about the local development of economy, this is exactly what the minister should do. At the end of the day, we will have a minister who will decide, from coast to coast, but first we must have someone from the area who can define, exactly, the priorities and what is good for his or her province, area and people. Then recommendations will be made and, at the end of the day, cabinet will decide.

We should have regional representation strong enough to defend each and every region of our grand country.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. It is always a pleasure to listen to him even though we do not share the same point of view, which is not necessarily the case this morning.

To the general public, the title “Minister of State” is not very meaningful and is hard to grasp. I know that analogies can be clumsy, but I have one that might work. I would like to know what my colleague thinks of it.

I will use my teaching background to explain how I see Bill C-24. At a school you have principals, class monitors, teachers, and lab porters, but they will all get the same salary because they all work in education.

Is the Liberal model as absurd as that sounds?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. I appreciate my colleague's question. We agree on two things: the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Other than that, we disagree on just about everything else. I am kidding, of course.

It is rather embarrassing that the Liberals only wanted to make the pay the same. Their arguments do not hold up. The fact is that ministers of state will not have the same authority or the same staff. Ministers of state cannot directly make effective executive decisions.

As the member for Beauport—Limoilou said so well, this is just smoke and mirrors. They are trying to salvage the situation by having it seem like every minister is on an equal footing. We know very well that, in reality, when a minister does not have a deputy minister, officials, or a department working under and reporting to him or her, and carrying out decisions, that minister is not a full minister, except for the fact that they might receive the same pay.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my esteemed colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his great conversation and his participation in this.

As my colleague knows, I come from a rural riding in the southeast corner of Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, some in the Liberal government believe rural Canada belongs to communities of 100,000 people. Places like Kitchener-Waterloo are now no longer rural areas but are urban.

I would like to hear a little more from my colleague about the ministers who represent regions. Could the member comment on how that represents rural parts of Canada?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, Canada is a great country. We should recognize each and every region, each and every area.

It is not true that Canada should only focus on cities, as it is not true that we should only focus on regions. We have to work together. We have to listen to people. We have to make decisions based on the best interests of everyone. We have to think about the people who live in rural areas, in cities, in neighbourhoods, wherever. We want to take this seriously.

Unfortunately, when we put aside regional cabinet ministers responsible for each and every region of Canada and decide to have a one-size-fits-all, what happens is big cities will be put ahead of rural Canada. That is not good for Canada, it is not good for Canadian unity, and, first and foremost, it is not good for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-24, which amends the Salaries Act.

I have had the great privilege of representing my riding in the House of Commons since January 23, 2006, and the royal treatment that the Prime Minister and his ministers have been indulging in since they took office in 2015 is completely unheard of. It is insulting to the Canadians that we are.

Since this Liberal government took office, no one has been spared. The regions, families, companies and every sector of the economy are hurting. It is important to point that out. Everyone is hurting except, of course, the Liberal's little clique. Canadians never expected that they would be misled like this after the election.

I would first like to tell the people of Lévis—Lotbinière that only the Conservatives will continue to fight to put an end to the Liberals' improprieties and to show Canadians that the old Liberal culture shell games that have always benefited the Liberals are still going strong. We will fight back against the practices of Liberal ministers, such as the Minister of Finance, who is currently showing a clear lack of ethics. He is gouging Canadians to build his family empire on the sly in a nice safe tax haven in Barbados.

There is a great deal more that could be said about the Minister of Finance, but I will simply offer him a piece of advice. He may not like having his personal spending discussed in the House, but Canadians expect those who hold high office in the Canadian government to adhere to the principles of transparency, accountability, and trust, in accordance with the spirit of the Conflict of Interest Act.

All of us here in the House, including all the ministers in this government, are required to comply with this act. There is a Canadian legal principle that stipulates that a person cannot plead ignorance of the law to avoid compliance.

This Liberal government is unique in Canadian history for its boundless hypocrisy. Worst of all, its word means nothing. It is truly appalling. Bill C-24 creates eight new Liberal ministerial positions, including five for ministers of state who were appointed after the 2015 election and three as yet unspecified.

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Members may recall that this time last year, we found out that preferential treatment was being given to supporters willing to make a contribution to the party in exchange for access to ministers, who were all too willing to prioritize the interests of a minority over the common good.

Bill C-24 will eliminate the positions of regional development agency ministers and transfer their many responsibilities to a single minister, one with special privileges, naturally. We are very concerned about Canada's regions. Indeed, how can a single minister be expected to replace 5 other ministers and fully grasp the situation in every region of a province, for instance Quebec?

I have had the privilege of visiting Quebec's regions and I can say that, like everywhere else in Canada, our situation is unique. This summer, the Prime Minister said that appointing a minister from Toronto to oversee all the regional development agencies would do away with the sort of politics that we always had. What a joke.

We have known for a long time that Toronto is the one pulling the country's strings, not the Prime Minister's Office, which explains the finance minister's huge influence. He is one of the government's untouchables, though we cannot understand why.

Worse still, when the Prime Minister said he was putting a minister from Toronto in charge of ACOA because of the kind of politics in Atlantic Canada, that was a defamatory insult to Atlantic Canadians. Since the government did the same with the Quebec regional development agency, can we infer that the Prime Minister's attitude toward Quebecers is just as cynical?

The Liberal-dominated committee responsible for studying Bill C-24 did not hear from a single witness about the plan to cut regional development minister positions. That kind of political manoeuvring from a government that claims to make its decisions based on evidence is not acceptable. Unlike the Liberals, the Conservatives will fight for appropriate regional representation and authority without insulting Canada's regions.

The most basic right in a democratic country is the right to be heard. This kind of thing is unprecedented. Bill C-58, which limits access to information in Canada, is yet another example of the Liberal Party's conceit and lack of transparency. Canadians are ashamed of this government.

● (1150)

The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates only heard from a government house leader and a teacher during the course of its study. That is an insult to the intelligence of Canadians and our most fundamental right of expression as full participants in the decision-making or policy development process.

Since when is a decision like this made in Canada? The arrogance it must take to have the audacity to make such an important decision without consulting the grassroots, those who understand the situation in every region.

As if that was not enough, Bill C-24 also amends the Salaries Act to grant equal salary to all ministers, giving junior ministers the same salary as ministers with more important portfolios without having new responsibilities. This is a bit surprising. Given the government's poor record, we wonder if anyone over there is actually working in

the right direction here, in other words, working to ensure our economic prosperity in Canada.

On this side of the House, we believe that taxpayers' money belongs to the taxpayers, not the Liberal Party. I prefer making my own investments rather than the Liberals making them for me. The announcement by the government of a new minister does not mean additional rewards for friends, and these budget allocations will not benefit all Canadians. Our official critics on this side of the House are more productive, and at no additional cost to Canadians.

Moreover, the Minister of National Revenue does not even know what is happening in her own department, as she has said so well in the national media and as I heard her say again last night. Clearly, the net is tightening on the Minister of Finance.

What we have here is a careless government. They have given up on defending democracy, accountability, their commitments, protecting everyone regardless of status, their responsibilities and the common good, all to benefit a minority. Most reprehensibly, they have given up on future generations, whom they leave in a financial abyss. By delighting in showering today's taxpayers with money, the government is misleading voters, because governments never really give money away, as they can only do so by mortgaging our children's future.

Currently, the Liberal debt represents \$2,500 more per year for a family with two adults and two children. This means that, for the next 30 years, because the government has told us that we will undoubtedly have a deficit for the next 30 years, an extra debt of \$100,000 per Canadian family will be left to future generations by this government opposite. That is shameful. Only the Conservatives can ensure a financial balance that will eliminate the deficit by not living on credit at the expense of our future generations.

We can never say it enough: the Liberals, who believe they are above the law and have to be caught out before admitting their mistakes, have no claim to the label they gave themselves; they are anything but a responsible, open, and transparent government. The mistakes that led them to explain themselves before the Ethics Commissioner are multiplying, but there is worse: now they want to play a guessing game with Canadians. With Bill C-24, the Liberals are also asking Parliament to approve the appointment of three mystery future ministers. What nonsense.

I often rise to seek answers from the government. Like many, I remain in the dark, surrounded by the Liberal fog, a thick fog that will very soon mix, I'm afraid, with marijuana smoke. I will close by saying that too many Liberal decisions remain unjustifiable, irresponsible, unethical, and illogical. It costs too much to elect a Liberal government with a parade of preferential ministers, when it is us, the official opposition, who do all the work in Canada.

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•(1155)

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important conversation and one that we need to have. It was fantastic to hear from the member the Conservative perspective on the value of the jobs that ministers did. I would like to understand how he characterizes that certain ministers do less, have less contributions to make, and have less responsibility than other ministers. I would like to understand the factual basis he uses to evaluate that.

We in this government believe that a minister is a minister is a minister, that all ministers have very important roles to play, and, therefore, should be paid commensurately and equally for equal work. Could the member give us some idea of why he feels that not all ministers are created equal?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

However, the member may not have realized it, but in her government not all ministers do the same work. Indeed, they do not all have the same opportunity to do the same work, particularly with the withdrawal of the ministers of state, who could be regional ministers, with the Canada Economic Development Agency for all regions of Quebec, and for the regions of the Atlantic, Ontario and western Canada. Those ministers were truly closer to the reality of people and businesses to lead economic development. Economic development is carried out region by region according to the priorities of each region.

Currently, in the Liberal government, there are no more ministers who report to the minister responsible for all agencies in Canada regarding regional priorities, where a vision is needed for a future Canada, and where we should be investing to improve the Canadian economy. Those ministers do not exist anymore, so Canadians can no longer count on their government to listen to them.

•(1200)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I am a staunch defender of pay equity between men and women, but it seems to me that equity is equal pay for equal work. However, if I understand Bill C-24 correctly, there is no equal work, so there is no injustice in having a pay scale.

Our salaries as members are publicly known—we cannot complain that we are poorly paid—and many social groups are pushing, for example, for a minimum salary of \$15 per hour, which is not a fortune, we must admit. Why is it not the work, but titles, that we are evaluating in Bill C-24?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to answer my colleague and I may go even further.

In effect, there are critics on this side of the House, both among the Conservatives and the NDP, who work much harder than some ministers on the other side. If we had no critics on this side of the House, we could not uncover the injustices committed within this government. That work is done free of charge. We have our base

salaries and we do not ask for any more. We do not have an office paid for by Canadian taxpayers to stand up for Canadians. We do it voluntarily for the well-being of Canadians. If we break it down, compared to the other side, we on this side of the House do not cost much, but we get the job done.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised by the comments. Every member in the House of Commons does his or her very best for his or her constituents, at least I like to believe so. At the end of the day, all members work hard. There is a designation that is made for ministers because of the additional responsibilities given to them with respect to government policy and so forth. That has been fairly well recognized.

Is the member across the way suggesting that opposition members with critic portfolios should also be receiving an additional honorarium? Is that Conservative policy?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but that is not what I meant.

I simply meant that there are ministers on the other side of the House we never see. We do not know what they do. They make no really significant contribution to the well-being of Canadians. We only see four or five ministers doing anything on the other side. All the others are shadows. On this side of the House, we have shadow cabinets, but on the other side, they truly have shadow ministers.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise.

I would like to take a few moments to tell the people of Beauport—Limoilou who are listening right now that I am truly very disappointed with what the Finance Minister did last week and this week. Canadians have become aware that he misled them for two years and that he did not put his \$20 million in Morneau Shepell shares in a blind trust. I seriously expected him to rise last week for his final response in question period to say that he regretted it, and that not only did he no longer have his shares, but he was donating to charity the \$65,000 in additional monthly profits that he pocketed for the last two years. That would have been the least he could do. He is an extremely wealthy man. He should have done that, and I do not think that it would have jeopardized his retirement.

With respect to Bill C-24, I will be addressing primarily the aspect of the ministers and the administrative change that means absolutely nothing, as well as the supplementary estimates. I will also very quickly address the issue of regional development. The Liberals are abolishing regional development minister positions. These positions are key, because today 60% of Canadians live in large cities. The same is true almost everywhere in the world. These positions are also important because the voice of rural Canadians is being less and less heard in the House. There will no longer be ministers representing regional development agencies in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec or western Canada. These agencies will no longer exist, or at least they will not have any ministers. These ministers sat at the cabinet table to ensure that every region of Canada had a voice.

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The first thing the Liberals did was to make sure that there would no longer be any ministers representing the regions and to entrust all decisions to a single individual, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in Toronto. This has already had a serious impact. Last fall, \$150,000 in funds earmarked for economic development in northern Ontario was allocated to a company based in the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development's riding of Mississauga. This is precisely the new type of politics the Liberals have been playing.

This spring, an Atlantic liberal caucus subcommittee indicated that they had been told that processing times at ACOA were three times longer since the appointment of a minister from Toronto. It is not surprising, since he himself, as a minister from Toronto, is completely overwhelmed by the affairs of Canada's great city of Toronto and completely overwhelmed by the affairs of his own department. That is why we need independent ministers who can focus on the region they represent. We are saddened to see the government go ahead and abolish these key minister positions in Canada.

I spoke about Bill C-24 here in the House about six months ago. It was late spring. At that time not so long ago, I was still a permanent member of the powerful Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. It was quite the learning experience for me. I had to read a huge number of documents and learn about many financial, economic, and structural issues. The committee deals with government operations and estimates.

Every four or five months, the committee reviews and analyzes the supplementary estimates, in other words, the credits the government wants to have approved by the committees so that it can close its fiscal year on a sound note. I observed one thing. I do not remember exactly whether it was credit A, credit B or credit C, or which department it was. I think it was the Treasury Board. After it was elected, the government immediately wanted to raise the salaries of the ministers of State, as is proposed in the bill. Normally, to do so, the government must introduce a bill like the one we are debating today concerning ministers' salaries and allowances.

• (1205)

That is not what they have been doing for the past two years. In fact, the Liberals used the supplementary estimates, by including the votes in the supplementary estimates and getting them approved through the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates for two consecutive years. We Conservatives were a minority. We voted against that funding, but that did not change anything.

If this bill were so important, if it were true, as they claim, that this bill is intended to foster ministerial pay and gender equality, then why did they use the back door to increase salaries? Why did the Liberals not introduce Bill C-24 when they first came to power in 2015? If gender equality were that important to them, they would have introduced this bill as a priority at the outset.

Something about this really surprises me. An hon. member for whom I have enormous respect and who served in the military said that a minister is a minister is a minister. First, that is an extreme extrapolation. One can say that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, but at the same time, a minister is still a Canadian like any

other. The part that concerns me is that ministers of state are not on the same footing as ministers. The question is simple: do they have deputy ministers? No, and this bill will do nothing to change that fact, either.

Ministers of state will not have deputy ministers or cabinets, which have a staff of about 40 to assist their minister perform difficult tasks. They will not have the right to submit memorandums to cabinet explaining government issues. Most importantly, they will not have any officials serving under them. For example, the Minister of National Defence has 80,000 public servants under him. Not only is there the civilian administrative wing comprising some 20,000 employees, but there is also the military wing, because military troops are public servants. All told, we are talking 100,000 people.

Ministers of state will not have 100,000 people to manage and give orders to. Neither will they oversee an actual institution, or have headquarters from which to work. For example, Public Services and Procurement Canada is across the beautiful Ottawa River, and there is a huge building there with Public Services and Procurement Canada written on it. About 10,000 people work there.

Ministers of state have none of the prerequisites that would make them equal to ministers. This has nothing to do with gender equality or equity between individuals. Ministers of state simply do not have a minister's workload. That is the only thing Canadians need to know.

Remarkably, the hon. member of St. Catharines himself said it a thousand times in his speech on administrative changes. That is exactly what it is: an administrative change. It is not a substantial change. The Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, who comes from the Eastern Townships, will not have a building with 10,000 public servants or a cabinet. She will not have anything a real minister has. I am on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, so I recognize that the files she manages are extremely important, but her workload will still be quite a bit lighter than that of the Minister of National Defence, for example.

My colleague from Calgary Shepard made me think of something. It is not true that all cabinet ministers are equal. No one can tell me that the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Canadian Heritage are on equal footing. I must say that I prefer heritage to the economy. That being said, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has a portfolio because she is the House leader and she is the Minister of Small Business and Tourism. She has more to deal with than another minister who does not have these two portfolios and these two responsibilities. It is as simple as that.

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I wanted to say one last thing, something a little more philosophical. Imposing a gender-equal cabinet comes with its own share of risks. At the end of the day, philosophically and legally speaking, what does it even mean? It means that we will never see an all-female cabinet in Canada. I would even go so far as to say that this is good way for the Prime Minister of Canada to make sure that women never make up more than half a cabinet.

• (1210)

In fact, I would even say that this will stop the advancement of women in politics.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what an interesting way for the member to end his comments by talking about a 100% female cabinet, something which no doubt would be wonderful to see, and hopefully we will see that one day in the future.

It is important to recognize that Stephen Harper had the largest cabinet in the history of Canada. The member seems to be fixated on the size of the department. We cannot compare the magnitude or size of departments like the Department of Defence to the Department of Democratic Reform. What matters is when ministers sit around that cabinet table, each minister has a responsibility for developing and advancing government policy.

The Conservatives seem to be stuck on the so-called junior ministers. We see all ministers as equal. There is only one tier of ministers. We understand that the Harper government did not see it that way, but things have changed. There is one tier of cabinet ministers today. Therefore, their voices around that table are equal, no matter what the size of their departments. There is a variance in size with all departments.

Therefore, when those cabinet ministers sit around the cabinet table, would he not agree at the very least that they should have an equal vote, no matter what the size of their departments? At least that is the case under the current Prime Minister. Would he not advocate that this should be the case?

• (1215)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the bill does not speak about equal votes; it speaks about equal voice. I will tell members something interesting. When I was an intern in the Prime Minister's Office, the greatest honour of my life was to be part of a cabinet meeting. There, I was completely astounded to see MPs, not ministers, enter the room and be part of the meeting. They would stand and give their opinion with respect to the discussion. The ministers would acknowledge them, saying that this was the direction they should take. That is equal voice. Those MPs did not need a title or a ministry to have an equal voice. Having an equal voice around a cabinet table has nothing to do with which ministry one has.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to carry on along that theme, as this is one of the interesting windows into the Liberal mindset with Bill C-24. The Prime Minister has ostensibly brought forward legislation to help the Liberals take their cabinet ministers seriously. Presumably, if they do not have a minister's title, the Prime Minister will dismiss their

voices at the cabinet meeting saying, that they are not serious, that they are called a minister of state, so what they say is not important as what the other people have to say. That tells us something about not only the legislation or the composition of cabinet. That tells us something about the Prime Minister.

I know the Prime Minister might not be the only one to not take the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader seriously, but it does make me wonder if the Prime Minister is able to take him seriously because he is not a minister. What does that mean for parliamentary secretaries in the Liberal caucus? What does that mean for Liberal backbenchers? What does that mean for Liberal chairs of committees? They are not called ministers. Are we to understand that the Prime Minister does not take good ideas seriously, that he just takes the title of the person who is talking seriously? Is that the lesson of Bill C-24?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the case, and I must put forward a great example.

When Winston Churchill was the minister of the Royal Navy in 1918, he went on a ship. Things were not going as they should have, so he went to see the commander. He asked him to bring all the men on board so he could speak with them. The commander said to Mr. Churchill that he should never speak to the soldiers, but he again said that he wanted to speak with the soldiers. He went to one of the lowest-ranking marines and asked him what the plan should be to get out of them of the mess. The soldier told him his plan. Churchill then turned to the highest-ranking officer and told him that he was to do that. Since then, occidental armies have this kind of practice where everyone listens. I was in the army and I know that commanders always ask their soldiers what they should do. Of course afterward it is the commanders who will decide.

Therefore, you are right, sir, the government does not listen to people who do not have a title. However, in the former Conservative government, Harper used to listen to everyone.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I noticed the conversation went across the floor, with members speaking to each other. I just want to remind hon. members to address their comments through the Chair just so that we can keep some semblance of decorum in the room. It just makes it a lot easier on the Speaker, and members do not want to upset the Speaker, I am sure.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be joining what is becoming a more spirited debate this morning.

I want to reflect for a moment on something the member for Elmwood—Transcona said when he called this debate a creative waste of time. I do not think there is a better description of Bill C-24 so far. There really is no better way to describe it.

I have also reflected on the Minister of Finance's approach to his small business tax changes, which I would call creative destruction of wealth. There has never been a minister of finance who has been this creative in attempting to destroy so much wealth.

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I wanted to mention that because it is worth reflecting on. It is an old tune that keeps on playing. The best Yiddish proverb I could come up with to describe what the Liberal government is doing, and continues to do, especially with respect to Bill C-24, is “to every new song one can find an old tune”. This is the old tune of the same old Liberal Party. Nothing has changed. The Liberals are back to doing the same old things. The Liberal Party will take care of anyone who is a Liberal, but a small business owner, or anyone else for that matter, is going to feel the pain.

A Fraser Institute report stated that the average Canadian is now paying \$800 more in taxes. After-tax income is down, and that should be the best metric for the government.

Instead of dealing with economic issues today, we are debating pay hikes for ministers, in fact pay hikes that they have already received. As the member for Beauport—Limoilou mentioned, the Liberals have already taken care of their own. They have already taken care of their pay. Every time the Liberal government talks about transparency, equity, and fairness, taxpayers end up paying more, never less. More money is going out. Instead of lowering the pay of all ministers down to the rate of pay of a minister of state, which the government could have done and would have showed fairness and equity, the government chose to raise everybody's pay.

Many members have mentioned this before, that this is an administrative change. The government's main argument right now is that this is just an administrative change, and members question why we are debating this. We could ask them the same question. We are debating this because the government has put this forward as the important issue of the day, not NAFTA negotiations, agricultural legislation, another free trade agreement, small business taxation, or mortgage rules. No, the important issue of the day is pay hikes for Liberal ministers. That is what the government wants to talk about.

In this much-vaunted attempt to talk about transparency, there are three mystery ministers. In a previous debate when I participated on this at second reading very late on an evening in June, I talked about the different types of ministries the government could set up. The government purposely did not put forward a minister responsible for seniors, something that many seniors associations have asked for. The Liberal government does not have one.

Perhaps some of the present ministers could come forward to help the Minister of Finance deal with the ethics shield. Maybe a minister for ethics shields would be good. In case anything about Morneau Shepell, Bombardier, or anything related comes up, the minister for ethics shields could shield the Liberals from the trouble they could get into. Perhaps that is what the Liberals should do.

I mentioned pay for performance in my previous debate. That is how we should be rating every single minister on that side. They are responsible to the crown, but they are also responsible to the House. They are responsible for the mandate letters that the Prime Minister deliverer to them, telling them what they would do and telling them to deliver results. That is done on behalf of the House, not just members on that side.

The mandate letter is how we rate the effectiveness of a minister. So far, we see that whenever a minister fails in the House, he or she is not fired but rather receives an ambassadorship overseas. That

former minister gets a pay increase. Perhaps he or she will get a pay increase like the ambassador to France, who received \$120,000 pay increase above what a career diplomat would get. Perhaps a failed Liberal candidate will be sent to the consulate in San Francisco and get double the pay of what a career diplomat would get in that role.

The Liberals say that the pay hikes will be for five ministers of state. Maybe they will get a new title, which every single member here has mentioned. They say this is just a title change; there is no effective change to their mandates.

The Liberals talk about fairness. They called this an adaptive bill, a modern bill. It costs more to taxpayers every single time they mention those words. Thirty ministers are supposed to be equal. The member for Beauport—Limoilou raised a great point. The mandate letters are not equal. They are not equal in workload and they are not equal in content. Nobody can tell me that the government House leader has the same amount of work as the Minister of Health.

• (1220)

The government House leader has two mandate letters to deliver on. The Minister of Finance has an extremely long mandate letter with detailed tasks to undertake. Nobody can tell me that these letters bring the same workload on them, the members of their staff, and the departments that they use, as the letter of another minister with a smaller department and a smaller mandate. It is the content of the work that they are supposed to do. Of course, they are all equal. They are all persons, and they are all equal, but ministers are not created equal by the Prime Minister. They have different tasks, roles, and priorities to undertake on behalf of the government to supposedly deliver on those promises. A great example of one of the promises we saw, which the Liberals forgot at first, was the small business tax reduction, which they cancelled and now uncancelled and are now really committed to doing, but they have not done it quite yet.

However, it is in the mandate letters where we truly find the value of a minister, and truly find the quality of ministers. No one can tell me that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has an equal workload to the Minister of Science or the Minister of Public Services and Procurement. The workload is immense at this point in time, because the mandate she is required to deliver on is far larger, which is why other ministers are then assigned to assist her with those tasks.

In politics, I think we have all heard that it is a team sport. We play as a team, and we lose as a team. I do not think there is a single individual who finds politics to be a solo adventure or journey. However, what they are saying on that side is that they are going to treat everybody equal by title, and keep piling on the workload, whichever way the Prime Minister wants to. The member for Beauport—Limoilou and the member for Elmwood—Transcona mentioned the delivering of value.

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Listening to the voices at the cabinet table and listening to other perspectives has nothing to do with what is written in a law, but it has everything to do with personality, character, and leadership skills. Whether one chooses to listen to an alternative point of view, or to a minister who does not have a title, or even to a member of Parliament who has expertise in an area or field that perhaps a ministry lacks or the cabinet lacks, it is up to the leadership, ending with the Prime Minister, to bring them in, hear what they have to say, and to take that into account.

However, it is the same old tune, because in a lot of ways, a lot of these ministers are invisible. We have been watching this sideshow with the Minister of Finance answering some questions on small business taxation, but the minister responsible for small business has barely stood up in the House to speak to what probably is the most important change or impact on her particular mandate. She has barely been allowed to speak to what will in fact make or break her success as the minister responsible for small business.

Ministers come with departments, buildings, civil servants, and budgets that they are responsible to manage. Nobody here can tell me that there is equality among the mandates of the ministers and equality of the tasks. I do not see that in the private sector either. When I was a director in a human resources professional association, I had a smaller budget than every single other director there. The value I brought was that I took care of corporate affairs and research for the membership on what members wanted. I had an equal voice at the table because my CEO allowed me to speak to defend the points I had to make and to challenge others at the table when they were making mistakes.

This is all about leadership. We cannot legislate leadership, and that is what the Liberals are trying to do with this. It just does not work that way. Therefore, as I said before, this entire debate is worthy of an episode of the *Yes Minister* series, which I love to quote here. In fact, I will make a suggestion to the government. The show has, as a central character, a minister of administrative affairs. The government could use that. It could have that single minister stand up and answer all the questions in the House and defend all of the government's initiatives by simply saying, "In time, we will consider your ideas", and simply avoid answering all the questions, as the Liberals have done so far, at times successfully and at times less so.

However, nobody can tell me that this pay hike for Liberal cabinet ministers is the issue of the day, the issue of the month, or what Canadians at home are talking about. In fact, they are not. I will be very pleased to be voting against the bill at all stages.

• (1225)

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

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the previous speaker and to the member for Elmwood—Transcona. They tried to give a false impression. They tried to give an impression that there is an elite group of people within and that they are the people to whom the Prime Minister listens. I listen to my constituents, as the Prime Minister listens to Canadians, and that is where it starts, listening to what people have to say, those whom we represent and to Canadians as a whole.

We will see the degree to which we are listening by the actions that the government has taken. All one needs to do is address the

issue of the middle class and the many different government actions and responses from a wide variety of ministers, and we will see Canadians' needs reflected in government policy. At the cabinet level, that is where a group of individuals meets and is required to be able to meet. That is where decisions have to be made, and all sorts of consultations lead into that.

In the presentation that we just heard, the member tried to give the impression that there is the hardest-working person over here and the least-working person over here and that those persons should all be paid accordingly. That is what the member across the way suggested. We are suggesting that there is one tier of ministers. There are only 168 hours in any given week. All of us work very hard. Some of us have different responsibilities, and some of those responsibilities include some sort of remuneration, such as the role of cabinet minister and leader of the official opposition.

Would the member not agree that, when it comes to those additional responsibilities, they should be treated equally?

• (1230)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: No, Mr. Speaker, that absolutely does not make any sense. If they are going to have equal pay for equal work, the work has to be equal. The value assigned to the work is up to his leadership on that side of the House, but are the mandate letters that are delivered to each minister going to be made equal? Are they going to have each minister punch in and punch out, just to make sure they put an equal number of hours into their work?

We know this for the minister of finance and the minister of foreign affairs, that there are certain ministries that require ministers to work far more hours, to involve many more people, and to have ministers dedicated to assist them in fulfilling their mandate letters, which is why they are different. That is the very basis of setting up a cabinet, and the Liberals are not achieving that. It is not working, and we see that with the poll numbers going down. We can see that Canadians are rejecting what they are getting from that side, because they are not getting transparency and they are not getting accountability.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, very often in this House one of the challenges is that we can be internal in our focus and we forget that we are here to legislate for the good of the people of Canada. I have noticed with the current Liberal government that increasingly its issues are about the Liberals, and not about the people of Canada.

While the Liberals are focused today here on the pay of people in their cabinet, there are much larger issues of gender equality and struggles of people across this country. Therefore, if we really wanted to address an issue of equality and particularly gender equality, we would expect to see a government that would bring policies forward that would actually help the millions of women and families on the ground in this country. The NDP has pushed for a policy of affordable child care, as an example, of which there has not been a single space created by the government in the last two years, nor do we hear a word of that in the Liberals' recent fiscal update.

What ideas does my hon. colleague have, or what does he hear from his constituents that would make a practical difference in their lives to help bring about greater equality, particularly for women in this country?

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Calgary Shepard has 45 seconds or less.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Forty-five seconds, Mr. Speaker; that is time for maybe one Yiddish proverb at best.

I talked about an old tune from the Liberal government, and the old tune is “It is all me, me, me”. It is about “look at the nice socks I have”, “look at how great I am on Instagram”, and “look how good I look on Twitter”. It is all about show business and no substance.

People in my riding want jobs. I know it is going to hurt the member for Vancouver Kingsway to hear this, but they want energy jobs, pipelines, and development of the oil sands. I come from a riding where families who live there work in the oil sands business. They work in energy, and really that is the top priority. That is what I hear all the time from them. That is the number one thing they want. They want well-paying, middle class jobs, and they want the government to get out of the way but they do not get that from that side. Therefore, I agree with the member on that.

It is the “me, me, me” government. It is a great way to describe the Liberals. The government is creatively wasting the time of the people of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak this morning. I say “happy”, but that depends on where people are in the House. Right now, I think that Bill C-24 is a travesty. The Liberals are trying to push something through the back door, or the front door, or the side door, that Canadians are not really concerned about. While the Minister of Finance is still gracing the front pages this morning, they are talking about increasing the number of ministers.

Maybe their time would be better spent looking at existing ministers and making them do their jobs properly and ethically. In my opinion, adding more ministers, when they still cannot figure out where to send three of them, is another thing in the Liberals’ DNA that makes them want to please everyone, especially their special friends, without giving any thought to the fact that Canadians will once again be the ones paying for it.

When we speak of gender equality and equity, we speak of equal work for equal pay. Everyone agrees. It is a fundamental principle. Therefore, if ministers do not all have the same level of responsibility, why should they be paid the same salary? That means that they want to give them still more. Here again, I have not done the math, but it means that, if everyone gets the same salary, they should have the same level of responsibility, new ministerial cars, government departments, and employees. They will need more than one or two employees, because when you have such important files you need the necessary resources.

In my opinion, gender equality is when women and men are allowed to speak. That is gender equality. It is being able to express ourselves as human beings, to say the things we need to say. No one needs to be a minister for that. A simple member of Parliament, if given the chance, can speak. Unfortunately, we have a Prime Minister who takes up a lot of room. When he arrives for question period, no one on the other side of the House is allowed to speak. He

is the only one who can answer questions. However, there are ministers across the aisle. They are all equal, or so they tell us, but they do not have the right to speak. That is dangerous.

The Liberal government wants to add new ministers, but is abolishing the regional development minister positions. Instead of appointing other ministers, let us return these ministers to their functions so that they can give a voice to their regions.

I have nothing against the Minister of Economic Development. He is in his tower in Toronto and already has his hands full with that city. However, if I were to go to him tomorrow to discuss what is happening in Saint-Urbain or Saint-Irénée, I am not certain that he would know that they are in Charlevoix. He might think that they are in Europe. If I were to speak to him about the problems of farmers in Saint-Irénée or Saint-Urbain, I am not certain that he would understand what I was saying. I find this absurd. The Liberals want to increase the number of ministers, but they are eliminating ministers that are important to our regions.

• (1235)

If the Liberals want to add ministers, so be it. However, they should appoint them in the regions, where the people need to be heard.

Earlier, I was listening to the Liberal spokesperson, who was shouting rather loudly, because the Liberals act as though we, on this side of the House, understand nothing. Now, he should perhaps listen to me. When trying to ensure equality of men or women, the Liberals should give them their rightful place rather than putting on a dog and pony show. There is enough of that on Twitter and Facebook, not to mention Instagram. There are shots of the Prime Minister's socks as he visits a business and I really could not care less. However, I do care about the small businesses and farmers in my riding who have pressing needs.

In my view, Bill C-24 is a fine little bill that the Liberals have pulled out of a hat—hooray for Halloween, which is almost here—to avoid talking about the real issues of concern to the members of the House and Canadians. For example, did the Minister of Finance refuse himself from any discussions that could be in some way related to his interests? This morning, we learned that Morneau Shepell signed multiple contracts with federal departments. In the meantime, the Liberal Party is making us debate Bill C-24.

Are we on a reality TV show? We want to know the facts. When will the Liberals bring back regional economic development ministers? If they want to appoint solid ministers, now is the time. They should go and find them in the regions. I am sure there are solid people across the aisle. I am thinking in particular about Atlantic Canada. In Quebec, I think we are stronger than the Liberals, but elsewhere, they could find solid people.

It is insulting that the Liberals have introduced such a bill today, when Canadians need answers to their questions. What the Liberals are doing today is a sad charade. The Liberals have said themselves in committee that they do not believe in this bill, and yet those same members will stand up and vote in favour of it. They always say that the Liberals have free votes. We saw that yesterday, too.

Government Orders

Bill C-24 will not achieve any of the objectives the Liberals claim it will. Earlier the Liberal member was trying to say that he wants everyone to have an equal voice in the House. All 338 members have an equal voice. They can all say whatever they have to say. However, that does not appear to be the case across the aisle. Every time we ask them a question, it is always the same members who reply. It would seem that not all members across the aisle are allowed to speak. Rather than introducing this kind of bill, perhaps the Liberal Party should simply give its own members some air time.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised a couple of concerns. First, she said that this bill is not important, which we will have to agree to disagree on.

I am wondering if she could point to when she expressed concern about the previous government twice amending the Salaries Act. I am also wondering if she could indicate when she was concerned about the size of the ministry increasing. In particular, could she educate us as to when, in the past Parliament, she expressed concern to Prime Minister Harper about his having the largest cabinet in Canadian history, one that was about 33% larger than the current government's cabinet? Could she share with the House the time she expressed her outrage at the cabinet growing too large?

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to answer my colleague's question, because I was a parliamentary secretary under the Harper government, and proud of it.

If he did raise his ministers' salaries, he did it across the board. He did not give a raise just to parliamentary secretaries. He did not give away money to his friends. The Liberals are giving their friends money to keep them quiet, not to make them talk.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciated my colleague's speech.

I would like to focus on the art of setting pay. Typically, this depends on the job description. I find it hard to believe that ministers with different workloads are paid the same.

Even more startlingly, Bill C-24 seems to suggest that we create three new ministerial positions whose job descriptions we know nothing about, but that will come with the same salary as the others. This means these new ministers could have a higher or lower workload than ministers of state, yet earn the same salary. By extension, everyone in the House could be paid the same amount, because it would seem that the relationship between pay and job description no longer exists.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his very relevant question.

I completely agree with him. The government is trying to make us believe things, and that is the problem with the Liberals. They introduced Bill C-24 by saying that they are going to create three ministerial positions, but no one here in the House knows what these ministers will do. Before we vote on a bill like this one, we need to know where those ministers will be going and what they will be doing. Will those ministers represent regions? Regional development

is important. I am going to vote against this bill because it is a smokescreen, as usual. The Liberals are not strong enough to introduce something clear and concise.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in addressing the previous questioner, my hon. colleague raised a point of consideration that I think we should all share.

In this bill the Liberals are proposing adding three mystery minister positions without naming them. First of all, that is not open. That is not transparent. It does not show respect for this place. Recently, the government also instituted a new Minister of Indigenous Services. Is the government adding three new positions on top of that, or is one of those mystery ministers the new Minister of Indigenous Services?

I do not think the government has been clear. If it is not being clear with us, it is not being clear with Canadians. What does the member think about this?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Obviously, this bill is going nowhere. The Liberals firmly believe in it, but since this Parliament began two years ago, since we have been here, we have never been sure what direction the Liberals want to take. They do not even seem to know themselves. It all seems well and good to create ministerial positions on paper, but that is not enough. As my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière, whom I cannot name but who is my best friend on this side of the House, was saying earlier, we are the opposition. Everyone has the right to speak and everyone here is doing his or her job. We are doing our job here. We are asking questions. The creation of additional ministerial positions will only make things worse. They will never answer the darn questions.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be speaking today on Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act. Part of the reason I am happy to do so is that it is the middle of the day. The last time I spoke to this bill, I believe it was about 11:30 at night last spring when the government decided that it needed to keep Parliament sitting until midnight every night for weeks, not because it was trying to bring forward any legislation that would allow it to keep its campaign promises, but to fill the time, which I do not think was very useful.

Government Orders

The first thing about this bill that I want to cover is the total hypocrisy of the government bringing this legislation forward at this time. This legislation would pay junior ministers the same as senior ministers, and would remove six regional economic development positions and add three mystery positions. The reality is that two years ago the government already made those salaries the same and eliminated those economic development ministers, and so this is just a cover. It shows a total disrespect for Parliament. The government should be coming here to discuss issues of importance to Canadians, issues that would change the way we do things in Parliament, but instead the Liberal government does whatever it wants. It makes decisions without duly consulting Parliament, and then tries to cover up.

This is not the first case of this nature. I remember when I was just a new parliamentarian debating the withdrawal of the CF-18s from Iraq. On the first day, I showed up with my speech to talk about this and found out that the government had already withdrawn them. There was absolutely no point to debate it for two to three days, which we did anyway, because it had already withdrawn them. It showed a total disrespect for oversight by Parliament.

Let us talk about some of the other examples such as the payment of \$10.5 million to Omar Khadr, a terrorist. That was obviously very controversial in Canada. There was no consultation on that either. What about giving Bombardier \$372 million? There was no consultation there either. The Liberal government continues to spend Canadians' money, make decisions about changes and not consult, and then when it is convenient, several years later, it will come with a bill and ask us to get up and speak to it.

That said, let me talk about the specifics of the bill. I wish I had an opportunity to make all these comments before the government had taken action. First of all, let us talk about paying the junior ministers the same as senior ministers. This has absolutely nothing to do with gender. In the real world, where people work in their professions, there are multiple different ways of evaluating jobs, based on skills, experience, level of responsibility, the demands of the job, and whether or not the job is in an isolated location. All these things are taken into account. There are lots of different job skills we can look at such as the Hay scale. There are various items like that.

When we think about the ministers, let us look at the skills and experience of the ministers we are talking about. Let us look at the responsibility level and see if there is a match. Then we can also talk about competence, because in some cases people are paid more for their competence and the amazing things they have been able to accomplish in the role.

First of all, if we talk about the Minister of Status of Women, for example, versus the finance minister, the latter manages a budget of \$373 billion. The status of women minister has a far smaller budget. I know of \$38 million of it, but it is hidden in so many pockets it is hard to add it all up because the government budgetary system is so confusing. Clearly, if the finance minister introduces things like unfair taxes, these could have a huge effect on small businesses, and could even cause a health crisis if all the doctors leave the country. These things are serious. What impact will there be if the status of women minister does not do her job appropriately? Really, I do not see it.

We can talk about the democratic reform minister versus the defence minister. Now, if the defence minister does not do his job, people die. We go to war with countries and serious situations develop. When the democratic reform minister does not do their job, no one notices.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We noticed.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, my colleagues in the NDP are correct. They did notice this is not going to be the last election under first past the post.

• (1255)

Let us talk about the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities versus the Minister of Health and the fact they are handling different levels of things. When the health minister does not do her job, it can be a huge issue for all Canadians because we all are impacted. I do not see the sports minister as having the same impact. Obviously, the responsibility level is different, so the pay level should be different as well.

One really insulting thing about the way the government has organized the ministers, especially one of the junior ministers, is to put small business together with tourism, together with the House leader's role. Small businesses create 90% of the jobs in this country, so that is a huge area of opportunity. That is something that is continually changing with the changing competitive environment in the U.S. One-third of the Liberal House leader's time can be devoted to that. Tourism is supposed to be a great growth opportunity. We hear all kinds of rhetoric about how great it could be for Canada's GDP and how much more there is to do, but that minister can only spend a third of her time on that. That does not really line up.

I really do not want to talk about the competence issue because we have all had our bad days, but when I look at some of the junior ministers and the women who were put in those roles and the things they were supposed to do, such as implementing democratic reform, those things did not happen. What has the Minister of Status of Women done for women? I was on the special committee that studied pay equity and made recommendations. In budget 2017 how much money was there for pay equity? Zero. The government had a chance to do something but did nothing.

Let us talk about eliminating violence against women and girls. The Liberals gave \$200 million to Iraq for economic development, but \$100 million over five years to eliminate violence against women and girls in Canada. For those who cannot do the math, that amounts to \$20 million a year to eliminate violence against women and girls and \$200 million on the spur of the moment for economic development in another country. Seriously, do not even take me there.

Government Orders

I only have a few minutes left, so I want to talk a little about the ministers for regional economic development. The idea was to have regional ministers who would focus on economic activity within those regions. In Atlantic Canada, for example, perhaps they would have heard the voice of Atlantic Canadians on energy east if the ACOA minister's job had not been eliminated and moved to Mississauga.

How about B.C. and Quebec? They are still waiting for a softwood lumber agreement and have no one to advocate on their behalf for the 400,000 jobs that are threatened in that industry, in addition to the ones that have already been lost. Two years on the file and absolutely nothing has happened, because there is a logjam with the one position that filled in for those other six positions.

Alberta's oil and gas industry has been totally decimated. There is no one to stand up and advocate on its behalf because, again, it is all coming out of Mississauga. We can also talk about Ontario's manufacturing performance and the number of jobs that have been lost and the dismal performance in that regard.

It was a huge mistake to eliminate the regional development ministers, but again, it was already done two years ago so this is just a cover-up.

If we talk about the three new ministers, I would have a couple of suggestions. First of all, it would be great to have a minister for seniors, because seniors are struggling. The government goes on and on about the amazing GIS increase of about \$60 a month, when the cost of hydro in Ontario has gone up 170%. The GIS increase is nothing in comparison. There needs to be more of a focus on seniors, because one in six Canadians is now a senior, and that will rise to one in four in just a few years.

I would also like to see a minister dedicated to getting the independent watchdogs of the House hired, because we have been extending the terms of the current Ethics Commissioner and Lobbying Commissioner, and these people are clearly not coming to any decisions anytime soon. It would be nice to have a minister dedicated to making sure that the House has independent people to ensure that everything happens according to the rules.

Finally, I would say that we maybe need a minister of math because it looks like there is a big problem with math on that side of the House when the Liberals implement taxes that are supposed to increase taxes on the wealthy 1%, yet tax revenues from the latter actually decrease by more than \$1 billion, and the new taxes do not even touch the Prime Minister.

● (1300)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I do want to thank the hon. colleague across the way for her speech, I am offended by the compare and contrast between ministers' roles, and member's point about who will die and who will not die. We are talking about the status of women, about women who struggle every single day to make ends meet, women who are in shelters, and women who are abused. Our Minister of Status of Women stands up for those women. She put together a plan to ensure that we have a gender-based violence strategy.

If the member says that another minister looks after people's lives, what does she say to her constituents who are part of that group of women who do not make it to the end of a week without struggling? What does she say to our constituents who fall into that group of women?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to what the status of women minister has done about violence against women, let us just look at some of the numbers from this government. Remember, the government is spending \$20 million a year to eliminate violence against women, despite the violence impacting one in three indigenous women and one in four Canadian women. However, \$12 billion was given to other countries, and \$400 million more was spent to collect Statistics Canada data. Does that tell us the priority the Liberal government is putting on violence against women?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to get into a debate about which member of cabinet is more influential and important, because sometimes that changes with personalities. We all know that different cabinets take on different structures. Sometimes a member with a so-called lower level portfolio has more influence at the cabinet table and with the Prime Minister. One way is to follow the money. Sometimes it matters quite a bit. As my colleague pointed out, ministers with portfolios that have a large department and large impact, such as defence and finance, typically have proportionate influence.

I am confused about this whole bill and wonder if the member can help me out. I am often confused by Liberal doublespeak. I am unsure how to phrase this. At committee when this bill was going through, questions were put forward. Is this bill about gender equality? Has it been put through a gender lens? Is that what this legislation is about?

The Liberals at committee said absolutely not, that this bill was not about that. However, with the bill now in the House, other Liberals have stood to say that this bill is about all of that. Can she help me and Canadians understand what this bill, which is consuming so many hours in the House of Commons, is actually about? Is it about what Liberals did not apply, which is a gender analysis lens to this piece of legislation, or virtually any piece of legislation which they promised to do, or is it about what Liberals studying the bill are now saying it is about?

Government Orders

The Prime Minister made this great commitment that the cabinet would be balanced. However, a reporter pointed out that the cabinet was not gender balanced; rather, the Prime Minister was including some ministers at the secretary of the state level, as what have traditionally been called “junior” ministers. They were included in that number to make the cabinet look balanced. Is this not to repair their claim, and to make what was false now true by simply changing the designations and the pay of each of the individual members of this now larger cabinet?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that excellent point. He has pointed out the utter hypocrisy between what the Liberals say and do, and the way the message changes as they go along. We saw this during the recent disastrous tax changes that the finance minister introduced. At the beginning he said, “We are going after the wealthy 1%. People are not paying their fair share of taxes.”

The Liberals were very strong and chose to double down on that. However, when they started to see the huge fire created across Canada, they said, “We’re consulting with Canadians. We’re going to listen to Canadians”. Then, when it became the climbdown that it was, they said, “Well, there are a few tweaks that we’ve got to make to our proposals.”

We saw the same thing when this bill came forward, namely, that it was not about gender parity. In reality, it should not be about gender parity because jobs are evaluated based on one’s skills, experience, and levels of responsibility. There are many global systems that people use to determine what the pay grade should be based on those factors, and not based on gender.

However, when it is convenient and the Prime Minister wants to look like a feminist or as if he is doing the right thing for a photo op or a headline, and not for the actual money on the bottom line that he is putting into the budget, he does exactly what the member said he does.

• (1305)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason feminism is material to this bill is that colleagues in the Liberal Party have talked about the Prime Minister’s feminist bona fides. Colleagues in my party have talked about whether this bill is actually feminist. Colleagues in the NDP have raised the same question. I want to have a more honest conversation today.

Two days ago, in the House of Commons, the Minister of Status of Women was asked a question by one of her colleagues on the Liberal backbench about feminism and different slurs that have been used. She made a reference to two things that have made the news recently. One was calling parliamentary colleagues Barbies. I have had the great pleasure of being called that before. In fact, an artist in Manitoba, who I understand actually had grants at the time, although I am not sure, from the Manitoba Arts Council, put together a movie that insinuated that I was a talking-point Barbie, so I have some sympathy. The minister also talked about a very derogatory term, “feminazi”, being used.

The problem I had with the Minister of Status of Women’s response was that she made a glib comment that I think was designed to absolve her party of guilt on this aspect. To me, rather than being honest about the fact that none of us, to put it politely, is perfect in this regard, and no party is fantastic about this, the minister

herself stood very proudly and very glibly ignored this key fact. I raised comments made by one of her colleagues. If I had had more time to find the quote, I could have raised the fact that one of her colleagues may have insinuated that one of my colleagues was akin to a stripper. Some of my colleagues opposite are now sitting on the independent benches for various reasons.

We are all uncomfortable here now, and we should be, because when we talk about being feminist and standing up for women’s rights, we cannot pay lip service or make it a partisan issue. That is what we do here over and over again. I am not going to pretend that my party has been perfect, and I am also not going to wave the stick at just the Liberal Party. I am going to ask all members in the House to do a lot better.

With regard to this bill, if my colleagues in the Liberal Party really support women’s rights, they are going to tell the Prime Minister that maybe it is not right to pass a bill that calls female ministers equal when they do not have the ability to bring memoranda to cabinet. For my colleagues on the Liberal backbench who do not understand what that means, it means that there are people in the “gender-parity cabinet” who are called full cabinet members, and are included in the count of their quota, who do not have the right to bring a topic to cabinet for consideration without the approval of a senior, and in most cases male, minister.

They also do not have the right to chair cabinet committees. In fact, if we look at the chairmanship and composition of the Prime Minister’s cabinet committees, which is where the real power is in government, which you know, Mr. Speaker, and all of us in this place know, it is actually a lie and an affront to say that there is gender parity in that cabinet. If we are going to be uncomfortable, let us talk about that fact.

Rather than enshrining this in law and having people stand here and extol the virtues of it, let us call a spade a spade. This bill would not create gender parity. It would make women in cabinet say that they are equal, even when they are not, because of the Prime Minister’s ego. That is the antithesis of feminism. That is making women cover over inequality for the political gain of a man. I do not care what political stripe members are in this place, that is wrong.

I have had to roll my eyes and facepalm when some of my male colleagues have said things that made me absolutely and completely angry, things that were cringeworthy. I have talked to them afterward and said that I was not going to carry the bag for them. They know that.

• (1310)

I am very proud of the advances my party has made for women in this country. We might not agree on how to achieve gender equality, but if we are going to move forward on that, I would like to think that we are going to agree that a bill like this does not do it.

I do not care if the Prime Minister calls himself a feminist. He should be putting his money where his mouth is all the time, and this bill does not do it. I cannot support it, nor should any member of the Liberal caucus. I would like to see them talk to the minister and say that I have a point and this should be tweaked.

Government Orders

I was appointed as a junior cabinet minister. I was appointed as a minister of state. I was really glad to do that, because it gave me time to understand how the bureaucracy worked, how government worked, and how the cabinet table worked. Male colleagues were appointed by former Prime Minister Harper to the same role. It was not about gender. To me it was about career progression. I had someone who believed in me and thought I had the potential to be a senior member of government but who also gave me time to learn how government worked before the onslaught of question period and media scrums.

We know that there are ministers in the government, and I am sure they are well-intentioned and came to Ottawa wanting to effect change, who do not know how to do their jobs. They do not understand that bureaucrats are going to put out memos for them to sign off on about things like taxing employee discounts. They are not going to understand that it means that they should not sign off on those memos and should review things.

I had time to learn how that worked before I was stuck in as a minister of national revenue. That is not a bad thing. That is a good thing. I am so honoured that I had the opportunity to learn how to do that while contributing to government.

Here we are today with a bill that says that it would create gender parity in cabinet, and it would not. How can people across the way stand and say that it is a great advancement for feminism, when it is not?

A better way to have more women in politics and around the cabinet table would be if we understood that there are tools at our disposal right now. Earlier in the debate, one of my colleagues talked about the fact that the Prime Minister already has in his toolkit the ability to have full cabinet ministers. Hopefully they would be, as they have been across different governments, people who have a degree of experience in this place and in parliamentary committees and an understanding of how government works. That is a different skill set than they would have in any private sector industry or NGO. This place has a learned skill set, and that is okay.

Focusing on tokenism, and then trying to cover it up with a thin veil of feminism that is false, is actually doing a disservice to Canadians, because we are throwing people into situations when they are not ready to govern. That abdicates our fiduciary responsibility to Canadian taxpayers. It abdicates our responsibility to the public service to understand how to translate a political mandate into change within the public service. It abdicates our responsibility to Canadians in that ministers have to understand how those two things work together when they are bringing bills forward in the House of Commons and through committee. It abdicates our responsibility to women, because we are calling something feminist when it is not.

I am not going to stand here and say that I am perfect or that anyone in this House is perfect, but by standing here pretending that this bill is feminist, we are doing a disservice to all Canadians.

My colleagues opposite should go into their caucus room next week and say that maybe they should make some changes to this bill. It can be done in committee. It does not work right now. It is not

doing it for me, it is not doing it for the NDP, and I am sure it is not doing it for a lot of people in the Liberal caucus.

● (1315)

Let us do something that resembles work in this place. Let us have a debate, translate those changes at committee, especially given the testimony we heard at the government operations committee, and have a bill that creates, not stymies, gender equality.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a central focus of the member's concern about the bill was memoranda to cabinet. Within our government, with our Prime Minister, all ministers within the ministry can provide a memorandum to cabinet. I was wondering if, given that fact, it changes the hon. member's view of the bill, as that was a central focus of concern for her.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that under the structure created by the Prime Minister, there are certain ministers in cabinet, many of them women, who have to report to senior members within the cabinet who are men. That is not gender equality.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue on the theme of gender equality, which I was surprised to hear Liberals bring up in today's debate. We had a witness at committee, Professor Margot Young, from the Allard School of Law at UBC, who said:

Framing this as a bill that somehow addresses issues around gender equity in the current cabinet composition is a mistake, and it's a mistake of significant ideological character....

...to respond to a question about women in the cabinet by saying simply "because it's 2015" loses a key leadership moment to articulate and shape opinion about what it means to actually have women in positions of equality, in positions of leadership and power.

In response to that, the Liberal member for Don Valley East said:

I thank you for being here, but I don't think we have the relevance to our study for Bill C-24....

If you have any additional points to make.... They would not be regarding this bill, because it is irrelevant to what you are saying. There is nothing that says it is a gender-balanced bill; there is no indication that it has anything to do with gender equality.

Members might forgive me for being surprised to hear Liberals saying today that the bill has everything to do with gender equality.

The member for Newmarket—Aurora said, in response to the same witness:

I don't disagree with anything you've said. I'm not sure the purpose of this bill was at all to express gender equality.... I don't think it's meant to be a tool that's going to address gender inequality, pay equity, or any of the other issues you raised in your opening [statement].

I would like to know what the member thinks about that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I am tired of feminism being used as a word and a tool for political gain by all parties in the House. I am tired of tokenism. I am tired of having worked my way up to where I am and having bills like this come to the House of Commons. I am tired of having Liberal colleagues, colleagues of all political stripes, stand up on technicalities, saying that maybe this is not this and that.

Government Orders

If we are going to get serious about gender equality, this debate has to stop. We have been having this debate for 30 years. We need to stop putting bills like this forward, stop technicalities, and stop having announcements about gender parity when it is not gender parity. We need to start empowering women and overcoming systemic barriers to allow women to participate in all facets of society. The Prime Minister needs to stop saying that he is a feminist to sell his socks on the cover of international magazines.

That is the difference between this and a true conversation about feminism that we can achieve through different policy mechanisms. It is not based on one political stripe or one political ideology. We cannot gloss over the fact that it is a convenient label to sell votes. That has to stop.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to switch the channel a bit and ask the member if she could talk about the days when she was minister of state for western economic development, which is a regional development agency that is going to be cut off. Under this legislation, there will not be ministers for regional economic development agencies. What if a minister from Toronto had been the minister in charge of WED? I wonder if my colleague could talk about that and the work she did in that portfolio.

● (1320)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, sadly, there are a lot of Calgarians and Albertans who are used to Toronto telling them what to do. I will leave it at that.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill for pointing out the vacuousness of the Liberals' position on gender equality. It is all show and very little tell when it comes to their position. I thank her for that very gracious yet succinct effort to expose what the Liberals have really done on gender equality, which is very little.

I want to go to the other part of this bill, which addresses the regional economic development facilities we have across the country. Bill C-24 effectively does the following. It abandons a decentralized decision-making process and replaces it with a highly centralized top-down decision-making process when it comes to the regions of our country, to my region of the country, British Columbia, in the west, to the northern areas of our country, to eastern Canada, and to the Atlantic provinces. What this bill does is effectively create eight new Liberal ministerial positions, which reflects the five minister of state roles that were filled after the 2015 election. It also does something else. It adds three Liberal ministers yet to be named. I will get back to that in a moment, because it comes down to transparency. I can say that, after 12 years in this House, it is the first time I have seen legislation come forward that creates undefined ministerial posts without any idea of what purpose they will serve.

Also, Bill C-24 formally eliminates the positions of the six ministers for the regional development agencies across the country, agencies like Western Economic Diversification Canada, FedNor, and ACOA in Atlantic Canada. That must be concerning to everyone in this House, because it reduces the accountability of government to the regions and the communities across this country.

In my early years as a politician, I was a member of city council. It has been said, quite correctly, that city council is the level of

government closest to the people. When I was sitting on city council, we had residents of our communities come forward and make their concerns known. They would bring us their proposals as to how they wanted to see our city develop. We could make decisions that very night or day, and the next day we could start implementing those decisions. What was great was that, as a municipal councillor, because we were from that very community, we could hear directly from the people affected by our decisions, and we could tailor our policies and programs accordingly.

What is happening now federally is the exact opposite. The ministers who were appointed to the various economic development agencies in the main regions across the country were the ones who had their ear to the ground. They were the eyes and ears of the government when it came to that region of the country. What the current Liberal government has done is quite arbitrarily said, without any consultation with the regions, that it will not have any ministers for the regions but will simply get rid of them and appoint a minister from Toronto to make all major decisions relating to those regions. I do not want to begrudge Toronto and Ontario with a minister responsible for economic development, but I can say that once we get out into the other regions of the country they will be saying, "What happened? What about us? There is somebody in Toronto making decisions for us out here in the region." That should be embarrassing for the Liberal government.

What should be even more embarrassing is this. In the last election the Liberal Party elected 32 members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada. One would figure that out of 32 members of Parliament, the Prime Minister could find one who would be the representative for ACOA, and represent the interests of Atlantic Canada.

● (1325)

He just could not get his mind around that and said that it would be better, rather than having an Atlantic Canada minister, to appoint someone from downtown Toronto to make these decisions. I think of our democratic process, about the accountability that governments should be focusing on, and about responsiveness to the very people whom each one of us serve when we are establishing ministries that are focused on ensuring that every region of our country benefits from economic development. We should make sure we also appoint people to represent those regions and to be the voice in cabinet of those regional development agencies and of the people who live in those regions.

How do I know there is a lot of concern? We just have to ask the people from Atlantic Canada. For example, Conservative leader Jamie Baillie, said, that appointing an ACOA minister from Toronto, "is yet another sign that the Liberals are taking Atlantic Canada for granted." We saw that with the appointment of a Supreme Court justice from that region and how long it took for the current Liberal government to finally understand that Atlantic Canadians needed to have a voice on the Supreme Court.

Government Orders

We go on to Éric Tétrault, president of the Quebec Manufacturers and Exporters. He indicated that he hoped that the situation would not be a total loss and that a Quebec MP might be put in charge of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the regions of Quebec. Did that happen? Of course it did not. He went on to say, “We have quite a few development programs with them [being a government] in areas such as innovation and skilled labour. We are afraid they’ll get mixed up with a national policy that won’t necessarily work for Quebec. If we have to deal with officials as far away as Toronto or Ottawa to get the government to pay attention to problems with the Quebec economy, we’re in trouble.”

We are hearing that across the country.

Let us go back. I was reading the *Cape Breton Post*, and this is what it said:

The more you push...out to big centres, like Toronto, Ottawa, or maybe, Montreal, as the base of decision-making for those organizations, the less in tune they are with the regions that they’re trying to help the most.

As we focus on developing an economy that is truly going to share the prosperity of this country with every Canadian, with every community across this country, and with every region, the government has to understand that the government members need to have their ear to the ground in each of those regions. It is not enough to say, as the member across the way just suggested, that they have 32 MPs from the area. Do the Liberals have any representation when it comes to economic development?

The previous government understood full well how important it was to have a member of cabinet who was also designated the person to represent the interests in that person’s region. That is why there were not a lot of complaints heard across Canada. One of the concerns I have is that this decision was taken because the Prime Minister has completely capitulated to our public service. We know that for years our public service has not necessarily been a big fan of these regional economic development agencies. Now of course the public service has the Prime Minister, who will do its bidding, and has eliminated the key ministers who could have provided the ears to the ground and the eyes in the region that would have allowed the government to make good decisions for economic development in every part of our country.

I have one last thought. Bill C-24 also lacks transparency. As I mentioned earlier, the bill would appoint three mystery ministers for whom the job description has not been defined. That is a lack of transparency. The government, by stealth, is trying to introduce ministerial positions and Canadians have no idea what the positions are going to entail.

Therefore, this bill, Bill C-24, is very disappointing to me, to our Conservative Party, and certainly to Canadians across this great country of ours.

• (1330)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard a number of Conservatives refer to the Minister of Innovation as the minister from Toronto. We would be more than happy to bring forward a map for hon. members on the other side, because his constituents would think differently about where they are from.

The hon. member was concerned about Atlantic Canada, an area of the country in which the Conservatives did not win any seats. In terms of the hard work of 32 members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada standing up and demanding better than the previous government, we have seen \$282.7 million invested in ACOA for innovative, evidence-based growth, working with the Atlantic immigration pilot project to increase immigration, which the Atlantic provinces want. Our minister is listening to the hard-working MPs who are bringing forward those concerns. Is that a concept that did not exist in the previous government? The results speak for themselves.

With the economy firing on all cylinders, how can the hon. member be opposed to this particular plan?

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, we see the disingenuousness of that question when we think about energy east. Energy east was strongly supported in the Atlantic provinces but the Atlantic provinces did not have a regional minister who could advocate for them. What happened? The federal government stuck its finger into the pie, messed around a bit, interfered in the process, and energy east threw up its hands and said it is no longer going to invest in Canada. That is what comes from a Liberal government, a top-down, centralized government not in tune with the regions.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the focus of the member’s speech was more on the issue of regional economic development ministers. With respect to that, one of the funny things about this legislation is that the Liberals are keen to eliminate the option for separate economic development ministries to reflect the current practices of government, but they are not doing other things that would reflect the current practices of government, like getting rid of ministers of state. That would be a bad idea in our opinion, but it would reflect the current practice of the government. There is a double standard when it comes to what they want the legislation to reflect and what they do not want it to reflect.

I do want to come back briefly to the issue of gender equality in cabinet and back to the committee meeting where we learned some interesting things from some of the Liberals on that committee. One witness at committee said:

The second point I want to make is that to claim that it is about gender equality [not only is a mistake but] is dangerous. I think it’s dangerous because too often we cut off the really important, substantial, and tough conversations about gender equality by claiming that we’ve already dealt with it and we’ve dealt with it in some more formalistic way.

That is why I suppose Liberals on committee were quick to deny that the bill was about gender equality, because they did not want to be doing that very thing, where they pretended that we had dealt with substantive gender equality issues when we had not in fact. That is why it is such a surprise to hear Liberals making that argument again.

I am wondering if the member has any thoughts on why Liberals today in the House would be so keen to muddy waters that their colleagues at committee thought it was important to keep clear.

Government Orders

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, as the father of four wonderful grown daughters who have their own careers and who have really blessed our lives and blessed the lives of people around them, I know how important gender equality is, but it cannot be artificial gender equality and that is what happened here with the Liberal government. The Liberal government is great at photo-ops. It is great at using slogans, but when it comes to addressing the underlying reasons why women are not rightfully taking their place in our society, the Liberals are an absolute failure.

We need to empower women to understand that they can aspire to anything in this country, whether it is to be in the House of Commons, whether it is to be the CEO of one of the most powerful corporations in our country, whether it is to be the principal of their school, or whether it is to be in their home providing leadership as a mother, as a mentor, to their kids.

I concur with the member. Even though Bill C-24 pretends to be a bill that would strengthen the Liberal government's reputation for gender equality it actually undermines it, because it is fake.

• (1335)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act, also known as the "Seinfeld act", as it is a bill basically about nothing.

Let us go back to the origin of the bill.

It is 2015, and the Prime Minister announces with great fanfare that the new cabinet will be gender equal, but it turns out the Prime Minister has reserved the five minister of state slots, the junior ministries basically operating inside other full ministries, toward women. However, no fear, the government quickly says that it is an error and they are made full ministers. Perhaps this was the very first recorded example of the early administrative confusion excuse the finance minister rolled out for his issues in missing out on announcing his villa in France. While I will note that it is gender equal, it had the highest percentage of women in the junior minister roles since Trudeau senior was in power.

Now I have no issue with the makeup of the cabinet being gender equal in number. However, I am disappointed the Liberals went with a quota system that excluded so many qualified women MPs in order to find roles for what was shown to be poorly chosen male ministers.

Think where we would be if the Liberal quota system had not foisted upon us the current finance minister, no ethical skulduggery, no conflict of interest by having the finance minister make policy decisions that just happened to enrich his family fortune while hurting average Canadians.

The government would not have had to appoint the member for Vancouver South as Minister of Defence, where he repeatedly claimed the glory of other battles of soldiers who risked their lives for Operation Medusa. We certainly would not have had the ongoing bungling of the sole-source Super Hornet debacle either.

However, when it comes to gender equality scandals and broken promises, like using taxpayer dollars to rent limos from party supporters, the Phoenix pay fiasco, and electoral reform, the Liberals have it nailed. Let us go back to Bill C-24.

I call Bill C-24 the Seinfeld bill because it is a bill about nothing. However, at least with Seinfeld, we got to have fun with Festivus, the Soup Nazi, and Kramer. With Bill C-24, it is basically a waste of time, a whole-of-government approach to a waste of time. Everything the bill would accomplish can be or already has been done. Equal money for ministers and ministers of state has been happening for the past two years: ministers of state through appropriations, and regular ministers, as before, from the general consolidated revenue fund.

The government House leader told us that all 30 members already "receive the same salary" and that this had been the case since the first day in office and would not change with the bill. So why the need for Bill C-24? Why take up time in committee and the House when there are so many other pressing matters?

We are told that the five junior minister of state titles need to be changed in order to have a voice at the cabinet table. How does this make sense? Are we to believe a minister of state with a groundbreaking idea or policy would be ignored at the cabinet table just because he or she had a different title? Surely the Prime Minister does not differentiate between opinions coming from ministers and ministers of state based on title alone. Gerry Butts seems to be heard loud and clear at the cabinet table, and he does not have a minister's title.

On second reading of Bill C-24, the Liberals spoke to the virtues of the bill, saying things like "we're committed to pay equity in our cabinet". The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board said, "This government is also committed to ensuring that pay equity extends to the cabinet table." A Liberal colleague on the operations committee said, "we have chosen is to say that women deserve equal pay for an equal voice at the cabinet table."

It was abundantly clear that Liberal after Liberal stood up and spoke to Bill C-24 with the intent of framing it in terms of gender equality, which was the message they wanted to send. The Liberal members of the government operations committee must have been just giddy with delight when the NDP requested a professor of law from UBC, who is an expert on gender studies, to appear to testify on Bill C-24. However, I was a first hand witness to their meltdown and disappointment when the witness tore into the government's legislation and communications regarding the framing of Bill C-24 in gender terms.

The expert witness said:

...this particular piece of legislation really doesn't...have much to do with gender equality...to claim that it is about gender equality is dangerous...because...we cut off the really important, substantial, and tough conversations about gender equality by claiming that we've already dealt with it

She went on to say that:

...women need these positions of leadership, not because of the actual amount of dollars, but because of the responsibility, the profile...the authority that those positions command.

Government Orders

It is very much like a CEO and a branch director being paid the same wage. They receive equal pay, but they are not equal. The CEO has to manage the company. The branch director manages one portfolio. While they receive the same pay, they are not equitable because the scope and responsibilities are not the same.

● (1340)

That is what the Prime Minister has done, and his party, dangerously, claims it is about gender equality. We heard in committee that to frame it as legislation that speaks substantially to the issues of gender equality and cabinet composition was wrong and dangerous.

In response to a question about whether the Prime Minister's claim of gender equal cabinet was cynical, the witness expert replied that it was dishonest on behalf of the government.

The Liberals immediately attempted to walk back the previous statements made by dozens of Liberal MPs in this very place that Bill C-24 was about gender equality. The member for Newmarket—Aurora said, “I don't think anyone was proposing that this was a gender equity bill.” The member for Châteauguay—Lacolle tried to simultaneously claim that Bill C-24 was a good first step, which the witness rejected, and then tried to reframe the question by asking if the junior ministries were more emerging ministries. Yes, all ministers are equal but some are more emerging than others.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I hate to interrupt the hon. member but I am having a hard time hearing that riveting speech. People are talking among themselves. It is nice to hear people talking among themselves, but maybe just reduce it to a whisper.

I will let the hon. member continue.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I am shocked. Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, all ministers are equal but some are more equal and emerging than others, it appears.

The member for Don Valley East, to her discredit, labelled the witness's testimony as disingenuous because Bill C-24 had nothing to do with gender equality. If it is not about gender equality and it is not actually needed to do anything about what the government has already been doing pay and organization-wise the last few years, what is it for and what does it do?

It also formalizes the centralization of regional ministries under the minister from Mississauga. If ever there was a more perfect analogy for the Liberals' attitude toward the rest of the country, I cannot find a better example than a minister from suburban Toronto holding regional ministries from the west, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada. It is a slap in the face to these regions in Canada. I would much rather have a ministry of western economic diversification to advocate on behalf of the west than the three Liberal MPs from Alberta, who deign to represent their province second and toeing the party line first. The Liberal government has been AWOL when it comes to Alberta.

The government House Leader insists that a whole-of-government approach will serve regions better because everyone will be in on the

conversation. Of course she did not fail to mention that diversity was our strength, although she was referring to regional diversity in Canada this time. She said, “Regional expertise with national expertise is a way for it to work better together to create a synergy, to take a whole-of-government approach.”

I apologize for those sitting at home watching this on CPAC. I know people are rolling their eyes so far back in their head listening to this statement that they have probably sprained their eye muscles.

They then went on to use the words “whole-of-government approach” 11 more times in justifying having the minister for western diversification being based in Toronto. Except with this whole-of-government approach, we have no one to step up and advocate for Alberta. Certainly not the three Liberal MPs we have from Alberta, all three who did Oscar-worthy impressions of mimes when it came time to speak up for energy east.

Alberta Conservative MPs presented to the government the Alberta jobs task force, with many recommendations for help with our jobs crisis. We asked for infrastructure funding to tackle the issue of orphaned wells. It would have put highly-skilled people back to work in Alberta and Saskatchewan and helped the environment. What did our minister of economic diversification based in Toronto get us? Well, he managed to find taxpayer money to pay out bonuses to the billionaire owners of Bombardier.

What about those superclusters we hear so much about? Well, a few weeks back I received a text from a friend of mine who was flying in to Calgary. He noted that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development was on the same plane. I figured, great, he was going to Calgary to announce that we were getting a supercluster. Unfortunately we heard that the Alberta supercluster application, which is the clean resource innovation network made up of a consortium of think tanks, universities, the provincial government, and oil and gas bodies, was shot down. The minister commented that it was rejected because of an overlap of superclusters for agriculture and construction. That is regional expertise working with a synergistic conversation for a whole-of-government approach working for Alberta.

Rather than present legislation that addresses the job crisis in Alberta, or helps with these parts of the country struggling with the opioid crisis or the myriad of other issues affecting livelihoods and survival of Canadians, we get Bill C-24, focused on upping salaries in attempt to fix a mistake the Prime Minister made, legislation on titles and salaries that really does nothing that the government has not already been doing for the past couple of years.

I await the day that the Liberals move beyond government by words, tweets, selfies, and feel-good statements. Retracting Bill C-24 would be a good first start.

Government Orders

• (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. We do not have that regional minister in western Canada. However, we have had more development in western Canada in the last couple of years than we had in the last many years of the Stephen Harper government. We can talk about the increases of western diversification. We can talk about infrastructure dollars going into rural western Canada. We can talk about so much—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Normally when the Speaker rises, there is some quiet or at least I hope there will be some.

I want to mention that I was having a bit of a hard time hearing the hon. member for Edmonton West earlier. Now I am having a hard time because it is louder. I will give the hon. member for Winnipeg North the same opportunity.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, those are Conservative heckles from across the floor. We cannot just make this stuff. It is real. It is happening today. There is more economic development taking place in western Canada, without having that regional minister.

The difference is that under the current Prime Minister, we do not need 40 cabinet ministers. Stephen Harper had 40 cabinet ministers. That was a record high in our country. We have never had 40 cabinet ministers. We have 30, and there is gender equity among our cabinet. Western Canada, like the rest of Canada, is doing quite well, with 475,000 jobs in the last two years alone.

When we take a look at what the bill proposes, it tries to generate an adequate-size potential cabinet. It would prevent future Conservative governments from having 40 ministers. It would limit the numbers. Would the member not agree to limit the number, as opposed to having that record high of 40 ministers from the Stephen Harper era?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his rant.

Let us look at what the Liberals actually have delivered for Alberta: a record unemployment level that we have not seen since the last time we had a Prime Minister Trudeau. The member talked about infrastructure. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is based in Edmonton.

For infrastructure spending in Alberta, we get 14% less per capita than the rest of the country. How is that delivering for Alberta, when it is 14% less? Thank heaven the minister is not based in Toronto, like the western diversification minister. We would get even less. We get carbon taxes from the Liberal government. We get the Prime Minister telling a gentleman who is begging for help, who has been unemployed, to just hang in there. What has the Liberal government delivered to Alberta? Nothing.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for recounting some of the events that occurred at committee when we were hearing testimony on this bill. He also witnessed what I would say was verging on rough

treatment of the witness by the member for Don Valley East. I think the member alluded to some of that in his speech.

Clearly the Liberals on committee were not aware that the government thought the bill was all about gender equality. I do not know why that is the case. We have kind of heard in the debate that the Prime Minister needs help from legislation and titles to take members of his cabinet and caucus seriously.

Does the member think the Liberal members on the committee were out of the loop because they were not called “minister” and the Prime Minister did not deem it important to let them know what the major Liberal arguments were for the bill?

• (1350)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does wonderful work on the committee. He really stepped it up. I appreciate his bringing to light some of the hypocrisy of the government.

He asked if the committee members were out of touch. I would like to think they were, but they actually spoke in second reading about the bill and explained to us that it was all about gender equality. We heard from a learned expert from UBC who explained that it was sham, calling the Prime Minister dishonest in his actions. She very clearly said that it was dangerous to say this was about gender equality. Then the Liberal members on the committee attacked her to the point where the chair had to intervene and ask them to show a bit of respect for the expert.

I have no idea why the Liberal members switched from “it is gender equality” to “not gender equality”. I think, like us, they looked at the bill and realized it was a bill about nothing and did not bother to read the brief on the issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock. I will point out to the hon. member that he has nine minutes for debate now and will have one minute remaining when the bill is next before the House, and questions and comments will take place after that.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although my speech may not be as humorous as that of my friend from Edmonton West, I will try to live up to his standard.

I too am pleased to stand to speak on Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act. As some may know, a few months ago I was given the privilege by the leader of the official opposition to be named critic for FedNor, an agency that now has less accountability to Ontario's north, which I will expand on momentarily.

For those watching at home, Bill C-24 would create eight new Liberal ministerial positions and formally eliminate the positions of six ministers for regional development agencies, whose responsibility to local community organizations and businesses would now be in the hands of a single minister. Local development projects and decisions in communities like Prince Rupert, Timmins, Whitehorse, Churchill, Goose Bay, and Miramichi, for example, just to name a few, would be made by that single minister from Mississauga.

Statements by Members

This summer, the Prime Minister said his appointment of a Toronto-area minister for all regional development agencies was “a way of reducing the kind of politics that we’ve always seen from regional development agencies”. I am not sure what the Prime Minister was actually referring to. Regional ministers being accountable to and responsible for matters of regional importance is not political. That is just common sense, something the government has been lacking lately.

Let me say what is political. It is making decisions without consulting the very people who will be affected by those decisions. No wonder the level of trust in government in some rural areas is decreasing. When decision-making is centralized, especially decisions that have a large effect on a population, and they are made in some faraway place with, at times, little or no on-the-ground knowledge of the unique needs of each province, region, county, or municipality, problems happen.

To make matters worse, the government operations committee only heard from the government House leader and one professor studying this bill. The Liberal-dominated committee did not hear from a single witness on the issue of regional development agencies. That is right. Maybe the Prime Minister felt local folks cannot make these decisions for themselves after all. The Prime Minister added insult to injury with his cynical slur against Atlantic Canadians, claiming a Toronto-area minister needs to run ACOA because of the kind of politics he insinuates exists in Atlantic Canada.

What about Quebec? I am sure Quebecers will be going to bed easier tonight knowing that a minister from Mississauga will now be making decisions for that province. After all, I am sure it has been a long-accepted tradition in Quebec that Toronto knows best. I wonder how Mr. Forget, the current president of the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, is now feeling. He was pleased, back in November of 2015, to see three Montreal ministers in cabinet, but almost with a sense of foreboding, he wondered at the time what would happen to the Quebec economic development agency, stating how important it was for Quebecers to have the attentive ear of a Quebec minister on matters related to local economic development.

The Prime Minister's decision to formally eliminate, through Bill C-24, regional development ministers reminds Canadians that, under the Liberal government, they no longer have regional ministers representing and fighting for their regions' interests because the Prime Minister thinks this is a kind of politics being played. Instead, the Prime Minister, leaving all regional development in the hands of a single minister from Mississauga, again seems to think this is a better kind of politics. We see a pattern forming.

Last week, I was in northern Ontario and heard the concerns of small businesses, community representatives, and chambers of commerce regarding the northern Ontario economic development agency, or FedNor, and how they wanted more transparency, accountability, and local influence in the decision-making on projects that will have a significant impact on their communities. What I do not think they had in mind was the \$150,000 in FedNor funds that were given last fall to a company based in the innovation minister's riding, a Mississauga riding. Apparently, this is the preferred kind of politics the Prime Minister had in mind.

●(1355)

This spring, a Liberal Atlantic caucus subcommittee reported that it has had reports of a threefold increase in processing times at ACOA since the appointment of this Toronto-area minister. The subcommittee noted that centralized decision-making is viewed unfavourably as impeding the agility of programs. The subcommittee was asked to advocate for regional decision-making in order to better address regional needs.

The future of regional development agencies is cast further in doubt as there are no specific references to any of the regional development agencies in the innovation minister's mandate letter. Not only will local and regional development projects be decided by a Toronto-area minister, but that same minister has no mandate, no accountability to his Prime Minister, for the stewardship of these agencies. Is this good politics or bad politics? Forgive me if I am starting to get confused, but we do see a pattern. Any claim by my colleagues opposite that this is about ministerial equality is about as believable as Mississauga being in northern Ontario.

Bill C-24 would amend the Salaries Act to allow for the equal payment of all ministers, ensuring that ministers with more junior portfolios are paid the same as ministers with larger and more senior portfolios, without adding any new responsibilities. What does this mean? It means the ministers with junior portfolios will not have their own deputy ministers, will not have the same departmental budgets, and will not have the same authority as ministers in most senior portfolios.

While the Liberal speaker claimed that Bill C-24 is an example of housekeeping, and it is the housekeeping item they claim to legislate equal salaries for all ministers, the bill fails to ensure that all ministers are created equal. I see I am getting the wrap-up sign, so I will continue after question period.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock will have two and a half minutes following question period, and I thank him for wrapping up his comments for the moment.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is still happening: every time Quebec behaves like a distinct society, Canada goes ballistic.

Statements by Members

The best example of that was 25 years ago when the Charlotte-town accord on the future of Quebec and Canada failed dismally. Quebeckers and Canadians said no to each other. Quebeckers said no because the agreement would not have done enough to protect their distinct society, and Canada said no because it could not bear to give Quebec even an inch of freedom.

That led to a seismic shift in Canadian politics. The separatist movement picked up steam, with 54 BQ members winning seats the following year. Quebeckers spoke loudly and clearly enough for the Bloc Québécois to form the official opposition here, but the fundamentals never change, as we saw when Philippe Couillard tried to kick off a renewed discussion about Quebec's place in Canada. The Prime Minister immediately shut him down.

That all happened 25 years ago to the day. The faces here in Parliament have changed, but Quebec and Canada are still deadlocked. The people of Quebec remember everything.

* * *

• (1400)

AVIGNON—LA MITIS—MATANE—MATAPÉDIA

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Georges Harrisson, Paul Lemieux, Pierre Vicaire, Véronique Pelletier, Hermel Gallant, Jean-Yves Lebrun, Jean-Guy Dionne, Réginald Morissette, Laurette de Champlain, Madeleine Perrault, Édouard Lauzier, Jean-Yves Thériault, Danielle Marcoux, Jacqueline Paquet, Marielle Roy, Andrée Métivier, Lucie Lapointe, Marie-Brigitte Lehouillier, Enrico Carpinteri, Serge Gendron, and Rodrigue Boulianne are outstanding citizens from my riding to whom I awarded a sesquicentennial pin, in honour of the 150th anniversary of Confederation, at two ceremonies held on October 13 in Amqui and Carleton-sur-Mer.

These pins were awarded to recognize the significant contributions these exceptional individuals made to the development of our region. I would like to take this opportunity in the House to once again thank them for their commitment, leadership, and dedication to our community. They are a wonderful asset to our riding. Congratulations and thank you.

* * *

[English]

ALBERTA MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 16, the province of Alberta held its municipal elections. I would like to thank all the candidates in Yellowhead who put their names forward to serve on their local municipal or county councils. To those who were re-elected or who won, I offer my congratulations. They are entering one of the best forms of governing. They will be part of a team that sets directions, goals, and policies for their community. They should be proud of what they have accomplished, and should enjoy the rewards of serving their constituents. Whether they represent one of our small summer resort villages or one of our large county councils, they will play a very instrumental role in governing their community. As a former councillor and mayor, I advise all of them to listen to their constituents and work together as a team on their council. The rewards are worth the effort.

[Translation]

QUEBEC FEDERATION OF WOMEN FARMERS

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since this is Women's History Month, I would like to take this opportunity today to recognize the incredible work that is done by the Fédération des agricultrices du Québec. Last weekend, I attended the Saturne gala, an event organized in connection with the federation's 30th anniversary to pay tribute to outstanding women farmers who are known for their commitment, passion, and hard work on our local farms.

Women's involvement in farming often goes above and beyond farm work. They also take on administrative, financial, accounting, and union tasks. Equality is a fundamental value for Canadians, and without the contribution of women, the farming industry would never have been as successful as it is today and would never be able to reach its full potential.

I invite all my colleagues to recognize the courage of women farmers in Quebec, and I congratulate this year's award winners. I thank them for helping Canadian agriculture to flourish.

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. I want to remind members before we go on that props are not permitted in the House, and that they are not to be holding up props when one is making a statement.

* * *

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for Women's History Month, I want to honour the women who took risks and fought for a woman's right to control her own body. It was Canadian women like Dorothea Palmer, who was arrested for distributing contraception information and devices, and Elizabeth Bagshaw, who illegally operated the first birth control clinic in Canada between 1932 and 1966, who paved the way for our access to birth control today.

Unfortunately there are still barriers to accessing contraception. From a human rights perspective, birth control should not be accessible just to those who can afford it. My motion, Motion No. 65, calls upon the government to collaborate with the provinces to provide free access to prescribed birth control.

Full control of our reproductive health rights is an essential step toward equality. If the government truly supports human rights and gender equality, it would and should make prescription birth control free for Canada 150.

Statements by Members

•(1405)

*[Translation]***CORN FESTIVAL**

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to celebrate the success of a special event involving my riding and that of my colleague from La Prairie.

As part of the Canada 150 celebrations, Maison LePailleur in Châteauguay and Kahnawake Tourism organized an event last month to bring the community together: our first annual Corn Festival. I was delighted to attend this festival celebrating the francophone, anglophone, and indigenous cultures that have enriched our region.

[English]

This first-ever festival, hosted by Kahnawake and Châteauguay, celebrated that wonderful gift of nature, corn, and featured the history of its use and cultivation; much music and dance; and, of course, juicy local corn, boiled, broiled, and popped. This collaboration between Kahnawake and Châteauguay is building relationships between our two communities, and we look forward to future collaborations in the sacred spirit of reconciliation.

* * *

AGRI-TRADE EQUIPMENT EXPO

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this November, my riding of Red Deer—Mountain View will once again host one of Canada's biggest agricultural trade shows. The Agri-Trade Equipment Expo is a joint venture between the Red Deer & District Chamber of Commerce and Westerner Park. From November 8 to 11, Agri-Trade will host over 470 exhibitors representing the very best in agricultural equipment, technology, services, and products not only from Canada but from around the world. This is an opportunity for everyone to see how our Canadian farmers and producers ensure that the food on our tables is the best in the world.

Our Canadian agriculture industry is vibrant and innovative, contributing more than \$100 billion to our economy. I encourage everyone to come to the Agri-Trade Equipment Expo in Red Deer's Westerner Park to learn more about Canada's innovative farming techniques and meet the hard-working farmers and producers growing our food.

* * *

*[Translation]***ACTION GROUP ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about The Action Group on Access to Justice, which was established by the Law Society of Upper Canada.

[English]

In recent days, the action group has engaged the public on how to leverage innovation in the legal profession, to reduce systemic barriers, and to provide better access to justice for children living in poverty. In the last year, our government has supported these laudable goals by adding \$2.7 million in addition to the \$11.5 million in legal aid funding, in particular to help refugees and asylum

seekers. In family law, we committed \$107.8 million over five years to provide more mediation and more child services.

[Translation]

With respect to criminal law, we are modernizing our sexual assault laws and training so that victims can come forward knowing they will get the justice they so deserve.

[English]

In addition, we have made over 115 court appointments with more women, more diversity, and more talent on the bench. This has the effect of reducing court delays and improving access to justice. I want to commend the action group and the law society for all their work.

When it comes to access to justice in this government, they will always have a great—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Richmond Hill.

* * *

RICHMOND HILL

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Richmond Hill, the Canada 150 celebration continues. There are even more reasons to celebrate as this year also coincides with a number of bicentennial anniversaries. Alongside my community, on October 15, I was pleased to celebrate the 200th congregational anniversary of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church; and on October 22, the 200-year anniversary of the birth of Baha'ullah.

For two centuries, our Presbyterian church, located at the heart of Richmond Hill, has been providing invaluable community and worship services to a congregation of 200-plus people from over 30 different countries and it continues to do so today with the support and dedication of the Reverend Duncan Jeffrey and its members.

Today, millions of people of the Baha'i faith around the world follow the spiritual and social teaching of Baha'ullah.

As we continue to celebrate this significant occasion, I am reminded of the unique values of diversity and freedom that make this country so great.

* * *

CANADIAN FARMERS

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in this free and democratic country, we have so much to be thankful for. I am first and foremost thankful for a God who loves us and was willing to send his son, Jesus, to pay the settlement for our sin and how through faith in him we can receive that gift. I am thankful for my wife. I am thankful for my family. I am thankful to have the opportunity to represent my constituents of Provencher. As the harvest winds down across this country, I am thankful for our farmers.

Statements by Members

In Canada, we are blessed with the abundance of land with which to farm, but without the hard work and dedication of our farmers, that blessing would not be fully realized. Farmers are incredibly talented. They are conservationists, they are veterinarians, they are mechanics, and they are even meteorologists. I want to thank our farmers today for providing us with safe, nutritious, and delicious food. Food does not just show up on our store shelves miraculously, but it is through the hard work and dedication of our farmers. Often, in our abundance here in Canada, it is easy to take our farmers for granted. Today, I want to make sure that farmers across this great country know that we are thankful for them.

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● (1410)

WORLD MIXED CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week a Canadian curling team made up of Thunder Bay's Trevor Bonot, Kory Carr, Megan Carr, and Stratton's Jackie McCormick won a silver medal for Canada at the world mixed curling championship in Switzerland. Team Canada went undefeated throughout the round robin in playoffs and earned their spot in the final with a 5-3 win over Norway that came down to the last rock. The final game, which saw Canada close a 5-2 gap with 5-4 in the seventh, ended with Scotland taking the goal and team Bonot bringing home a very impressive silver. This team showed incredible dedication in the months leading up to the championship, with members living across northwestern Ontario.

The medal was hard earned and well deserved. I am glad to be joining Canadians across the country in congratulating the team members.

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YOUNG PRESIDENTS' ORGANIZATION

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate an organization that fosters entrepreneurship, shares ideas, and builds leaders.

Young Presidents' Organization, or YPO, is a global organization throughout which chief executives engage across borders, share experiences, and learn from one another. It has more than 25,000 members from around the globe.

Today, we are joined by members from my corner of the world. YPO Alberta chose to host its annual chapter retreat in our nation's capital to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday. YPO has had six decades of success connecting diverse leaders from across the globe. Their mission, to build better leaders through lifelong learning and idea exchange, reminds me of the work that we do here every day of empowering, pushing, and even cajoling each other to be better leaders for a better Canada.

Please join with me to welcome friends, colleagues, and community leaders from Alberta and Saskatchewan.

We are very happy to have you here, my friends. *Bienvenue à Ottawa*. Welcome to Ottawa.

The Speaker: I am afraid I have to remind my hon. friend from Edmonton Centre to address his comments to the Chair, and that only the Chair recognizes people in the gallery.

The hon. member for Calgary Heritage.

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ARTS COMMONS

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the performing arts contributes a bright swath to the cultural fabric of my home of Calgary. The Arts Commons in Calgary offers multiple performing spaces and is an important venue for artists. The Arts Commons is a member venue of the performing arts centre consortium. The executive members are visiting Ottawa today for their fall meeting and are in the chamber's gallery now.

Among the CEOs of the 35 largest performing arts centres in North America is this year's chairman of the consortium, Johann Zietsman, who is also the president of Calgary's Arts Commons, and a good friend.

The member groups of the consortium make enormous contributions to Canadian culture and the arts. These groups enrich the lives of Canadians and contribute to the unique energy of our cities.

I would like to thank members of the consortium for their ongoing work in promoting the arts across North America.

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MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, in communion with Rome since the 18th century, adheres to the Byzantine tradition and has its seat in Damascus, Syria. His Beatitude Joseph Absi, Archbishop of Damas and Patriarchal Vicar, was installed as the patriarch of the Melkite Catholic Church, which has nearly two million followers in Syria, Lebanon, and around the world.

We are honoured to have Patriarch Absi visiting Parliament Hill today. On behalf of my colleagues in the House of Commons in Canada, it is my privilege to wish him a warm welcome to Canada.

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

I want to wish Bishop Absi, well known for his strong sense of dialogue, every success in his duties as the patriarch of his dedicated followers. I wish similar success to all the clergy leaders, the worthy representatives of the Melkite Church—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Oral Questions

[English]

PENSIONS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more and more Canadians are experiencing the harsh reality of losing their pension and benefits when a company goes bankrupt. Sixteen thousand Sears Canada employees are worried there won't be any money left to pay their pensions after Sears completes its bankruptcy proceedings, especially after company executives rake in their millions in bonuses. For anyone who worked for U.S. Steel or Nortel, this is an all-too-familiar story.

Far too many companies in Canada are hiding behind the outdated bankruptcy legislation that puts workers at the end of the line. Severance is lost, benefits are cut, and workers only get a fraction of the pension they have earned. When a pension is ripped off this way, it is gone for good. For retirees, it amounts to nothing less than legalized theft.

Unless this government takes immediate action to protect workers' pensions, their jobs are on the line next.

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "I was blocked from participating in student government because of my Jewish identity and my affiliations with Jewish organizations". This quote was not written in the middle of pre-war Europe, but two days ago by a student at McGill University.

Noah Lew wrote these words after being removed from the student society at McGill University for voicing opposition to the university's boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement. This was done in public by his peers, and with applause. Let me call this for what it is. It is anti-Semitism, and it is wrong.

The people and the students who participate in this anti-Jew, non-respectful, anti-tolerant, anti-democratic, and divisive debacle should give their heads a shake. Today, we are here to tell them that Canadians will not allow the intolerance they demonstrated to take root in Canada's pluralism. Today, parliamentarians of all political stripes stand here and against the hate of these people and students. Their anti-Jewish tripe has no quarter here, nor with the people we represent.

Today, we stand with Noah.

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JESSE CADMAN

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to remember Jesse Cadman, born in 1976 in my hometown of Surrey. Today, Jessie would have been my age. However, 25 years ago, at the young age of 16, he was murdered at the hands of a young offender for simply wearing a hat they did not like.

In the wake of their son's death, Jesse's parents, Chuck and Dona, showed inspiring bravery, strength, and grace. Both of them went on to serve in the House of Commons. Inside and outside these walls, they worked tirelessly to protect victims' rights, reform our justice system, and tackle the pressing issues of gang and youth violence.

The work of the Cadmans should stand as an inspiration to all MPs as we work to ensure that no parent ever experiences the trauma Chuck and Dona endured.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ministers are banned from owning stocks. That is because we do not want them to use their power to help the companies they own or inside information to unduly profit. The minister used a loophole to get around that ban by just putting the stocks in a numbered company in Alberta.

I have a simple question: Has the minister owned other stocks in his numbered companies?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians have confidence in our government. I had a constructive discussion with the Ethics Commissioner this morning. I informed her of my continuing goal of working with her. I also told her of my intent to sell all my family shares in my former family firm, Morneau Shepell, and to move forward with a blind trust. I told her it was my intent and my family's to donate any difference in value in my family shares from the time I was elected on October 19, 2015, until now. This is the way that we—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1420)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the minister had not owned those stocks over the last two years while ministers are banned from owning stocks, then he would not have had those profits in the first place. Can he confirm now if he will donate the resulting tax savings that he will enjoy from the charitable tax credit to help pay off his deficit?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is so important that Canadians have confidence that we are working on their behalf. That is why on this side of the House we live up to the highest standards of integrity. That is why I am taking these steps, which I know will help Canadians to have real confidence in our government. I do hope that all members of the House will consider their affairs in a similar fashion, making sure that these can hold up to scrutiny and do it in a way that has the confidence of Canadians that we are working on their behalf.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the minister was caught holding an offshore company without referring it to the Ethics Commissioner. Then he was caught by Canadians as continuing to own shares in his family business. Now after being caught, he has put that money in a blind trust, but he is asking us to blindly trust him about the roughly half-dozen other numbered companies he continues to own.

Oral Questions

Why does he not just tell us what is inside those companies?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said to the House, the confidence of Canadians in what we are doing is so important. As I have also said, I have worked with the Ethics Commissioner and followed her recommendations. As I have said, I am going to go further than that. What is really important is that it allows us to do the work we do on behalf of Canadians. It allows us to keep growing the economy. It allows us to keep growing jobs for Canadians across our country. We are in an excellent situation right now where we can ensure that Canadians continue to be successful, with an increase in the Canada child benefit and an increase in the working income tax benefit. This will help Canadians over the long term.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a very simple mathematical equation: if A equals B, and B equals C, then A equals C.

I will explain: A, the Minister of Finance gives \$400 million to Bombardier; B, Bombardier is a client of Morneau Shepell; C, the Minister of Finance has received \$65,000 or more from Morneau Shepell every month since becoming a minister. As a mathematician would say, QED: what was to be demonstrated.

What will it take for the minister to understand that he is in a direct conflict of interest?

[*English*]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear: (a) we believe in the aerospace sector; (b) we believe in aerospace sector jobs; (c) we believe in growth; (d) we believe in investing in employees in Canada. That is what we have been doing, all of the above. We will continue to invest in the aerospace sector. We will continue to make sure we have good quality jobs in Canada. That is the bottom line.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am delighted that members know their letters and I encourage them to know the Standing Orders and not to interrupt.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is fascinating to see how proud the Liberals are of supporting the aerospace sector in Alabama and, I might add, in Europe.

The bottom line is that Morneau Shepell has ties to Bombardier, the Bank of Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, the Senate, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. All told, Morneau Shepell's contracts with the government are worth \$14 million.

What more will it take for the other side to understand that the Minister of Finance is in a direct conflict of interest?

[*English*]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is absolutely correct. Of course, we support the aerospace sector. These are 208,000 good-quality jobs that on average pay 60% more

than other manufacturing jobs. This industry contributes \$28 billion to our economy. This industry helps our small and medium-sized enterprises, 800 suppliers across the country.

We will continue to defend the aerospace sector. We will continue to invest in employees. We will continue to make sure the economy continues to grow.

• (1425)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I could not care less about the finance minister's fortune. What I do care about is good governance and plain, old-fashioned common sense.

Common sense is telling us that the finance minister controlled directly or indirectly a massive interest in Morneau Shepell. The finance minister tabled Bill C-27, for which he actually lobbied prior to being elected to the House. Because Bill C-27 would benefit Morneau Shepell, he stood to benefit from this transaction.

How can the minister not see that this constitutes a conflict of interest?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will continue to work on behalf of Canadians. That is what we are elected to do.

We very clearly said when we came into office that we would focus on ensuring retirement dignity for Canadians. This is a broader goal. We have been working on it since day one. The enhancement to the Canada pension plan was a really important step for the future. Moving back to age 65 old age security, which was so quickly moved to age 67 by the previous government, was really important, and going one step further to help 900,000 seniors with an increase in the guaranteed income supplement was critically important.

We will continue to fight for retirement dignity for Canadians.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps talking about a higher standard of ethics. Let us see how it fares.

[*Translation*]

In 2002, the national defence minister had to step down from the Liberal cabinet for giving his ex-girlfriend a \$36,500 contract. That same year, the solicitor general had to step down from the Liberal cabinet for awarding a \$6.5-million contract to a college presided by his brother.

Shares in Morneau Shepell, including the one million or two million shares held by the Minister of Finance, went up by nearly 5% after Bill C-27 was introduced.

How can he deny that this is a conflict of interest? What is his definition of—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, trust in our government is very important. I said that I will continue to act on the recommendations of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and I will go even further. I will sell the shares that my family and I hold, I will set up a blind trust, and, as I said earlier today, my family and I have decided to donate the difference in value of our shares since I became a member of Parliament.

That is one way to ensure that Canadians have confidence in our government.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, the House unanimously passed Rona Ambrose's bill on sexual assault training for judges. This training is required to educate judges and to encourage victims to report sexual assault. Now more than ever, it is important to take swift action.

Unfortunately, this bill is being held up in the Senate. It is completely unacceptable and ridiculous that the Senate, with its unelected members, is stalling an initiative that has the unanimous consent of the House.

Will the Prime Minister join us and ask the Senate to move quickly on Bill C-337?

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, sexual assault is completely unacceptable. Our government has an unwavering commitment to ensuring that victims of sexual assault are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

I was incredibly proud to stand with all members of the House to move forward private member's bill, Bill C-337, to the other place. I hope it moves forward to provide the necessary training for the judiciary.

We will continue in the absence of that to do everything we can as a government to ensure that we provide the necessary—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

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BANKRUPTCY

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more is possible. The Liberals just need the backbone to make it happen.

Everyone knows that our bankruptcy legislation is failing to protect Canadian workers. Workers know it, companies know it, we know it, and so do the Liberals. In fact, the Liberal member for Don Valley West said that this legislation needs to be amended and that he hopes the government looks into it.

Again, will the Liberals do what is right and change bankruptcy and insolvency laws, yes or no?

• (1430)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take

this opportunity to thank the member for his advocacy and hard work. I understand the concerns he is raising with respect to pensions.

We as a government have been very clear that we support secure pensions as well. That is why we introduced the Canada pension plan and enhancements to it. That is why we will work with Sears employees during this difficult time. That is also why we have held 82 different sessions through Service Canada to assist these employees during this difficult time.

We will continue to make sure that we have secure pensions and assist workers as they go through the bankruptcy process.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance recently told us that he recused himself only twice from matters in which he had personal conflicts of interest. The problem is that Canadians are having a hard time believing him because he has several conflicts of interest. First, there was the introduction of Bill C-27, which he sponsored, then his many numbered companies with investments in all kinds of sectors, and there are also his ties to Bombardier.

In order to deal with all of this, could the minister disclose all his assets so that Canadians can determine the extent of his conflicts of interest?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, it is very important to work with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to ensure that she understands our entire situation. That is exactly what I did. I followed the recommendations of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and I said that I would go above and beyond. As I said, my family and I will sell my shares in Morneau Shepell, my former company. I will also do something else that is important. I will donate the difference accrued in the value of my shares from the time I was elected until now. That is very important.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister just admitted that he did what he did because he was in conflict of interest. I am sure he has other conflicts of interest. Canadians are having a hard time believing him; they want the whole truth. I can understand why, before entering politics, the minister would have considered his personal financial affairs nobody's concern but his own, but now that he holds a seat in Parliament, now that he is a minister, they are everyone's concern.

Did the minister recuse himself on any other occasion when he was in conflict of interest?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I think it is very important that Canadians have confidence in our government, and that we are working for them. We can assure them of that situation, because we worked together with the commissioner to make sure that she understands all of our situations.

Oral Questions

To all members of this House, I can say that I will continue to work hard on behalf of Canadians, making sure that, as I have not had for the last two years, I do not have conflicts of interest going forward. That is critically important. That allows us to get to the very important work we are doing on behalf of Canadians, making a real difference for families today and tomorrow.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance lobbied for target benefit pension plans while he was the executive chair of Morneau Shepell, which manages those exact plans.

Days after he tabled a bill that sets them up, his company's stock value jumped by millions of dollars. However, the Prime Minister and the finance minister see nothing wrong with using public powers to grow their private family fortunes.

Meanwhile, Canadians have no idea what else the minister is hiding in his many other numbered companies and trust funds. It is time for him to come clean. What else is the minister hiding?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do have a process in this country. We do have a process in this House for dealing with our assets.

All of the members and ministers in this House, and ministers before me, have dealt with it in a similar way, and that is working with the Commissioner of Ethics. That is what I have done. In following all of her recommendations, I have assured Canadians that I am meeting their high standards.

I have decided to go further. I have decided not only to sell all of my and my family's assets in the company I built with my father for 25 years, but also to donate any difference in value in those shares from the time I was elected until now.

Working together with the Ethics Commissioner will allow us to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I want to remind members that, of course, when they are heckling they may be taking a question away from one of their colleagues.

The hon. member for Lakeland.

• (1435)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week a spokeswoman from Morneau Shepell admitted those new target benefit plans will increase work for the firm, so the minister's law benefits the minister's family company that has been paying him the whole time. It turns out that Morneau Shepell also does pension work for Bombardier. Of course, the PM and the finance minister gave hundreds of millions of tax dollars to Bombardier. What a tangled web we weave. Will the finance minister be honest with Canadians and finally reveal what else he is hiding?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why do the opposition members continually undermine the aerospace sector? When our government stood up and said we would contribute \$372.5 million for more research and development, they opposed that. When our aerospace sector was under attack by the U.S., and particularly by Boeing, they went missing. Now we are trying to work with the

company to make it have greater market access, and again they are trying to undermine the aerospace sector.

We will defend aerospace sector jobs, and we will defend the aerospace sector suppliers, because it is important for our economy.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if it were up to the finance minister, Canadians would have never known that he was both an owner of Morneau Shepell and the regulator. Now he wants us to throw him a parade for, two years later, having finally done what he said he was going to do the first day he took office. He has a conflict of interest because of his Morneau Shepell shares, which are sheltered in a numbered company. He has seven or eight more such numbered companies hiding his other assets. When will he finally come clean with Canadians and reveal all of his assets so they can determine how many conflicts of interest he is in?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fully understand why the members opposite want to obsess on my personal situation. What they do not want is Canadians to hear about the rosy economic picture we presented this week. We presented Canadians with a situation that really has not been one they have seen since before the previous government, and that is a growth rate that is the best in a decade. What they have also seen is more jobs, more jobs for them and their families. The level of confidence in our country is going up. That is what is allowing us to continue to invest and put our faith in Canadians. We will continue to do that and not obsess about things that really are not about our big objective, making a difference for Canadians.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not have faith in the minister because he misled them when he said he would put his assets in a blind trust. He forgot that he had Morneau Shepell shares when he was the regulator. He forgot about his French villa in an offshore corporation. Now we should just believe him that he has no more conflicts of interest. Canadians do not believe the minister, so why does he not just come clean and disclose all of his assets so Canadians can know how many more conflicts of interest he is in?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite well knows, the way we work in this House is that we work with the Ethics Commissioner to make sure she understands, at a very granular level, all of our assets. That is exactly what I did. By disclosing all of my assets, I allowed her to provide me with recommendations, which I followed.

Mr. Pat Kelly: What about accountability to Parliament, Bill?

The Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge to come to order and not be heckling throughout the answer.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Translation]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government ignored three court orders about adequate health services funding for indigenous children, then yesterday, the Minister of Indigenous Services said that the provinces should have been the ones defending themselves before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

If that is how the Liberals handle their most important relationship, I shudder to think how they handle their other relationships. The provinces were not found guilty of discrimination; the federal government was.

When will the Liberals stop blaming everyone else, live up to their responsibilities, and put an end to discrimination?

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member opposite, as well as all members in this House, recognize the very severe circumstances that indigenous children are facing, with more than 50% of the children in care in this country being indigenous children. We have to all work together to address this very serious problem. That requires indigenous leaders, it requires the federal government, it requires the provinces, territories, and child and family services agencies to be involved. We have got to get this right, and everyone needs to be involved.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, their names were Chantel Fox and Jolynn Winter. They were 12 years old, and they were loved. The current government was found culpable in their deaths, specifically the refusal of the minister's department to respond to what was known to be "life and death situations." The minister is in Federal Court, not to clarify but to "quash" the order. There has been \$6 million of taxpayer money wasted fighting first nations children in court. Therefore, for Chantel, for Jolynn, and for all the other children falling through the cracks, will the minister just call off your lawyers, do the right thing, and end that Federal Court case today?

• (1440)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is an experienced member and knows that he should be directing his comments to the Chair.

The hon. Minister for Indigenous Services.

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member opposite of the lengths to which we have gone to make sure that Jordan's principle is fully implemented. This makes sure that all children will get access to the care they need.

Up until our government took power, we did not have resources for this. We now have hundreds of millions of dollars of resources. Close to 19,000 cases have been requested. We are working to make sure all children will get access to the care they need, and making sure it is done right.

The Speaker: I am afraid I will have to ask the hon member for North Island—Powell River not to be heckling throughout the answer.

Oral Questions

The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

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ETHICS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only did the finance minister mislead Canadians about putting his investments in a blind trust. Today *The Globe and Mail* is reporting that the minister's so-called ethical screen is being enforced by his political staff, not Finance Canada officials.

The finance minister keeps saying that Canadians should trust the Ethics Commissioner, but what he is really telling us to do is trust his Liberal staff. Does the minister expect Canadians to trust a system that is being enforced by someone who was hired by and reports to the minister himself?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for clarity, the Ethics Commissioner suggested a conflict of interest screen. The way that screen is administered, which is consistent with the previous government's approach, is that the Department of Finance identifies the issues that should be put forward as conflicts of interest, and then that is administered through my chief of staff. It is an approach entirely consistent with those in the past, in my estimation, one that has been working and one we will continue to make sure works.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is in fact not at all consistent. He hides behind this so-called ethical screen, but it turns out his political staffer is the only person enforcing it. Really? An ethical screen needs to be enforced by departmental officials, not someone who relies on the minister for employment. This is a complete farce.

We now know that, for two years, the only person policing the minister's ethics has been his senior political staffer. When will the finance minister disclose what else he is hiding in the web of numbered companies, to finally ensure that no more conflicts of interest exist?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to say other than that the member opposite is flat out wrong. The situation we have been using has been an appropriate conflict of interest screen, as recommended by the Ethics Commissioner.

What I have said is that we are going to go further. This is the way we get confidence from Canadians to continue doing the work they want us to do. The reason we are getting deflected on these sorts of issues is that the members opposite do not want to acknowledge what their constituents are feeling, and that is confidence in our economy, confidence that their children and grandchildren are going to be better off, because the things we are doing are making a real difference for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not fools.

Oral Questions

What the Minister of Finance said at the beginning of question period is very simple: he has been in a direct conflict of interest for the past two years and he is taking action only because he was caught. That is what is really happening with the finance minister, and it is unacceptable. He may be smiling, but Canadians are not fools.

For the past few days, he has been repeating that everything is okay because there is an ethical screen in place to prevent him from doing anything stupid. However, I can see why he is smiling because the person in charge of his ethical screen is his chief of staff, who, of course, does not have any idea what ethics are, as we learned this morning in *The Globe and Mail*.

When will the minister finally act in the interest of all Canadians?
[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to repeat, the commissioner said the conflict of interest screen was the best measure to ensure there were no conflicts.

All I can assume is that the member opposite is actually questioning the commissioner. That is not what I am doing. What I am saying is that I have followed the commissioner's recommendations, but I have decided to go several steps further. This is what allows us to continue in the work we are doing for Canadians, the work that we will continue, no matter what, making a real difference for families today. Things like the Canada child benefit and the working income tax benefit make a real difference and will help people to see better outcomes.

• (1445)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will help the minister to understand on behalf of all Canadians.

When a person is in a conflict of interest or a conflict of ethics, it takes a third party to help him properly reflect on the situation. That should not be the chief of staff since he is on the minister's payroll. It should be an independent party who will tell the truth. In short, the ethical screen that the minister claims to have in place is a sham.

What else is the minister hiding about his other numbered companies?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why the member wants to talk about my finances and that is because he does not want to talk about Canadians' finances. However, that is our goal. We want to continue working for Canadians. We have been very clear: it is very important that we improve the situation of Canadian families. It is very important that we continue to have a very good level of growth. Those are our goals. They are very important. I will continue to work to achieve them.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning *La Presse* reported that Netflix hired three lobbying firms that met with Canadian Heritage officials four times in five months this spring. According to the Registry of Lobbyists, over the past two years, they have had 11 separate opportunities to

chat with three different departments and with the Prime Minister's Office. They did not waste any time; they know very well who calls the shots here. All these consultations are great, but clearly, they are merely a gimmick. Who is the government consulting when it comes to culture? Apparently, the Americans.

Is this preferential treatment for Netflix and web giants part of the minister's vision, or just an idea from the lobbyists camped out in the Prime Minister's Office?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the course of our consultations, we heard from over 30,000 people and we listened to the Quebec and francophone cultural sector. I understand the concerns of the cultural sector, which is precisely why we are investing in it. We have reinvested in the Canada Media Fund specifically to support francophone content in our television programming. We invested \$675 million in Radio-Canada to make sure we have an excellent public broadcaster in French. We will also update our laws, particularly the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act, to protect our culture in this digital age.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that Netflix lobbied the Liberal government heavily in lead-up to the deal announced last month. It is a deal that is funded by increasing Netflix rates on Canadians, all the while letting this massive corporation keep its unfair advantage. Now we have learned that other digital giants, like Google, have lobbied the government 63 times.

Are we going to see more sweetheart deals with these massive corporations, and why is the government so focused on preventing big businesses from paying their fair share?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the context of our consultations, we heard from 30,000 people from across the country, and I have been in close contact with the cultural sector throughout the country.

We announced some key investments in the context of our creative Canada strategy. We are reinvesting in the Canada Media Fund. We are also reinvesting in CBC with \$675 million. However, more than that, we announced our first cultural export strategy, \$125 million more, and ultimately we will be modernizing our Broadcasting Act and our Telecommunications Act to make sure we protect our culture.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our feminist Prime Minister is recognized around the world for our government's efforts to promote and defend women's rights. However, in my riding of Ottawa—Vanier, I hear from many female public servants that the public sector health care plan does not support their choice of contraceptive. The plan only covers oral contraceptives.

Can the President of the Treasury Board update this House on the measures he is taking to correct this situation?

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Ottawa—Vanier for her question, but particularly for her leadership.

Empowering women and respecting their rights, including their reproductive health rights, is what we do as a government. Women should have their choice of contraceptives, which is why my department has reached out to the public sector unions to make it clear that we agree that non-oral contraceptives should be covered under the public service health care plan. We will work with our public sector unions to make that happen.

* * *

• (1450)

TAXATION

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even before the finance minister introduced his disastrous small business tax increases, the Liberals were already clawing back disability tax credits from people with type 1 diabetes. The 80% of people who were receiving the credit became the 80% denied.

Why are the Liberals taxing the vulnerable to pay for their out-of-control spending, and will the minister immediately instruct her agents to return to the criteria used in April this year?

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that all Canadians have access to the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. Let me be absolutely clear. There has been no change to the eligibility criteria for the DTC related to diabetes. Our government actually made it easier for Canadians to apply for the credit by allowing nurse practitioners to complete their patients' applications. The concerns brought up by these groups are worrisome. We have already met with them and will continue to work with them.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Kat Grossman is a 27-year-old woman who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes five years ago. Now she has to deal not only with the consequences of her disease, but also with the mean-spiritedness of the Liberal government, which is denying access to the disability tax credit. What message is the government sending to public servants to get them to take money away from the most vulnerable?

When will the government accept that it is solely responsible for this and give Kat and all diabetics their money and their dignity back?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been no change to the eligibility criteria for DTC in relation to diabetes. We have heard the concerns raised by these groups. We have already met with them and will continue to work with them. The agency is currently hiring nurses to review the disability tax credit applications, and as the first step in the process, the minister has asked the agency to improve its data collection for the credit to better understand the portrait of claims and the decision-making process of the agency.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week both the minister and the Prime Minister have insisted that

neither the law nor its interpretation regarding the disability tax credit have changed in any way, but we know that the Liberals changed the application process in May to reduce tax credit approvals for type 1 diabetics.

Will the Liberals finally admit that they are so desperate for cash that they are raising taxes on diabetics?

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me again be absolutely clear. There have been no changes in terms of the eligibility criteria for DTC for people with diabetes. The concerns raised by the groups are worrisome. We have already met with them, and we will continue to work with them.

For 10 years, the former Conservative government cut scientific research, including on diabetes. We have actually invested \$41 million in diabetes research. Our goal remains absolutely clear that Canadians will continue to receive the credits to which they are entitled.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to claim that there has been no change in policy, but yesterday I tried to table documents in the House that establish that in May of this year, the process did in fact change. The Liberals refused to allow this evidence to be tabled.

Having made a decision to raise taxes on diabetics, why are they now denying responsibility for their actions?

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that all Canadians have access to the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. Let me be absolutely clear. There has been no change to the eligibility criteria for the DTC related to diabetes. Our government actually made it easier for Canadians to apply for the credit by allowing nurse practitioners to complete their patients' applications.

The concerns that were brought by these groups are worrisome. We have already met with them, and we will continue to work with them.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Health was at ground zero of the opioid crisis. She visited the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver and heard from front-line workers about the brutal realities of this growing epidemic. For 12 months we have been urging the Liberal government to declare this a national public health emergency, and for 12 months it has refused.

Oral Questions

Today Donald Trump declared this a public health emergency. How is it possible that the government has fallen behind the Trump administration in taking action to save lives?

● (1455)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in a national public health crisis in Canada, and we are responding in a way that is comprehensive, collaborative, compassionate, and evidence-based. We recently announced \$7.5 million to enhance the development of evidence-based practices that could be used when dealing with this crisis on the ground. To build on this investment in budget 2017, and many actions to date, we will continue to bring forward evidence-based solutions to help save lives and turn the tide on this national public health crisis.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, never once has the finance minister been straight with Canadians. Reporters had to dig to find out about his villa in France. Two years after telling everyone he had put his Morneau Shepell shares in a blind trust, he had to admit that it was not true. Now that he has been caught profiting from a bill that he himself introduced, he is trying to buy his way out of the problem. Maybe on Bay Street, when people commit a crime, they just ask the judge, “How much do I have to make the cheque out for?” However, it does not work that way in the House of Commons. This is an admission of guilt by no other means, so I ask the—

The Speaker: I want to remind the hon. member, as I said during statements by members, that props are not permitted in the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rules are very clear. When we are elected as members of this House, we are granted resources for the exclusive use of serving our constituents. We are not granted resources to benefit ourselves personally or our family members.

The *Calgary Herald* is reporting that last Monday, which was, coincidentally, civic election day in Alberta, the Minister of Sport used House of Commons materials to support his father's campaign for school trustee. Was the minister granted permission from the Ethics Commissioner to use House of Commons materials to enhance his father's electoral efforts?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, any discussion regarding Parliament's finances has to be held in accordance with the rules and standards.

This is a new file on the table. We will forward any information the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner might need and we will follow up to ensure we are a transparent and neutral government.

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is well and good, but this particular Minister of Sport is also a minister of the Crown and a member of the Privy Council.

Additional resources are granted to have that portfolio help all Canadian taxpayers. Therefore, I would like to know if the minister used any of his ministerial resources to try to help his father get elected as a school trustee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is very important in the House to respect the rules, laws, and regulations.

We know that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner will answer all these questions. Any problems should be reported to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and we will take responsibility for our actions.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is only one guarantee with the current government: it can never take enough money from hard-working Canadians' pockets. The Liberals are raising taxes on diabetics. They are raising taxes on employee discounts. They are raising taxes on bus passes, kids' hockey, and piano lessons, yet this Minister of Sport, like all Liberals, always finds money to help himself and his friends, like the minister did for his father. Why is the taxpayer on the hook for the Liberals' generosity to their friends and insiders?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the opportunity to rise in this place and remind Canadians of the important work this government is doing: the historic investments in infrastructure, by working with provinces, territories, and municipalities; lowering the tax rate on small businesses from 11% in 2015 to 9% in 2019. This government has given more money to families with children who need it the most under the Canada child benefit to ensure that those families that need it are able to help grow this economy. This government will continue to make strategic investments to ensure that Canadians are succeeding. Those are the very people we will continue to—

* * *

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the end of September, my office staff and I organized a round table for women who are deeply involved in my riding's economic development.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade was visiting, it was a unique opportunity to discuss the challenges faced by business women.

Oral Questions

[English]

The government has made advancing gender equality one of its most important priorities. Can the minister tell this House what the government is doing to secure a better economic future for women in Canada?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for her leadership in advancing gender equality. Our government's efforts to empower women and girls are working. We are applying an intersectional gendered lens to every decision cabinet makes. We are actively encouraging women and girls to enter STEM fields, and we are investing over \$60 million in organizations across the country to do this work. Our most recent call for proposals is encouraging partnerships to address systemic barriers to women's economic security. We encourage all eligible organizations to apply.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, somewhat ominously, President Trump recently called upon Congress to “improve infrastructure and security on the northern border.” Our Minister of Public Safety was in the United States pleading with the Americans to help solve the illegal-border-crossing crisis, which we know has already created massive backlogs and a long-term impact on Canada's social assistance system. What he failed to do was even broach the topic of closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement with President Trump, which begs the question: When will the Prime Minister stand up to President Trump and for Canadian interests and make him close the loophole?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have this opportunity to note that last weekend, at the G7 meetings in Italy, I had the opportunity for a bilateral discussion with the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security. We discussed a variety of issues pertaining to the Canada-U.S. relationship, including the value of our border, a border that accommodates 400,000 travellers every day, a border that accommodates \$2.5 billion in trade every day, and a border that we are both dedicated to thinning and making more efficient and more secure for both countries.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Liberals voted against my bill on the bilingualism of Supreme Court justices even though they supported it three times when they were in opposition.

Their excuse was that it could be unconstitutional. However, several constitutional lawyers have said the opposite. Even the Liberal member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel told the Canadian Press that this constitutional argument does not hold water.

Why did the Liberals not stand up for the official languages and, above all, for Quebeckers, Acadians, and Franco-Ontarians? Have they abandoned their principles?

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate standing to speak about the Supreme Court of Canada process that our Prime Minister put in place to not only appoint one Supreme Court justice but to move toward supporting another Supreme Court justice in the very near future. Our Prime Minister and our government are fundamentally committed to appointing Supreme Court justices who are functionally bilingual, have the highest meritorious qualities, and represent the diversity of the country. I am very honoured to assist the Prime Minister in making the second choice for the next Supreme Court justice.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 17, Russian President Vladimir Putin placed one of his fiercest critics, Bill Browder, on Interpol's most wanted list for the fifth time. It was removed a few hours ago for the fifth time. Mr. Browder led the campaign seeking justice for murdered Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. The notice was submitted to Interpol one day after this Parliament unanimously passed Magnitsky legislation.

Does the Minister of Public Safety believe this is an appropriate use of Interpol resources?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no, Canada vehemently disagrees with the Russian government's abuse and misuse of the Interpol listing system. The Kremlin does not determine admissibility to Canada. That is done by Canadian border officers implementing Canadian law. Bill Browder has a strong record of human rights advocacy, and the member for Scarborough—Guildwood has long made that very point. In 2015, Parliament unanimously supported Irwin Cotler's motion recommending the legislation Mr. Browder has been calling for, and we all unanimously adopted that legislation earlier this month.

* * *

● (1505)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first the Liberal government left mention of Jews off the National Holocaust Monument dedication plaque and muted the horrors of the extermination chambers with euphemisms, but now we learn that the Liberals, who doubled their modest deficit with their runaway \$20 billion, Liberals who spent almost a quarter of a million dollars on an artsy budget cover, are economizing by not clearing snow at the National Holocaust Monument. The death camps operated year round. Why should Canada's commemoration not?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were proud to stand with members on both sides of the House to inaugurate the National Holocaust Memorial, which commemorates the six million Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust along with other victims. This government is completely committed to building a more inclusive society.

I am surprised to hear these concerns coming from opposition members, as the conversation was initiated under their watch. The NCC is responsible for the day-to-day operations and management of this monument, including snow removal.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is up to the National Assembly alone to pass legislation in areas under its jurisdiction, and that includes religious neutrality within the Quebec government. It is not up to Toronto, Calgary, or Ottawa to decide, it is up to Quebec. The Prime Minister does not seem to understand this concept yet.

The Minister of Transport was quoted as saying that the government has no intention of meddling with an act passed by the National Assembly. Could he let the Prime Minister know?

There seems to be some confusion over there.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, diversity is Canada's strength. Canadians expect our government to defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As the Prime Minister has said repeatedly, it is not the government's job to tell people what they should or should not wear. We are going to monitor the discussions currently under way in Quebec so we can fully understand the applications of the act passed by the National Assembly.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that made things any clearer. Rather than getting briefed by the heritage minister, perhaps the Prime Minister should have been briefed by the Minister of Families. Yesterday, the Minister of Families was quite clear when he said that it was not up to the federal government to tell Quebec how to do things.

It is not difficult. Quebec makes its own laws and Ottawa does the same. It is as simple as that.

Will the Prime Minister listen to his Minister of Families instead of his Minister of Canadian Heritage and let Quebec legislate in areas under its jurisdiction?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that my colleague is very concerned about this issue and that she is trying to play politics with it, but our position has always been clear.

We will defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We will look at how the law that was passed by the National Assembly is applied. The Prime Minister has always said, and he reiterated it during the last election, that it is not up to the state to tell someone what they can or cannot wear. That has always been our government's position.

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I seek permission to table two documents that will establish that there in fact was a change of policy and process under which the applications for type 2 diabetics are processed.

The Speaker: There appears to be no consent.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to ask if the government House leader would please share with us what we will be looking at for the remainder of this week and next week when we come back.

[Translation]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a few minutes, we will begin examining Bill C-17 on the Yukon. Tomorrow, we will begin debate at third reading of Bill C-46 on impaired driving.

● (1510)

[English]

On Monday and Tuesday, we will continue debating Bill C-49.

On Wednesday, we will commence report stage of Bill C-45, the cannabis act.

Finally, on Thursday, we will start second reading debate of our second budget implementation bill. We intend to allot four days of second reading debate for this bill. We look forward to that debate as well as the discussions at committee.

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for me to table a petition.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table the petition not in the usual form?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition on behalf of people in riding of Haldimand—Norfolk. They are deeply concerned with clause 14 of Bill C-51. As it stands, clause 14 would remove the only provision in the Criminal Code that would directly protect the rights of individuals to freely practice their religion, whatever that religion may be.

Government Orders

The petitioners call on the government to remove clause 14 from the legislation and protect the religious freedoms of all Canadians.

impacted indigenous communities being engaged as equal partners. They understand that this is not only essential to support reconciliation, but a legal obligation as well.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

YUKON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.) moved the bill be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Yukon, who we would like to recognize for the exemplary and effective representation of Yukoners in the House.

Today we begin third reading debate—

The Speaker: The hon. member has asked to split her time, but in this situation she would have to have unanimous consent to do that.

Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, today we begin third reading debate on Bill C-17, an act to amend the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, or YESAA.

[*Translation*]

I want to acknowledge that we are gathered on traditional Algonquin territory.

[*English*]

We know that a sustainably developed resource sector is essential to the economic success of Yukon. A prosperous resource sector will serve as an important foundation for Yukon's future economic and job growth.

Yukoners have also made it clear that unlocking this economic potential must be contingent on environmental sustainability and on

This is even more significant in regions like the Yukon, which are subject to comprehensive land claim agreements and self-government agreements. The original 2003 YESAA stems from the umbrella final agreement between Canada, Yukon first nations, and the Government of Yukon, which required a five-year review of the YESAA. This was carried out by the previous government and resulted in a number of mutually agreed upon recommendations.

Bill S-6, the Yukon and Nunavut Regulatory Improvement Act, was introduced in the Senate in June 2014 and received royal assent in June 2015.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

A large part of the bill implemented the consensus provisions based on the recommendations from the five-year review.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, despite spending years working with Yukon first nations on the comprehensive review, the previous government added four further controversial changes outside that process and pushed them through absent meaningful consultation. As members are now aware, these controversial changes included legislated time limits on the review process; exempting a project from reassessment when a authorization was renewed or amended, unless there had been a significant change to the project; the ability for the federal minister to provide binding policy direction to the Yukon environmental assessment board; and the ability to delegate the federal minister's powers, duties, or functions under the act to the territorial government.

This disregard for meaningful consultation reflected the previous government's unfortunate and misguided paternalistic approach regarding indigenous people in Canada. Rather than working in partnership with indigenous communities to find common ground and mutually beneficial solutions to issues, it forced indigenous peoples to resort to the courts to assert their rights. This not only led to unnecessary costs for all parties, but often caused unnecessary delay, legal uncertainty, and undermined reconciliation.

[*Translation*]

It also positioned the federal government to lose court case after court case.

Government Orders

[English]

In response to the passage of these four contentious provisions, three Yukon first nations launched a court challenge in the fall of 2015. The court petition claimed that the amendments were in violation of the Yukon umbrella final agreement and that there was inadequate consultation. Despite their court action, Yukon first nations entered into subsequent discussions with the governments of Yukon and Canada about how to resolve this situation outside of court. These discussions led to the signing of a memorandum of understanding in April 2016, which clearly outlines the steps required to resolve the first nations' concerns with Bill S-6.

As a direct result of that collaborative process, the Yukon first nations pursuing legal action have adjourned their hearing dates while this bill proceeds.

This bill would re-establish trust with Yukon first nations and restore legal certainty for responsible resource development. It would also remove a key impediment to increased investment, development, and jobs in Yukon.

[Translation]

The vast majority of Yukoners support this bill.

[English]

In fact, a unanimous motion supporting Bill C-17 was passed by the Yukon legislature last spring. In addition, the Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon government, and the Yukon Chamber of Mines issued a joint letter last March, urging the passage of Bill C-17, without change, as soon as possible.

The letter also stated that they looked forward passing the bill so, “the Yukon economy can benefit from the certainty established by the final and self-government agreements in Yukon.” My office spoke with the Yukon Chamber of Mines earlier this week and it confirmed its support for passing the bill on an expedited basis, with the understanding that issues, including reassessments and reasonable timelines, would be dealt with through other policy mechanisms shortly thereafter.

First nations and the Governments of Canada and Yukon agree that issues, including reassessments of projects and reasonable time limits for assessments, require a strong policy framework. Canada, Yukon, self-governing Yukon first nations, industry, and the board are all committed to working in collaboration through the regulatory process to establish practical timelines for the assessment processes and clear and sensible rules for when reassessments may be required.

[Translation]

The Conservative opposition told the committee that the bill should be set aside not just until the process moved forward, but until it was finalized.

[English]

The members claim that this is in response to concerns expressed by some industry representatives about delays in moving forward with the regulatory discussions I referenced above. Yukon first nations have been clear. Passing Bill C-17 is an important show of good faith and a first step in moving forward with these important discussions.

It is disingenuous of the Conservatives to cite delays they caused by filibustering this bill last spring as justification for further delaying moving the legislation forward and the subsequent needed regulatory discussions. By trying to further delay, or even derail the bill, the Conservatives risk driving this matter back into litigation and undermining the very certainty for industry for which they claim to be advocating.

Bill C-17 clearly demonstrates our intent to work closely with all partners, including Yukon first nations, the Yukon industry, and the Yukon government, to re-establish trust with Yukon first nations and restore legal certainty for responsible resource development.

● (1520)

[Translation]

I hope all members will support this bill.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her comments the minister clearly identified the fact that the timelines in the reassessment process are critical to the industry, as the industry has expressed. Indeed, officials from industry came to committee and expressed significant concerns. They said that the government could not walk and chew gum at the same time. Industry had anticipated replacement language in this legislation, or at least that the conversation would have started around what the proper timelines in the legislation would be. What would the policy criteria be? The minister and her department have left industry hanging. There is no reason not to have those conversations as the bill moves through the process.

Could the minister explain when and how the government will ensure that there will be reasonable timelines and good policy language around reassessment?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we clarify that the chamber of mines wants this legislation passed expeditiously, as do Yukon first nations and the Yukon government, as demonstrated by the unanimous vote in the Yukon legislature.

As we discussed with the chamber of mines this week, the chamber is very comfortable with having ongoing conversations about reasonable timelines and reassessments. It wants us to get on with it and pass the bill. That is what the House needs to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her speech, and I applaud the government's commitment to fixing what the old Conservative government broke. While this is a step in the right direction, there is still room for improvement, and the government can do even more.

I have a quote here from someone who is concerned about the new fiscal approach that was imposed by the Conservative government:

Government Orders

The fiscal approach contradicts and violates our final agreements. In several fundamental ways Canada cannot implement its fiscal approach and meet the modern treaty agreement commitments under self-governing Yukon first nations.

That was from the chief of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, who appeared before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in February 2016. I would like to know the minister's plan for addressing his concerns.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Fiscal agreements with first nations are crucial, and we have to have good conversations with them about their self-government and their ability to provide their people with the programs and institutions they need.

[*English*]

I am very comfortable with the excellent conversations going on now with the self-governing first nations on a new fiscal relationship that will give, as we promised, stable, predictable, and adequate funding.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that the minister and her office reached out last week. I am sure that was after they heard very troubling testimony at committee.

I want to go back to the reassessment process. We heard that since that legislation was passed, that particular feature was used over a hundred times with no detrimental environmental effects. It just saved industry enormous amounts of money and time.

Given that it was used over a hundred times, why has the government not reached out with new policy and regulatory language that would address these issues, because these are absolutely critical for industry?

• (1525)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, we received a letter on March 13 of this year signed by the premier and Grand Chief Peter Johnston, as well as the president of the Yukon Council of Mines. In that letter, they urged the government of Yukon self-governing first nations, the Council of Yukon First Nations, and Yukon Chamber of Mines to look forward to Bill C-17 being passed without change as soon as possible. In the final paragraph, they said that they looked forward to the support of the House in moving the bill through, so that “the Yukon economy can benefit from the certainty established by the Final and Self-Government Agreements in Yukon.”

As the member noted, we were surprised by the testimony of the chamber of mines officials at committee. We sought clarification and it reaffirmed that it wants the bill passed through the House right now and looks forward to any conversations about appropriate timelines and the reassessment process.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here today.

[*English*]

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-17 at third reading. I speak from the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe.

In 10 words or less, today is all about Bill C-17 removing four clauses illegally put into law. We are all legislators here, and we should be the first to unanimously agree to pass the bill for that reason. That is why, as the minister said, the Yukon legislature was unanimous in passing the bill, including the Yukon Party, which is the Conservatives. I should in theory be able to sit down now and we would vote unanimously to pass the bill, as the Yukon legislature did.

I would like to thank every member in the House today for their thoughtful debate and co-operation in going through report stage very quickly.

I would like to tell a story to give a sense of the feeling behind all of this. People at home can participate in this exercise too. Think about someone who retired and decided he wanted to get into business with a couple of partners or friends of his. They all got together, spent a couple of years working really hard to get a business set up, perhaps a resort in a wealthy country. He would sit and have piña colodas and enjoy himself. His kids were going to high class school. He mortgaged his house. Everything was on the line. It was pretty important to his family and their lives. Then one day when he went to work, he saw a sold sign. One or two of his other partners had sold his dream business, his life savings, and put it into a factory in a third world country with millions of people, in a dangerous slum, where he would have to try to get his kids into school. How would he feel under those circumstances? Obviously he would be very angry. He would feel betrayed. He would be apoplectic. Under those circumstances, what type of relationship would he have with those two partners? Would he ever do business with them again? He could never imagine that.

In the case we are talking about here, the three partners are the federal government, the Yukon government, and the first nations government. They cannot just walk away. From now onward, indeed forever, they have to work together on things for their people. Imagine the great rebuilding of trust that would have to be done with those partners because of this situation.

How did we get here? As the minister said, after 20 years, not just the two years in the scenario we set up, the modern treaty or UFA was signed. It is constitutionally protected, so even we in the House cannot change it. It prescribed that YESAA would be created for assessments in Yukon. That took 10 years and was approved in 2003.

Imagine, as in the case I just talked about, after negotiating for 30 years, all of a sudden one or two of the partners added four significant clauses without negotiation. This is what happened. The four clauses are probably illegal, if not technically, then in the spirit of the law or the honour of the crown. Anything done illegally, regardless of the content, whether good or bad, had to be undone and cancelled. That is basically the end of the story today.

Government Orders

Normally, for that reason, I refuse to talk about any of the content of those four items. Nevertheless, because I have four minutes left, there were some concerns raised that I might try to alleviate a bit. The minister and the opposition have already mentioned the reaching out that has been done. The process will start right away to deal with timelines and reassessments.

I thank the mining association and the mining companies, because in the years when the government was not really following the honour of the crown, individual mining companies made partners with first nations. The chamber of mines worked with the Council of Yukon First Nations and took a great leadership role, so kudos to the mining industry.

● (1530)

In the second reading debate on April 10, 2017, members commented about the removal of time limits. They said that the Liberals were taking out time limits, that we wanted to remove all time limits, that we put time limits on the review process, that we removed timelines, that time limits do matter, that we eliminated timelines, that we would repeal the time limits, that we would remove the time limits. One would think that people watching this and hearing all those comments would think there were no timelines, but timelines were put into the bill when it was established.

In 2003, the bill explained how timelines were created through the rules of the board. They were gazetted and have been in place ever since. My understanding is that they have not changed in all those years. Since the first project was approved in 2005, the timelines have been there and are still working. The opposition said in the second reading debate that it was important to leave decisions in the hands of Yukoners, and that is exactly what this bill would do, because those timelines are created by Yukoners. I am sure that the opposition would rather have people in their ridings setting deadlines for important things as opposed to the government setting them in Ottawa.

Those timelines compare favourably with those in other jurisdictions. Some of the projects take half the time of British Columbia assessments. The timelines have not been lengthened in recent years. There are two categories of projects. For a district office, the average is only 70 days, and for small projects they are considerably shorter. The timeline put in Bill S-6 is 270 days. That is far longer than those projects' timelines. On the executive committee, the other category, the very serious projects, of which there have been only seven, the fault was in the other direction. There was just not enough time put in. What has happened is that first nations have not been able to do the appropriate analysis, nor have the territorial or federal technicians in various departments.

What happens if there is an assessment without the appropriate input or analysis? Two things probably happen. First, for purposes of integrity, the project is rejected. The mining industry or developers would not want that. Second, a chance could be taken and it could be approved, but it could be challenged, especially by first nations, because there are requirements in YESAA for their input.

The final point I would like to make is on reassessments. I have 10 quotes, but I will not read them. There are two things I will say in the limited time I have. First, technically there are no reassessments. If something is exactly the same, section 40 of the act does not allow a

reassessment. In fact, what has happened in reality is that when a project comes up, quite often, on the ground, the decision body will say that it is exactly the same, that it is just renewing a licence and it will not go ahead. A lot of the 100 projects the opposition member quite rightly brought up would not be reassessed under the present system, so there would not be 100.

The second thing that happened in that five-year review is that one of the policies changed and they have gone to temporal scoping, which is a good thing. That means that instead of scoping like they used to according to the licence and causing the reassessments that were of concern, they can scope a lot longer in the life of the project, resulting in far fewer reassessments.

For all of those reason and reassurances, I would like to go back to what I said at the beginning. We have to remove four improper clauses. I hope we can do that quickly, because it will bring back certainty for the mining industry, developers, and first nations and, hopefully, start to rebuild the partnership that is so important for any development in Yukon.

● (1535)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently the finance committee went to Yellowknife and heard from a variety of people from the north; obviously not from his neck of the woods, but important voices. I hope he would agree.

One of the things that has been raised is that many of these groups we spoke about, whether we are talking about industry or indigenous people, do not always have the resources to meaningfully consult, particularly if we have an array of departments—environment, natural resources, indigenous services, or what not—all hosting different consultations on a whole host of items. They do not have the resources, staff time, or technical expertise to meaningful engage. Therefore, most of the time, they just simply do not engage. They do not do that.

The member's government is responsible for putting out a tremendous amount of uncertainty and, at the same time, making it seem impossible for these groups to be meaningfully consulted. How does the member propose that we work on this issue?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, first of all on the uncertainty, that is what we are doing today: returning the certainty.

The member made a very important point that, in this particular case, the Yukon is different from NWT or any other part of Canada, because for this assessment, the rest of Canada has to go through CEAA, but the Yukon does not. It has its own assessment and its own regime. However, talking about intervenor funding, each first nation gets a specific amount of money from the federal government for the exact purposes the member mentioned.

Government Orders

I will say that there is the possibility of a way to improve the allocation of those funds. For example, some projects may be heavier in mining, and those districts where there is a lot of development may have a lot of projects, whereas another first nation may not have any projects in a particular year, yet they both get the same amount of money from us. The member may have raised a point unintentionally, that we could do a better job of distributing the money, but we do distribute the money so that they can do some analysis of those projects.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member from both of his times here in this place. I know him particularly as the chair of PROC, and so I know him as a person who is not very partisan. I am sure that reflects both him and his territory. I say that because I would not ordinarily ask this kind of question in this kind of circumstance. However, because it is this hon. member, I am quite comfortable asking, and I know I am going to get a fulsome answer.

So far, it sounds as if most of the major players affected by Bill C-17, or that have an interest, are onside, with maybe a couple of questions and clarifications. However, I would ask the hon. member this. Are there any entities in Yukon, anyone affected, either entities or individuals, that are still offside, with still more work to be done, or would he answer me that, no, virtually all of the players who have a vested interest in Bill C-17 have had their issues addressed in the bill, or at least they know that any details are still going to be followed through?

If he could give me that assessment from his territory, I would appreciate it.

• (1540)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, as the opposition member mentioned, there was a particular mining company, for example, that had been through a lot of assessments on changes in the projects, and the definitions of when that could or could not occur. I think the company still probably has questions about that. However, as the minister mentioned, the negotiations are starting, as soon as this bill is passed, to look at those reassessments and timelines.

I think any person would want certainty—get it out of the courts and get the certainty—even those members who have concerns, because those should have been addressed in negotiations and they were not. However, if we get the bill passed, they would go into those negotiations right away. It would actually deal more quickly with the concerns that those several people might have.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to stand to speak to Bill C-17. I first want to make a few comments in response to what the minister said, then I also want to go to maybe the 100,000-foot level, and then narrow it down into Bill C-17.

The first thing I want to note is that the minister accused the opposition of filibustering and keeping the bill going. There could be nothing further from the truth. The Liberals have had two years in which to bring a fairly simple piece of legislation. There was some modest debate in the spring, but to be frank, the House leader and the government did not see this as a priority to bring forward. I know at committee we moved it through quite rapidly. We did our due diligence, as any committee should do, but we certainly did not

spend inordinate amounts of time trying to delay the process. Then, as we saw by the earlier vote today, we passed it on division so that it did not have further delay. Therefore, I want to make note of the fact that, although it is the opposition that really has a responsibility to look at legislation, assess it, and bring forward some of these issues, I think is a bit disingenuous to suggest that we are responsible for the delay, when as a majority government it has all of the tools at its fingertips to move these pieces of legislation through.

To start, I want to speak to the big picture. There was a very difficult economic time. We had a global recession. Certainly, we had 10 years in government where not only did we use spending to drive Canada through the global recession but we did many things to try to set our economy up for success. Our plan worked. We did exactly what we said and got back to a balanced budget. Therefore, the current government not only had a balanced budget but also had a system that was set up to create success and to continue to power the economy. I think we all know that government spending cannot drive the economy. It takes business. In particular, it takes a strong natural resource sector to move us forward. I think it is important to recognize that not only did we get back to a balanced budget but we hopefully created an environment where things could continue to grow. There is a strong economy right now, and I think the current government can look to some of the benefits and wisdom of what we had done.

To go to the bigger picture, I first want to talk about natural resource development, about the north, and to some degree about the coasts. The government talks about caring about the north and its importance. However, it is interesting that it has no representation on the executive. Not a single minister resides north of the 60th parallel. As much as Atlantic Canada found it very difficult to have a minister for ACOA from downtown Toronto or Mississauga, I think the north in particular really notices the fact that its minister for economic development is again from Mississauga, and certainly more familiar with things like GO trains and Highway 401, and perhaps would have some problem identifying with some of the issues in the north. Therefore, the lack of representation is one challenge the Liberals have, and that lack of perspective can sometimes create challenges.

The next thing I want to note that the government has done that will make things very difficult for northerners is that it brought in a carbon tax, which will affect them more than any other place in Canada. The impact from climate change is felt more in the north, but the impact of things like the carbon tax will be felt in an extraordinary way by the people there. They rely on diesel to receive food and other vital supplies by boat, plane, and ice roads, and this carbon tax will increase the cost of everything. Therefore, when the government brought in this carbon tax, it was giving lip service when it said that it recognized that it would create a challenge for the north.

Government Orders

● (1545)

It was interesting yesterday. We had a piece of legislation that said to tell Canadians what the carbon tax is going to cost. It was a private member's bill. Even though the government knows what it is going to cost Canadians, it refuses to reveal that. The Liberals voted against a piece of legislation that would tell Canadians what a carbon tax would cost them.

As I understand, talking to some leadership from the north, there was a commitment that not only would the government do an analysis of what the impact would be but there would be measures put in place. As we travelled with a committee this week and talked to many of the leaders in the north, we heard that there has been nothing. We have no idea what the impact of this carbon tax is going to be, nor do we have any commitment in terms of how we will deal with that. Certainly, people will be affected disproportionately by climate change and will also be disproportionately affected by this particular initiative.

Another issue in terms of the big picture and how I believe the government is failing the north is with respect to the critical importance of consultation and partnerships. Just before Christmas, the Prime Minister announced a moratorium on oil and gas development in the Arctic. There had been zero consultation with the people and the communities that would be most affected. It was a unilateral decision.

Two days ago, we heard from representatives of the Government of Nunavut at committee about this decision, which has the potential to impact their prosperity and lives. They were not asked or consulted. Rather, they heard about it 20 minutes before it was implemented. They got a phone call telling them about a decision that would impact their lives and their future.

Nunavut's premier, Peter Taptuna, stated:

We do want to be getting to a state where we can make our own determination of our priorities, and the way to do that is gain meaningful revenue from resource development.

And at the same time, when one potential source of revenue is taken off the table, it puts us back at practically Square 1 where Ottawa will make the decisions for us.

Northerners have been very clear that they want a greater say in their own affairs and more control over their own resources. Here we have a bill where the government says it gives more control. However, we see by every other action by the government that many have been unilateral in nature, whether it be carbon tax or moratoriums.

Protected areas are important, and parks are important. Many people care about having a system of marine protected areas and parks that makes sense. However, I think there has also been a worry expressed in the north that the government just wants it to be a park. It does not want to support resource development at all. It wants it to be this nice park where people can enjoy the protected area.

Another example where the government has taken unilateral action is the northern gateway pipeline. The government arbitrarily overturned a legal decision from the National Energy Board; it had approval. At that time, there were 31 first nations that were equity partners in the northern gateway pipeline and were profoundly disappointed with the government's decision. The first nations stood

to benefit more than \$2 billion directly from this project. For the indigenous band members, and especially their youth, it was a lost opportunity for jobs, education, and long term benefits.

Members have probably travelled, as I have, throughout the north. Resource development is absolutely critical for the future of people of the north. It is all right to say the government is going to consult, but it did not consult when it made an arbitrary decision around the northern gateway project.

● (1550)

I could go on about the B.C. tanker ban. It is in my home province. This is more legislation focused on phasing out the oil sands. That is the only purpose. Venezuelan oil and Quebec oil are okay. Saudi Arabian oil on the east coast is okay. Canadian oil is okay in Vancouver, but not in northern B.C. The Liberals have a tanker ban. What kind of conversation did they have? What kind of consultation did they have with the indigenous communities in that area before they arbitrarily made that decision?

When the Liberals suggest that the past government made mistakes in terms of not consulting properly, I would say that putting some timelines, assessments, and small parameters on projects in the environmental assessment process is much less egregious than the absolute lack of consultation the Liberals have had in terms of issues that are of incredible importance, such as oil tankers, pipelines, and moratoriums. I could go on, but I think I have made my point.

In spite of what the Liberals say, we had a trilateral process. There were many recommendations that were implemented. We heard from the member for Yukon that, in fact, they usually exceed the timelines, so why do we need those timelines? That shows that the decision to put in timelines was not that significant. We can talk about the reassessment process. The member said that the reassessment process would have been okay anyway, so it does not matter that there is in legislation a piece that finalizes it. Perhaps the trilateral conversation should have been stronger, but ultimately, the legislation and the pieces in it are not that significant.

Regarding funding transfers, we can again talk about lots of money going to the north. The finance minister stunned northern premiers by cutting \$91 million from the federal transfers to the territories. It was not until February that they walked that back and dropped it to \$24 million in core funding. That \$24 million might not sound like a lot in terms of a federal budget, but I guarantee that in those three territories, that is a significant amount of money.

Government Orders

Another thing that just came out yesterday is that there are going to be new regulations for diesel. Diesel powers more than 200 remote communities. They need to keep the lights on in every Inuit community in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. Where was the conversation about what the impact will be? I did not see anything on the impact and how the Liberals are going to offset it. I know there is a little money, but it is not a lot.

We talk about climate change. At the Alert weather station, where people are actually doing the important work of measuring, the Liberals are cutting back on absolutely vital environmental measures in Alert, and possibly in surrounding areas, for six months. There are a number of people who live in the north. These are well-paying jobs. I do not think that the training is so difficult that the Liberals cannot train people to keep that weather station in the north doing those important measurements on the environment and climate change. What did they do? They said that they could not find anyone. Well, let us get creative. Let us find someone and get someone in that station, because I believe that with a bit of creativity, we could easily have people there getting those measurements, which the government claims are incredibly important.

We have heard the big picture in terms of how the government is failing the north. It is failing in terms of consultations and is perhaps setting up significant challenges down the road, because they have lopped off at the knees the ability of the north to create economic success.

● (1555)

I know that the minister's special representative is going around talking about parks. What she said was that parks are okay, but what people in the north are wanting to talk about is suicide, the housing crisis, and jobs and opportunities. If we look at the goal of the government to create whatever percentage of the area as a national park, it is way down the list of the conversations the people in the north want to have. They want to talk about how they can improve their lives. With these arbitrary decisions, the Liberals are certainly cutting off many opportunities.

In the Yukon, the mining industry contributes about 20% to the GDP. As a mining representative told the indigenous and northern affairs committee, reconciliation is not theoretical to them. In many ways, the rest of Canada has a lot to learn from the north in terms of how we move forward in partnership. There are many extraordinary examples of the ability of everyone in communities to work together for the benefit of all.

Jonas Smith, of the Yukon Producers Group, said:

...these are small communities. Everyone goes to school together. Their kids play hockey together. It is one community. It's not this academic concept in the Yukon. It's...everyday life.

Mike Burke, of the Chamber of Mines, told us:

We are really on the forefront of reconciliation. We're working in all the first nations' backyards, and the economic benefits...flow through to the community. It's not the old days where we just had employees from the local communities. We're seeking partnerships. That's what we're trying to do, and to make a difference in the Yukon especially in the communities that we're involved in.

We have talked about the process. We have talked about the items that went into legislation we passed and the items the government is looking to remove. I still fail to understand how the government, as it was taking two-plus years to move this legislation, which it

committed to doing, could not actually have had the conversation at the same time on what it could replace it with. There was an opportunity missed, and I think that was a legitimate point brought up with industry.

It goes back to my "chew gum and run at the same time" comment. There is no reason the government could not have done those two things concurrently. To get this legislation passed, it still has to go through the Senate, so we are going to have a process there. The government does not plan to start talking until this legislation is passed. Meanwhile, it potentially will be creating some real problems.

Sheila Copps was on a panel last night, and she said we should not assume that regulations are going to do the job for everything. There are some things that really are important to have in law. Policy, as we know, is not as strong as perhaps having legislation or having things in the agreement. If there is anyone to be blamed for the slowness of this going through the House, I would put it in the hands of the government.

I encourage the government to start the work now, while it is still in the Senate, in terms of having the timelines that will be in place and a reassessment process that is going to be acceptable, so that when this legislation is passed, it has a new regime that will continue to support our industry and support Yukoners in the way they need to be supported, with strong and vibrant economic opportunities.

● (1600)

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is a colleague of mine on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and this is a subject we have debated together. I am curious, though, because there is a question that goes to the heart of the honour of the crown. I would like to get her understanding of the honour of the crown. She was a sitting member in the Harper administration at the time these unconstitutional amendments were made to the law that we are now seeking to amend.

I have enjoyed some magnificent experiences on rivers that would be subject to this bill and some magnificent experiences with first nations, who have shared their salmon and shared their experience and their knowledge. I know that their understanding of the honour of the crown is that we do not unilaterally change all sorts of provisions that go to the heart of the relationship between the crown and indigenous peoples. That is exactly what happened with this law that we would now amend. There is no other way of putting it.

I would really like to understand better, for the sake of the indigenous peoples across this country, what it is about the legislation that is in place that would not be overturned if the court proceedings were to go forward.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, what we heard is that the things that are being removed from this piece of legislation are minor pieces that are actually in effect. The member for Yukon talked about timelines and that they do it faster. He talked about the reassessment process not mattering. Therefore, I would suggest that this legislation put into legislation what was indeed already in policy.

Government Orders

I would suggest that if the member wants to talk about making decisions in collaboration and in partnership, perhaps he should be looking at what the Liberals have done in terms of moratoriums on oil and gas in the north, tanker bans, and overturning pipeline decisions. What kind of consultation and collaborative process and honour was there when the Liberals unilaterally made those particular decisions?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

I would like to ask her a simple question about the fact that most Yukoners seem to support the environmental assessment process that was developed over the years. That process had been developed in Yukon, for Yukon, by Yukoners, and the Harper government imposed changes without even consulting the territory's first nations.

I would like to know why she would oppose changes that reflect the wishes of the people of Yukon.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, that question is similar to the one that was just posed. We heard that this is the practice, so what they are going to do is take out of legislation what is common practice, and they are going to put it into a policy framework. What they are doing is certainly going to ultimately have the same impact. The big problem is that we are going to have delays. We are going to have delays while they do not wait to have that conversation, which should have started perhaps two years ago. If they were going to repeal these four sections, what were they going to replace it with in their policy framework? What industry was concerned about at our meetings was that they do not have anything to replace it with, so they are going to leave a void in the legislation.

•(1605)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from Kamloops was talking about the closure of a weather station in the north, because the government could not find anyone, or maybe it was that it did not look hard enough.

I remember living in northern British Columbia, and we had a weather station locally. When the government opened that weather station, there was nobody in the community who was trained, but people came in, and it did not take long to train several people to work that weather station, including some aboriginal people at the time. I wonder if the member could clarify whether she thinks the government could not find someone or did not look that well.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, this station in the high Arctic is doing very important measurements. When they read that the Liberals were closing it because they could not get the manpower for six months, the reaction of many northerners was that this was a great paying job. I am sure if the government had been creative and used a little ingenuity, it would have found someone who could have been trained to go in and take it over. For all their talk about the importance of climate change and science, because of their lack of a little ingenuity on how to get some manpower up there, we will have a six month gap of important data.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that we finally get the chance to debate a

bill that will give territorial powers back to the territories. For that reason, we support Bill C-17.

This is a bill that will return certain powers that were taken away by amendments, four in particular, introduced by Harper's Conservatives. At the time, the Conservatives claimed to have conducted extensive consultations, but the only consultation that was held was the five-year statutory review. This means there was no proper consultation about such a major change. If there had been, first nations would not have challenged the amendments in court.

If the Conservatives insist on maintaining that they did consult properly, how can they explain the lawsuit filed by these first nations? The first nations are waiting to see how things go with Bill C-17, but still, that says it all.

How can the Conservatives keep insisting they did everything right and held proper consultations in spite of the lawsuit filed by these first nations?

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, throughout the debate, we heard that there was an issue around timelines and reassessments, and that the court process had been deferred. We are also have heard that for industry, the ability to have timelines is absolutely critical and to compel a complete reassessment process for a minor change is very costly.

Certainly, we are hearing that there is no concern with the actual spirit and intent of what is happening. Timelines are important. Understanding when reassessments are needed is important. We are talking about whether there was enough process. In this case, the government determined there was not enough process, so we have legislation to take away those guidelines. Then it will have a process to put very similar ones back in, because they are very important for everyone in order to move forward with certainty.

•(1610)

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it feels like this is reflective of the high-handed, unconstitutional approach the previous government took to relations with our indigenous peoples.

I would like to return to the argument the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo made before. She alluded to the fact that there was a global recession, as though that is some kind of justification for unilateral changes to rights that are constitutionally protected. Could the member please articulate why a global recession would justify the breach of the honour of the crown?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely did not say that. I was talking about the global recession and how the government was lucky to be left in a positive economic position.

Government Orders

The point I was also making was that the Liberals talked about the honour of the crown, but then they regularly did things such as moratoriums for oil and gas in the north, tanker bans, pipelines, no consultations. Where is the honour of the crown in that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent to split my time with the hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie have unanimous consent to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues. I can confirm that I will be splitting my time with my extraordinary colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

I stand today as a New Democrat to speak in favour of Bill C-17, even if there is much to criticize about what the government has done in terms of governance, business management, indigenous relations and environmental management.

I would like to take this opportunity to have a bit of fun. As the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, I decided to crunch some numbers in an effort to compare my situation in Montreal to that of my hon. colleague from Yukon. The territory in question has a population of around 38,000 spread over 483,443 square kilometres, for a population density of 0.08 persons per square kilometre. My riding has a population of 110,000 in an area 11 square kilometres, for a population density of 10,000 persons per square kilometre. That is far more people than in the territory my colleague has the honour of representing.

I had the honour of visiting Yukon during the tour of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I had the opportunity to see Whitehorse for the first time in my life and to visit the surrounding area. My colleague represents a magnificent territory that must be protected by the proper environmental assessments, but I will get back to that.

I will digress for a moment. Since I was there with the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, I cannot help but think that we are in a system where one government does things and the next government undoes them. From our perspective, if we had a more consensual system of policy development, this defect in our system would be less apparent. We would stop wasting so much time, money effort, and energy. There ends my digression about electoral systems.

There are three things I would like to address concerning Bill C-17. First, I would like to point out why it is important for men and women to become involved in politics. The values and principles of the party I belong to lead me to believe that the main reasons to do so revolve around fairness, social justice and human dignity. That is why, as a progressive party, we will fight inequality and insist on a fairer distribution of wealth and greater equality of opportunity.

Secondly, why are we in politics? I think that all political parties can agree on that. We do it to ensure the safety and protection of the

public. That is the fundamental role of all governments, a role we believe must involve setting up sound environmental and socio-economic assessment processes. Indeed, such processes not only help preserve our environment and ecosystems, but also ensure public health and protect the public from abuse by certain companies or from actions that would create pollution, illness and, indirectly, problems for Canadians living near certain industrial activities.

That might have been a roundabout way of putting things, but it just goes to show why we need to pass legislation that ensures that the public and public health are protected. We are taking a step in the right direction today.

This bill is also important and useful in terms of respect for first nations. The Liberal government likes to talk about its nation-to-nation approach with regard to the relationship between the federal government and every first nation on the ground.

What is really unfortunate, however, and I noted it in my question to my Conservative colleague, is the frontal attack that was launched at the time by the Harper government against the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act in relation to mining projects, without having first consulted first nations.

• (1615)

I think that the bill before us corrects things in that regard. It also respects a desire that clearly appears to be shared by all major stakeholders regarding this issue in the Yukon. It is a sign of respect toward first nations and that shows openness and dialogue. That has been hailed by people who were critical of the somewhat cavalier attitude of the previous Conservative government. In that way, it is a good thing.

Regarding our ability to maintain respectful and equal relations with first nations, I would be remiss if I did not add that, although Bill C-17 is a step in the right direction, or rather a return to a better direction, the Liberal government's actions do not always reflect their words, sadly. I will give two quick examples, starting with the Liberal government's refusal to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which says a lot about the government's posturing. It is unwilling to apply changes that would benefit all first nations communities across the country.

Therefore, I want to remind everyone listening to the debate in the House that we have a Liberal government that is refusing to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The minister told us that all of a sudden it could not be implemented even though several countries have done so. That is unfortunate. I am asking the government to revisit its position on the matter.

Government Orders

I am also asking the government to revisit its position on all court challenges involving indigenous rights and treaty adherence, and especially involving health care for children. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay reminded us today that the government has already spent \$6 million of taxpayers' money to challenge indigenous rights in court, especially the right to children's health care. It is disappointing to hear the same old rhetoric from the Prime Minister and the entire Liberal cabinet while the government uses taxpayers' money to challenge the legitimate claims of indigenous peoples.

What else is missing from Bill C-17? Earlier, the minister seemed open to changes, and I hope that is the case. Some of the environmental assessment issues have been resolved, but many first nations chiefs and representatives also said that, when the previous government did this, it unilaterally imposed a new fiscal approach on them. The new fiscal approach is extremely restrictive and, in their opinion, it contradicts the treaties the federal government signed with first nations. Once again, many people are telling the government that there is still work to do, there are still things that need changing. That is very important.

I would like to quote Eric Fairclough, chief of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. In February 2016, he appeared before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and had this to say about the new fiscal approach, which Bill C-17 does not change:

The fiscal approach contradicts and violates our final agreements. In several fundamental ways Canada cannot implement its fiscal approach and meet the modern treaty agreement commitments under self-governing Yukon first nations.

It's a step backwards for self-governing Yukon first nations. Its implementation will violate the commitments of the Yukon first nations final agreements rather than promote reconciliation. It's not what the Prime Minister said, and it's not what the INAC minister said either, according to their own words.

Although we are pleased that the measures Yukoners called for are back, the job is not done. There is still a lot of work to do to change this new fiscal approach.

I would like to quote one more witness. Ruth Massie was the grand chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations. Speaking before that same committee in February 2016, she said:

This fiscal policy is being imposed. We have not accepted it because of the language in our agreement. How is it going to affect us if it goes forward? We will have no choice but to defend our agreements. That means going back to court, because that's not what the provisions in our agreements say.

• (1620)

I am calling on the Liberal government to finish the job. I understand that a discussion is currently taking place, but if we want to be consistent, we need to be able to change this fiscal approach, which was imposed on the indigenous peoples of Yukon.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the conversation around the approach and the process, but I would ask my hon. colleague if he agrees that timelines are an important feature of an environmental assessment process and, when there are going to be changes to a project, if it is important for there to be clarity in terms of when a project requires a reassessment and when it does not.

[Translation]

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

I would say yes, time management is important in conducting an environmental assessment, but in our opinion, we must take the time needed to conduct a proper environmental assessment. It is arbitrary to want to limit any environmental process in an absolute wall to wall manner, as the Conservatives did, because we hinder the people on the ground who must conduct the best possible studies to reach the most informed decisions.

Saying, as the Harper government did in the past, that consultation times must be minimized and that the environmental assessment process must be reduced is not what gives the best results. It is a way of cutting corners and signing blank cheques so everything can be done as quickly as possible. It is not necessarily the right thing to do. The Harper government did it with its amendments to Bill S-6 at the time, giving the minister the power to give binding instructions to the office overseeing the environmental assessment process. Not only was the time available to properly do the work reduced, but there was also interference from the minister, who could impose his views on the organization that was supposed to be independent and manage the assessment process.

That is why I think that these changes are needed today.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member speaks very passionately, and I love to hear him speak, so I will give him a chance to speak more passionately again about this bill.

First, there was unanimous support by the legislature, with its all-political spectrum, in Yukon, so why would someone go against that? Second, are treaties in this country not most sacred? As the member for Pontiac said, if the honour of the crown is constitutionally protected, why would anyone go against that?

To give him some time to think, I want to correct something for the record. A Conservative member suggested there was a cut of \$24 million in the transfer payments. That is not true. What happened was that new statistics came from the provinces, the transfer payments were based on a formula, and what was really amazing to me, which I have never seen before, the finance minister came to the rescue and found a way of rejigging the formula so that most of that money was recuperated. In fact, in the next budget more money was added so that all the territories got more transfer payments, not less.

Government Orders

The member made the good point that \$24 million is an awful lot of money for a small territory. A couple of months ago, the Prime Minister provided \$240 million for the mining people in Yukon. Based on the Conservatives saying how important \$24 million was, we can all imagine how much that \$240 million was appreciated in Yukon.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker I thank my colleague from Yukon for his question and correction. His comment is interesting.

Indeed, while stakeholders were unanimous in their opposition to Bill S-6 at the time, in this case, restoring what was needed and demanded by people in Yukon and by several first nations has also garnered unanimous support. I think the vote in the territory's Legislative Assembly is a good example of that.

I would like to take the opportunity given me by my hon. colleague to tell him that much of the work is done, but I think that a lot more work remains in terms of the need for good, respectful relations with first nations. I ask my hon. colleague and the party that he represents and that forms the government to reconsider their position on the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and also consider that we should review the budget cuts imposed with the new financial offer from the government at the time.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. Normally one of the first things we do when we rise is to establish our bona fide credentials on what we are about to talk about, and I have none of that. The fact of the matter is that I love the north. I have been to Resolute in the Northwest Passage, and I urge members to take the time to see this magical place, a historical place. It gives a sense of the vastness of this beautiful country. The flight alone, being in a big jet and flying for hours and hours and looking down and knowing it is all Canada, is an amazing feeling, and it is a very magical place.

I want to say parenthetically that one of the things that struck me about Yukon was its beauty. At the risk of giving my friend from Timmins—James Bay problems with his own constituents, when he came back, he said it was so beautiful that he could live there. Remember the beauty of Ontario's north is also stunningly beautiful. Yukon is a wonderful place.

I have been to Iqaluit a couple of times, Yellowknife a couple of times, and Pond Inlet once. I represent downtown Hamilton, where we do not do a lot of mining, so it behooves me to try to find what I am going to do. I could come here and read a canned speech that covered all the details, which I did not fully understand. However, I decided I wanted to listen to the debate. I have read the material, and it is not that complicated a bill, but it is not straightforward either. It really does help if people sat in on the hearings or they live there.

It is a great feeling to see wrongs righted—and to be a part of that is a good feeling—aside from the politics of it, which need to be mentioned. The Cons are not in power now, but they were and they are not finished paying their price for all the things that many of us

did not like. However, it is not the main focus today, and I will not be spending a lot of time on it, unless someone provokes me.

I was struck by the debate. Since I have been here, particularly when we are talking provincial or territorial specific issues, there have been some things that affect Ontario uniquely, but not that many. In the main, it usually affects broader parts of Canada, and I do not get a lot of Hamilton legislation per se. If I represented a territory like Yukon and a bill came forward, I really would hope that hon. members would try to ratchet up the honour of the debate just a bit, to recognize that it is not quite like all our other files. Because of Yukon's size, it does not always get a whole lot of attention, certainly not nearly as much as it deserves, but this is its moment.

As much as possible, it is important for us, particularly those of us from completely opposite parts of our great country, to show as much respect as we can, a little more than when we deal with regular business. I have been very pleased that is the debate here. There are some criticisms. It is hard to have debate without any of that, but it is not the main focus. The main thing has been what is in the best interests of Yukon, the people, the first nations, and also what is fair and what is right, so I am pleased to support this.

• (1630)

I am very much moved by my colleague who is, I am sure this House will appreciate, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. When he speaks on issues affecting first nations, we can hear a pin drop in our caucus. We could hear a pin drop in this House when he speaks, and what he had to say about Bill C-17 sort of set the tone for me as I came into this honourable chamber. In speaking to Bill C-17, the member said:

I want to acknowledge the importance of this legislation. There is a lot of talk today about nation-to-nation reconciliation and so on and so forth. This is one example of how to get it right. This is one example of how to proceed.

That alone, I have to say, would be enough to make me vote for this bill.

I want to also just mention, as an aside, that my friend from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo happened to mention, “from a 100,000-foot level”, and then went on to make a couple of comments. I just want to take a few seconds to tell this great story. It is about a colleague of hers. We were at committee. One of my favourite expressions when we are doing things like this is “from 30,000 feet”. That just happens to be the number I like. I said, “from 30,000 feet”, and then I went on and on as of course I can do. Laurie Hawn, a former Conservative MP, a great guy, took the floor right after I said my “from 30,000 feet” and really went after them and tore them right apart, and he said, “Chair, I have to say that I am a former fighter pilot and do you know what you see from 30,000 feet? Nothing.” I always thought that was one of my favourite committee stories, and it certainly speaks to Laurie's sense of keeping us all on our toes.

Government Orders

As members can tell, I do not have an incisive speech on the details, and if my friend from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo wants an opportunity to lay me wide open on that issue, now is that opportunity.

However, I did want to stand and express my respect for the government. I want to express my respect for the minister and for the member for Yukon for righting a wrong. I believe there has been a certain level of co-operation even on the part of the official opposition, which along the way has taken a couple of cracks, but in the main, this House is showing the kind of respect and concern for a part of our country that does not get talked about a lot but is clearly one of the jewels of our great country. I look forward to standing up and casting my precious vote in favour of Bill C-17.

• (1635)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always I listened to my colleague with great interest although, as he noted, the details in terms of the legislation were a bit shy. However, I do appreciate his talking about how beautiful Yukon is. On my first trip there, I got to paddle the river and it was just an amazing experience to paddle on the Yukon River.

We do need to talk a bit about this bill, and perhaps I will repeat the same questions for the member as I asked for his colleague. When we are moving forward with something so important as the economic opportunities not only for Yukon but for across the north, because our northern communities, more than the rest of the country, depend for their prosperity on their economic opportunities and natural resources development, does the member believe it is important to have timelines around an environmental assessment process? When there is a small change, does he believe that a company should be put through a very expensive reassessment process to deal with something that is very inconsequential?

Those are two of the items from this bill that would get removed, and I do think it would be nice to hear whether he thinks those should be somewhere in the way we do our business.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I am a little disappointed the member did not take a different course, but that is fine. Since she asked the same darn question she asked before, I ask her to read the answer given by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. I agree with everything he said in answer to the exact same question.

If the member wants to go down that road, I have a lot more faith and trust in Bill C-17 in recognizing and respecting first nations rights. I understand that fully. I also understand the bill well enough to know that it will go a long way toward fixing the damage, the outrage, and the disrespect that the previous government showed as it dealt with this issue. At least now we are dealing with it properly.

I hope that answers the hon. member's question.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the member flies on a jet across the Northwest Territories, he must learn a lot of drama. It is obvious from his display here.

The member said that he believed in the bill. I believe we need to work with our aboriginal communities. Let us look at how well the government worked with our aboriginal communities on the northern pipelines through British Columbia. The aboriginal

communities wanted to see those go through. They were very excited about the economic development they would see through a segment of BC that has been relatively dead for years. I know that because I lived there for over 30 years. The government decided to disregard even the environmental review that was done, which was agreed to by the aboriginal communities.

What does the member have to say about that?

Mr. David Christopherson: Now I am really shaking, Mr. Speaker, but I have been like this for a long time. That is just the way I am.

I think members of the official opposition have lost their minds. Why they would want to pick fights on a bill that reflects the horrible way they used their power is beyond me. My advice for them, and it is too late to give it and they would not want it anyway, would have been to just shut up and let it go. There is no win here.

I understand the member's points, and that is part of question period. He just needs to read the question in *Hansard* that was asked by my friend from Timmins—James Bay during question period. That is one example. He will see who is holding the Liberal government to account on that file just as we did with the previous government.

The facts still remain. The last government showed so much disrespect to the people of Yukon. That is why I feel so good about making it right.

It is crazy politics for members of the official opposition to nitpick in the hope of finding something they can say when they ought to be hanging their heads in shame and be thankful that it is finally being fixed.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Yellowhead, Parks Canada; the hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, Taxation; the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, The Environment.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Bow River.

One thing is certain: the hon. member for Hamilton Centre is a great speaker and therefore a tough act to follow. I must say that I share his respect and admiration for Canada's territories, namely, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon. I have admired that region ever since I was a little boy. In my childhood and teenage years, I had a specific dream, one that I have not totally given up on but is fading as time goes by. We will see what happens in the future. I used to dream that I would live out my old age on Great Bear Lake. I would build a house and live there from about the age of 75 or 80 until the end of my days.

Government Orders

When I was 14, I took a flight from Toronto to Osaka, Japan. Just like the member for Hamilton Centre described it, I flew over the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Alaska. It is true that it is hard to believe just how huge our country is. There are millions and millions of lakes. It sometimes seems that there is more water than land in the north. It is almost frightening. That is when I really understood why winters are so important there for travel, because the ice creates roads everywhere, and so people do not have to go around the many lakes.

Simply put, those territories are incredible, and I want to say right off the bat that I speak here today with utmost humility. As the member for Hamilton Centre was saying, we are talking about Yukon, and it is rare for the people of Yukon to have the opportunity to be heard in the House. I hope my comments convey how much respect I have for the people of Yukon. I will try to raise a few points that the opposition sees as essential to our discussion in the House.

I want to address some of the comments that were made, including one by the hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill. She said that the opposition should be ashamed of the way it treated indigenous peoples when it was in power. I find it rather hypocritical for a Liberal member to say that because one of the first things the Liberals did when they came to power was abolish the First Nations Financial Transparency Act.

I can say that as soon as that happened, our indigenous affairs critic got a lot of mail. We heard from a lot of indigenous people. That decision affects indigenous women and it affects indigenous peoples. We developed that legislation to ensure that leadership and the indigenous elite, the first nations chiefs, were accountable not only to the departments, but also to the people living on their reserves. I think that was very respectful toward indigenous peoples to do that. It was something that they wanted. One of the first things that the Liberals did was abolish that legislation. When I go door to door, people often tell me that they think that was an awful decision. My colleague from Yellowhead was talking about it and I completely agree with what he had to say.

I would also like to say that, despite how humbling it is for me to participate in this debate, we must not forget that the Yukon is a territory that belongs to all Canadians. Make no mistake: a territory does not have the same status as a province. For centuries, Canada's north has played an important role in the country's economic development and in weaving the fabric of our country and economy. Yukon has a role to play. It is only natural that the federal government decides when to intervene in the affairs of the Yukon because it is indeed a territory. If we want to make the Yukon a province, then that is another debate.

The member for Yukon said that everyone in his territory, in his riding, which is huge, supports his bill. I understand that. However, I think that there were some good things about Bill S-6, which we introduced in 2015, even if the government does not agree. I also think that there are some negative things about the bill that is currently before us, even if the government thinks that there is nothing wrong with it.

I would like to talk a little bit about those negative aspects. One of the problems I see with Bill C-17 is that it follows the Liberal government's tendency toward centralization.

● (1645)

Why am I talking about a pattern of centralization? The government did away with the regional development ministers and gave all the responsibility to one minister of economic development for Canada, who lives in Toronto. That is an obvious example of centralization. The government also did away with the position of political lieutenant for Quebec, since the Prime Minister claims to be the province's general—

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, my point of order also applies to other speakers. Basically, it is on relevance, and I know how you will rule. However, the lead critics from both parties could not even fill their entire speech on this. I do not think there is anything new that anyone in the House can add to the bill. Because of the goodwill of all parties and how co-operative they have been so far, I hope we will not continue with irrelevance or repetition so we can get on we other important work of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his point of order. Of course, he is right in indicating that two of the rules in the House with respect to speech is to avoid repetition and at the same time ensure that members keep their comments within the bounds of relevance pertaining to the subject before the House.

The member will also know that members are given a great deal of liberty around posing arguments on either side of the question that the motion brings forward. I will continue to listen to the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou. I note he has made references to the motion before the House. In respect to its relevance, I would ask him to ensure he stays within those boundaries through the remaining half of his speech.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I totally understand the member's reasoning. However, as the NDP member said, we are talking about Yukon, so I think that we should proceed, and that that is a good thing.

I would now like to talk about centralization. A carbon tax was imposed on the provinces without consulting them. As for health transfers, the government imposed conditions that the provinces opposed but were bullied into accepting. This brings me to the central theme of my speech: devolution.

In the 1980s, under Mulroney, and again under the Harper government, we began a positive process of political devolution that focused much more on Yukon than Nunavut or the Northwest Territories. This bill, Bill C-17, not in its entirety but certainly some of its clauses, works against the very devolution that I believe to be good for the people of Yukon. Why? Because it will eliminate the federal minister's ability to transfer ministerial powers, duties, and functions to a territorial government.

Government Orders

I was very proud to learn about this legislation in 1995. I thought it was fantastic that a Conservative government had introduced it. It is a truly Conservative measure because we support decentralization. As is the case with Britain's Conservatives who ceded power to Scotland, which now has a quasi autonomous parliament, western Conservatives support decentralization. We ceded very important powers to the Yukon government over time.

It actually started with a Liberal government. With the advent of responsible government in the Yukon in 1978, political parties were formed for the first time. Under Mulroney in the 1980s and 1990s, there were transfers of very important federal powers. In 1992, at the end of the Mulroney era, the first nations and the government entered into an agreement. Under the Martin government, Yukon was given all the powers that other provinces had, except over criminal prosecutions.

In Yukon, mining is the main industry. Therefore, it is very important for the people and their government to make their own decisions about environmental assessments and the projects they will accept.

For me, the problem with the Liberals' Bill C-17 is this desire to roll back the powers we delegated to the Yukon government to approve or deny proposed mining and resource development projects. This bill is a definite step backwards in terms of devolution.

This is what the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie was just referring to when he said that one government takes one step forward and the next takes one step back. I think that if there is one thing that successive governments should not go back on, it is this type of important policy on territorial devolution. Yukon was one of the territories that benefited the most. In spite of its flaws, Bill S-6, which was passed in 2015, did a lot for devolution.

In short, it is a shame. That is pretty much all I wanted to say today. In closing, I would like to add that my colleague takes the prize for hardest-working MP. He is a very brave and courageous man, because taking the plane every week as he does must be gruelling.

• (1650)

[English]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the last two speakers talk about flying to Japan. I took an overnight flight and missed all of that beauty, so I am feeling a little jealous.

Canada, the world, and I am sure the constituents in the member's riding are moving toward achieving the 17 goals and 169 targets of the sustainable development goals. Can the member speak, with respect to the members of his constituency, to the importance of ensuring that sustainable research development respects indigenous people, especially as they are the stewards of the land?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, of course indigenous people are stewards of their lands. My wife works for the Inuit. My mother worked for the Inuit. My father works for the Mi'kmaq. I know quite a bit about indigenous people, and I respect them a lot. My name is an Inuit name, but I cannot say my own name in this House. I understand what the member means. That is why we need to

continue with the devolution of as much power as possible to the territories, as the Nunavummiut are requesting right now. It is their choice to make on an ongoing basis. I think Bill S-6, under the Conservative government, was positive in that way.

The Deputy Speaker: I will make reference here that while members are not allowed to use given names of other hon. members, they may, if they wish, include their own names in comments they make in their own speeches.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a little shocked to hear my colleague criticizing the Liberals for supporting devolution and not wanting to delegate power.

He says he has great respect for the first nations people and all that, but Bill S-6, which was brought in by Harper's Conservatives, delegated powers to the Yukon government. However, it did not delegate the same powers to the first nations people who live in Yukon, something that was denounced by the NDP and the first nations themselves.

When Bill S-6 was passed, Ruth Massie, Grand Chief of the Council of First Nations, appeared before the Senate committee and said:

Pursuant to the UFA, the CYFN, including Yukon First Nations, Canada and Yukon, undertook a comprehensive review of YESAA. Initially, CYFN, Yukon First Nations, Canada and Yukon worked collaboratively to prepare the interim YESAA review report. In the end, Canada unilaterally finalized the report and systematically rejected the input from the CYFN and Yukon First Nations.

The Council of Yukon First Nations reiterates that the five-year review has not been completed, and three key issues identified by Yukon First Nations remain outstanding.

Therefore, I find it surprising to hear my colleague say that Bill S-6 was so great and that it was better than what Bill C-17 is trying to accomplish. Moreover, the Yukon first nations are before the courts, but they agreed to postpone their lawsuit and wait and see how parliamentarians would vote on the bill, because they in fact want us to pass it. If Bill C-17 is passed, they will drop their lawsuit regarding Bill S-6.

I am puzzled by all this. If the government respects the nation-to-nation relationship, if it wants to move toward reconciliation and recognize the rights of the first nations, then it has to stop putting up obstacles, taking away their power, and trying to impose things unilaterally.

• (1655)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleague that, in actual fact, I am sure that Bill S-6 had many flaws. It is rare that members recognize that sort of thing in the House, but I mentioned that at the very start. I recognized that it was flawed.

Government Orders

I was not part of cabinet at the time, so I cannot say why that decision was made. As I said, one of the problems I see with Bill C-17 is that some progress is being lost with regard to the devolution of power to the Government of Yukon. I think it is up to the Government of Yukon to make sure that all parties in the territory are satisfied with industry-related decisions.

I understand that the government could have consulted more but, at the same time, the federal government holds discussions with its counterpart, the territorial government.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and speak, and I appreciate the speech of the member for Yukon. He is very forthright and talks about his constituency in a manner that is understandable.

I remember the Yukon from that old guy, Pierre Berton. I remember the books he wrote and the TV shows he did. I remember Chilkoot Pass, the gold rush, and stories of Dawson City. We all learned to memorize *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. That does not happen in our schools anymore. I wish it did because I remember the visions Robert Service's poem brought to our minds, with pictures of the Yukon. We also grew up with stories of *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*. The Yukon is a part of our history, part of my youth, and the stories I grew up with.

It is interesting now that we talk about resource development in Canada. The Ring of Fire is a phenomenal resource sector in the Canadian Shield, extending all the way across the country. In more modern times, the territories are developing diamond mines. I have relatives who work in diamond mines in the territories. We have a tremendous resource sector that we need to learn how to develop.

As we work through Bill C-17, we have heard some positive things. I have probably more questions than statements. The hon. member mentioned a little about the renewal piece. According to the CYFN, the timelines would not provide adequate time to complete a thorough environmental assessment. Specifically, the CYFN suggested these time limits would make it difficult for the Yukon Environment and Socio-economic Assessment Board to meet its obligations under the act and for the first nations to review the assessments and provide input. Therefore, I would hope that as we work through this, that does happen, because that is a critical piece. The timelines stated in there need to be worked with so that all partners in this can come to an agreement on what will work.

Yukon has a very different piece. This is a concern for me. I question if we will be able to draw investment to Yukon when it is different from the rest of Canada. The mining industry and investors worldwide see the Canadian rules and how they work, other than Yukon. The Yukon is a small piece out there, which they will have to deal with differently. Will it cause a problem for investment in Yukon? The last thing we want to see is a small segment that is different and the mining association saying it will not bother with it because it would have to go under a different set. We have to make it so it works for investment in Yukon, or it could be a problem.

Regulations from the Canadian government are sometimes implemented differently than others. We saw pipelines upstream, downstream, and greenhouse gases being included as part of the regulatory process that was not there before. If the Canadian

government implements regulations it has to understand, if it is going to get investment, those things cannot change. I am concerned that could happen.

Under the project's environmental assessment the CYFN stated the project renewals and amendments are part of the assessment process and should be completed by the Yukon Environment and Socio-economic Assessment Board. Further, the CYFN suggested that allowing government, instead of the Yukon Environment and Socio-economic Assessment Board, to determine whether a project renewal requires an assessment could introduce the perception of political interference. That is another challenge, to try to keep that political interference out of it if we develop this three-pronged approach to making decisions. I hope that can be addressed too.

● (1700)

As a major employer, it is critical to work with this. The delegation of power has been mentioned, but the amendments would enable the federal minister to delegate any of his or her powers and duties under the YESAA to the territorial minister. The CYFN has stated that this amendment could potentially change the distribution of powers and responsibilities under the act. Further, it suggested that this amendment would create a bilateral relationship between the federal and territorial governments, which is not in keeping with the spirit and intent of the umbrella final agreement. My colleague referred to this. It is something unique in this particular area of Yukon and something we have to pay attention to, to address, and to realize there are challenges in this process of who has the powers, whom they are delegated to, and who perceives them as different from what they are.

I will mention the carbon tax in the north, because it will have a bigger effect there than anywhere else and we need to prevent it from creating problems for economic development. The transport committee heard from the mining industry about the services it has there. There will be a deep seaport in the next 20 years. There is now a road to the ocean in the Arctic. They need to use the deep seaport and roads for economic development. The carbon tax will be a tough piece to add onto that. We have to find ways to work with that. With this process of development, the all-weather road to the ocean, and the possibility of deep seaports, we need to be able to get around that particular handicap, as it is harder in Yukon than in the lower provinces.

I live in a beautiful part of our country, which we all appreciate. I appreciate the history and stories that I grew up with. It is truly a representative part of our country.

Government Orders

• (1705)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am more excited about the member's speech than any others today, for several reasons. First, the member is absolutely right. I learned *The Cremation of Sam McGee* in grade 3. It is why I moved to Yukon and became chair of the Yukon Robert Service Society. I thank the member for bringing back those old memories.

The other reason I love the speech so much is the three main points the member made related to the bill. I am assured now that he will vote for the bill, because they were all in favour of Bill C-17. The first was that if it is different, will people invest there? People will certainly invest there because, as I mentioned to the media this morning, there is full employment there, unlike the rest of the country, because people are investing there. If it has a better assessment regime than anywhere else in the country, it will encourage people to invest. In fact, one of the most senior mining executives in Canada said that to me yesterday. At an assessment forum here yesterday, I was talking to someone yesterday about an assessment in another part of the country that in fact included four assessments, whereas this regime has only one assessment.

The other point the member brought up was by the grand chief of the Council of Yukon First Nation, who believes that it would change the distribution of power to a bilateral one not in the spirit of the treaty. All the comments you raised were criticisms of Bill S-6, the previous bill, the one we are changing. It is great that you have raised them, and since all of your points were in favour of this bill and against the previous one, I am delighted that you will be voting for it.

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, he did not ask me a question, but restated what I said, and I thank him for doing that.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind hon. members that when we start using the word “you”, for some reason it starts to proliferate in speeches.

I would also remind members that they are perfectly able, if they wish, during the five-minute period for questions and comments, to pose either a question or a comment.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, coming from the province he does, he perhaps knows more than anyone else how important it is to put timelines on the environmental assessment process so that people do not end up waiting five or 10 years and spending enormous amounts of money. Could he speak to the fact that although the government has committed to re-establishing timelines, it will not be in legislation but in policies? Could he maybe speak to how important timelines are and perhaps how a legislative framework is a little stronger than a policy framework for those particular components?

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely true if people are going to invest billions.

We talked about energy east. Through the investment process, \$1 billion was spent on a timeline that went on and on, until they finally said there would be no end to spending more money on it, not knowing where it would end. Therefore, it needs timelines. Northern

gateway went on for a long time. It got an approval, but then it was cancelled outside of that process.

Timelines and processes are critical for investment. It has really handicapped the resource sector and the oil and gas industry. It needs to be clear in this one to make it work.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member raised several points that caught my interest. First was the need for infrastructure to develop our resources in the north. I am from the Northwest Territories. We have three functioning mines and a number of mines on the horizon. Infrastructure is what really decides whether it is a feasible project. I am glad the member has recognized that.

He also recognized that Yukon is looking a different model when it comes to the regulatory process. We in the Northwest Territories take great pride in our regulatory process. In that process, 50% of the members are indigenous, representing aboriginal governments, and it works well. The timelines are shorter. It allows communities to be more involved.

Could the member talk about the regulatory processes that are different? Maybe he should look at this. Would the member commit to studying that model to see if it is a better model than what he has seen in other places?

• (1710)

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right on infrastructure.

When another colleague and I were on the environment committee, we talked about protected spaces. We had panels with indigenous people from the member's particular area, from the territories. It was interesting how they would suggest that it was great to protect spaces, but that they had to have the right to develop them. That was very interesting in showing how they wanted to deal with their own territories.

I would agree that we need to have a northern strategy. We need to have the infrastructure for it. We need to make it work. There are great resources, and the people there understand them. They understand the environment they live in, and they want to develop resources their way, the right way for them. I think there are great resources and great possibilities.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-17. Bill C-17 is a justice bill, believe it or not. I say this because I believe that, fundamentally, the government is responsible for justice.

How does justice come into Bill C-17? Governments are about making decisions. With every decision to be made, the interests of each group that are impacted by it must be balanced and taken into consideration.

Government Orders

Previously we passed a bill that brought into place the YESAA agreement. The agreement was the process by which decisions would be made on how the resources in the Yukon would be developed. The YESAA was a great piece of legislation, bringing stability and immense development into the region. By all accounts, most people were very happy with it.

Since then, there have been some political decisions made to change YESAA. What is frustrating about this is that there do not seem to be any principles underlying these changes. It would seem that decisions made on one particular project would have underlying principles that would be the same on another project. Those principles would be consistent, fair, and equitable, which all sound like justice issues.

There are four major changes to YESAA that are impacted by Bill C-17. With two of these changes, in particular, I will try to explain the logical inconsistencies that come with this bill.

The first one I am going to talk about is the time limits. When YESAA was developed, a time limit for decisions was put in place. I believe it was 18 months. When an applicant brought forward a project, he or she was guaranteed within 18 months to have a decision. This brought stability and a timeline to the decision. When someone launches an application, until they receive the decision, there is often a lot of activity that goes on. There are a lot of documents and witnesses to be found, all costing money. If there is a decision that has to be made within a specific time frame, that speeds the entire process up and produces a definitive answer in the end.

It was said that time limits were unnecessary because most of the decisions were made in 52 days. The average decision was made in 52 days, making the 18-month time limit irrelevant. The logic was that the time limit was not needed, because the decisions were being made in very short order.

However, the fact that there was a time limit may have been the reason why decisions were made in 52 days. It does not mean that we do not need a time limit. Currently, the time limit is the fundamental reason decisions are being made in a short amount of time. Whether the decision-making was drawn out or sped up, it was beneficial to have a decision made earlier rather than later. At some point the decision was going to have to be made.

If there is no end date, there is no reason why anyone would come to a quicker decision. There would be many incentives to ensure that, if someone did not like the decision that was going to come out, he or she could throw sticks in the wheels. All kinds of things can slow things down. We have seen this over and over again with other projects that have come along. Energy east is a prime example of changing goalposts.

● (1715)

The irony of all this, in saying that the time limits were unnecessary because most decisions were being made in 52 days, is that the opposite logic was being used on the delegation of powers. It was said that we have never needed the time limits, so we should not need to have time limits. As I understand it, the delegation of powers has not necessarily been used ever. It was just there for security purposes, agreeing with the ability for the minister to issue a binding policy directive. That had never been used as well, but it was there to

offer security, to offer a definite reason for people to negotiate, because the minister had that backup, that power. If the parties could not come to a decision, if all the interests coming to the table could not come to a decision, the minister could step in. However, it had never been used. On the one side, we had the time limits and on the other side was the minister's directive.

In one instance it was the same people arguing that they had a hammer hanging over their head and in the other instance they said they do not need it because it has never been used. It seems to me that, if we are going to use the logic, we need to have a principle in place for when we make these decisions. From my perspective, the principle would be what we could do to bring stability, predictability, and a reasonable time to decision-making. That is the underlying principle when we put in place these policies like time limits, like the ability of the minister to issue directives, like the minister's ability to delegate authority. That is the underlying principle. We need to come to timely and efficient decisions so that we can encourage development in the north.

I have been to the north a number of times. I have not made it to Yukon, but I made it to Nunavut and to the Northwest Territories. I have been to northern B.C. and I understand that the landscape in northern B.C. is very similar to the Yukon, so I can definitely imagine what Yukon is like. I enjoy spending time in northern Canada. I consider myself to be from northern Canada, although I do still live in the boreal forest in northern Alberta, so I do not have the rugged landscapes like there are in the north.

I know that bringing development to northern Canada is essential for all the Canadians who live in northern Canada. Why? It is because this is what puts food on the table. When we are discussing these policy points—time limits, renewal or amendment projects, or policy directions, or delegation of power—they are fairly abstract things, but the reason we are discussing them is that we want to ensure that people who live in northern Canada can put food on the table. That is what we have to remember when we are discussing this.

In order for that to happen, we need to have resources coming into the communities, and how does that happen? It happens in the free exchange of products, the free exchange of ideas to the free market, and that happens when one party has something to offer to another party. What does northern Canada have to offer to the world? It has natural resources, diamonds, gold, forestry products, oil. All these things make our lives significantly better.

Looking at the surfaces in the House, I would say 30% to 40% of them are made out of wood. That wood started out in the forest, perhaps in northern Canada. We paid someone to cut down the trees. We paid someone to cut the trees into lumber. We paid someone to carve the beautiful carvings that we see all around us. All of that put food on the table for some families in Canada. All of that put a roof over the head of some people in Canada. That is what we are discussing when we are discussing the YESAA bill.

● (1720)

We want to ensure that the people of Yukon can get the beautiful resources they have in northern Canada, the forestry products, gold, and oil, to the world where it is needed, and thereby put food on the table for their families.

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I have several constituents who regularly travel to Yukon. They are involved in gold mining. I have talked to several of them, and I am not sure if they make a lot of money gold mining but it looks like they have a lot of fun. The very fact they can go up there to make that money or mine that gold—as I said, I do not think they make a lot of money, because spending a lot of money to find a lot of money is essentially what it involves—spurs activity. It ensures that hotels are full, that restaurants are busy, that the heavy-duty equipment dealer is selling mining equipment, that the mechanic has a job, and that the gas stations are busy. Why is that? It is because people are searching for resources and helping other fellow human beings enjoy their lives.

How do they do that? They do it by obtaining the natural resources we can use to build houses, heat our homes, build automobiles and cellphones, all of the things that make our lives here in southern Canada much better. Each of us carries a cellphone in our pocket, and many of us could not survive without it. At least, we think we cannot. Every piece of that cellphone started in the ground somewhere.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk: Ping, ping.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: The chair of the indigenous and northern affairs committee is reminding me that my cellphone went off at committee, much to my embarrassment. She continually reminds me of that.

Nonetheless, a lot lithium, the thing that runs our batteries, comes from northern Canada. The rare earth metals used in our cellphones come from northern Canada. I was recently in the Northwest Territories airport in Yellowknife, and when people are in the security line, they can see a whole collection of minerals on the other side of the glass. It was fascinating to see copper, nickel, and gold, all of the things used to build everything we use.

If I look around here, I can see copper wire being used for our headsets, to make the lights turn on, for the microphone system, or for charging my phone. All that copper started out in rural Canada somewhere in the ground and had to be mined. When we are talking about YESAA, we need the natural resources in northern Canada to continue to live the life we do. We need those resources to have the cellphone we carry in our pocket, which we all know improves our lives incredibly.

One of the things I really enjoy about my iPad is the fact that I can FaceTime with my children. This particular job takes me away from my family a lot of times, and I know that without the modern technology of Facebook and my iPad, I would not see my children as often as I do. Because of my iPad, I am able to FaceTime with my children. If it were not for mines in northern Canada, northern Alberta, or in northern B.C., we would not have the copper, the rare earth metals, all those things that build our iPads.

Western civilization is truly astounding.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk: So is your speech.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: The chair of my committee is laughing at me, but I am dead serious about this.

● (1725)

The reason our lives are so incredible is the free exchange of ideas and products. Not only does that allow us to have incredible things like iPads, but it also allows us to live in every part of the world.

Northern Canada, in particular, is a very cold place. In order to survive in northern Canada, we need to ensure we have the resources it takes to heat our homes and the resources it takes to build those homes. When it comes to YESAA, we need to ensure that we can get the resources out of the ground, off of the landscape, to the refineries, to the sawmills, to the diamond cutters, or wherever it might be, so that all of us can have a better life. It is absolutely critical.

Why would we be changing the process to make it less likely that we can attract business from the around the world? We are in competition with the world. Lo and behold, we have diamonds in the Northwest Territories, which is a great thing, but perhaps there are diamonds in other parts of the world. We must consider this and ensure that we are able to get our diamonds out of the ground and to market as cheaply or cheaper than our competition around the world—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe we have a point of order from the hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I am enjoying the speech, the treatise on western civilization and diamonds around the world, but we do not have diamond mines in the Yukon at the moment. However, on a point of relevance, I would appreciate it, and Yukoners would appreciate it, if we could concentrate more on this bill that would enhance mining.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): As I often mention when relevance is brought up, I have heard some speeches that go off on what I think are tangents, but hon. members have this amazing amount of ingenuity and manage to bring it around. Therefore, I will leave it with the hon. member to continue his speech. He only has about a minute left, and I am sure he will bring it around.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I think we need a system of principles that are used across the country to ensure we have stable time limits for decision-making, complete justice when it comes to decision-making, and we need to ensure that the resources of the Yukon can be developed for the benefit of all Canadians.

● (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***ACT RESPECTING THE FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN FOR VICTIMS OF CRIMINAL ACTS**

The House resumed from October 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-343, An Act to establish the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Criminal Acts and to amend certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to rise to speak to Bill C-343, An Act to establish the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Criminal Acts and to amend certain Acts. This bill seeks to establish a new department supporting an office of the federal ombudsman for victims of criminal acts, and it would drastically expand the role, mandate, and powers of the current victims ombudsman and thereby incur associated costs. Bill C-343 also proposes to make the victims' ombudsman an agent of Parliament with unrestricted investigatory powers and, in my opinion, an overly broad mandate.

To better understand Bill C-343's proposals, it is important to review the existing mandate of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. The current office was created in 2007 pursuant to a decision of the Prime Minister as part of his prerogative for the machinery of government. The ombudsman's mandate establishes the terms and conditions of an order in council and provides that the office do the following: to assist individual victims with regard to the provisions of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act; to promote and facilitate access to federal services and legislation available to victims of crime; to increase awareness of victims' needs and victims' issues among criminal justice personnel; to promote federal legislation for victims of crime among criminal justice personnel; to identify and review emerging and systemic issues, including those issues related to programs and services provided or administered by the Department of Justice or the Department of Public Safety.

The ombudsman is required to submit an annual report to the Minister of Justice on the activities of the office. The bill's sponsor has stated that the Department of Justice can remove anything from the ombudsman's annual report that is unfavourable to the department, before tabling it in Parliament. I must correct this statement, as it is simply untrue. Neither the Minister of Justice nor officials in her department have any authority whatsoever to alter the ombudsman's report in any way. The Minister of Justice tables the ombudsman's annual reports in Parliament, along with a government response that often responds directly to criticisms or recommendations included in that report. In addition to the annual reports, the ombudsman may also issue special reports at any time to the Minister of Justice or to the Minister of Public Safety concerning any matter within those ministers' mandates. These special reports can be made public by the office of the ombudsman 60 days after being submitted to either minister. As is the case with the annual report, the ombudsman's special reports cannot be altered by the ministers of justice or public safety or by officials from those departments.

Since the establishment of the office, the ombudsman has published nine annual reports, seven special reports, and two systemic review reports. In addition, the victims ombudsman has made numerous appearances before House and Senate parliamentary committees to provide recommendations on various bills addressing issues, such as on-line crime, increased penalties, victims' rights, firearms, elder abuse, and the amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act affecting victims.

The sponsor has stated that the bill would improve the functioning of the victims ombudsman's office by making the ombudsman independent and directly accountable to Parliament. While the proposed changes would make the office a separate department, the bill curiously proposes to have the ombudsman report to Parliament through the Minister of Justice, who would table the annual report. As this is in fact exactly the same process as that currently followed, the bill appears to fail in its goal of making the ombudsman directly accountable to Parliament.

The current Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime is funded through the Department of Justice, but operates at arm's length from the federal departments responsible for victims' issues. This arm's-length relationship is critical to the credibility of that office. There is no evidence that the existing system for ensuring independence is failing in any respect. It allows the ombudsman to address victims' concerns by working directly with the relevant federal department and to propose options for policy and legislative reform that would benefit victims, and yet it does not involve the additional expense associated with the creation and maintenance of a separate department as proposed in Bill C-343.

The bill's sponsor has stated that there would not be any new costs associated with the proposed new ombudsman's office. We know that this is simply not accurate. New costs would be incurred on an ongoing basis to develop the internal services to support that office, such as human resources, security, communications, information management, and technology and financial services. These costs are currently borne within the Department of Justice. In addition to these costs, there would be extra costs incurred as a result of making the ombudsman an agent of Parliament. As previously noted by the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence, section 54 of the Constitution requires that bills that appropriate any part of the public revenue must be recommended to the House of Commons by the Governor General.

● (1735)

Standing Order 79(1) similarly prohibits the House from passing any bill that requires the appropriation of funds without the support of the Governor General.

The sponsor of Bill C-343 also has suggested that the ombudsman's existing mandate does not allow her to fully discharge her responsibilities. Most notably, the sponsor is concerned that the mandate does not permit the ombudsman to conduct reviews of complaints under the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. I respectfully disagree. The existing mandate is sufficiently broad to allow the victims' ombudsman to provide a second level of review for complaints of alleged rights infringements under the Canadian Bill of Rights. Since coming into force in 2015, that act has enshrined rights for victims of crimes at the federal level.

Private Members' Business

These rights apply to victims in their interactions with the Canadian criminal justice system. One of the key objectives of the act is to foster a culture of change in the system to ensure the police, crown prosecutors, correction officials, and others provide victims with the information they need about their case, provide them with the necessary measures of protection, give them opportunities to be heard, and to facilitate their ability to seek restitution for the losses incurred as a result of the crime.

The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights also expanded the role of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime with respect to addressing victim complaints. It provides that victims who are not satisfied with the outcome of the internal complaint mechanism of a federal department may file a complaint. The website for the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights complaints mechanisms indicates clearly that the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime is the second level of review for the listed federal departments and agencies. This mechanism is open and accessible to all Canadians.

The ombudsman's website currently shows that her office assists victims by providing them with information about their rights under federal law and how to request her office conduct a review of a victim's complaint about any federal department, legislation, or services related to victims of crime. The office reported that it had responded to 713 issues that were the subject of complaints in 2015-16. Victims' rights were included among the top five topics for which Canadians sought the assistance of the ombudsman's office.

In spite of the sponsor's assertions to the contrary, it appears quite clear to me that the ombudsman's current mandate allows her to provide assistance with complaints related to the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights.

I value the important role the current Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime plays in our criminal justice system. She is a former colleague and a close friend. In the absence of compelling evidence that the ombudsman requires any of the measures suggested by the sponsor, I am unable to support Bill C-343.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-343, an act to establish the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Criminal Acts and to amend certain Acts.

The NDP has proudly and always has been a strong advocate for victims' rights. I therefore support the bill because it seeks to better support those victims on the road to healing. By ensuring the independence and the long-term existence of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Criminal Acts, the bill places a priority on the rights of the victims. No matter what government is in power, it is victims who will be recognized.

The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Criminal Acts, an act which was created in 2007, is an institution under the auspices of the ministry of justice. The important and declared purpose of this institution is to help victims of crime and their families. Its mandate has evolved ever since, notably with the introduction of the Conservative government's Victims Bill of Rights, Bill C-32, in 2014.

At that time, we supported the victims bill of rights bill, which sought to ease the burden for the victims by granting them this set of rights, although some experts argued that it would not meet all the needs of victims. As was made clear by a significant number of witnesses during the 2014 committee study, victims had to be put first. Much remains to be done in that regard.

This is all the more important given the current legal context and the implications of the *R. v. Jordan* decision. Timelines on unreasonable delays for trials have been imposed, up to 18 months in the lower provincial courts and up to 30 months in superior federal courts.

In the wake of this decision, many charges related to violent crimes have been stayed. This is notable in the case of a man accused of killing his wife, a father accused of child abuse, and a sexual assault of a toddler in a daycare centre. This brings to light the abysmal lack of resources in our justice system, and its terrible consequences. It underlines the necessity of appointing more judges, of creating more courtrooms, and of providing the system with adequate resources. If not, many other charges, like those already mentioned, will be stayed due to unreasonable delays.

We must put ourselves in the victims' skin to understand how terrifying and disheartening it must be to learn that an offender escapes justice. The government must come to realize the additional emotional trauma and stress it can cause people victimized by crime, and the urgent need for those victims to have access to a legal system that allows justice to be done. The government must act accordingly. Victims must be confident that their government is there to help and support them in this difficult and often bewildering journey.

However, despite these pressing needs, the previous government and current government did not do their best to address the situation. Quite the contrary, they contributed to the deterioration of our justice system while they were in power and when they were in opposition.

Although the former Conservative government introduced strong criminal laws as well as the Victims Bill of Rights, it also slashed police budgets and undermined police resources. Moreover, the actual delays on trials are nothing new. This situation has been a reality of the system for decades. These deficiencies are the result of years and years of neglect and cuts to our judicial system.

The former Conservative government could have done something to prevent the present chaos when it was in power. Why did it not give the judicial system the resources that were needed? Why, instead, did that government cut resources drastically? I am, however, pleased that one of the members of that previous government has seen fit to at least partially redress that neglect by introducing Bill C-343.

For their part, the Liberals' justice agenda is equally insufficient. It is under the current Liberal government that charges for sexual assault and first degree murder are being stayed. What is the government doing to ensure that those accused of these crimes are brought to trial? The government has been very slow to address this situation. However, it must act now and deal with the crisis to ensure that no more charges are unfairly stayed or withdrawn. Quite simply, the government must adequately fund the justice system. This is a priority, or at least it should be.

● (1740)

Why the government feels it does not need to adequately resource our justice system is a mystery. Does it regard Canadians as the lumpenproletariat? Notably, it could make a real and important difference by appointing more judges and by providing sufficient resources to our courtrooms. Proper funding is essential. It is crucial if we are to have any chance of bringing hope to victims and bringing those accused of violent crimes to justice. It is the only appropriate response if we are to truly respect those who have suffered, their families, who have likewise suffered, and our communities. We need to bring them a sense of closure and a sense that the system has served them well.

In addition to providing proper resources to our justice system, everything must be done to ensure that victims are offered adequate support on the road to healing and recovery. Bill C-343 seeks to promote the better provision of help and services for crime victims. This, of course, is very much in keeping with the values of the NDP.

I am sure members are aware that since the federal ombudsman for victims of crime operates as a program under the Department of Justice, it is not necessarily independent. This is a problem. Freedom from political interference is exactly what the proponent of the bill presently before us wants to address. The intent is to strengthen the office of the ombudsman by upgrading this position from a program and making it equal to that of the correctional investigator.

For instance, the ombudsman is currently required to submit the annual reports to the Department of Justice rather than to Parliament. Therefore, no matter what is said, in the event the department does not agree with a recommendation or is concerned about a criticism from the ombudsman, it can remove it from the report. This goes against the fundamental goal of the institution. How can the ombudsman be the voice of the victims it serves if its recommendations are at risk of being removed?

To make absolutely sure that the ombudsman can effectively represent victims and their rights, the position has to be independent and accountable directly to Parliament. This is crucial to better protect the rights of victims and to prove to all victims that they matter. Therefore, I strongly recommend that Bill C-343 go to committee, where its effects can be examined and where there can be a discussion in regard to how to better strengthen the role of the ombudsman. However, this does not change the fact that the Liberal government must take immediate action to amend the current crisis.

We must always bear in mind that the road to healing after suffering a great trauma is very difficult. The experience of victims of crime can be very painful and arduous when they become caught up in the justice system. By testifying in court, and when sometimes having to challenge a ruling, they have to relive the terrible crimes

they experienced. This is often complicated by added administrative barriers and difficulties, notably the problem of understanding the legal jargon and the necessity of filling out form after form. This is the reason it is critical to the healing process that the voices of those who have suffered be truly heard and that their rights be truly respected. We must ensure that their road to healing is as seamless as possible.

By passing bill C-343, we can show victims that we support them. This is something we, as parliamentarians, must take seriously. Every party must be committed to the well-being and healing of victims. Action must be taken now out of respect for those people. They need to know that their needs will always be addressed, that real and just action is possible, and finally, and most importantly, that victims will be treated fairly in Canada's justice system. I would hope that the latitude is given to the ombudsman to make that so.

● (1745)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today in support of the hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix and her private member's Bill C-343, an act to establish the office of the federal ombudsman for victims of criminal acts and to amend certain acts.

I am confident and hopeful all parties represented in the chamber will join me in resounding support for this bill, because it would ensure the protection, information assistance, and liaison services would remain in place for victims, much as they currently are for criminals from the office of the ombudsman for federal offenders. Having an arm's-length regulator in place for the victims of crime is the right thing to do, and I will speak specifically about the services offered by the victims ombudsman in addition to laying out the case to ensure that equivalent supports and services are accessible to victims of crime, as they currently are to offenders.

The mandate of the victims ombudsman would be to ensure that victims are informed, considered, protected, and supported. The service would offer victims of crime the opportunity to learn about their individual rights under our federal laws, learn what services are available to them, and if necessary, lodge a complaint about any federal agency in its dealings with victims of crime. In addition to this, the federal ombudsman for victims of crime would ensure that policies are made to reflect victims' needs and concerns. By being in communication with victims, the ombudsman would be able to identify the areas that may be of concern to victims or that may negatively impact victims, and when appropriate to do so, the office of the ombudsman for victims of criminal acts may make recommendations to the government.

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The mandate relates exclusively to matters of federal jurisdiction and enables the ombudsman to specifically promote access by victims to existing federal programs and services for victims; address complaints of victims about compliance with the provisions of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that apply to victims of crimes committed by offenders under federal jurisdiction; promote awareness of the needs and concerns of victims and the applicable laws that benefit victims of crime, including to promote the principles as set out in the Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime with respect to matters of federal jurisdiction; and to identify and review emerging and systemic issues, including those related to the services by the Department of Justice or the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness that could negatively impact victims of crime.

I am proud of the Harper government's initiative to create the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime as an independent resource for victims of crime. I was there in 2007 when the government launched this. I was very pleased with the support of people like Senator Boisvenu, who was not a senator at the time but was very interested and involved with victims of crime. I am sure that, regardless of what side of the aisle one sits on, all members would agree that this office has served an important role for all victims of crime.

At the present time, the ombudsman operates, as we heard, within the Department of Justice and therefore does not function as a completely autonomous body. This could prevent the ombudsman from conducting a formal investigation within the Department of Justice itself. Another example of this would be in a federal prosecution where a victim of crime felt that his or her voice was not afforded the adequate opportunity to be heard. This could ultimately undermine the confidence of victims towards the minister of justice and the Department of Justice. Other examples could be when a victim has not been invited by the Parole Board or the prison system to a hearing on the offender's release, when the federal crown and defence make a plea bargain without consulting the victim, or when a victim is refused the opportunity to make a statement before a sentence is given in court.

This illustrates the importance of the ombudsman to become a parliamentary officer answerable to the Parliament of Canada, because an ombudsman is a person with authority to conduct thorough, impartial, independent investigations and make recommendations to government organizations with respect to the difficulties and problems experienced in the case of victims.

● (1750)

Normally, an ombudsman will investigate in response to citizen complaints, but he or she can also investigate on his or her own initiative. In most cases, an ombudsman is appointed by Parliament and can issue reports and recommendations to government officials and ultimately to Parliament itself.

The same protections are offered to criminals through the correctional investigator as the ombudsman for federal offenders. If criminals are protected by their own autonomous ombudsman, it is only fitting and reasonable that victims of crime should be afforded the same rights. By the same token, it is only equitable to ensure that the ombudsman for victims of crime is equivalent to that of the

position of the correctional investigator for offenders. This is in line with the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights mandate: information, protection, participation, and restitution for victims. Victims must be strongly and independently represented. This is a fundamental right that criminals have had since 1971.

At present, the federal ombudsman for victims of crime must table its annual report to the Department of Justice, meaning that if a recommendation and/or criticism is mentioned in the report that is not favourable to the Department of Justice, the minister could remove it. Such a possibility is not acceptable. It could have the effect of challenging the faith that victims of crime should have in our overall justice system. The ability to monitor, to make recommendations or necessary criticism is imperative.

I would like to highlight some of the more high profile submissions and the importance of this work.

The ombudsman submitted to the pre-inquiry design process in order to facilitate a national design process for the current national inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women. The ombudsman also made recommendations for Bill C-26, which sought to make a number of changes to the Criminal Code and other legislation to address some issues related to sexual offences against children, including creating a new national public database containing information on high risk child sex offenders. The ombudsman has also made valuable contributions to the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. I remember how important this was to my colleague, Peter MacKay, and the leadership he showed on this. These are just to name a number of them.

Ultimately, the mandate of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime is to inform, consider, protect, and support victims. It is the obligation of parliamentarians to ensure that Canadians who are victims of crime can continue rely on their elected members of Parliament to ensure that they are adequately informed, that their needs are taken into consideration, that they are fully protected as citizens of Canada, and that they are fully supported by the federal government by the respective departments they represent. The only way to ensure that Canadians are fully and impartially represented is to put the ombudsman for victims of crime at arm's length from the Department of Justice.

I respectfully ask my colleagues in the House do the right thing by all Canadians and support the hon member from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix's bill to ensure victims are effectively and independently represented. Together, we will ensure that victims of crime in Canada will continue to be informed, considered, protected, and supported.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I would like to commend the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix and Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu for their efforts. They worked extremely hard on this bill to stand up for victims across Canada.

Today, we are talking about the importance of Bill C-343, which seeks to amend the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights in order to make the ombudsman for victims of crime independent from the Department of Justice. This bill would also create an ombudsman's office that is independent of the department, which is very important.

It is 2017, and in the interest of fairness, it is high time that victims enjoyed all the same rights as criminals. I said "the same", but I really think that victims should have more rights than criminals.

This bill sets party politics aside and puts the well-being of victims and their families first. To begin with, understanding the importance of the ombudsman's role is crucial. The ombudsman plays a vital role because he or she represents victims of crime when their rights are violated. Furthermore, trials and investigations can be very painful for victims and their loved ones, which can slow down the healing or grieving process. It is therefore not surprising that many families and victims decide not to proceed at some point in the process. Clearly, the ombudsman's office is an extremely important resource.

However, given that it currently falls under the Department of Justice and is not an independent office, it could be abolished at any time. In fact, it is the only ombudsman's office that is not independent of a department.

The ombudsman for federal offenders is independent, but the one for victims is not. What this basically means is that, at present, criminals have more rights than victims. Bill C-343 will give the ombudsman for victims of crime the importance that that office should have in our society.

The creation of the office of the ombudsman for victims of crime would make the ombudsman an officer of Parliament just like some of the most important players in our democratic society, such as the Auditor General and the parliamentary budget officer. These officers are accountable to Parliament and not to a minister governed by the leader of a political party and his or her agenda.

Thanks to this new status, the ombudsman would have the power to compel the government to be accountable for the welfare of the victims, who would be able to trust this office when they file a complaint against the government, which includes the Department of Justice. The victims will be guaranteed to be invited to the Parole Board of Canada when it deals with their case. They will be guaranteed to be consulted when the defence and the crown negotiate a plea bargain, and they will be able to make a statement before the sentence is handed down.

This bill will also ensure the continuity of the position. In other words, it cannot be abolished. The ombudsman position is currently nothing more than a program that can be abolished as quickly as the Liberals raise taxes.

Being under the Department of Justice limits what the office of the ombudsman can do. For example, when the ombudsman wants to conduct an investigation, he cannot see it through. His status simply prevents him from doing so.

In the event that a victim files a complaint against the Department of Justice, the ombudsman would have to investigate the very hand

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that feeds him. The confidence of victims and Canadians is crucial to the legitimacy of the judicial system.

At present, can we blame victims for losing confidence in our system when their rights are violated and they have no recourse? Can we blame them for feeling betrayed and abandoned by us, the decision-makers?

I want to point out that this bill would make the position of ombudsman equal to the position of correctional investigator, which operates at arm's length from the Department of Justice. That is another important federal agency for criminals, who enjoy more powers and rights to defend themselves than the victims of crime, who currently only have a simple program to protect themselves.

How is that fair?

• (1800)

Victims of crime should enjoy the fundamental right to have strong and independent representation, just as criminals have had for several years. Giving victims the opportunity to access the services of an office that would defend their interests without running the risk of a conflict of interest is a matter of equal rights and fairness between victims and criminals. In addition to expanding investigative opportunities, the office of the ombudsman could also do a better job of advocating for the rights of victims of crime under the four pillars of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights: the right to information, the right to protection, the right to participation, and the right to restitution.

To clarify this for my colleagues in the other parties, having an ombudsman who is not independent is like having a union representative who is his own boss. That arrangement would make no sense. Because of the indispensable role the ombudsman plays, it would be perfectly appropriate to make the position independent of the department. This is not meant to discredit the ombudsman, but rather to empower the ombudsman to help more victims. The ombudsman will have the power to investigate various departments and the independence this position requires in order to properly defend and apply the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Victims of crime should be the focus of the justice system in Canada, not criminals. This bill is one more step in the right direction. If more of my colleagues introduced bills like the one put forward by the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, Canada's justice system would have the absolute confidence of all Canadians.

This bill is just as important as the one that was introduced by my former colleague, the Hon. Rona Ambrose. Her bill changed the way we treat victims of sexual assault by ensuring that judges have the proper training to respond to victims' unique needs. I need hardly remind members that that bill was unanimously passed by the House of Commons during the previous session. Even the Liberals recognized that victims of crime need help and recognition, not partisan games.

Imagine how much easier it would be for victims to report their assailant knowing that justice would be served. Imagine a father who lost his daughter or a mother who lost her son. They would know that the person who murdered their child would pay for what he did.

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I am hearing a lot of noise coming from across the way. I think that is shameful when we are talking about such an important issue.

This bill is not partisan in any way. The well-being of victims and their loved ones must be the priority of every elected official, even those who are talking while I am giving my speech. Finally, Bill C-343 is more than just a simple bill. It is a matter of principle and respect for victims and their families. It seeks to provide them with the support they so desperately need.

In closing, I invite all members of the House to show their support for victims of crime by voting in favour of Bill C-343. I would like to thank the bill's sponsor and Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu for all the work they do to support victims and their loved ones in their fight for justice.

● (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak in support of Bill C-343 introduced by the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. This is a good bill. It is a common-sense bill. It will go a long way toward strengthening the role of the victims' ombudsman so that the victims' ombudsman can better fulfill her mandate of promoting, advancing, and protecting the rights and interests of victims of crime.

Just by way of background, the victims' ombudsman was established about 10 years ago by the previous Conservative government. It was established through the government's national victims strategy.

The purpose of the national victims strategy was to give victims of crime a voice at the table. As part of that strategy, the ombudsman was established to provide an important link between victims and government. Among the responsibilities of the victims' ombudsman include assisting victims to access programs and services, promoting awareness around the needs and issues of victims, and dealing with certain complaints brought forward by victims.

Over the last 10 years, the position of the victims' ombudsman has evolved. It has changed and part of that has to do with the passage of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, which our previous Conservative government brought into law, which statutorily enshrines rights of victims, rights that include the right to information, promotion, protection, and restitution.

I would submit that with the passage of the Victims Bill of Rights, the role and the importance of the victims' ombudsman is all that much more important. Consistent with that, bill C-343 would do much to help strengthen the victims' ombudsman to protect and defend the interest of victims.

Bill C-343 would make the ombudsman truly independent. It is true that the ombudsman does operate on an arm's-length basis but the fact remains that the ombudsman is housed within the Department of Justice. The ombudsman reports directly to the Minister of Justice. Bill C-343 would change that by moving the victims' ombudsman out of the ministry of justice. Instead of reporting directly to the Minister of Justice, the ombudsman would report directly to Parliament.

Having the victims' ombudsman report to Parliament rather than the minister would do a lot to help the ombudsman better carry out his or her mandate. After all, policy recommendations or a report of the ombudsman might concern matters that pertain directly to the minister or the Department of Justice. Moving the ombudsman out of the minister's office and out of the department to have it independently housed, to have the ombudsman completely independent, makes sense from that standpoint.

Additionally, Bill C-343 would make the victims' ombudsman permanent. Right now, the victims' ombudsman is a program of the Department of Justice and as a result, the ombudsman could be cancelled at any time by the government.

● (1810)

Bill C-343 would change that by statutorily establishing a victims ombudsman. I believe it would complement the first part of the bill, as it would make the ombudsman independent and help to ensure that he or she could carry out their work without interference, or the perception of interference, not to mention the possibility that the government in an instant could shut the ombudsman down simply because it perhaps did not like a report or recommendation by the ombudsman.

In addition to making the ombudsman independent and permanent, Bill C-343 would give the ombudsman some additional tools, including investigative powers. That is consistent and important in light of the passage of the Victims' Bill of Rights and would help the ombudsman ensure that the rights of victims, including those that are statutorily enshrined, are respected.

In short, Bill C-343 is a good bill. I know there have been some issues brought forward by the Liberals. However, I would submit that the concept of independence and permanence make sense. At the very least, the bill merits going to committee for further study and review.

The establishment of the victims ombudsman was due, in part, to the recognition by the previous government, unlike the Liberal government, that our criminal justice system has often placed criminals and their rights ahead of the rights of victims. For too long, victims have been ignored and not given a voice.

The Conservative government not only created the position of the ombudsman, but took many meaningful steps to give victims a voice in Canada's criminal justice system to ensure that their interests were addressed and that there was a place for them to go. While there was a tremendous amount of work done with many successes over nine and a half years, there remains a lot of work to be done to give victims a voice and to restore the place of the victim in Canada's criminal justice system.

I believe that Bill C-343 is a step in that direction. On that basis, I urge the House to pass Bill C-343 so it can go to committee for further study and review.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix for her right of reply.

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Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Senator Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu as well as my assistants, because without them, I never would have been able to introduce my bill, one that I think is so important. I also want to thank my colleagues who support Bill C-343.

As I recall, the position of federal ombudsman for victims of crime was created in 2007. It was demanded by victims of crime for victims of crime. Since 2007, under the previous Conservative government, the rights of victims of crime have evolved considerably, but a lot of work remains to be done. For two years now, we have been waiting for this government to take up the torch on helping victims. To support the government's future efforts, I am proud to have introduced my first private member's bill, Bill C-343.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would like to be able to speak without being interrupted by the members opposite, Mr. Speaker. If they are not interested, I would ask them to leave the chamber.

We all know that it is unusual and unacceptable that the rights of victims of crime in Canada are still not systematically recognized, or recognized nearly to the same degree as the rights of criminals.

Victims of crime were very important to former Prime Minister Harper and nearly a decade ago he worked very hard to assert their rights. Recognizing victims' rights has become synonymous with wanting to give victims of crime a voice and rights that are on par with the rights of criminals. In the course of trying to gain this recognition, a number of things have been considered, including the creation of a federal ombudsman for victims of crime, a sort of counterpart to the federal ombudsman for criminals.

From day one, the ombudsman for victims has always reported to the Department of Justice. He is therefore not independent, unlike the ombudsman for criminals. He is tied to a Department of Justice program that can be abolished at any time. The powers of the ombudsman for victims of crime are limited, unlike those of the ombudsman for criminals, including the power to investigate when complaints are lodged by victims, especially complaints against the Department of Justice, to which the ombudsman reports directly.

The National Office for Victims, which is part of the public safety portfolio, the Correctional Service of Canada, the Parole Board of Canada, and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada review victims' complaints and work with them in order to formulate recommendations on how to remedy any infringement or denial of their rights.

If a victim of crime disagrees with a response received from the Department of Justice, he or she can go to the ombudsman for victims of crime. However, since the ombudsman is not independent from the department it is supposed to criticize and monitor, its powers are more limited. It could end up in a conflict of interest, to the detriment of the victims themselves.

The ombudsman could suggest an apology to the victim or a new review of the victim's request, but it would be a highly delicate matter to contradict a decision made by the department under which

it operates and side with a dissatisfied victim demanding a new review of their complaint.

The main goal of Bill C-343 is to make the position of ombudsman for victims of crime equal to the position of correctional investigator, which is independent of the Department of Justice and can operate freely, unlike the ombudsman for victims of crime.

If the ombudsman makes a recommendation or criticism that is unfavourable to the Department of Justice, the department can remove it from the report at any time and thereby directly circumvent one of the chief purposes of the ombudsman for victims of crime, which is to be a voice for the victims and represent their rights and interests.

● (1815)

Victims of crime are asking for a voice and for fair and equitable representation before the Department of Justice. This is indispensable especially since the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights was passed because it expands the responsibilities of the ombudsman, who is the guardian of victims' fundamental rights. I sincerely hope that everyone in the House will be strong and stand up to protect victims of crime.

● (1820)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 1, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

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[English]

PARKS CANADA

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the mid-1970s when I was an RCMP officer, I was stationed in Fort St. James and saw the outbreak of the pine beetle in one of the provincial parks in British Columbia. I remember that some of the people I knew said to forestry personnel that we should burn that portion of the park to destroy the pine beetle before it spread.

Because it was a park, that was not allowed and over the 35 years that I lived and worked in British Columbia, I watched the pine beetle spread right across that province, destroying close to 16 million hectares of B.C. forests. The pine beetle is an epidemic. I then watched this summer as B.C. burnt up because of the dead forests caused by the pine beetle. It was sad to see a place where I spent so many years of my life and worked from one corner to the other burn up.

Now, over the last three years since I was in government, I have watched the pine beetle move from British Columbia into Jasper National Park. I was very concerned when I heard they were in the park, and I watched them defile Mount Robson. Within a year they slowly moved toward the town site of Jasper. Within the next year I saw them move past the town site toward the eastern entrance of the park. I have brought this to the attention of a number of different officials within the current government, and when we were in government.

Jasper Park has turned brown from one end to the other. The trees are dead or dying. The people who work in Jasper Park, lodge owners, and townspeople fear for the safety of their community because of the dead pine trees all around the town of Jasper. There are roads that are maybe 25 feet wide with high and dead pine trees near some of the lodges. If a fire started, people would not be able to get out of there.

For two years I have called on the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to develop an action plan to stop the spread of pine beetles in the park. We are still waiting for a response.

We saw in the last couple of years the pine beetle moving from Jasper Park into the forest sector of Alberta's foothills, and it is spreading. We have been keeping them under control. The forestry companies and the Province of Alberta's forestry department have been working feverishly, culling the trees infested by the pine beetle. However, the pine beetles are rampant. We treated about 40,000 trees last year and this year there are over 540,000 trees with pine beetles, and they are spreading rapidly.

Last Friday, I brought this issue up for the fourth time in two years in question period. That does not include the other times I have brought it up in debates both here and while I was a member of the environment committee. I have also written letters to the Minister of Environment. In May 2016, the parliamentary secretary said he would be willing to sit down with me to discuss this issue. That has never happened.

In June this year, the minister said in the House that she looked forward to discussing it further, but I have continued to repeatedly bring up the pine beetle issue because there has been no talk and no

action. Our environment is at stake and tens of thousands of jobs are at risk.

• (1825)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Yellowhead for bringing this very serious situation back to the floor of the House of Commons tonight.

What he has just described is indeed troubling and a powerful reminder of the terrible damage insect species can inflict on Canada's forest, and in turn the companies, employees, and communities that depend on the forest sector. That includes the more than 16,000 Albertans who work in the province's forest industry.

The reality is that Canada, with its extensive forests, is particularly vulnerable to pests, such as the pine beetle, and the risks have only intensified with climate change, allowing them to spread further and wider, ravaging everything in their path. We are acutely aware that the pine beetle is posing a serious threat to Alberta's pine forests, as well as Canada's boreal forest.

The good news, if there is any good news in this, is that the Canadian Forest Service, which employs Canada's largest team of scientists to counter this menace, is on the ground in the member riding to do everything possible to deal with the situation.

The CFS is a recognized centre of excellence on pests and invests \$20 million annually to develop scientific solutions that help forest managers and communities respond to damaging pests by slowing their spread, mitigating their impact, and reducing the risk of infestation in areas not yet affected.

For the mountain pine beetle specifically, this science has helped assess the economic and environmental risks, particularly under a changing climate, and developed adaptive options for affected communities and industries. Its work has also assisted in maximizing value from beetle-killed timber, as well as developing new technologies and products.

As well, the CFS is convening the national response in close collaboration with its provincial counterparts, and working with its Parks Canada colleagues to monitor both beetle expansion and other forest-health related risks in the national Rocky Mountain Parks.

Finally, forest companies are doing their part, too, reaching out to the Canadian Forest Service with greater frequency to better understand the risks that insect species represent to their operations and investments. Yellowhead is a good example where industry, provincial government agencies, Parks Canada, and the Canadian Forest Service are working under the strategic direction council.

This means developing and implementing co-operative management strategies informed by science to mitigate the infestation and spread of mountain pine beetle at the regional level. That is just one example of the collaboration taking place.

Adjournment Proceedings

Together, we are doing everything we can to protect the economic value of the provincial forest and achieving the ecological integrity objectives of national and provincial parks, and protected areas.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, companies like Weyerhaeuser, Millar Western, and West Fraser, which are lumber companies in my riding, spent millions of dollars trying to combat the pine beetle as it slowly crept in from the park.

We tried to work with the park for the last two years. We have had meetings. I have held meetings and round table discussions. We had park officials, CFS officials, as well as representatives of Alberta forestry attend. Parks Canada continually told us it was going to try to cull the trees and do some burns within Jasper National Park. I was just there a few weeks ago and nothing had been done yet.

We need help. The province of Alberta cannot do this on its own. We cannot be on the ground, doing science. Now is the time to combat the influx of the bugs. We have to get rid of them, either by burning or cutting the trees. The province of Alberta does not have the money. The forest companies are strapped, financially—

• (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat that our government is seized with the challenge of protecting Canada's forests from harmful native and invasive species, not just in Alberta but, indeed, across the country. Alberta is not alone. Canada is there and industry is there.

The Canadian Forest Service's team of scientists has demonstrated, time and again, that it has the experience and expertise to develop innovative solutions for these infestations, and it continues to do so in Alberta.

Our government is proud of the efforts, and I know the member opposite appreciates it, too. Together, we will meet this challenge and protect a way of life that has helped to shape our country.

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. We are elected to fix problems, not create them. Unfortunately, that is exactly what the Liberal government is doing. I am here this evening because I asked a question on Monday, I asked the Prime Minister the question again on Wednesday, and I still do not have an answer.

In my riding, a young 34-year-old woman has had type 1 diabetes for more than 20 years. She has a glucose monitor and of course she lives with this health problem 24 hours a day. This does not prevent her, however, from having an active life, running a day care, and helping the people in our community in Sainte-Justine, in Les Etchemins.

For many years, she has received some government assistance through the disability tax credit. It is not a huge amount, but it does help. She can also save some money with her registered disability savings plan. She is going to need it because she needs special care.

This year, when she filed her income taxes she was asked to provide more information. She had a form filled out by her doctor and that form was sent to the Canada Revenue Agency. To her great surprise, her application was rejected. She is not only losing her disability tax credit, but her registered disability savings plan is also in jeopardy. Her doctor is well aware of her problem and ticked off all the right boxes.

The problem is that it is not just my constituent from Sainte-Justine who is going through this. Thousands of diabetics across Canada are having to deal with this situation. They are being denied a tax credit and that is compromising their registered disability savings plan. I am asking the government to fix this. There is no need to hire public servants. Just make it so that a doctor can acknowledge that a person is diabetic, the way it has always been done.

The shocking thing is that the government is going after people with chronic health problems while we are witnessing the worst conflict of interest in my 12 years of political life. The Minister of Finance failed to disclose to the Ethics Commissioner the fact that he had a villa in France and the fact that he did not put his shares in his own company into a blind trust.

It is really sad to see the government lecturing Canadians with chronic health problems while the person responsible for managing billions of dollars in public money could not care less about ethics rules. He hides the fact that he owns a villa in France from the Ethics Commissioner and sets up a numbered company in Ontario. In fact, it is not in Ontario; to pay even less in taxes, he sets it up in Alberta. This only adds insult to injury for this woman from Sainte-Justine who is working hard just to make ends meet. She has three children, she runs a day care, and her husband works. These are hard-working people. However, she just got her knuckles rapped; her annual budget is compromised, as is the money she has set aside. What is most shocking is that the Minister of Finance is taking another \$840 out of her pockets in taxes. It is appalling.

I am calling on the parliamentary secretary to intervene and fix this situation. This woman from Sainte-Justine needs her tax credit and is going to need her registered disability savings plan.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to clarify the information shared recently in the House of Commons on this very sensitive issue. Our government is committed to ensuring that all Canadians receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. Let me assure Canadians with diabetes and their families that there has been no change to the eligibility criteria for the disability tax credit related to diabetes.

Adjournment Proceedings

As a nurse, I know personally the difficulties that face many Canadians who suffer from type 1 diabetes. While we have seen the research on this disease come a long way, there remains so much more to be done. Our government, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, supports diabetes research to improve primary prevention, develop effective treatments, and ultimately cure all types of diabetes. That is why our government invested over \$41 million in diabetes research.

CIHR also funds a considerable amount of research in areas that impact on diabetes prevention and management of complications of diabetes such as obesity, kidney disease, and cardiovascular disease. As an example, in March 2016, the former minister of health announced five new SPOR chronic disease networks—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, grants are all well and good, but they do not solve the problem faced by my diabetic constituent in Sainte-Justine.

I appeal to the experience of the parliamentary secretary, who is a nurse herself. This constituent has type 1 diabetes, she wears an insulin pump, she is diabetic 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. What is the government waiting for? When is it going to fix this situation and stop throwing up roadblocks?

She already has her hands full managing her health problems. She does not need to deal with bureaucratic nonsense. She is diabetic. She needs to be given access to her disability tax credit and registered disability savings plan.

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, let me be absolutely clear that there has been no change to the eligibility criteria for the disability tax credit related to diabetes. Diabetes affects the lives of many Canadians. That is why our government is taking concrete steps on multiple fronts to assist Canadians suffering from it.

To again clarify, unlike the previous government, we are actually investing in diabetes research. We have simplified the DTC application forms. We are hiring nurses to assess disability tax credit applications. We have asked the CRA to improve its data collection process in order to better understand the agency's DTC decision-making process.

Canadians can be assured that, unlike the previous government, we will continue to work to make the disability tax credit even more accessible for Canadians who rely on it.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 18, I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport the following question. It was about a technical briefing, where she had said that 100% of B.C. first nations supported the tanker ban. I said that she neglected to mention the very many who count on energy as an opportunity for their future. This is a government that committed to free, prior, and informed consent. This is hardly an example of getting that free, prior, and informed consent. I asked if the minister was prepared to table in this

House a list of the coastal nations that supported the tanker ban and on what date.

We were trying to get at something very specific, and the response of course was very unsatisfactory. We truly are no clearer today in knowing who the Liberals consulted with. However, we do know that there were aboriginal chiefs from northern British Columbia who challenged the Prime Minister on his, “ill-conceived” moratorium on oil tanker traffic off the northern section of Canada's west coast.

According to the *Financial Post* of May 15, 2017, the Woodland Cree Chief Isaac Laboucan-Avirom stated, “I think it's for the betterment of the country that we do challenge it....The decision to do that impairs not only the people on the coast but it impairs the diverse Canadian economy.” He added that there was, “absolutely a lack of consultation.”

In the same article, the Eagle Spirit's Chief's Gathering denounced Ottawa's moratorium as “ill-conceived” and “inappropriate.” I will quote from it again. It states, “As Indigenous peoples, we want to preserve the right to determine the types of activities that take place in our territories and do not accept that the federal government should tell us how to preserve, protect and work within our traditional territories”. The group is considering its legal options. It says, “Once again the federal government is not respecting nation-to-nation dialogue and consultation and is forging ahead on proposals without the consent of many Indigenous communities.”

What may surprise the minister is that there are first nations that support economic development. Once again, the Liberals talk all the time about the importance of consultation, about a nation-to-nation relationship, but it appears that is only when it is convenient for them, and it does not go more broadly to all of the issues that are important to first nations. Therefore, what we see are arbitrary decisions being made by the current government when it does not feel that it wants to consult.

I think we can look at this as another example, that being the northern gateway pipeline project. The Liberals arbitrarily overturned a legal decision from the National Energy Board, and again failed to consult first nations. In fact, 31 first nations, which were equity partners in the northern gateway pipeline, were profoundly disappointed with the government's decision. They stood to benefit from more than \$2 billion directly from the project. For them, it was a lost opportunity for jobs, education, and long-term benefits for band members, especially for their youth.

I want to quote from a statement by the Aboriginal Equity Partners stewards, who clearly expressed their shock. It states, “that the Federal Government had no intention of pursuing any further consultation and dialogue with our communities on the important issue of the Northern Gateway Project.” It went on to say, “We are also deeply disappointed that a Prime Minister who campaigned on a promise of reconciliation with Indigenous communities would... blatantly choose” to ignore it.

The response to that question was that the Liberals indeed consulted widely and supported—

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1840)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, formalizing an oil tanker moratorium on British Columbia's north coast is an extremely important commitment by our government. Once passed by Parliament, the moratorium would provide an unprecedented level of protection for northern B.C.'s coastline around Dixon Entrance, Hecate Strait, and Queen Charlotte Sound.

The area covered by the moratorium includes coastal temperate rainforest, a unique and sacred area for coastal indigenous groups. The proposed moratorium would protect the coastline by prohibiting oil tankers carrying more than 12,500 metric tons of crude oil or persistent oil as cargo from stopping or from loading or unloading these oils at ports or marine installations within this area.

Our government consulted extensively on how to formalize a moratorium and improve marine safety. Since January 2016, we have held 75 engagement sessions. Our government engaged directly with groups along the north and central coast of B.C. that would be affected by the moratorium or had expressed an interest in discussing it. We held several meetings with indigenous groups and received numerous letters on this issue.

We also consulted with provincial and territorial governments, the marine and resource industries, environmental groups, and communities. Further, an online portal was available for Canadians to provide input and share their views on the moratorium and on improving marine safety.

We heard diverse perspectives from the groups, and even within groups, on the oil tanker moratorium. The parameters of the proposed legislation were very much informed by the feedback we received during these consultations.

The oil tanker moratorium is another action our government is taking to protect our coasts and waterways. It will provide important environmental protection for British Columbia's north coast, something people have sought for decades.

As we move forward to implement measures under the \$1.5 billion oceans protection plan, we will continue to engage and work

closely with indigenous peoples and stakeholders across the country to advance measures to enhance marine safety, protect the environment and communities, and support economic development.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, clearly, what they have done is a two-part process as they attempt to shut down the oil sands. They are not listening to the many indigenous communities that would benefit greatly from the development of these resources, including pipelines and the ability to transport oil safely from the coast in British Columbia.

It is ironic that the government continues to allow oil to come into Canada, and down the St. Lawrence, from countries such as Venezuela and Saudi Arabia but fails to consult with indigenous people, who have every right to have their voices heard and respected and every right to enjoy the opportunities that development of our natural resources in a safe and effective manner would provide for them. To be frank, it is shameful.

• (1845)

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, as mandated by the Prime Minister, formalizing an oil tanker moratorium on British Columbia's north coast is a priority for our government. That is why the Minister of Transport and his officials held engagement sessions from coast to coast to ensure that people's voices were heard on improving marine safety and formalizing a moratorium. Furthermore, the minister received numerous letters from indigenous groups, industry stakeholders, environmental groups, and individuals expressing diverse views. These perspectives were considered by our government and helped shape the parameters of the oil tanker moratorium.

We have heard that people expect our government to strengthen the economy while protecting our environment. The proposed legislation demonstrates that a clean environment and a strong economy can go hand in hand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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