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(HANSARD)

Thursday, December 7, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 7, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled “Certificate of Nomination of Nancy Bélanger to the Position of Commissioner of Lobbying”.

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PETITIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be back. I presented a number of petitions on this subject with respect to firearms reclassification. My constituents are concerned that firearms reclassification decisions can be made arbitrarily, and can create a situation where the property of a person that is legal today could become illegal tomorrow. This is not only a firearms issue but also a rule of law issue.

My constituents call upon the House to reverse the 10-round magazine reclassification enforced by the RCMP, and to remove the power of the RCMP to arbitrarily make classification decisions on firearms.

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 ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed from October 24 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, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague, the member for Winnipeg North.

Before I begin, if this is the last occasion that I rise in this House to speak this year, I would like to wish all of my colleagues a wonderful and merry Christmas, and all the best for the new year.

During earlier debates on this bill, a number of members spoke to the importance of Canada's regional development agencies. They expressed concern about the impact on the regional development agencies of the proposed removal from the Salaries Act of the ministerial positions associated with them, and I rise to speak to this point today.

Bill C-24 would not dissolve the regional development agencies, or RDAs. They would continue to exist as separate organizations, and would not be consolidated. They would remain a strong, local presence in the regions they serve, and nothing in this bill would change that. The regional development agencies are essential delivery partners in the government's plan to foster economic growth. They will continue to work with communities and economic development organizations to promote local growth.

In this 100th year of Confederation, it is worth reflecting upon what has made Canada the modern, prosperous nation it is today. Canada is a nation of strong people and big thinkers. Our identity is shaped by our heritage and our geography. The Government of Canada recognizes that each region of our country has unique strengths. We also recognize that innovation does not just happen in the big cities, but in every region of the country.

Government Orders

Where innovation happens matters, because that is where the best jobs are located. Innovation happens right across our country in communities from coast to coast to coast. This is why Canada's regional development agencies are central to the government's plan to create well-paying, quality jobs. It is why, under this government, one minister, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, would be the responsible minister for all of the regional development agencies.

This change would be a positive for the regions, be it in eastern Canada, the north, or in western Canada. It would not diminish in any way the regional focus and local presence, but it would enhance the agencies' ability to work together, to share best practices with each other, and to learn from one another's experiences. When all regional development organizations are able to work together in the same portfolio and under the same minister, it facilitates knowledge sharing and best practices. Regional and national expertise would be working together for the benefit of all Canadians.

Together, the regional development agencies would have a national footprint, with offices in every region of Canada. This regional presence enables them to connect companies, communities, and Canadians with each other, and with the programs and services they need to grow their businesses, attract global investments to their communities, and, yes, create jobs.

The regional development agencies serve as a focal point of contact for outreach and engagement to better understand the needs of Canadians and the challenges they face. With our strong regional presence and well-developed local relationships with stakeholders and communities and other levels of government, regional development agencies strengthen the government's ability to support innovative, inclusive growth in every part of this great country.

The government supports the regional development agencies. We are investing over \$1 billion each year for the regional development agencies in support of community and business growth in every part of Canada, supporting an innovative, clean, and inclusive economy. For example, the regional development agencies are key partners in delivering the accelerated growth service, which brings together key supports, including advisory services, financing, and export support to help propel entrepreneurs to success across Canada.

The regional development agencies are also taking action to boost the growth of Canada's clean tech sector and increase financing support for promising clean technology firms. Starting in 2016-17, the regional development agencies doubled their combined investments in clean tech projects to \$100 million a year. This presents entrepreneurs and innovators in every part of the country with an immense opportunity to showcase their ingenuity while encouraging sustainable prosperity for all.

It is this kind of strategic alignment that could be accomplished by having a whole-of-government approach to regional development agencies, working together to strengthen our country as one country while preserving the diversity of our regions. This is what our government is doing for the benefit of all Canadians.

Regional development agencies also deliver programs and initiatives tailored to specific parts of Canada that have their own unique identities. In eastern Canada, the Atlantic Canada Opportu-

nities Agency, or ACOA, is a lead economic development organization with flexible programs and an on-the-ground presence. ACOA is well positioned to help grow the economy, foster innovation, and assist in the creation of new jobs, new technologies, and new export opportunities. ACOA has built a strong network of collaborators, including other levels of government, business, academia, and community leaders across the region.

• (1010)

The Atlantic growth strategy has been implemented to improve business development, advance workforce skills, and increase collaboration among both levels of government to help create a stronger Atlantic Canada economy, something we can all be proud of.

The strength of Canada Economic Development for the Regions of Quebec, CEDQ, lies in its community presence through a network of 12 regional offices that work directly with community stakeholders. This allows CEDQ to understand local needs and issues, to provide timely and adapted solutions to these socio-economic realities, and to align programs and actions with the government priorities and the innovation and skills plan.

In southern Ontario, FedDev Ontario's core programs support the productivity, export capacity, and scale-up of firms, and help accelerate the commercialization of new ideas and innovations. FedDev Ontario contributes to building public-private partnerships and supports communities seeking to diversify their local economies.

In northern Ontario, FedNor's flagship northern Ontario development program focuses on delivering Government of Canada priorities to communities, businesses, and first nations in the less populated but very beautiful northern portion of Canada's largest province.

The government's prosperity and growth strategy for northern Ontario will focus on ways to build on northern Ontario's unique strengths and competitive advantages in such sectors as mining, resources, and agriculture, among other sectors.

In western Canada, Western Economic Diversification, WED, invests in programs that help build on western Canada's strengths. WED's on-the-ground presence in the west supports the western Canadian innovation ecosystem through strong relationships with regional stakeholders, the provincial government, and other federal organizations.

WED is helping to strengthen innovation networks and clusters by supporting innovators to develop the next great technologies, products, and services; creating better jobs for the middle class by assisting western Canadians to obtain the industry-relevant certification and skills they need to compete in today's global and highly competitive economy; and generating more trade and foreign investment opportunities by providing entrepreneurs with the tools needed to grow their companies into globally competitive successes.

Government Orders

The Government of Canada is committed to building a sustainable, diversified, and dynamic economy in Canada's North. The investments of Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, or CanNor, help create jobs, support community economic development, and bring real and tangible benefits to northerners.

CanNor plays a key role in the north's inclusion through its relationships with indigenous organizations and businesses. It creates opportunities for small and medium enterprises, which are the backbone of the Canadian economy, by investing in renewable energy and clean technologies, supporting the growth of northern businesses, and partnering with indigenous groups and companies.

These are examples of the work regional development agencies do every day on the ground on behalf of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast in communities large and small. The regional development agencies will continue to do this important work and fulfill their mandate. The voices of the regions will continue to be heard. The work being done in the regions will remain in the regions. What they do is essential. That is how and where economic development takes place.

They will continue to help Canadians start and grow globally competitive companies, and they will help those companies turn their research and innovation into business opportunities.

They will continue to promote regional advantages to attract global companies, and under one minister they will work together to better coordinate government-led programs for entrepreneurs and innovators.

While each regional development agency meets the needs of local and regional populations differently, together they are the story of Canada, be it on the east coast and the Atlantic provinces, on the west coast, in the north, or in southern or eastern Ontario. Together they are the story of Canada, of innovation and dedication, and a celebration of what makes our country unique.

• (1015)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks. He mentioned southwestern Ontario, and that is the region of my riding of Chatham-Kent—Leamington.

I remember when the Conservatives were in power there were quite a number of announcements in that regard in southwestern Ontario and throughout the country. I do not want to catch my colleague off-guard, and I do not expect him to know the answers, but I wonder if he would commit to supplying me with information on some of the money and some of the grants that were provided to my region as well as some of the agencies. I am not hearing any announcements anymore. My riding is not getting the grants that it received in the past.

I wonder if the member would commit to supplying me with the amount of money that has gone into southwestern Ontario.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I am certain a list of those grants that have been announced are available for every region in Canada. We continue to look at where each grant is going, ensuring that all grant applications that fit the needs of the area, the employers and employees are looked at by all RDAs across Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about the importance of economic development.

Certainly all three levels of government—municipal, provincial, and federal—have a role to play in promoting economic development in our regions. However, our country is large, and our regions differ significantly. I cannot believe the government has the gall to introduce a bill that eliminates the possibility of appointing a minister responsible for development of a particular region that has its own unique issues.

If economic development is such a priority for the government, how can it put a minister from Ontario in charge of economic development for all the other regions?

Does my colleague not think the minister responsible for economic development really should have a solid understanding of a given region and its unique issues? How can a single minister be responsible for all the different regions and our country's economic development?

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, within the minister's portfolio, nothing has changed on the ground. Nothing has changed with each of the RDAs. They continue to look at each of the regions under their particular mandate, whether it is the lovely province of Quebec, or the east or west coast. Those RDAs continue to do an intake of applications and continue to look at each of them on a merit system in fulfilling their mandate.

In my wonderful riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, there was an announcement of a \$3 million repayment loan to a manufacturer that made components for commercial aircraft. That will create 60 full-time positions over the next two to three years. Those wonderful stories are being repeated across the country, from coast to coast to coast, including in the hon. member's province of Quebec.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question has more to do with why we are spending time talking about Bill C-24 when all the actions that would result from the bill were already taken two years ago.

At the same time, we have issues like taking a half a billion dollars of Canadian taxpayer money to spend on Asian infrastructure, instead of on Canadian infrastructure, on which the Liberals shut down debate. Why is the government shutting down debate on important things and spending time on these things on which actions already have been taken?

• (1020)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, Bill C-24 would allow us to continue to do our great work. It would allow the RDAs to do their great work. It brings them under one roof to support small and medium-sized enterprises across Canada.

Government Orders

With regard to the Asian infrastructure bank, Canada is a multilateral and bilateral partner with a number of organizations around the world. If we look at the specific entity we are partnering with, a number of countries, a number of our allies, be it in Europe or in the Asia Pacific region, with which we trade, invest, and create good middle-class jobs are also involved in that. We should be at the table as well.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Good morning, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to be in the House today under your watch to inform you that I intend to oppose Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, which we are discussing this morning.

This morning, we are talking about salaries. Since a little change just happened right before my eyes, I would also like to give my best to Mr. Speaker, a colleague whom I greatly admire. To confirm what I was telling your predecessor, I intend to oppose this bill, which is another example of this government's half-baked ideas. Whenever it introduces a bill, it is not necessarily trying to do something good for Canadians; it is just trying to make itself look good.

Let me provide some background for people listening this morning, and remind the House that this Liberal government really dazzled everyone when it was first elected. It was all about sunny ways. This government really cares about its image. We were told to look at the beautiful cabinet photo, since cabinet has the same number of men and women. It was quite beautiful, right? Everyone had to admit that it really was a nice photo.

Now that the holiday season is upon us, it is time to send pictures and Christmas cards. We had a photo of the entire cabinet, which, we were told, had achieved gender parity. However, it was a pretty loose definition of parity, it was all for show, and that is what I will demonstrate here this morning.

When we looked at the photo, the first thing we did was read the titles. There were indeed ministerial titles. For those listening at home, cabinet is made up of two kinds of ministers. You have the senior ministers, like the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Sometimes, when the department is really big, a second minister is appointed to look after part of the portfolio. That individual, a minister of state, does not have the full responsibility of the department. Ministers of state are accountable to the minister they are supporting.

For example, I was fortunate enough to serve as both. I was the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness, a full minister. I was responsible for five Canadian agencies, namely the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Correctional Service Canada, and the whole works.

I would have liked to have a deputy minister or a minister of state, but I did not. However, I was the minister of la Francophonie. I was deeply honoured to be given that responsibility. That was a minister of state portfolio because the minister of la Francophonie is a deputy who supports the minister of foreign affairs.

At the time I was proud that Prime Minister Harper told me that he needed me to fill the role of minister of la Francophonie. However, I was not responsible for Canadian foreign policy. I was specifically responsible for everything related to la Francophonie. Obviously, I was not responsible for the entire department. I have to say, that as minister of public safety and emergency preparedness, I had enough on my plate. I accepted that role. That being said, my salary did not change. That is what I am getting at, because we are talking about salaries this morning.

I very much respect the Minister of La Francophonie, but unfortunately, la Francophonie does not seem as important to the current government as it is to us. Hon. members will recall that it was a former Conservative government that created this entity. It is only right that a minister of la Francophonie or a minister of state not get the same salary as a full minister because they do not have the same responsibilities. There is a lot of talk about equal pay for equal work. It makes sense that if we do not have the duties of a superior, then we should get the pay of a subordinate. That is how it works in life. That is what taxpayers are entitled to expect.

● (1025)

One of the reasons I am opposed to this bill is that to maintain the illusion of parity, yet again, it is taxpayers who will foot the bill.

When journalists took a closer look at the impressive lineup of ministers in this beautiful picture, they noticed that ministers of state were included. Nothing wrong with that, but it meant that both ministers and ministers of state were counted in the calculation. They also untangled the Liberals' concept of parity and realized that many of the ministers of state were women and that in many cases, they would be reporting to a male minister. This picture of a gender-balanced cabinet, which had been announced with so much fanfare, turned out to be a picture of a plain old paternalistic cabinet, with female ministers of state reporting to male ministers.

This is no longer the postcard-perfect, sunny-ways ideal we were promised by the Liberal government, which was acting as if it had reinvented the wheel.

I have a colleague, right here next to me, whom I hold in the greatest respect. She is a former minister, having served as the minister of public works and government services. I had many occasions to work with her in my capacity as an MP, minister, and cabinet colleague, because she was responsible for procurement. She played an important role in awarding procurement contracts, and the Auditor General himself acknowledged that they had been awarded with great integrity. It is important to have genuine integrity, not just the appearance of integrity. My colleague is a woman who worked as a full minister in the Conservative government.

Not so long ago, the opposition benches were fronted by a female leader of the opposition, Rona Ambrose, who had previously served as minister of health and minister of the environment. She was a female full minister, a competent woman who received a salary corresponding to her title. She was a minister, and she was paid a minister's salary.

Government Orders

There is also my colleague, who was here in the House this week. I find it interesting that she was a minister that came from Canada's Far North. She was minister for the Arctic Council, minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency—we can get back to that ridiculous bill later—and minister of the environment. I am obviously talking about Leona Aglukkaq. I met her mother this week, and she speaks neither French nor English. She speaks an indigenous language, and I needed her daughter to interpret. Her daughter was minister of the environment and minister of health, and these were real ministerial positions.

I am talking about full ministers and not ministers of state, whom Jean Lapierre called "little ministers", as my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent reminded me. I do not want to downplay the work of ministers of state, but there are full ministers and there are ministers of state. Therefore, there is a salary for full ministers and a salary for ministers of state.

What do the Liberals want to do now? They want to combine them. Why? The government is just trying to make itself look good.

Another one of my female colleagues who is very competent and who holds the government to account is the former minister of transportation, who managed the Canada Post dispute and the labour dispute in the rail sector. I cannot name her because she is still an MP. I am referring to the excellent member for Milton. She is another woman who was a minister and was extremely competent. She had the salary of a minister because she did the work of a minister. Whether held by a man or a woman, the position has a salary.

I will now come back to the bill introduced by the Liberals. This is a remedial bill and taxpayers are going to foot the bill. The bill will let the government save face with respect to its claims of a gender-balanced cabinet. We are realizing that it is probably the most paternalistic cabinet in Canada's history.

This is an embarrassment for the Liberals. What are they doing? They realized that they were cornered. Therefore they have racked their brains and resorted to the usual tactic of picking taxpayers' pockets to solve the problem. It is not complicated.

That is what they usually do. We have seen it with families. That is another illusion. It is not funny how they boast about loving the middle class. They want to help families and are going to give them extra cash. They are just trying to pull the wool over our eyes when they say that they are cutting taxes for the middle class. We are drinking the Kool-Aid and believing that it is true, and that it is good to give the middle class big subsidies.

● (1030)

Fortunately, we live in a democracy, and we have independent organizations. The Fraser Institute is not falling for the government's line. It says eight out of 10 families are paying more tax under this government, which eliminated tax credits for education, ballet and piano lessons, sports, public transit, and more, and got rid of income splitting too. It gave with one hand and took away with the other.

That is what is happening here this morning. Cabinet is paternalistic. It is trying to save face by giving everyone the same salary. That means they will be paying ministers of state a ministerial salary. That is not okay. Assistants are not supposed to get the same

pay as the boss. That is what the Liberals are trying to do this morning, and that is what I have tried to explain.

I oppose this bill for many reasons. I hope I will have a chance to talk about this some more when it is time for questions because there are other major problems with the other subterfuge here, and taxpayers will be on the hook for that too.

[*English*]

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

Madam Speaker, there are two things that the Conservatives have really established, one being that they have an issue with the cabinet size. When Stephen Harper was prime minister, he had Canada's largest cabinet. The member, a former minister, would be familiar with that cabinet. It was a large cabinet of 40 people at a substantial cost, quite possibly.

Why does he believe that Stephen Harper needed such a large cabinet, a historic number of cabinet ministers, and why does the former minister believe that during the Harper era, it was necessary to have two-tiered cabinet that did not, for example, recognize the value of small business and tourism as a major portfolio?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Prime Minister Harper surrounded himself with competent women and men with various responsibilities specifically in order to clean up the Liberal mess from the previous decade and to balance the budget.

Future generations will be stuck with the mess left by this government, which is running up a deficit and taking more money out of taxpayers' pockets. It is even going after diabetics, as we learned yesterday, and people with autism.

Once again, it is important to put the right people in the right positions and pay them accordingly.

Why does my colleague not recognize that a minister is not the same as a minister of state, and that different jobs are worth different salaries?

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I never thought I would say this in the House, but I agree completely with my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis. I would like to hear his opinion on another aspect of this bill, which has been debated before in this House.

I am still waiting for the job descriptions of the three positions that are supposed to open up in cabinet. Any time I have ever applied for a job, there was always a job description and salary attached. When there is a perfect match, someone can be hired. The opposite seems to be the case here. Anyone who has a Liberal resumé can usually count on a job offer.

Has my colleague heard anything at all about the job descriptions for the three new positions created in Bill C-24?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for his fine words. I am pleased to know that we share the same opinion. He made a good point.

Government Orders

Three positions are being created and will incur additional expenses, but we do not know what those positions are for. However, we do know that one thing was left out of this bill and that is the regions, including Trois-Rivières, Quebec, the north shore, Ontario, northern Ontario, and British Columbia. The Liberals' centralizing vision is driving them to eliminate the regional minister position, even though it is an essential role.

Why do my friends across the way not recognize the regional disparities and diversity? They say they are the party of diversity. They keep bragging about that. Canada is a country made up of different realities, so why did they get rid of these regional minister positions? The position fell under an economic department dedicated to Quebec and was filled by a Quebecker, but the Liberals got rid of it.

The government is making less room for a Quebec minister with an economics background and less room for the regions while taking more money from taxpayers. That is the Liberal way, and that is why I am voting against this bill.

• (1035)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I heard it all from the member across the way. He says it was the Liberals who caused Stephen Harper to have the largest cabinet in the history of Canada. Do not blame him, blame the Liberals, because there was this apparent issue when Stephen Harper became prime minister because of what he inherited.

Let me remind the member what Stephen Harper inherited: a multi-billion dollar surplus. That was what he inherited, and he converted it into a multi-billion dollar deficit. The Harper government also inherited a multi-billion dollar trade surplus, and converted that into a multi-billion dollar trade deficit. The Harper government inherited an economy that was moving forward, and it took that government less than two years to get the economy almost going backwards, which then caused the Conservatives to invest in Canadians during those minority years.

Though the Harper government had the largest cabinet, I would suggest to my colleague across the way that the big difference between the Liberal cabinet and the Conservative cabinet is not only in terms of size, but also gender parity, which the member across the way does not seem to recognize as a very important issue. Many Canadians took great pride in the announcement by the Prime Minister when he introduced his cabinet to Canadians. The idea of gender parity was long overdue and was applauded by every region of our country. It was exceptionally well received.

I am disappointed. We had the NDP and the Conservatives, an unholy alliance, come together in the last year or so in opposition to good legislation. They both like to mock the announcement of this Prime Minister's cabinet. I do not know why the NDP and Conservatives do not see gender parity in cabinet as a good thing. I do not understand why both of these opposition parties believe that all cabinet ministers should not be treated equally. That is what this piece of legislation will do; it will ensure that all cabinet ministers are equal, unlike the Conservative cabinet.

What is wrong with having gender parity? The NDP often talk about it, and now they have a chance to reinforce it. When the Prime Minister made the announcement, they had a chance to recognize it as a good thing and say that for what it was. That is what Canadians, as a whole, recognized the cabinet as being. It was even recognized beyond Canada's border, making international news as a step in the right direction.

I was surprised by the criticisms being levelled. The opposition say that Stephen Harper labelled a certain spot as being for a junior, less important minister. I disagree. How can members across the way try to convince me or Canadians that small businesses, especially given the number of questions they ask about them, deserve a junior spot? We recognize small businesses for what they are, the backbone of the Canadian economy, absolutely critical to promoting ongoing job growth for Canada's middle class, as well as supporting the middle class. This is a government that has been supporting our small businesses.

• (1040)

Today, we have a minister who is constantly out there in support of our small businesses and promoting tourism. There have been tangible results. We have seen record numbers of tourists coming to Canada. In fact, in the last week, the minister responsible for tourism, the one they say is a junior spot, has been in China to promote Canada as a tourist destination. I do not know why the members across the way do not want to recognize how important tourism is to our country. Maybe they need to meet with some of the stakeholders and some of their constituents who deal with the hospitality industry to see the real value of tourism. They might not recognize it, but this government recognizes the value of our hospitality industry and the importance of tourism to our country. It creates thousands of jobs every year and employs millions of Canadians, either directly or indirectly. I see that as a very important portfolio.

We have a full minister, a minister of equal value, known as the Minister of Status of Women. Again, that is a very important ministry. Unlike the former Harper government, we have a government that is applying a gender lens to budgetary measures through the Minister of Finance. We have a number of different initiatives under way. The Minister of Status of Women has and should have an equal voice at the cabinet table, but not according to the New Democrats and Conservatives. The New Democrats and the Conservatives join together and say no, that should not be the case, that it is a junior ministerial position. I suggest that Canadians would say that the New Democrats and the Conservatives are wrong, that the Status of Women as a ministry should be equal to the Ministry of Finance.

Government Orders

We then hear, “Well, they have different responsibilities”. Of course they have different responsibilities. Each minister has different responsibilities, but they all sit around the cabinet table and that cabinet makes joint decisions. They all have a responsibility to ensure that they are informed on the decisions that cabinet will be making as a whole. Why would they not be paid equally? Again, I would be disappointed if I were a New Democrat. The new Democrats are saying that they believe in pay equity, but they are quite content to see the Minister of Status of Women paid less than the Minister of Health. I would suggest they are wrong on that point too. If they were consistent in what they are saying across the way, they should be rethinking their position on that.

The opposition members are saying that youth are important, and we agree. Youth are very important. Some of the members say we should have a minister of youth. The nice thing about this legislation is that it would create the opportunity, not only for today's Prime Minister but also for future prime ministers, to designate a youth ministry. To me, our Prime Minister has this right. He understands the importance of youth and getting young people engaged, and he has taken on that responsibility himself. We have a Prime Minister who is advocating directly on behalf of youth activities and a parliamentary secretary who is doing an outstanding job on that, but it does not necessarily mean that prevents it from happening some time in the future.

A more commonly talked about issue on the opposition benches is that of seniors. This legislation would allow, whether today or tomorrow, more flexibility to deal with issues that are before the government. It would provide something that is critically important.

I want to talk about the name change. Instead of the previous “minister of infrastructure, communities and intergovernmental affairs”, we now have the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. That is a significant change. We are saying that we want a minister of infrastructure with equal status, because we have record amounts of infrastructure dollars being spent in every region of our country. We have a minister who is equal and sitting at the table focused on infrastructure and communities. That is a positive thing.

I suspect I might get some questions.

• (1045)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the comments of my colleague from Winnipeg North, but there is a point I want to adjust. First of all, my colleague said that when we were in office, we had the largest cabinet. That is not true. In 1984, there were 40 members in cabinet. Also, he said that the Chrétien-Martin government left the country with a huge surplus. We ought to also remember that they drastically cut subsidies to the provinces. He also forgets that when we were in office, we addressed the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. This is why we are very proud of what we did when we were in office.

Does the member recognize that when one is the Minister of National Defence it is quite a bit bigger than being the Minister of Small Business and Tourism? Is that not true?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, they sit at the same cabinet table, and they make decisions and value opinions with a national perspective. If we were to follow the logic of that question,

one could say that if there are 29 ministers, each minister should be evaluated, and there should be 29 different salaries. Maybe that is the direction the former prime minister was heading. I would suggest that all cabinet ministers, as the legislation says, are equal, and they should be treated accordingly.

In regard to the member's comments in terms of the deficit situation, remember that former prime minister Harper created that multi-billion deficit after inheriting a surplus before the recession took place. In regard to the cuts, it was Jean Chrétien who erased the tax transfer points, which guaranteed health cash dollars to provinces. If it were not for Chrétien back then, we might not have health cash transfers to provinces because of the tax points. I was in the Manitoba legislature—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, we do have to allow for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my colleague from Winnipeg North, and two things are clear.

First, he firmly believes that if you say something that is untrue over and over again, someone will end up believing it is true. Second, he thinks that the louder you talk, the more convincing you will be, even though Bill C-24 is fooling no one.

My question is simple: if the Liberals truly believe in pay equity, why are they doing nothing about it? Pay equity means equal pay for equal work.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would recommend that my friend understand what the NDP members have done and said. On the one hand, they like to say that they believe in pay equity, but they were awfully critical of the Prime Minister's gender parity within the cabinet. Part of that gender parity includes having pay equity. Because of the Prime Minister, a female minister for the Status of Women makes just as much as the Minister of National Defence. All ministers are paid the same amount.

• (1050)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Yes, but you only did that after you were pressured to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That is true, real, and factual. No matter what tone of voice I happen to use, that is the reality, and the NDP oppose that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek that if she has something to contribute, she should stand when we ask for questions and comments. Unfortunately, we have run out of time, but there will be other opportunities during this debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Government Orders

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill C-24, and I have to say that it is rather surreal that we are here debating this bill, a bill that is essentially about increasing the salaries of a few Liberal cabinet ministers. That really speaks to the priorities of the government, or the lack of priorities.

During the 2015 election, the Prime Minister criss-crossed the country. He made a big deal about the fact that if he was elected, he would appoint the first gender-balanced cabinet in Canadian history. Of course, we know that the Prime Minister was elected, and on November 4, 2015, he had an opportunity to fulfill his election promise when he appointed his cabinet on that date. On its face, it appeared that the cabinet was gender equal.

The only problem is that not all ministers are equal. There are full ministers, and then there are ministers of state. What is the difference between a full minister and a minister of state? To begin with, ministers of state do not have full departments. They do not manage a full department budget. Ministers of state do not have a deputy minister who reports to them. A minister of state does not have the same power and the same authority as a full minister.

The only way the Prime Minister was able to fulfill, on its face, a gender-equal cabinet was by filling the five junior portfolios, the five ministers of state, with female MPs, and then he could say that he had a gender-equal cabinet. It did not take long for a number of people to point out that the Prime Minister's gender-equal cabinet was not as equal as he made it out to be.

What did the Prime Minister do about it? He essentially played a game of pretend. He began by changing the titles of the ministers to remove "minister of state" and called them "minister" to create the illusion, the facade, that those five junior ministers without full departments were in fact the same as ministers with full departments. Then the Prime Minister increased the salaries of those five ministers, again junior ministers without full departments, to put their salaries on par with ministers of full departments. Now, to complete the facade, the Prime Minister has introduced Bill C-24, in which the government is asking Parliament to rubber-stamp what the Prime Minister did.

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, others members of the government, and the Prime Minister have talked a lot about the problem they have with two tiers of ministers. The irony of that is that Bill C-24 does not eliminate two tiers of ministers. In fact, what Bill C-24 does with respect to those five junior ministries is migrate them to a new category called "minister in respect of whom that department is designated". In the case of those ministers, they would get their resources from the department of another minister. It sounds an awful lot like a minister of state.

In substance, what is the government doing? The government is not doing anything to solve the problem that it purports exists, which is the problem of two tiers of ministers. For the Prime Minister, it does not really matter, because for the Prime Minister, it is all about optics. It is all about looking good. It is all about pretending that he is a champion of women. Of course, when one looks at the record of the Prime Minister when it comes to supporting women, it really is a wanting record.

•(1055)

We have a Prime Minister who has done virtually nothing to assist Yazidi women and girls, who are suffering torture and the most egregious human rights violations imaginable, to help them come to Canada. He has done next to nothing. We have a feminist Prime Minister who is going to remove genital mutilation from the citizenship guide.

The Prime Minister talks a good game, creates a nice facade, and uses women to make himself look good. However, when it comes to substance, when it comes to doing something meaningful, the Prime Minister, time and time again, is AWOL.

What else would we expect from the Prime Minister? After all, we have a Prime Minister who is a failed prime minister. He is a Prime Minister who, in the last two years, has blown the budget and returned Canada to long-term structural deficits. He cannot get anything done. He cannot get TPP done. He cannot get softwood done. He cannot get NAFTA done. He cannot get pipelines built. He presides over a government plagued by scandal and corruption. He is under investigation as we speak. With a record like that, what else is there to do beyond taking selfies, appearing on American television to talk about his socks, and introducing hollow, meaningless bills, like Bill C-24, that waste Parliament's time?

It is a little ironic that the government is introducing this bill. It speaks to the government's priorities. It is making life more difficult for everyday Canadians. It is taking more out of the wallets of middle-class Canadians. It is going after vulnerable Canadians, like diabetics, to raise revenue for this cash-strapped, spendthrift government. It is declaring war on small businesses. While the government makes Canadians pay, when it comes to the Liberals giving themselves salary increases, they are all in.

Bill C-24 is not about gender equality. It is about Liberals helping Liberals. Let us talk about the arrogance, the entitlement, and the condescension of this Liberal government. It was remarkable that the Prime Minister and members of the government tried to insult the intelligence of Canadians by proclaiming that this bill was about gender equity.

On February 2, 2016, none other than the President of the Treasury Board said, "we are committed to pay equity in our cabinet and the government will soon be bringing forward legislation to ensure that all cabinet ministers receive equal pay." Of course, Bill C-24 has nothing to do with pay equity. The principle of pay equity is equal pay for equal value. Bill C-24 does nothing of the sort, which is why it was laughed out of committee by expert witnesses on the question of pay equity.

Bill C-24 is a joke of a bill. It is one more reason 2019 cannot come soon enough.

•(1100)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, listening to some of the comments from the other side of the House makes me want to stand up and comment.

Government Orders

The whole issue of equity is important for all of us. Certainly the Minister of Status of Women is equal to every other minister we have in the House. What we are trying to do with Bill C-24 is promote more gender equity all the way through the service.

I would like to hear some comments from my hon. colleague on the issue of gender balance. He said that our Prime Minister has not accomplished anything. The member should try to look at our budget through a gender lens as to its impact on women. What about the 600,000 jobs that have been created? Our economy is doing better than any other country in the G7. Somehow I think my hon. colleague forgot to read that press release.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, in reference to Bill C-24 and this falsehood put forward by the government that this is about gender equity, let me quote Professor Margot Young of the University of British Columbia, who specializes in gender equality. She said this about Bill C-24:

To loosely categorize legislation that essentially isn't really about gender equity as responding to a gender equity concern is, as I said before, dangerous....

She went on to say:

Really, there's no gender substance, no equity...on the basis of gender equality, to this legislation.

I think that pretty much sums up Bill C-24 when it comes to this false notion that it has anything to do with gender equity.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague with respect to equity.

The other aspect of this bill that really concerns me is the provision that only one minister, in this case the member for Mississauga—Malton, will be responsible for managing economic development agencies. We have a government that seems to be solely focused on big cities. As the MP for a region such as Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, it is even more worrisome to know that there will not be a minister responsible for Quebec's economic development.

Our regions are different and we have different issues. Having a minister who does not know or understand the region is a disconcerting aspect of this bill.

Does my colleague believe that this bill is good for the economic development of our regions?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, my colleague, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, is quite right. On top of increasing the salaries of certain Liberal ministers, Bill C-24 would do away with regional economic ministries. It is not only with respect to Quebec but also Atlantic Canada.

As an Alberta MP, I similarly share the member's concern, and I have to say it really is inconsistent. This is a government that talks so much about working with the provinces and municipalities, and here it is eliminating regional representation at the cabinet table to bring the unique perspectives of the regions of Canada, by doing away with these regional economic portfolios. I think that is a mistake on the part of the government.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in rebuttal to that last comment from my hon. colleague across the way, I want Canadians and Atlantic Canadians to be reassured that this government has a keen focus on the economic development of our regions. That could not be more apparent than through the Atlantic growth strategy, which has the support from the highest reaches of this government, from the Prime Minister to the immigration minister, and the implementation of an Atlantic immigration pilot initiative that will help the economic development of our region in Atlantic Canada, something that the previous government, under Stephen Harper, never had a view toward. Atlantic Canadians remember the comments about the culture of defeat that Stephen Harper issued toward people in our region of the country. However, they are proud of the work of this Liberal government, providing economic growth as a strategic initiative for the people of our region.

● (1105)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I will speak to what Bill C-24 does when it comes to Atlantic Canada with respect to eliminating regional economic ministries. As a result, there is now a delay in processing times at ACOA. Ministerial approval delays are occurring. A 30-day processing time has now turned into a 90-day processing time thanks to the current government.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):

[*Member spoke in Cree as follows:*]

Niwakoma cuntik Tansai Nemeaytane Awapantitok.

[*English*]

Madam Speaker, on November 4, 2015, my grandmother, who was at home in Kelowna, had the opportunity to watch the swearing-in of our ministers in our government. She was very happy when she learned that there was going to be equality between the sexes in the formation of cabinet. She actually raised this issue with me, a lady who is not very political. She is almost 90 years old, and yet she raised this issue because she thought it was important. She was so proud of the answer the Prime Minister gave when he said, "Because it's 2015". I know there is some heckling, but when my grandmother says something to me about politics, it is a beautiful thing. I really believe we need true equality, and I am sure my grandmother, if she learned there was not true equality among the ministers, would like to see that rectified.

I am very proud of the government having presented Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, because it would amend the Salaries Act to include eight new ministerial positions, including the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women. It would authorize the Governor in Council to designate departments to support ministers who would occupy these positions, and authorize those ministers to delegate their powers, duties, or functions to officers or employees of the designated departments.

Government Orders

It would also make consequential amendments to the Financial Administration Act and change the legal title of Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs to minister of infrastructure and communities. This reflects the fact that the Prime Minister has taken on the role of intergovernmental affairs minister.

This bill would amend the Salaries Act to modernize, as well, and formally equalize the status of the government's ministerial team, because it is a team. In this government, there are no junior or senior ministers; there are just ministers who work for all Canadians. This government is committed to a one-tier ministry that recognizes the equality of all cabinet members and supports their work on our government's priorities.

Under the current act, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women were all considered to be secretaries or ministers of state. This bill would add five ministerial positions, which would replace the current minister of state appointments. All members of the Prime Minister's ministerial team were sworn in as ministers and have had full standing and authority since day one of this government. This legislation would formally recognize the equality of all members of the ministry.

The bill would formalize having regional and national expertise working together under one roof, which would create a better synergy among them. The regional development agencies would continue to fulfill their mandates and offer their programs, services, and opportunities for local economic growth. Reporting through the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development highlights the importance the regional development agencies play in the regions and permits a more integrated and whole-of-government approach to economic development issues.

I truly believe it is important that science, la francophonie, small business and tourism, sport and persons with disabilities, and the status of women are all priority areas for Canadians and, therefore, merit full ministerial status. Our government has also, from day one, been committed to creating a one-tier ministry, and this legislation would simply formalize this approach.

Changes made to the Salaries Act would formalize the equality of all members of the ministry and modernize the act to allow for more flexibility. The current act allows for 35 ministerial positions, including the position of the Prime Minister. The bill would amend the act to include five additional titled ministerial positions: the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Science, the Minister of the Status of Women, and the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. It would also add three new untitled positions to provide greater flexibility to structure future ministries to reflect the priorities of the government without resorting to minister of state appointments.

• (1110)

These changes would not impact the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. The minister of state appointments would remain an

option at the discretion of the Prime Minister, which may be used in the future.

On November 4, 2015, when the cabinet was sworn in, the orders in council included language to style the five ministers as full ministers. The language of the order in council was necessary, given the legislative framework and the current list of ministerial positions in the Salaries Act. Bill C-24 would modernize the legislation to include the five ministerial titles. That is important.

The bill further would amend the act by removing six regional development positions. However, this does not affect the current regional development agencies, which would continue, under this ministry, to operate under the mandate of the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development. The Prime Minister would continue to appoint ministers to oversee the regional agencies.

Under our government, all of these practices are currently in place, and this legislation simply formalizes the changes that were made when Canadians changed government, to have a better government. It addresses the administrative constraints that exist in current legislation.

When I was working for the First Nations Education Council in Quebec, it was interesting to note that the structures of the Assembly of First Nations in Quebec and Labrador had commissions that were often run by women, while the other leadership roles were often done, in this case, by men. Men were doing the chief positions and the women, in this case, were doing many of the social organizations that ensured the indigenous organizations in Quebec and Labrador were able to function properly. However, it is important to note, even though women often end up in certain roles—there might be a bit of a gravitation to certain roles—that we all have equal status, no matter what the roles are, especially the ministry of the status of women. One day perhaps we will have a minister of the status of women who might be a man. However, in this case, it is such an important position with everything that is going on in our society, that this position should not be a second-class minister, but a full minister, like everyone else in the council.

For me, it is very important. For my grandmother, it is important. I believe it is important for all Canadians that we not only symbolically but concretely demonstrate that these are our values and that we are willing to make simple legislative changes to ensure that all ministers have full status when they debate the important issues of the day.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I welcome him to the House. He has been a great colleague. He represents his people very well. Earlier he quoted his grandmother from British Columbia. I congratulate him for that, but I would like to bring another British Columbian's perspective to this issue.

We had Professor Young, a University of British Columbia law professor who specializes in gender equality, appear before the committee on Bill C-24. She said:

...this particular piece of legislation really doesn't, as far as I can see, have much to do with gender equality.

She went on to say:

Government Orders

...to claim that it is about gender equality 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. I think to point to this legislation and say that the expansion of categories that get the same pay level is actually dealing with gender equality is to essentially short-sheet the conversation....

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.

Three times she used the term “dangerous”. I wonder how my colleague feels about this comment from a law professor who deals with gender equality as a specialty.

●(1115)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Madam Speaker, when we use the word “dangerously”, it could be construed as being very dangerous. I would like more information on how it creates this danger. When I see ministers, or anyone in society, it is about equal pay for equal work.

We know that in Canada there are some professions to which men gravitate. As a person who was in the military for a long time, a lot more men are in the Canadian Armed Forces than women. Those in the Canadian Armed Forces work very hard, as do my colleagues and comrades, but in other professions, like child care, which is just as important to society, the pay is often less.

In this case, when we look at the Minister of Status of Women or other ministries, it is important for me that all my cabinet minister colleagues, although they are different from me as a backbencher, have the same level of status. It is important for a symbolic place like Parliament to ensure there is no differential in pay.

If we do the calculations on the statistics and data within the ministries, if we look at where people might be doing their best work in various ministries, and if everyone has equal pay, we would not find out that perhaps some of the expertise of some of our colleagues who end up in a certain area and other ministers end up in other areas have a differential in pay. It is important they are all equal.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be opposing the bill.

Bill C-24 highlights a central problem in this town, which is the centralization of power in party leaders' offices, particularly the Prime Minister's Office. All ministers, including ministerial staff, ultimately report to the Prime Minister, and they serve at the pleasure of the Prime Minister.

Viewers and members of Parliament would be interested to hear that the Prime Minister's Office has a budget to hire 500 political exempt staffers who work for the Prime Minister in the Langevin Block and in other ministerial offices. This is a much bigger budget than what the U.K. prime minister has and a much bigger budget than many other heads of government in the G7 have.

The bill would exacerbate the problem of the concentration of power in Ottawa by enlarging the salaries for cabinet ministers and would continue the march to further centralization of power in this town, which is contrary to the interests of Canadians.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Madam Speaker, there is a tendency across the western world to have a centralization of power. It is often very difficult to oppose, because many of us in the House,

whether on the backbench or on the opposition side, always seem to bend our will to the will of our leaders.

However, not to be trite, but Canada is a very large nation and sometimes we need that, because it is a very complicated nation. It is made up of many different components. I would not be predisposed to judging the Prime Minister on what he might need or what he deems he needs to run the country effectively.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-24. I want highlight for members of the House a lot of the specifics in the bill.

The bill's general theme is one of synergy. It is very pragmatic with respect to how we do business in the House but, most important, how we do business across the nation with our partners in all levels of government as well as the private sector.

To be specific, Bill C-24 proposes to modernize and firmly equalize the status of the government's ministerial team, team being the key word, throughout the Hill and throughout the nation, working with our partners, municipalities, the provinces and territories, and the private sector in a more proactive manner.

The bill highlights that there are no junior or senior ministers in the Liberal ministry, or any ministry for that matter. It recognizes the importance of a one-tier ministry, all ministers being equal, working to deliver results for all Canadians throughout our great nation.

Currently, five ministers would be directly impacted by this legislation, which proposes to make their positions full minister positions. Those ministers are the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women. This would simply formalize what the Prime Minister put in place on day one.

The bill would provide the Prime Minister with flexibility to adjust cabinet to the current realities of the times based on what we would hear. Our government relies on our consultations with members of the public and our partners to ensure the message that we bring forward is based on what we hear. We fully concentrate on this in comparison to governments of the past. We learn and, most important, we react accordingly based on those consultations.

Not to be repetitive, but I again want to drill down on what the bill identifies.

The bill would amend the Salaries Act to modernize, as well as formally equalize, the status of the government's ministerial team. In this ministry, there are no junior or senior ministers. There are just ministers working to deliver results for Canadians.

This government is committed to a one-tier ministry that recognizes the equality of cabinet members and supports their work based on the government's priorities, as well as the priorities of the nation.

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Under the current act, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women are all considered to be ministers of state. Bill C-24 proposes to add five ministerial positions to replace the current ministers of state appointments.

All members of the Prime Minister's ministerial team were sworn in as ministers and have had full standing and authority since day one of this government. The legislation formally recognizes the equality of all members of the ministry.

I would also like to highlight some of the residual benefits that the bill brings forward.

First, on regional development agencies, the proposed bill formalizes having regional and national expertise working together under one roof. It identifies how it will create better synergy by working closer together with our partners. It creates an opportunity for greater progress, which is this government's number one priority.

RDAs will continue to fulfill their mandates in confutation with our partners, listening, learning, and responding accordingly. They will continue to offer their programs, services and opportunities for local economic growth, working together. Cohesion between RDAs helps to grow the economy and deliver results.

• (1120)

Reporting through ISED ministers, highlights the importance of RDAs and the priorities they put forward within their different regions, the importance that they are part of the efforts to bring forward progress. It permits a more integrated and whole-of-government approach to economic development issues, therefore a more robust strategy that identifies objectives. With our partners, we can attach action plans to those objectives, and then, finally, execute those action plans to once again achieve progress.

RDAs are in fact in Atlantic Canada. For example, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency is delivering results. There are economic development agencies for the regions of Quebec, and for southern Ontario, FedDev as an example. When we look at FedDev's accomplishments in the past year, over \$783.9 million has been invested through a post-secondary strategic infrastructure fund, or an investment fund for the province of Ontario; \$222 million invested in support of scale-up firms and entrepreneurs, innovative clusters, clean growth, and export development. I can go on, but unfortunately I only have 10 minutes.

Once again, there is progress.

The Federal Economic Development initiative for Northern Ontario, FedNor, and the western economic diversification are examples of working with partners for progress.

The bill proposes to formalize having the regional and national expertise of the regional development agencies all working together under one roof for progress. This creates better synergy and more opportunities for greater progress. It provides the flexibility needed to make real impacts in communities across our great nation.

The regional development agencies would all continue to fulfill their mandates of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in

becoming more innovative, productive, and export oriented, achieving progress. They would continue to work with communities and economic development organizations to identify and generate opportunities for local economic growth, as well as continue to provide programs and services to entrepreneurs and communities that build on distinct competitive regional advantages, their niches.

In my former life as a municipal representative, I fully respected the people I worked with on a daily basis, whether it was bumping into someone at a grocery store, or soccer field, or hockey rink, or on the sidewalk, or going for a walk with my dog, or being somewhere with my daughters Logan and Jordan just sitting and chatting, or bumping into somebody who had an idea and wanted to discuss how he or she could progress ideas with our level of government. I knew how important it was in my position to take that message to other levels of government and other departments in order to leverage those ideas to become a reality through strategy, objectives, action plans, and execution.

Currently this government is doing a transportation corridors study and an infrastructure smart cities study, which align with the very direction the government proposes through this bill.

I ask members of the House to understand the synergies and partnerships, and to therefore appreciate the progress we are trying to bring forward on behalf of our great nation.

• (1125)

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for the member for Niagara Centre. This cabinet was appointed 25 months ago. Those ministers were appointed 25 months ago. Under what authority of the House have the ministers been paid up until this point?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Speaker, there are three simple answers to that question: one, equal status since day one; two, the importance of a one-tier ministry; and three, a minister is a minister.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, in light of the response we have just received, I would like to call upon my colleague's expertise as a former municipal mayor.

Is a public servant a public servant, and, in that case, does everyone get the same salary?

[*English*]

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Speaker, the answer would be no.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is clear that the Liberals are coming here today with Bill C-24 to ask for parliamentary permission to do what they already did two years ago. It is clear they did that without any parliamentary authority at all.

Government Orders

In terms of the equality of the jobs, in the real world if someone wanted to take an existing job, like a minister of state, compared to a full minister's job, the skills, years of experience, and the responsibility of those jobs would be looked at.

Could the member explain to me how, on any planet, the role of status of women has the same responsibility as that of the finance minister, who handles \$355 billion in taxpayers' money and can influence businesses all over the country, including his own?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Speaker, members ought to appreciate the fact that this bill is not creating any new departments. There is nothing new in comparison to day one.

The ministers will work within the existing framework. We believe that the portfolios for la francophonie, small business and tourism, status of women, sport and persons with disabilities, and science are all important to Canadians and, of course, that their ministers be compensated accordingly. They deserve equal weight around the cabinet table. It is unfortunate that the Harper government did not see it that way. Therefore, we are dealing with something that, unfortunately, was not dealt with in the past as well as it should have been.

Finally, this is a whole-of-government approach. Once again, it is a team approach. What is most important about this approach, as I said earlier, is working with our partners across this great nation and, with that, creating the progress and development that each and every Canadian deserves.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we heard a recent question asking why the status of women minister should not be a minister of state. We make up 50% of the population. Why on earth would this not be a full ministry? Considering the intersectionality and barriers that women face, it should be a full ministry. Considering the intersectionality and barriers that persons with disabilities face, that should also be a full ministry. If a government wants to operate and develop good policy based on evidence, then the minister of science should be a full ministry. Does my hon. colleague agree with that?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Speaker, absolutely, I do agree, but I want to expand a bit more.

Again, it is about equality for women, as well as equality for our youth, and equality for our seniors, and it demonstrates the importance of hearing those voices across this nation and at the cabinet table. In a whole-of-government approach, the entire cabinet represents their voice. We want to ensure that is the case. It is 2017, going on 2018. It is a very pragmatic approach by the government, being very forward-thinking and forward-looking in putting those objectives and actions plans in place and, of course, a plan of execution so that this country, once again, gets what it deserves, and that is progress.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, today we have the opportunity to speak on a centralist bill that lacks transparency, turns its back on the regions, and glosses over ministerial inequality. I am referring, of course, to Bill C-24, the act to amend the Salaries Act.

Bill C-24 has received little media attention. However, it speaks volumes about this government's philosophy. We can learn much by thoroughly reviewing each element of this bill. That is what I propose we do for our next few minutes together. To begin with, let us take apart the facade and see what is behind this bill.

First of all, Bill C-24 creates eight new Liberal minister positions, namely five minister of state positions and three yet-to-be-determined ministerial positions. We have no idea what these positions will be. The goal is to ensure pay equity among all ministers in this gender-balanced cabinet. The ministers may receive the same salary, but there is nothing in this bill to ensure that they will be treated fairly and equally.

These new ministers of state will in fact be junior ministers. They will not have a deputy minister, they will have much smaller budgets and they will have fewer powers. A feminist government, as the Prime Minister himself has suggested, does not create new superficial positions for the appearance of parity. He should instead give the same number of men and women major departments, with substantial and equitable budgets. Parity and equity also mean an equal division of key positions in the government. This means that a first target has been missed by our Prime Minister.

Let us now take a closer look at the announcement of the three new ministers. It would appear that the Liberal cabinet is not yet complete. Today we would have to sign a blank cheque for three new ministerial positions that, after two years of governing, have not yet been identified. In other words, today we are to approve the appointment of three mystery ministers. I would even say that they are phantom ministers. Approving the appointment of these three ministers in this government, which claims to be transparent and accountable, is a second missed target.

We then learned that Bill C-24 will eliminate the positions of six ministers responsible for regional development agencies. That is painful.

The responsibilities of these regional development agencies will now be concentrated in the hands of a single minister. Currently, this minister comes from a major centre, Toronto. Imagine that: a minister responsible for regional economic development who comes from Toronto. This means that now a minister from the big city of Toronto will be responsible for regional development across the country. When it comes to listening to the regions and sharing powers, this is a third missed target.

We are therefore signing the death warrant of regional economic development ministers. These ministers, who were supposed to defend and represent the interests of their regions across Canada, at least had the advantage of being familiar with the people on the ground and especially their needs. They helped ensure better coordination with the regions, and they represented a diversity of voices at the cabinet table.

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I doubt the Liberal government is giving a single minister all that power just to save money. Saving money is not really its thing. We have seen over and over again that this government is not afraid to spend money hand over fist. No, this decision speaks to the Liberal government's core philosophy and reflects the Liberals' concept of federalism.

By now, this should come as a surprise to nobody because it is something we have seen many times. The government took power away from municipalities when it created the infrastructure bank and the smart cities challenge. Its new passengers' bill of rights gave the Minister of Transport more power, it is restricting access to information from the offices of cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister, and it alone is making decisions about the when, how, and who of legalizing marijuana by ignoring the provinces, municipalities, and indigenous communities.

The Liberals' brand of federalism features a centralizing, paternalistic government that wants to monopolize decision-making and does not respect the provinces' jurisdiction.

● (1135)

This summer, the Prime Minister said that appointing a member from Toronto to be minister responsible for all the regional economic development agencies in Canada was, and I quote, “a way of reducing the kind of politics that we’ve always seen from regional development”. That is an extremely simplistic way of looking at this.

I wonder what kind of politics the Prime Minister was referring to, because, to us, regional representation and accountability is the kind of policy that is absolutely welcome and legitimate. The Prime Minister seems too attached to his powers, incapable of trusting the expertise of others, and too worried about delegating responsibilities to anyone. This is one of the government's biggest aberrations since it came to power.

We also know that last fall, \$150,000 from the Ontario economic development fund was given to a business in the riding of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, in Mississauga. Is this the type of politics the Prime Minister had in mind when he said he wanted to centralize powers?

Furthermore, a Liberal Atlantic caucus subcommittee indicated that it had had reports of a threefold increase in processing times at the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency since a Toronto-area minister, a big-city minister, was appointed to oversee maritime regions. According to that same subcommittee, centralized decision-making impedes the agility of programs. This means that regional businesses that count on the regional development agencies will have to foot the bill for the new centralized model. On top of being affected by the finance minister's new tax reforms, job creators in our regions will be further disadvantaged by this Liberal government. These are all factors that are not helping our regions right now.

For a bill presented as a simple correction of a pay imbalance between ministers, we are both surprised and disappointed by its contents. It concentrates more power in the hands of a big-city elite. It creates three new ministerial positions that are shrouded in mystery. We know nothing about the duties these ministers will have. They are phantom ministers. It eliminates the positions of ministers responsible for regional economic development across

Canada. It also increases processing times at the development agencies that are supposed to help our entrepreneurs. We are supposed to be working to help our entrepreneurs, but this bill throws roadblocks in their way.

Once again, the Liberal government has forgotten the regions all across Canada. It is not being transparent and is implementing a paternalistic and centralizing federalism. Worst of all, the aim of this bill, which is to ensure fairness among the ministers, is not even met.

Perhaps cabinet members will have the same salary, but they will not have the same responsibilities and powers. Key positions will still be given to a handful of men, as we see now. This means that Bill C-24 completely misses the mark.

In closing, the Liberal government, which keeps saying that it wants to be more transparent, reacted when the media and the opposition started scratching the surface and noticed that its so-called gender-balanced cabinet was really just for show. Indeed, there were very few women in key cabinet posts with all the powers that go along with them.

The government's solution was to come up with a kitchen sink bill in which it simply increased the number of ministers of state, who will not even have the same tools to work with, who will report to other people, namely, the Prime Minister and his office. He also used this as an opportunity to get rid of the regional economic development ministers across Canada, even though those ministers understood their region's local reality. All of these things combined spell disaster for all regions of Quebec.

● (1140)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague, since I represent a similar regional riding. In Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, the municipalities and economic development agencies I am in touch with are concerned, because the government appears to be focused only on big cities. Since the largest town in our riding has a population of 56,000, we are worried that only the interests of the country's largest cities will be looked at.

We are concerned to see a bill that does not include a position for any minister responsible for Quebec, since each of our regions is different. We need a minister whom we can talk to, who understands and is familiar with the reality of the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot and takes an interest in it. I agree with my colleague on this point.

Is this evidence that this government does not care at all about regions like those we represent?

● (1145)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very good question.

As a former mayor, I would say that, if there was a minister able to help us develop our municipal projects in Quebec, it was the former minister of Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions. I am utterly convinced that the same goes for the five other economic development ministers across the country, such as the one from the Maritimes, who had to be very aware of the realities of the people in that region.

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In fact, if we played a little game of “Reach for the Top” with our economic development minister, who is from Toronto, to ask him a few questions about various Quebec municipalities, I would be surprised if he knew where Kamouraska or Tingwick were, or if he understood the reality of our regions and our small and medium-sized municipalities, not just the major centres.

This is extremely unfortunate, because our regions have just had an extremely useful tool taken away from them, one that allowed them to look after their own economic development, which they are best able to do.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I indicated earlier, it is well-established, through the Library of Parliament, that the largest cabinet in Canada's history, with 40 cabinet ministers, was under Stephen Harper. Also, Stephen Harper had no problem saying there should be two tiers of cabinet ministers. That is quite different. As well, gender parity did not even come close to happening under Stephen Harper.

This government ensured there was gender parity in cabinet when it announced its cabinet. We have also ensured that all cabinet members are equal. Under Harper, a minister of democratic reform was equal to a minister of finance. However, we are saying today that all ministers, whether a minister of status of women or a minister of small businesses, are equal to a minister of democratic reform. The difference is that we see all ministers as equal when they sit around the cabinet table. Each vote is one vote.

Why did Stephen Harper have the largest cabinet in the history of Canada? Why did he feel, and the Conservatives still believe, that inequality among cabinet ministers is the thing of today?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Madam Speaker, I cannot wait until the government stops talking about the former government and starts worrying about itself. It has now been in power for two years.

I would really like the government to explain what equality means given that some ministers have deputy ministers and substantial budgets while other ministers get promoted because this government likes to spend recklessly. I want the government to stop preaching and, unlike the Prime Minister, to focus on content and not form. This government is only interested in appearances and, this week, it showed us its true nature by introducing a bill on transparency and then invoking closure.

The last people I need lessons from are the members opposite, who are trying to make us believe that they have introduced this bill for the right reasons.

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when we re-elected the Quebec caucus, the first step we took was to ensure we achieved gender balance.

This simple act, as small and modest as it is, plainly showed that this culture of gender equality and fairness is fundamental and right.

I still wonder today why we have to debate such obvious things at great length. Clearly, the problem is so serious that the debate is still relevant. However, it is sad that we are forced to make arguments to

defend what the general public would like to take for granted. In fact, the public would like this to be seen as the norm.

However, this equal representation does not exist everywhere. It is obvious that in 2017, we have a lot of work to do to find that balance. Unfortunately, if the public does not see any concrete initiatives or receive a clear message, that probably means that we are not doing our job.

It is funny repeating something so annoyingly obvious. We are being forced to put forward major arguments to say that the very least we can do is ensure that men and women are treated equally and fairly, and that every voice carries the same weight and is treated in the same way.

This debate has been going on for a long time. People who do not follow the debates all that closely, and sometimes I can see why, do not realize just how beneficial it would have been to settle this debate from the outset, when the bill was introduced. We are still debating it a year later. Still, regardless of what side of the House you are on, this is the type of issue where there should be no partisanship, because it is a question of gender equity.

When we are talking about pay equity and when both men and women have the same jobs and the same responsibilities, regardless of which government is in power, the Prime Minister's Office is a unit where all members' voices carry the same weight.

The Prime Minister's Office is an organization where, regardless of origin, culture, gender, or experience, a voice is a voice. Of course, experience in one area or another has a certain value. Experience is probably the only element with added value when it comes to the content and thorough study of the topics under discussion.

Bills like the one before us now are extremely simple. Clearly, the general public supports this bill.

Many of us had careers in the private sector at one time, and this question comes up constantly. Every day, we see inequality and find that women are treated differently. This situation is always mentioned, because there is no justification for it. That is why, from day one, despite the system in place, we have treated all ministers the same way. Our intent was that everyone receive the same treatment and that everyone's voice in the Prime Minister's office carry the same weight. There was no reason for it to be otherwise.

This debate is in itself unjustified. There is no reason why we should have been debating this subject for so long. I am looking at the number of hours we have spent on this, the number of debates we have held, and the number of witnesses who have spoken in committee on a subject everyone in the House knows about. Everyone is already aware of these types of situations and of the inequity, and the problem goes well beyond government. In fact, it is relatively widespread. I think that, if there is somewhere where we should start cleaning up and putting the house in order, it is here in this institution.

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•(1150)

Our responsibility to correct wage inequality is a non-issue. It should be a done deal by now, since everyone agrees on this. The bill gives everyone an equal voice, despite what hon. members across the aisle would have us believe. It is easy to say that you know what will happen, to fearmonger about this or that, to say that certain ministers will lose certain powers. Let us talk about ministerial powers. Wherever they sit, every member of caucus expresses themselves clearly and without limitation, never holding back from voicing regional issues.

In caucus, whatever group you are from, whatever your stripes, every member has a voice. Every member can talk about their problems, their concerns and issues that should be brought to a minister's attention. Rationalizing our approach by grouping together certain organizations really comes down to saving money and simplifying processes. Throwing out appointments right and left could result in a cabinet of unreasonable proportions.

I will it leave it to those involved to determine whether cabinet should have 30, 32, 35, 38 or 40 ministers. I will even be a good sport and refrain from arguing for or against having a large cabinet. As we heard at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, the official opposition, which is questioning certain basic expenditures, is wondering whether it is appropriate for the committee to spend a reasonable amount of money to travel across Canada to find out what Canadians need. All of a sudden, saving tax dollars became so crucial that we had to restrict the bulk of the committee's travels. How odd, given the attempt to normalize the fact that there were 40 or so ministers at one time.

The number is justifiable in the eyes of the person in charge. I think that we have responded and that we have followed up on the comments of those who are able to voice direct opinions on specific files. More than anything, we acted on a general consensus among the public that it should be a given that everyone at the big table should have an equal voice and an equal amount of power. Every minister should then get the same salary as their colleagues in the same organization whose responsibilities are similar.

Under the circumstances, I think we ought to stop fearmongering and making predictions. We may not be the skilled clairvoyants some hon. members are, but we rely on hard facts and sound evidence. We have been saying this from the start, but we believe, just like Canadians in general believe, that we should be past debating this type of issue. It should be obvious that treating everyone equally, in the same manner, and giving them equal powers and an equal voice is simply a reflection of the will of the people.

•(1155)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague may have stretched the truth just a bit when he talked about a unanimous decision of Canadians to support this move to gender equality, and so on. For example, Professor Margot Young, a University of British Columbia law professor, speaking before the government operations committee on Bill C-24, had some comments to make. She said, "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". Then in

response to a question about whether the Prime Minister's claim of gender equal cabinet was cynical or not, she said, "I would say it's dishonest".

It is clear there is no unanimity on this issue, and that in spite of the comment by the Prime Minister, "because it's 2015", which may have sounded great at the time, it is clear that the bill does not do anything to actually achieve gender equality. Does my colleague agree with the law professor from British Columbia, who is an expert in gender equality issues?

•(1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard: Madam Speaker, I was under the impression that simply being male made me an expert in males. I respect the profession of gender equality expert, but the mere fact of raising a question as to how gender equality should be assessed underscores the need to make the distinction.

In the end, we are all equal human beings. We work in the same institution, Parliament. Let us start making the distinction between gender and experience, then. Experience can be assessed, but a person who obtains a position for which he or she is qualified should be treated equally.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam President, I cannot help but take exception to the hon. member's comments. He said that this debate was unjustified, and that we could not continue discussing the subject because it furthered gender equality.

By digging a little deeper into the bill, we find that it contains only cosmetic changes that would allow the Prime Minister to continue boasting about being a feminist while he appoints women to minister of state positions rather than appointing an equal number of men and women. I hope that he knows the difference between the responsibilities of a minister who oversees a department and those of a minister of state. It is a big difference. We cannot simply raise the salary of ministers of state so that it matches that of ministers. They must get equal treatment, but they do not have the same responsibilities.

I do not know whether the hon. member is aware that, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, the world will achieve gender equality in 170 years. In Canada, in my region, the gender wage gap is 70%.

How, then, can anyone claim this debate is unjustified? I am appalled.

Mr. Michel Picard: Clearly, Madam Speaker, my colleague fails to grasp that this debate is unjustified in the sense that it is unbelievable that we should still be having it today.

Mrs. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: That is because it is still—

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Mr. Michel Picard: Madam Speaker, can I answer the question?

If we are talking about it today, it is because it is too late, and we have been talking about it for too long with no result. This should have been settled a long time ago. Some say the problem will be solved in 170 years, but it is ludicrous to make such predictions. We are approaching the issue by focusing on current needs. We hope that they will stop wasting time so that we can achieve concrete results.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I know this is a sensitive subject, but I would like to remind all members that they were given time to ask their question, and they must allow other members time to answer when it is their turn to speak.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been waiting for months to speak to Bill C-24. The official title is an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act. A more accurate title for the bill could be an act to cover up this Liberal government's embarrassing mistake of claiming to create a gender-balanced cabinet while actually appointing five women as junior ministers, and, under the traditionally appropriate practice of Canadian governments, paying them substantially less.

The Prime Minister's mistake was exposed when he unveiled his first cabinet after the 2015 election. Within days, as controversy swirled in the media and the public arena, and it must be said, among Liberal backbenchers, the Prime Minister's Office went into damage control. All of a sudden, the talking points were that every single member of cabinet, those with multi-million dollar departments and spending responsibilities and those with no departments and substantially fewer dollars and responsibilities, were equal. All of a sudden, Orwellian fable came alive in the cabinet room, just across from the public gallery, and *Animal Farm* came to life. The last commandment on the barn wall of the satirical story became a guiding principle of this infant Liberal government. All ministers are equal, the Prime Minister and his inner circle proclaimed, though he and everyone in the Liberal cabinet, on the Liberal backbenches, on this side of the House, and across Canada knew, as they still know today, that some ministers are more equal than others.

That did not matter then, and it does not matter now to the Prime Minister and his brain trust. All he had to do to correct his original goof was open the treasury and take the time and energy of law writers to craft the bill we are debating so that the Salaries Act could be amended so that five ministers of state could be re-profiled as full ministers and receive a salary equivalent to those in full ministerial positions. These salary bumps, \$20,000 a year each, are to be paid from the consolidated revenue fund.

In other words, the hard-earned tax dollars sent to Ottawa by Canadians were used to pay for the Prime Minister to make good. The original Governor in Council appointments of the five ministers of state made on November 4, 2015, were suddenly transformed to full ministerial positions. However, that was not the end of it. These new ministers, the five upgraded ministers of state, needed budgets, money to spend in their expanded, confected positions, so Bill C-24 would also provide a legislative framework so that these new positions could receive support from existing departments in the exercise of their mandates.

What is more offensive is that all of this convoluted damage control and financial funny business was done, until now, without conventional enabling legislation. All of a sudden, the five ministers of state were getting a substantial pay boost, an overnight \$20,000-a-year raise. Just how often does that happen for the middle class, and of course, those struggling to join it?

We have to remember that the much-delayed piece of legislation we are debating today, Bill C-24, is finally, more than two years later, the legislation that will officially correct the Prime Minister's original mistake. The government has been effectively writing post-dated cheques to pay these ministers.

To be generous to the Liberals, beyond these precious taxpayer dollars so flippantly spent, as we expend in this debate the time and resources of the House to fix his problem, we must remember that the Liberals came to office with very little institutional knowledge and experience. From third-party status in the previous Parliament, with barely 35 members, all of a sudden there was a Liberal majority. To make it even more challenging for this fledgling majority, the Prime Minister and his backroom advisers very obviously ignored a number of re-elected members of some substance, and certainly experience, to create a cabinet heavily populated by newbies, which we know well led to some of the more spectacular stumbles made by the Liberal government over the past two years.

In the rush for the appearance of gender balance, the Liberals also ignored a tradition that dates back in the history of Westminster parliaments that was also, for so long, a part of our Canadian cabinet tradition.

● (1205)

Therefore, it is time for a quick look back in history and the victim of this expensive and time-consuming process: the storied position of minister of state.

A minister of state has traditionally been a minister with a cabinet mandate and responsibilities but without a ministry, a junior minister enabled in his or her duties with a small portion of his or her departmental minister's budget.

Upon my election in 2008, I was honoured by Prime Minister Harper to serve as minister of state for foreign affairs responsible for the Americas, under the exceptionally capable foreign affairs minister, Lawrence Cannon, most recently our distinguished ambassador to France. I enthusiastically recognized my junior role, my supporting role, in the Department of Foreign Affairs, and I accepted the good-humoured ribbing I received from then Speaker Milliken, who would occasionally offer a musical reminder of my place in government from 19th century comic opera.

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Speaker Milliken caught me off guard the first time in the Speaker's corridor, just behind your chair, as you know, Mr. Speaker, by coming up behind me, as we both walked to this House, and suddenly launching into one of the choruses of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*. Members will recall that this is a political comic opera set in Venice. It is centred on the kings of a mythical kingdom called Baratara. I understand that Queen Victoria was amused, during a royal command performance of the opera before her, by the gentle poke at the role of monarchs in a constitutional democracy, and the chorus drew royal laughs. One particular chorus was the one sung for me, fairly often, by Speaker Milliken. It goes like this:

Oh, philosophers may sing
Of the troubles of a King,
Yet the duties are delightful, and the privileges great;
But the privilege and pleasure
That we treasure beyond measure
Is to run on little errands for the Ministers of State.

This bill marks the end of this historic position in this House, in this Parliament, though I suspect that a clearer thinking future government will reinstate both the tradition and the logical function, and the logically funded function, that ministers of state have performed over the centuries.

Bill C-24 does not only remove ministers of state in a misguided add to ministerial ranks; it also eliminates six very important ministers and ministries, those of regional development agencies across this country.

The elimination of these ministerial positions was one of the biggest blunders of the blunder-prone Liberal government. We told the Liberals more than two years ago that they were making a big mistake in eliminating the regional development agencies, just as we advised them against implementing the flawed Phoenix pay system for the public service, just as we advised them against cozying up with the terror-sponsoring, human-rights-abusing Iranian regime, just as we advised them against a heavy-handed imposition of electoral reform, and just as we advised against regressive amendments to the access to information and privacy law. The list goes on and on, and, with Bill C-24, on.

That is why I, in this House, and the official opposition, will vote against this unfortunate, wasteful piece of post-dated legislation.

●(1210)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to assure the hon. member that I will not break into song, and I will spare everyone their ears.

The hon. member for Fredericton.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for that roundabout tour through the history books, despite some of the liberties he has taken with the accuracy of some of the past actions of this government. What I would say is that 2015 demonstrated that Canadians are looking forward and not back. They were looking for a government that accepts the foundational and fundamental need to have evidence-based decision-making through science, a government that understands the importance of a gender lens in all its

decision-making, a government that demonstrates the importance of a disability lens and understands the intersectionality of different vulnerabilities in people across different governments, and a government that understands the importance of government by cabinet, which is well reflected in this bill.

We now have a cabinet in which all members around the table are equal in the weight they bring to decision-making. It has been one of the priorities of this government to ensure that decisions are made with the broadest possible perspective and through the collective abilities of the cabinet. Would the member not agree that as a forward-looking government, this is an appropriate way to form and make decisions on behalf of the Government of Canada?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, my friend. The short answer to his question is no.

At committee, gender equality experts effectively told us that the confection of ministers of state to full ministers was cosmetic, cynical, and tokenistic. Some even suggested it was dishonest. I have not dwelled on the back half of this legislation that will remove the regional development ministers. However, that mistake is reflected in the incapability of the government to push out the door more than \$2 billion in infrastructure funding that it committed to doing almost two years ago. That is because a single minister responsible for the country who is unaware of some of the regional differences, sensitivities, and needs simply does not have the capacity to address them.

I urge the government, if it is indeed forward-thinking, to reconsider the single infrastructure model and return to regional development ministers and ministries.

●(1215)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat pleased when I saw the Liberal government announce a gender parity cabinet. I think that most Canadians thought it was a symbolic move that was long overdue. Frankly, it was welcomed by those who believe in gender equality in this country. Some of the tokenism of that gesture was revealed when we learned that five of those positions were for ministers of state who would be paid significantly less, and that those positions would be held by women.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about this. The bill before us purports to fix that inequity by raising the salary of these women, without changing the actual constituents of the cabinet itself. A real commitment to gender equality would be a cabinet shuffle that ensured an equal number of men and women in full cabinet positions, as opposed to raising the salaries of the five women ministers of state to be equal to those of men, but without the accompanying power.

As well, the bill provides equal pay for women at the cabinet table, but the government has refused to bring in pay equity legislation for all Canadian women. Does my hon. colleague have any comment on that?

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Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I will begin with the hon. member's last question. Being in the official opposition, I enthusiastically support pay equity and equal pay for equal work.

With respect to gender parity, we also enthusiastically support equal opportunity for women in politics. Of course, we had the first female Canadian prime minister. As well, we had the Hon. Rona Ambrose, our interim leader, who served so notably in the past two years. She is a magnificent example of a woman who served capably in government, in opposition, and now in private life.

Yes, this comes back to the tokenism of simply using numbers to achieve gender parity, without the more meaningful substance of equal participation, authority, and responsibility in government.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill C-24. I have been listening to the debate and feel it is necessary to speak to a couple of issues that I feel the opposition has perhaps got wrong, or that I disagree with, essentially. I will start with the regional development agencies and then talk more about the five ministries that have moved from ministry of state status to full ministries, which they are right now.

Regional development agencies would continue to offer opportunities for local economic growth, and fulfill their mandates and offer programs and services, but would operate through the mandate of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. The fact that these agencies still have the opportunity to work and continue to fulfill their mandates, and the fact there are 338 members who can also provide information from the regions to the minister, is critically important. I heard members talk about the differences in Quebec. There are 41 members from Quebec—that province clearly thought we were doing a good job and sent us another member—and 31 members from Atlantic Canada. I am pretty sure that by Monday, there will be another one. There clearly are opportunities for the views of the regions across the country, as different and diverse as they are, to make their way to the government and for us to address the issues involved in a way that respects local individuals and diversity within the regions.

I want to talk a bit about the gender issue. I firmly believe that this is not a gender issue if we remove gender completely from the ministries that have been made full ministries. We have the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, to whom I am parliamentary secretary. There is a large amount of work required to ensure international development and our engagement with La Francophonie countries around the world, so that they have an adequate voice, that we are listening to their concerns, and are actively engaging with them. That is now a full ministry. If we take away who the minister is, that is a full ministry.

If we take away the fact that the Minister of Science is a woman, if we expect to have any policy at all based on a little evidence, let alone policy based on substantial evidence, the Minister of Science position is one that is sorely needed at the federal level. When we talk about running a country, irrespective of who is in that position, this ministry requires a full minister.

We have the Minister of Small Business and Tourism. This year, Canada's 150th birthday saw a tremendous amount of tourism in

Canada. A tremendous number of people came to Canada to explore its greatness in all of its forms and to celebrate with us our 150th year of Confederation. Next year will be the Canada-China Year of Tourism. Again, an influx of individuals will come to Canada to celebrate what we know is the greatest country in the world. They will come here to celebrate with us and spend their dollars here. They are enjoying this great country of ours. There are 1.8 million small businesses in this country. If we were to put them in one geographical area, they would have several postal codes. To say this ministry does not require a full ministry is nonsense, again taking out the gender piece.

• (1220)

As for the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, again, when we look at the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities in this country and the fact that provincial legislation is a patchwork and not uniform across this country, we need federal leadership when it comes to developing a Canadians with disabilities act. That is what the government is doing. This is not about whether or not we feel it is necessary that it be a full ministry. We need federal leadership when it comes to disabilities. This ministry requires that leadership, not as a ministry of state, but as a full ministry. That is why, when cabinet was sworn in in November, this is happened.

The most contentious issue concerns the Minister of Status of Women, and on that I do not even know what to say. When I hear that the position could be a minister of state, that this ministry does not need to be a full ministry, I say, we make up 50% of the population. Hello? Why would that not be a fully ministry? Again, let us forget about who is actually the minister, and just think about the ministry and 50% of the population.

When we look at the intersectionality of women and the barriers they face, when we think about yesterday, when we were very much seized with the events of 28 years ago and were remembering the 14 names, when we were thinking about the fact that gender-based violence disproportionately affects women not just around the world but in this country, the fact we are now questioning whether status of women needs to be a full ministry, I think, is quite ludicrous.

I am certainly quite happy, and quite impressed by the fact, that the government under the leadership of our Prime Minister thought it appropriate to ensure that all of these ministries were full ministries.

Now I will bring the gender piece in. When we look at the question of our gender-balanced cabinet, when these individuals were sworn in, the orders in council ensured that they were full ministers at the time. It was not about trying to make up for some mistake that we made. That is absolutely not the case. Having them as full ministries was done right from the beginning.

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The message about having a gender-balanced cabinet had an impact. That required leadership. That requires a Prime Minister who understands the power and the influence we can have around the world when we ensure that the policies we put forward, the decisions we make, have a gendered lens. Indeed, the message of a gender-balanced cabinet had an impact. I hear it when I go to different countries around the world. There is talk about the leadership Canada has shown. There is talk about the leadership to influence change, not just on a political level but also within business, on boards, in key positions, in decision-making positions.

I am truly happy to have had an opportunity to speak on this bill. I am truly happy that we could, for a moment, remove the gender piece and just speak about the importance of these ministries. However, when we do look at the gender piece, we know that it is critically important in our leadership to ensure that gender equality and gender balance does happen in every facet of our society.

• (1225)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we talked earlier today about the gender equality piece. I want to refer now to the issue of the regional ministers.

Currently, we have one minister in Mississauga who is making all of the regional development decisions for across Canada. The disturbing part to me is the fact that during the consultations on Bill C-24, not a single witness was called to discuss the potential implications of this drastic change.

We talk about transparency, consultation, and openness, but here, on a crucial issue of this magnitude, it seems to me that at very least we could have had two or three witnesses come to the committee to explain the potential pros and cons of changing from the regional representation of ministers to this one-size-fits-all minister in Mississauga.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, I said from the outset of my speech, the regional development agencies would still have the capacity to inform and promote local economic growth. They would continue to fulfill their mandates and offer programs and services.

We have an Atlantic caucus that is thriving. It has put forward many initiatives of growth strategy to ensure that the issues of the region were adequately brought forward in our caucus and to our minister. We also have caucus members here from Quebec who are actively advocating for issues within their province, and actively advocating to the minister and to all members of caucus about issues they are have in their region.

This is not a one size fits all. To say it is totally diminishes the value of every seat in here. This is a capacity for all of us to bring our issues forward in a respectful way to the minister, but also using our regional development agencies.

• (1230)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for Whitby for so eloquently reinforcing the significance of having 50% women in our cabinet.

I would like the member to elaborate on this outdated notion that somehow certain ministries, like Status of Women, are less important

than other ministries, and how Bill C-24 would take us into the progressive 21st century in terms of our cabinet.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, this whole notion that the Minister of Status of Women is supposed to be a minister of state is ludicrous. Again, women represent 50% of the population, which is a significant number. To say that if the Minister of Status of Women does not do her job, nothing will happen; well, we just have to think about yesterday's day of remembrance, and women are impacted negatively, disproportionately, when it comes to violence.

When it comes to ensuring that we have a national strategy on gender-based violence, that we are looking at every single policy from our budget onward with a gender lens, then the Minister of Status of Women needs to be a full minister.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the member. The population of women in Canada is not 50%, it is 51%. There is actually a majority of women in this country.

However, is the Liberal government creating a stand-alone ministry for women, or the Status of Women, similar to other ministries, like the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Finance, or is it just an agency under another department?

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, the Minister of Status of Women, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Science, and the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie are full ministers.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand up today, most importantly as the member of Parliament for Fredericton, to speak to the important nature of Bill C-24 that is before us today.

Folks in the region of the country I have the pleasure of representing have been quite amenable to the direction of this government as it relates to the importance of the diversity of views that are expressed at the cabinet table and throughout caucus, and, most importantly, that are brought from the communities of all members of Parliament to this place that help enrich the debate that we seek to have on a daily basis.

[*Translation*]

As the member for Fredericton, I would like to take this opportunity to tell my constituents about the merits of the bill before us today.

[*English*]

I will start with just a brief summary of the bill for people paying attention on this Thursday afternoon, or in some parts of the country still Thursday morning.

This enactment would amend the Salaries Act to include eight new ministerial positions, including the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie. Before I go any further, I want to talk to my experience working within La Francophonie.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

In my previous career, I had the opportunity to work with leaders of francophone countries on important issues related to child and youth development. I know how important it is for the Government of Canada to have a full minister dedicated to important issues related to the Francophonie. That part of the world receives a significant portion of our development aid. I know that our current minister is focusing on Canada's leadership role in that forum.

● (1235)

[*English*]

The bill would also make the Minister of Science a full minister. Canadians were fed up after 10 years of the lack of evidence-based decision-making on the part of the Harper government. We made a commitment well before the election campaign that, were we to be fortunate enough to form government, we would base all of our actions on scientific evidence.

My interactions with the Minister of Science have only enriched my confidence that this is a government that in all aspects of decision-making ensures that we have the science right. Constituents throughout the Fredericton region, Oromocto, the Grand Lake region, and into New Maryland have confidence in our current Minister of Science.

My constituency is home to two world-class post-secondary institutions as well as a thriving community college. We rely on scientific evidence and support for fundamental science to help foster the type of economic development that is so important to our region, to our country, and quite frankly, to the entire world.

It is well worthy that this legislation deals with a Minister of Science at a full ministerial level.

Third, the bill would establish the Minister of Small Business and Tourism as a full minister with a full ministry. In Atlantic Canada there is no greater player than small business. Small businesses make up upward of 99.5% of the businesses in our community and we rely on them for economic growth, to employ people in our communities, and to employ students who graduate from our world-class universities and post-secondary institutions.

[*Translation*]

I think it is crucial for us to have a full-time minister focused on small and medium-sized businesses and on developing a regional tourism strategy. That is another important aspect of our economic growth.

[*English*]

I am sure that my colleague from Charlottetown would agree that tourism New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island is largely in the summer. However, if we can expand the tourist reach into the spring, fall, and winter, that will be incredibly important to the economy of our region. I am sure that the constituents watching today will agree that having a full-time minister of small business and tourism is important, and that our government is moving in the right direction in that respect.

I have some tremendous constituents doing fantastic work in advocacy as it relates to the importance of respecting the rights and

listening to the voices of individuals who are living with an intellectual, physical, or cognitive disability, as well as the importance of family members and community as support systems around them. Therefore, to have a full minister of sport and persons with disabilities at the cabinet table, speaking about understanding the unique ability that each of us as Canadians have is certainly something that I believe in fully and I am happy to advocate on behalf of.

I also believe that my constituents think it is incredibly important to have a voice around the cabinet table making important decisions about the way that we invest in community infrastructure. For example, we need to be taking into account the unique rights, needs, and abilities of persons who live with a disability in the way that we build communities that will allow for socio-economic benefits for years to come, that are socially inclusive, and that lead to economic growth so that people with disabilities can be employed and access the services they need. That is an important voice to have at the cabinet table as a full ministry.

With the time that remains I will touch on two things. The first is the importance of having a full minister of status of women, which in this day and age is absolutely necessary to reflect the views of 51% of the population in our country. We know when women are given an equal opportunity to succeed in the economy that economic growth is better. If we look at the last two years since we formed government, across this country unemployment is at the lowest it has been in over a decade. Almost 600,000 jobs have been created in those two years, most of which are full-time jobs. Economic growth is at levels not seen in about 17 years, since the previous Liberal government. Focusing on women in economic roles, and the social inclusion of women and girls in all aspects, is a tremendously important part of the actions our government takes.

Just briefly, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I can tell this House and the Canadians watching at home that our allies in countries that are developing in regions far away from us are taking notice of our leadership on gender equality and gender issues around the world. We need to stay on this track. Canada can make an important contribution to the world, not just in the near term but in the long term, helping create greater social inclusion for more people and greater economic growth, not just for ourselves but for regions abroad.

Government Orders

Finally, the importance of regional economic development for our government is absolutely fundamental. I can tell members that is no more evident than in this government's support for an Atlantic growth strategy, which sees the highest levels of government here in Ottawa supporting work being done in Atlantic Canada. It is an absolutely wonderful collaboration between the Government of Canada, with the leads of the ministers at the federal level in those four Atlantic regions, working with the premiers and their counterparts to invest in economic development through people. What better way to grow the economy than through immigration, bringing newcomers and their families into our region; investing in strategic infrastructure that respects our traditional ways of work and investing in new and exciting opportunities like IT, cybersecurity; and really enhancing opportunities through the ocean economy in our region? Trade, investment, and clean growth are another couple of elements that make up our government's view of the importance of regional economic development in our country.

I see I am running out of time. I wish I had more to go on with, but I will be happy to answer questions from my colleagues in this House.

• (1240)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not that my question will make any difference, since all of the measures in the bill have already been introduced two years ago, without any parliamentary oversight, but the member opposite went on about how there was so much tourism opportunity in Canada that we needed to have a full minister, and there was so much to be done in the area of small business that we needed a full minister. Could he please explain, then, why we have a part-time minister doing the small business, the tourism, and the House leader's job at the same time, for the full minister's salary?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, I will give one brief example of the tremendous work that is being done by our full Minister of Small Business and Tourism. Just this week, she was in China, helping set up the tremendous opportunities that will be available to us in 2018 through the Canada-China year of tourism. Canadians should have confidence in the work ethic of our Minister of Small Business and Tourism, as well as the team she has around her, and the focus that permeates throughout the government. It is a whole-of-government approach that is focused on small business and tourism in all regions of the country, to ensure we enable small businesses to be the drivers of economic growth in our communities, and that we provide those small businesses that are focused on tourism the opportunity to invite the world to Canada and show the world what we have to offer.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. If there is one rule that practically everyone in Quebec and Canada agrees on, it is the principle of equal pay for equal work. The Liberals are pushing the envelope a little bit, saying that if the titles are similar, it must be the same thing. The minister of tourism and the finance minister are the same. They are both ministers so they should get the same salary.

My question is very simple. Does the Liberal government plan to use the same process when it comes time to renegotiate the collective agreements with the public service?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, on that issue, I have complete confidence in the minister responsible, in this case, the President of the Treasury Board. I would add that all cabinet members, who are all full ministers, have an equal voice at the cabinet table. They all discharge their duties very thoroughly. Canadians know that when it comes to issues related to science, gender, persons with disabilities, sport, or our role in la Francophonie, we have competent ministers who put their hearts and minds in everything they do on a daily basis.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was listening with interest to my colleague's speech earlier, and he spent quite a lot of time on the government's focus on science and getting the facts before moving forward. I wonder if he could stand up before the House, along with his members, and explain how they could vote against the science of doctors, psychiatrists, and all specialists who warned them that allowing minors, anyone under the age of 25, to use marijuana was a dangerous thing to do. I wonder how he could have taken that science and totally ignored it, while claiming that everything they do is in the best interest of science.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, is the member opposite trying to tell me that he does not believe that currently people under the age of 25 are using cannabis? Honest to goodness, we know that Canada has the highest rate of cannabis use among young people in the developed world.

When it comes to legalization, regulation, and restricting access to cannabis, we are completely focused on public health and ensuring that young people have less access to cannabis, that cannabis is regulated from seed to sale, that we do not allow money to get into the hands of criminal organizations, profiting gangs right across the country. We have taken a science-based approach, focused on public health, that ensures young people will be safe and that we can legislate, regulate, and restrict access to cannabis in communities across the country.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to speak on this important piece of legislation, which is terribly flawed, and hopefully the government will listen.

Before I speak to Bill C-24, the previous Liberal speaker shared with this House, with great gusto, that he was shocked about a question of young people having access to cannabis. He asked if the member was not aware that people under the age of 25 are using cannabis. Yes, that is happening. That is why, as a country, we need to better control cannabis and access by youth.

Government Orders

The new scientific Liberal approach is to make sure our young people, 12, 13, and 14 years old, who do not currently have access to cannabis, could have access to it. What they are proposing with the marijuana legislation is that youth between the ages of 12 and 18 would be able to legally possess five grams. When they hit the age of 18, it would go up to 30 grams. Five grams of marijuana is 15 joints, and 30 grams is 90 joints. Their new scientific approach is that they are going to keep marijuana out of the hands of youth by allowing them to have in their possession up to 15 joints each. That is a science course that I never have taken. Maybe it is the new Liberal science course.

However, we are here to talk about the government's approach to appointments of ministers, and I think everyone in this House fully supports the proposal and goal of having gender equity in cabinet. That starts with encouraging women and girls to get involved with politics much more than in the past. I am really excited seeing the pages here today; many of them are female.

I could not do my job as a member of Parliament without my partner, my wife of 45 years, Diane. When I am not in my riding of beautiful Langley—Aldergrove, my wife represents me, and many say she is a better speaker than I am. I would not argue with them. She is very bright, very capable, and very much my equal, maybe even my superior. I love her. I fully respect and agree with the goal of gender equity, and it needs to start with pay equity. Everyone in this House, on this side anyway, supports pay equity. The government says it does but if only it had a majority government then it could get it through and get pay equity. In fact, it does have a majority government, a strong majority, and it could get it through if it were a priority.

There is this parable that a tree is known by its fruits. If the tree has apples on it, it is an apple tree, and if it has oranges, it is an orange tree. If the government says it believes in gender equity, what kind of fruit is on its tree, its tree of truth? Unfortunately, Canadians are saying that what the government says and what the government does are two very different things. We are talking about changing appointments to ministers, changing junior ministers, ministers of state, to now be paid the same amount as a full minister, but not having the title, responsibility, or support.

Tokenism is not what this side believes in, and Canadians do not believe in tokenism. It has to be true gender equity. Some of the most intelligent women I ever worked with in this House include Rona Ambrose, the former leader of our party. Before that, she was minister in a number of portfolios and was very capable. I was her parliamentary secretary, and I was honoured to be given that responsibility. She is a very intelligent woman. I learned from her, and it was an exciting time to be the parliamentary secretary to the minister of environment.

• (1250)

Before being elected, I was with the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia. Aileen Shibata was our regional manager for loss prevention and road safety, a very intelligent woman. There are very intelligent women who should be given responsibilities in the House based on their skill level. That is how it should be: pay equity based on the work people do. If they have those skills, we need to honour those skills and give them responsibility, regardless of their gender.

The goal of encouraging women to get involved is very important and needs to be encouraged. We need to encourage the government to truly give women opportunities. I am thinking of what is said and what is done. There is a by-election going on in Canada. There are four ridings. One of them is South Surrey—White Rock, and the Liberals chose a man to run for them. He is a very nice, retired man, but there was a very capable and intelligent woman who wanted to run for the Liberals and they said, no, they wanted a man. It was very unfortunate because, if the government really believes in gender equity, it would have given that woman the opportunity to run.

The woman who is running is Kerry-Lynne Findlay, who is a former cabinet minister, and I hope she returns here after December 11, because she is very capable and again an example of our party's supporting women to get involved in politics.

Having been in the House for 13 and a half years, elected in 2004, I have experienced the importance of regional development ministers. The regional development minister for British Columbia is very successful. That regional minister's office is where the provincial representatives went to meet. In a coordinated, prioritized way, they were able to put the money into infrastructure where it was needed and would have long-term benefits. Without an organized approach, removing the regional ministers, we lose that organized approach and that voice, that consultation between the federal government and the provincial governments. It is a big mistake.

The other problem I have with Bill C-24 is the so-called mystery ministers. The Liberals are saying to trust them, pass this, and they are going to appoint some mystery ministers. Who are those mystery ministers? The last speaker said possibly the minister for the status of women. What about a minister for seniors? The largest demographic in Canada is seniors. Canadian seniors for the last two years have been ignored by Parliament because the government says it cares about seniors but it does not.

The most recent example was the announcement with confetti in the air and great splendour when Liberals announced the Canadian national housing strategy. There was mention of seniors 18 times in the report and not once was there any solution or announcement of how they were going to take care of Canadian seniors. How could that happen that they acknowledge the needs of seniors but nothing is announced to address the needs of seniors? That is because there is no minister for seniors.

With great sincerity, because Bill C-24 is going to be rammed through as it rams through everything, I would ask that it seriously consider the plight of Canadian seniors. Right now, 70% of Canadians who need palliative care in the last days, last weeks, and last years of their life have no access to it. That again is because there is no minister for seniors. There used to be, in the previous Parliament. The previous government had seniors as a priority, and I again ask that the government put its words into action and appoint a minister for seniors.

Government Orders

• (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Stephen Harper did have a minister responsible for seniors. However, let us keep in mind that he had 40 ministers in total, which was a record high. When we look at cabinets and ministries, no government in the history of Canada had more ministers than that prime minister.

This proposed legislation clearly establishes that there will be one-tier ministers, so when they sit around the cabinet table, they are all equal. Whether a minister of democratic reform, finance, defence, or health, they are all equal when they sit around that table. That is important for us to note.

The member was asking about the importance of a minister of seniors. We recognize the value of ministers here. We talked to the Minister of Finance about the increase to the GIS, which our government has done, literally lifting thousands of seniors out of poverty. We have decreased the age of retirement from 67 to 65. The member will recall that when the Conservatives had a ministry for seniors, they increased the age of retirement from 65 to 67. We reversed that.

It is important to recognize the priorities of government, and the good news is that the legislation would enable not only the current Prime Minister but future prime ministers to have a couple more cabinet ministers, and that is good thing too, I suspect, given the member's comments. Could he provide his thoughts on my comments?

• (1300)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I do not think it was deliberate, but the member has misled this Parliament or he is ill informed. In fact, the previous government realized that Canadians were living longer and working longer. Therefore, the Conservatives suggested that the age of eligibility be raised from 65 to 67, and that would take place in 2021. In fact, it had not yet taken place and the Liberal government, with great grandeur, said that it would roll the age back to 65. That was the Liberals' opportunity, but nothing changed. It was 65 in 2015 and it stayed at 65.

At the HUMA committee, we found out that the moves the government had made with the poison pill in its agenda would save the government close to \$4 billion a year by the way it was treating seniors, because it had scaled back. It has given a bit more here, but it takes a lot back here. The Liberals are hurting seniors.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we in the New Democratic Party have been championing equality for women for decades, and, again, I am happy to see there is a gender-parity cabinet. However, the government has become a government of spin, image, and good intentions rather than solid actions. We always have to look beneath the surface to see if the Liberals' rhetoric matches their reality.

I was looking at the structure of the government. Even though the government is making a big deal of its commitment to women and the Prime Minister says that he is a feminist and the government has gender parity in cabinet, I am quite shocked that the minister responsible for the Status of Women Canada prevails over the Status

of Women Canada, which is an agency currently under the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Therefore, although the government says that women make up more than half the population, it has not seen fit to create a stand-alone ministry responsible for women. Could my hon. colleague comment as to whether he thinks the government's lack of action on real equality for women matches its rhetoric and what the Liberals would like Canadians to believe?

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the member. There is a lot of rhetoric. It is unfortunate that the truth is not coming out. Canadians know where the Conservative Party stands. Canadians know where the NDP stands. Canadians do not know where the Liberal government stands. The Liberals will tell Canadians what they want to hear, but what they have planned is something very different. I would agree that their rhetoric does not match what they actually do.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to this very important topic. I will touch on a few different aspects of it.

I would like to start where the discussion left off with respect to increasing gender parity in the workplace and the labour market, and the ability of women to get into jobs, roles, and careers that traditionally they might not have been able to do so. I have been championing and working on this issue a lot since I came to the House. It speaks to giving women the tools they need to have the opportunity to fully explore and pursue the careers and jobs they aspire to have.

One of the things I advocated, and the government did do it, was to change maternity benefits for women. In the past, pregnant women were only able to access their maternity benefits eight weeks of the 15 weeks prior to their due date. This government made a real step toward changing that by allowing those maternity benefits to be taken 13 weeks prior, moving in the direction of properly putting the provisions and safeguards in place so women would have real opportunities to pursue a career at the same time as having a family and children.

Another issue is the size of the cabinet. This government has taken a dramatically different approach than the previous government did. It is very telling in the fact that it chose to reduce the size of the cabinet. More important, it made all members sitting around the table have an equal say. Whereas previous governments had fewer members of cabinet making decisions, this government said it wanted to have everybody who sat at the table to help make the decisions on behalf of Canadians. It is remarkable and should be applauded.

Two years later, we are now amending the legislation to catch up with this progressive step. It is only fitting that we need to to here with respect to pay. The truth of the matter is that the ministries that are changing, and we are seeing the full ministerial status come forward, such as la francophonie, science, small business and tourism, sport and persons with disability and status of women, are all ministries that deserve the full attention of the minister and the daily requirements demanded from them.

Government Orders

The interesting thing is that we never know the particular workload one minister will have at any given time. A lot of it has to do with who the opposition chooses to pick on that week, as we have seen with the Minister of Finance. We saw that with the Minister of Democratic Institutions at the beginning of our term. A lot of it comes down to the individual's workload and what he or she is dealing with at that time. As we have seen, all ministers who participate in cabinet contribute valuable efforts toward their own ministries.

One change that really caught my eye was the change from the minister responsible for infrastructure to the minister for infrastructure and communities. Being a former mayor, I am fully aware of the demands municipalities continually put on ministries, both at the provincial and federal levels, with asks, wanting meetings with the minister, and helping to shape legislation. For the first time, we see a minister, both in title and in practical implementation, fully devoted toward infrastructure and our communities.

● (1305)

At the municipal level, we need there to be somebody who has his or her full attention. That is exactly what we see with the changes related to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

When we talk about the importance of these ministries, I hope we can focus on the fact, and I hope everybody would agree, this is not just in title but this is in practice. It is about ensuring we have the right tools in place and people have the right information so when they do get around the table to speak at cabinet, they are contributing equally.

I am extremely supportive of the legislation. I want to see this go through so we can get on with a progressive agenda. Quite frankly, until this point, cabinet did not offer that progressive stance.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I acknowledge the government's efforts to increase gender equality in the cabinet, this bill illustrates the law of unintended consequences. It is increasing the remuneration and salaries of ministers of the executive branch of government. We have seen in this place, not just with the current government but with previous governments that have been in this place for the last number of decades, that time after time the House of Commons passes legislation, makes changes to the Standing Orders, makes changes to unwritten conventions that enhance the power and the budgets of the executive branch of government to the detriment of this elected legislature.

For that reason, I do not support the bill. We need to stop this scope creep of ever-increasing budgets and remuneration for the executive branch of government to the detriment of this place. It started with the formal recognition of recognized parties in the House of Commons, then extended to the recognition of registered political parties outside of Parliament, then the extension of the leader's power over registered electoral district associations, and now, once again, an enhancement of the budgets and power of the executive branch of government.

We have to stop this creep into the rights of members of Parliament, into the rights of this legislature, and see power re-balanced in this town. Most people do not realize that the overall budget for members of Parliament to hire staff is about \$120 million,

but the budget, just for one person in this place, the Prime Minister's office, ministerial staffers in ministers' offices is almost half of that, \$60 million. By increasing the remuneration, salaries, and budgets of ministers of the executive branch of government is a step in the wrong direction to rebalancing power in this town and ensuring that the elected representatives who are not in those 25 or so seats in government have a stronger voice on the floor of the House.

● (1310)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member. However, the fact is that the size of cabinet now is 75% of what it was during the previous government, when he was involved. The budget would have been more by default then.

I find it quite ironic that the Liberals are talking about efficiency in a smaller cabinet and creating cost savings as it relates to cabinet. Unfortunately, I disagree with him. The progressive approach this government is taking is much more in line with cost-saving measures, at least as it relates to the previous government.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech. He talked very clearly about the importance of having a minister responsible for the status of women or women's issues and the importance of that being a full minister with equal voice at cabinet. I agree with him very much on that.

My question, though, has to do with his government's lack of commitment to creating a stand-alone ministry responsible for the status of women. Currently the government has structured the ministry responsible for the status of women as an agency within the ministry of heritage.

Would the member agree that a government truly committed to equality of women, that truly wants to be a feminist government would create a stand-alone ministry specifically and exclusively dedicated to women's issues, or is the member content with having it being a mere agency under another department?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I have heard the member ask this question a number of times today. What I will say is that the minister of status of women has a full seat at the cabinet table, has the full ability to participate in the discussions, and her or his value, whoever it might be of the day, at least in this government, and is fully part of the decision-making process.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the long-standing battle for gender equality is far from over.

Yesterday, December 6, reminded us that violence against women remains all too real. Women who publicly declare that they are feminists and ask for equal rights and opportunities still endure virtual or real attacks.

We had great expectations of the Liberals when they announced that there would be a gender-balanced government. Feminists are fighting many battles. Equal pay and equality of opportunity are two of the best-known measures, but have yet to be implemented. Unfortunately, too many women do not have the opportunity to secure the positions they want because they experience discrimination, whether intentional or not, based on their gender.

Government Orders

Our Canadian society, just like the House of Commons, has not yet changed its work culture to ensure that high-level jobs are not given just to men.

The fight to move closer to gender parity cannot impinge on other rights. I will come back to that later in my speech.

With Bill C-24, the NDP is concerned not only with the missed opportunity on pay equity, but also with the elimination of the regional development minister positions. In fact, those positions might now be led by a single administrator who does not know the region, does not speak the same language, and is not physically in the region. What is more, economic initiatives will now be national in scope. That is why we are concerned about the bill. Previously, we could have ministers responsible for regions such as Ontario, Quebec, or western Canada. This all disappears under Bill C-24.

Quebec is losing its minister of economic development. I find that troubling coming from a government that says it wants to represent everyone and be more transparent. I will provide a very real and recent example: the refusal by the Minister of Canadian Heritage to tax Netflix, and other companies such as Google, and properly protect our culture, as the Government of Quebec has been urging the federal government to do. There is a growing disconnect between what Quebecers want and the ideas and decisions of the federal government.

Quebec has significant needs, in terms of both infrastructure and business development. We need to strengthen our SMEs, and we need a minister who understands Quebec's situation, not some unpredictable administrator.

This is something we are seeing with the Davie shipyard file, which we have brought up time after time in the House of Commons. The government is doing absolutely nothing for Quebec shipyard workers. It is deeply troubling.

The Prime Minister boasted about achieving parity in 2015. He claimed to have achieved that parity by including female ministers without departments. There is nothing wrong with giving departments to some ministers and not to others, nor with giving a practical title, like minister of state, to ministers with fewer responsibilities.

The only real problem this bill seeks to remedy is a political problem of the Prime Minister's own making. He is the one who boasted about forming a gender-balanced cabinet, yet appointed a disproportionate number of women to junior positions. Now Canadian taxpayers are being asked to pay junior ministers more just to avoid embarrassing the Prime Minister and forcing him to explain that his cabinet had a gender pay gap because he failed to appoint enough women to ministerial positions.

By blurring the lines between ministers of state and full ministers, the Prime Minister is prioritizing equal treatment over equal responsibilities in the interest of maintaining gender parity in his government. The saying is, "Equal pay for equal work", but in this bill, the work is not equal. That means there is a bit of a problem.

Bill C-24 purports to tackle a key problem in our society, namely women's place in society and, more importantly, their status. Real progress has been made in recent years to remove barriers to gender equality. Today's women are better educated, and more of them are

in positions of responsibility in the private sector, where we are seeing more female CEOs of major international corporations, as well as in politics, where more women appear in legislative assemblies, the Senate, and cabinet.

● (1315)

Thanks to great women such as Kim Campbell and our Governor General, Julie Payette, young Canadian women know that there has been progress and that they can overcome obstacles and fulfill their ambitions.

Even so, for many women in Canada and around the world, there is still a lot of room for improvement. Taking a broader international perspective, according to the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2016", we will not see true parity for another 170 years.

We are a long way, then, from achieving our common goal of gender equality. Closer to home, here are some facts about the status of women in my riding, Salaberry—Suroît. This data is from an economic profile prepared by Relais-femmes for the Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent regional conference of elected officials. Women's average annual employment income is \$32,000; men's is \$46,000. Even now, in 2017, women in the Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent earn, on average, 70% of what men earn.

Pay equity is not a luxury; it is a right. Equality is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but the fact is that women are still being denied their rights. Canada is very proud of being a democracy, a state where the rule of law prevails and we have laws that protect women's rights. However, the most basic rights, women's social and economic rights, are still being denied every day.

The World Economic Forum ranks Canada 35th in terms of pay equity. That is a pretty poor showing for an OECD country. Canada is nevertheless a party to the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which provides for equal pay for equal work.

Canada also ratified the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1981. This shows that, despite our commitments, we still have a ways to go before we achieve equality, equity and parity for all.

We have heard several interesting proposals from members of Parliament to help further the cause, and yet I regret to announce that Bill C-24 is not one of them.

Today, as a woman and an activist for Canadians, and in particular Canadian women, I am voicing my opposition to Bill C-24.

My motives are simple enough. The only problem Bill C-24 is designed to solve is the Prime Minister's image problem, one he himself created when he boasted about having a gender-balanced cabinet even though he appointed a disproportionate number of women to junior positions. This bears repeating.

This bill is insulting to Canadian women. Its only aim is to give the appearance of equal treatment, and it only applies to ministers. The Prime Minister's cosmetic reorganization will not affect middle-class Canadian women in the job market.

Government Orders

In truth, the bill is condescending, and only emphasizes the absurd fact that, for the government, men and women are not equal when it comes to responsibility. The facts are clear. Most female ministers in the Liberal government are ministers of state and have far fewer responsibilities. Canadian taxpayers are being asked to pay more for junior ministers, just so the Prime Minister can look good.

If he really wants to be a “feminist”, the Prime Minister should perhaps act on the recommendations of the 2004 task force on pay equity. The report has been on a shelf collecting dust for 13 years. We are still wondering when the Liberals will act on these recommendations. One of their election promises was to achieve parity by 2016. They promised to introduce a proactive pay equity bill and, so far, at the end of 2017, they have done nothing at all.

They have not yet implemented the bill. They have yet to even introduce it in the House of Commons. They have not repealed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, which was unfair and was brought in by the Conservatives in 2009. For all these reasons, it is impossible for us to vote in favour of Bill C-24, and it is even less possible to say that we have achieved gender parity.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the hon. member's speech, she was seemingly twisting herself into knots, both arguing for pay equity and, in this specific case, against it.

I will give her the example of the Minister of Science, who is responsible for universities across the country, and research and granting institutions worth billions of dollars. Why is her voice worth less? Why is she considered a junior minister in a government that is fully committed to science?

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, it is so sad to hear the Liberals speaking today; they are totally oblivious to the mess they will be creating.

They claim to be in favour of equality even though their cabinet is not gender balanced. There are fewer women in actual ministerial positions. The Minister of Science was mentioned, but she is a minister of state. She does not lead a department. She will have the same salary, but she does not have the same responsibilities. Do the Liberals think this is parity, having equal pay but not equal responsibilities? This is the message they are sending to young women in Canada: it is no big deal if they do not have the same responsibilities or the same value, since they will have the same salary.

In any case, this only affects ministers, while women in my riding earn 70% of what men earn. Are the Liberals fine with that? I do not think so. However, that is the message we are getting today. It is insulting and it is serious. This is not what women's rights are about.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague for her great speech.

I really liked what she said about the Liberal Party making this bill a cosmetic bill. This is one more bill designed to make them look like they support parity. She was right in saying that the women across the way who are ministers of state, even though there is nothing wrong with that, do not head up a department and have no visibility. It is the men we see most often on television, especially one man in particular, the Prime Minister of Canada. As a woman, I have a problem with that.

Whoever claims to want parity in the House and introduces legislation like this needs to give women a chance to speak. They cannot call themselves feminists when they are only interested in themselves.

Does my NDP colleague agree that this is just another bill designed to enhance the Prime Minister's image?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

This is indeed a cosmetic bill designed to boost the Prime Minister's image. He calls himself a feminist, but the facts show that he does not put female ministers forward. It is still women who are being assigned lesser roles than full ministers in cabinet.

How can they brag about parity when that is not the reality? The Liberals have yet to table the proactive pay equity bill they promised in 2016. That is not the reality in Canada in 2017. The Prime Minister once said, “it is 2015”. Well, what did we get in 2015? Nothing.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today, as it is on any day that luxury is afforded to me. We are all honoured when we get this opportunity, and I am no exception.

I am happy to speak to Bill C-24 at report stage. I sit on the government operations committee, where we reviewed this bill. I think I had a chance to speak to it at second reading as well. Therefore, I am going to address the debate from a bit of a different angle.

When we hear the many concerns raised in opposition to this bill, some are not necessarily related to the subject of the bill, but are perhaps valid concerns nonetheless. In my very humble opinion and submission to this chamber, anyone who is opposed to this piece of legislation, who argues it is unnecessary, and who wants us on this side of the House to believe it is merely cosmetic, I think does an injustice to the five ministries being elevated and the important subject matter of those ministries. It is not about the people or the ministers; it is about the ministries.

For example, in his mandate letter to the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, among other things, the Prime Minister indicates that the minister should develop and introduce new federal accessibility legislation. I highly doubt any member of this House would not think that is an important task to undertake, or that improving disability legislation in this country is a trivial matter. The ministry should be elevated to the status of a full ministry.

Government Orders

There should be no junior ministries. In essence, that is what this bill is about. It is not about the people, it is about the job. Certainly, we can have a ministry that is equal. Historically, in the Westminster model, a prime minister is first among equals, and the ministry itself should be a group of equals.

La francophonie is another ministry that is being elevated.

● (1330)

[*Translation*]

The department's mandate is to ensure Canada's strong and sustained engagement in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. That is important.

[*English*]

Canada is a proud member, as it should be, of the International Organisation of La Francophonie. It is one of the many international organizations Canada has the great honour of being a part of. In fact, we are leaders in this organization, as we are in many international organizations, and have been throughout our history.

Canada's international role and leadership on the global stage is not bound to whatever party is in government at the time. Every government realizes it is important for Canada to be a leader and a player on the world stage. I do not think there is a member here who would suggest that our role in the Commonwealth or NATO is not important. I hope, and I believe, that not one member here thinks that our role in La Francophonie is not important. That is what this bill does. It elevates these roles, which we should view as important, to the status they deserve because of the important work done by these ministries.

Of course, the ministry of small business and tourism will also be elevated should this bill become law. We do not need to debate the importance of small business to the Canadian economy or Canadians.

Also, I do not think we need to undermine the importance of tourism to our economy. Canada has seen growth in tourism this year as a result of the Canada 150 celebrations. We hope to see another increase in tourism next year when Canada and China enter their tourism agreement. Many small businesses and communities rely on tourism for jobs, for growth, and for keeping communities vibrant. Why should tourism not be a full ministry? Tourism is vitally important for all Canadians, and we need to focus on that when discussing Bill C-24.

The Minister of Status of Women would also be elevated to a full ministerial position. I have not heard anyone argue that we should not do that. We can all agree that the role of the Minister of Status of Women is an important one. Her ministry is an important ministry that does important work for all Canadians. The minister certainly deserves an equal place at the cabinet table. This role ought not to be dismissed or diminished in any manner. It is not a trivial role. The ministry does great work and needs to be at the same level as all other ministries in Canada. Bill C-24 would do that.

When we look at the ministry of science, I do not think for a minute that anyone here does not accept science as an important part of Canada, an important part of the Canadian economy, an important part of the innovative economy. The global economy is changing

rapidly. Canada needs to be and remain in the vanguard of that change. If we do not invest in science, if we do not encourage our children to participate in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, then we will be left behind. No member of Parliament, no Canadian in fact, would want our country to be left behind as we enter the new innovative global economy, in which Canada should rightfully take its place of leadership.

These are the types of things we are talking about and none are unimportant. None of them ought to be seen as lower in an artificial hierarchy. These topics are important to all Canadians. They are important to my constituents and I am sure they are important to the constituents of everyone in the chamber.

The opposition's role is to oppose, and valid concerns are always raised about legislation. It is part of the debating process, part of what we parliamentarians go through when we make laws. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. No one should feel less Canadian as a result. Being in opposition is an essential part of the parliamentary system. I want members to realize that when they criticize or raise valid or other objections, or when they raise issues that may or may not be important, from time to time it diminishes the subject matter of legislation.

For members to say that Bill C-24 is unnecessary, that it is a cosmetic exercise, that it is a pet project of the Prime Minister, is to say that La Francophonie is not important, that science is not important, that disability legislation is not important, that the status of women ministry is not important, that small business and tourism is not important. We all agree that these five ministries are very important and deserve to be at the table with all of the other important ministries. The ministry needs to be a one-tier ministry.

I urge all members to support—

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix is rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague across the way, no one here in the House, neither NDP nor Conservative, said that the Francophonie is not important. I ask that my colleague withdraw his remarks.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): That is a matter of debate.

The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, as I said, debate is a good part of the process, and I am happy to partake in it. However, we should follow the rules in this place when debating, and I am happy to continue to do so.

I was about to conclude by saying that I urge all members to support the bill, because it is a great bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I took part in this debate a few weeks ago and I kept repeating the same thing in what I would call a philosophical critique of the bill.

Government Orders

First, I think that making cabinet gender balanced is a terrible idea because having qualified ministers should be more important than gender parity.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that parity is the Liberals' way to prevent women from advancing to cabinet. Under this bill, women will never be able to make up more than 50% of cabinet. Is that just or fair considering that, for decades, men made up 100%, 70%, or 60% of cabinet? Now, the very clear message to women is that never will they ever represent more than half the cabinet. That is an interesting way of looking at this and I would not be surprised if that were the Liberal's primary objective.

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my friend's interjection. I enjoyed my time with him on the government operations committee. At committee, he was always insightful and informative, and it was good to have him as part of our committee.

I am not sure where he is getting his position that women will not be able to have over 50% of cabinet positions. I have read the legislation pretty closely. I studied it at committee clause-by-clause. My memory is not perfect, but I can recall no provision mentioning anything of that sort. If there is a such a provision in there, I would be happy to change my answer and refer to that provision. However, I believe there is nothing in the act that would prevent a cabinet from being 100% female. Perhaps that is what we should be striving for.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member was speaking about the role of women around board tables, I was thinking of the different not-for-profit organizations I have been fortunate to be part of. I have been a part of 28 organizations in Guelph and several businesses over the years where women and diversity were not at the table. Once people are at the table, their voice is heard like every other voice around the table. We do not then say they are younger and therefore that their voice does not count, or that because they come from the other side of the country, their voice does not count. Being at the table brings their voice forward, and as far as I know, we all have equal voices when speaking.

Could the member talk about the contribution that various voices give us in getting varied and better ideas going forward?

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's question gives me an opportunity to talk a bit about my former life. Do not be aghast at this, but I come from Bay Street and also have some experience as a lawyer in corporate governance. The evidence is clear that public boards with diverse directors are profitable and show an increased return on investment, and shareholders encourage it because it makes good business.

I would always say that having diverse perspectives is good for any organization, whether private or public sector. Hearing different perspectives lets people perhaps change their minds about decisions they would otherwise make, and ensures that the application of decisions is universal in scope and not just for a narrow group of people. If it makes for good business sense, as it does, it also makes good sense for good public governance. We should strive to have a diversity of opinions any time decisions are being made, and the cabinet table should be no exception.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House to speak to Bill C-24. I had the opportunity to speak to this same piece of legislation earlier in the spring, and the truth is that my concerns remain largely the same.

There are three main problems I wish to address. First, with this bill, the Liberals are seeking to get rid of regional development ministers. Instead of caring for the unique needs of Canada's diverse regions, the current government is choosing to apply a highly centralized and very top-down approach to decision-making. A minister from Toronto would now tell Atlantic Canada, as well as northern Canada and the western provinces, what they need and how to best economically develop. They are to trust him, because he is in the government, there to help them, right?

My second concern is that this bill lacks transparency, which of course very much concerns me. I will come back to that momentarily. The third concern I have with this bill is that the Liberals are hailing it as something that would result in equality among ministers, women and men, junior ministers and senior ministers. The government House leader said that it would create a cabinet that would uphold gender parity. When she said that, I could hear the Elvis Presley song, playing in the background, with the line, "that was just a 1-i-e", the word that cannot be said in this House.

I have only 10 minutes, so permit me to dive in and provide a fuller discussion. The bill aims to eliminate the positions—

• (1345)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): There is a point of order by the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, an unparliamentary word is just that: unparliamentary. Even if it is spelled, it is still unparliamentary.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member for Lethbridge want to withdraw the word?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, it is part of the lyrics of a song by Elvis Presley.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The rule is that members cannot say indirectly what they cannot say directly. I do not want to hear the word again, whether it is spelled or said. Perhaps the member could apologize or withdraw it, and we can continue.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, I apologize that the opposite side of the House is offended by all this questioning.

Government Orders

The bill aims to eliminate the positions of our former government's six regional ministers, who looked after these different parts of our country. The elimination of these positions will mean that the unique needs of western Canada, northern Canada, Atlantic Canada, northern Ontario, southern Ontario, and Quebec will not be adequately represented at the cabinet table. I would imagine that this would upset everyone in the House, because we should strive to represent these regions adequately. Instead of putting regional ministers in place who have boots on the ground and their fingers on the pulse in these different regions, the Prime Minister decided that one minister from Toronto would make the decisions for all of Canada in terms of their economic development and prosperity going forward.

Traditionally, regional development agency ministers brought their region-specific requests, requirements, or desires to Parliament to ensure that accurate representation was made. However, as I said, the bill would gut that opportunity. When asked about this decision, the Prime Minister said that appointing a Toronto minister for all regional development was "a way of reducing the kind of politics that we've always seen from regional development agencies."

What exactly is that supposed to mean? Is it that, in a nation with significant diversity, the unique needs of the different regions are not worth considering, or does it mean that it is too political, too complicated, or too uncomfortable for the Prime Minister to bring those voices to the table? Maybe the Prime Minister, who claims to place importance on consultation, does not actually give a care.

I will borrow the words written in an editorial in *The Guardian*, which said, "Exactly how does a central Canadian give the regional development agency more clout at the cabinet table?"

What the Liberal government has done is incredibly illogical, and what makes matters worse, and is quite embarrassing for the Liberals, to be frank, is the fact that in the last election, 32 ridings in Atlantic Canada elected a Liberal member of Parliament. Surely one of these 32 individuals is qualified to be a regional minister to stand up for their unique needs in Canada. What is the Prime Minister saying about those 32 individuals and their ability or inability?

When I think about the Prime Minister's so-called commitment to transparency and accountability, I would expect that he would want men and women at the table to represent these regions well. I would expect that he would want them to go to a shipyard in Halifax or to visit a mine in the north or an agricultural event in Saskatchewan. He would want those experiences represented around his cabinet table, but that is not the case.

This brings me to my second concern, which is that the government is actually refusing to be transparent. Bill C-24 calls on members of the House to approve three mysterious ministers, and it says nothing more. There is no transparency or accountability. The clause is absolutely unreasonable in asking the House to permit a blank cheque going forward. I am not okay with that.

That is not the only thing that is farcical in the bill. My third point is that when it comes to changing the salaries of ministers of state, Bill C-24 is nothing more than a hurried attempt to cover up for the Liberals' media embarrassment when the Prime Minister went out and said that he had put a gender-equal cabinet in place. The media

picked up on this immediately and noticed that all five junior ministers were, in fact, women. The Prime Minister actually chose to give these women less authority, less responsibility, and smaller budgets than their male counterparts. So much for 2015.

Bill C-24 is the Prime Minister's attempt to remedy this mistake. The problem is that just attaching a label and a few extra dollars to a position does not mean that the person is valued or respected any more than she was before. The bill does an incredible disservice to women, as it is tokenism at its finest.

As a strong, intelligent, and hard-working woman, I want to be entrusted with responsibility and granted a voice at the cabinet table, not because of my gender but because of my ability. I would expect the same from the women in the House. They want their salaries to match what they do, what they are capable of, and the trust put in them. Changing the pay system would not create equality. In fact, it would diminish the value of being a woman at the cabinet table.

• (1350)

The Prime Minister is saying, "Don't worry. I won't give you the same level of responsibility or assign you a comparable budget or trust you to function at the cabinet table the way others do, but I will give you a name placard and a few extra dollars, and we will call it good." It that for real? That is 2015? That is gender equality?

Here is the thing. The Prime Minister is a self-proclaimed feminist. So am I, but our ideas of feminism are not aligned. According to his definition of feminism, it is okay for Yazidi women and girls to be systematically kidnapped, tortured, raped, and sold while Canada stands by in vain, watching from afar. According to his definition of feminism, it is okay for newcomers to practise genital mutilation and it is no longer considered a barbaric practice in Canada. According to his definition of feminism, all women are equal, but some are more equal than others. There is a right type of woman and a wrong type of woman, and it is up to this Prime Minister to dictate what that is. Some are simply an inappropriate choice, according to this Prime Minister.

Now, on this side of the House, feminism looks like respect for every single woman. Feminism on this side of the House looks like taking a stand against gender-based hatred and violence. Feminism on this side of the House looks like protecting young girls from being brutalized. Feminism on this side of the House looks like preserving a woman's right to choose between two or more options, not just accepting the one that is dictated to her. This is feminism on this side of the House. This is the feminism that all of Canada deserves and expects.

Statements by Members

In summary, Bill C-24 is extremely flawed. It robs regions of fair representation, it lacks transparency, and it fails in its attempt to create ministerial equality. I will be voting no.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Lethbridge spoke about a number of things that actually arose today in our committee on citizenship and immigration, where we had the minister appear before us. With respect to a couple of points, I think she is fairly off base, but it is possibly because she was not able to attend the meeting, being in the House.

With respect to the issue of the section of the Canadian citizenship guide, it has not been changed. The words she referred to are still in the guide. With respect to Yazidi women and girls, the government is making huge efforts, as we have also heard in committee, on bringing people who are suffering under Daesh to Canada. It is doing its utmost to try to help them and find ways to address some of the concerns.

Does the member not agree with the motion, which was passed by the House, to bring Yazidi women and girls to Canada to settle and protect them, as is currently being done?

• (1355)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is ludicrous. Here is why. Those in this House know very well, as does the Canadian public, that it was our former leader, Rona Ambrose, joined by other members on this side, who brought forward the motion to bring Yazidi women and girls over to Canada to give them a second chance at life. That came from this side of the House. How dare that side of the House try to take credit for that action.

Let us talk about one more thing, and that is that in June 2016, the UN declared what was taking place in northern Iraq a genocide. Conservatives called on the government to take action. The Prime Minister said no. He said that we would wait. We would wait for more women to be slaughtered. We would wait for more women to be tortured. We would wait for more women to be raped. We would wait for more women to be sold into slavery. We would wait. It was not until after we applied significant pressure that the government finally acted. That is not feminism.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to lament the fact that with her decision to quote from an Elvis song, I think Elvis really has left the building. It is quite sad.

I would like to give the hon. member an opportunity to talk about how she would fix the bill. Is there any fix that would work for her?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is very simple.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to bring the attention of some of my friends on the government side to, in fact, what—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I am trying to hear the question from the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and I am having a hard time with the cackling that is going on. It has stopped now, so I will let the member continue.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I hope members of the government will listen. This is the Liberals' opportunity to learn something.

The orders in council that the government put forward on November 4 were the orders in council that created the ministerial positions. Let me read just one example, "...a Minister of State to be styled Minister of Status of Women, to assist the Minister of Canadian Heritage in the carrying out of that Minister's responsibilities...."

We have heard all sorts of impassioned speeches from members of the government that these five areas are important responsibilities that deserve their own ministers. I have a suggestion to those who have given those speeches. They should write to the Prime Minister and suggest that he do that.

Bill C-24 pays ministers who will remain ministers of state. There is an important difference between a minister and a minister of state. It is not a difference of the importance of the area, it is a difference of the public administration mechanism. Ministers of state are subject to full ministers in the exercise of their functions which is why the orders in council published on November 4 very clearly established that ministers of state, styled as full ministers, but in fact ministers of state, report to full ministers in the carrying out of their functions.

It is incredible that many members of the government do not understand this basic feature of how the ministerial system works and are giving speeches that misunderstand the provisions of the bill.

I would be curious for my colleague's comments on this simple reality of how Bill C-24 works.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this excellent question and for his excellent explanation. To be honest, I do not know that I can add much to it, he has covered it quite well. The government is claiming to do something that it is not actually doing. Liberals are putting a few extra dollars along with a placard on a door and saying, "there, now you are equal". No, actually there is a distinction in these positions.

I would like to make one point very clear and that is every single member of the House is equal in value, equal in worth, and equal in dignity and that can never be robbed from them. What the government is trying to do, however, is somehow say that adding extra money and adding a new placard, though not changing the rule, is somehow making the minister equal in voice at the table. That is just not the case.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

LEO ABRAHAM

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the last two years I have had the privilege of visiting many schools in my riding of Brampton North and I always find it is the teachers who are the unsung heroes, helping students transition through life's challenging times.

Statements by Members

Leo Abraham was a grade 4 and grade 5 teacher at St. John Bosco School and an inspiration and mentor to all who knew him. It is with great sadness that I must announce that Leo passed away last Thursday, after a head-on crash with a tractor-trailer while driving home from a Toronto FC playoff game. Leo's lighthearted sense of humour and non-judgmental nature created an environment that made everyone feel at ease and accepted in his presence. These unique qualities helped him connect with and mentor countless young students during his nearly 18 years as a teacher.

My thoughts and prayers are with his family, his wife Sonia and his sons Owen, Ian, Sebastian, and Ethan. They and all of the countless lives that he touched will forever miss Leo.

* * *

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, four years ago this week, the world lost a human rights hero: Nelson Mandela's legacy, the inspiration he sparked globally in those who similarly stand in opposition to political injustice and tyranny.

That is why the Raoul Wallenberg All-Party Parliamentary Caucus for Human Rights was moved to convene in this building today, a gathering of families of political prisoners. Their names are Raif Badawi, imprisoned in Saudi Arabia, with family in Sherbrooke; Dr. Wang Bingzhang, imprisoned in China, with family in Montreal; Sun Qian, a Canadian Falun Gong practitioner imprisoned in China; Leopoldo López, imprisoned in Venezuela, with family originally from Fredericton; Saeed Malekpour, imprisoned in Iran, with a sister in Vancouver; and Ayatollah Boroujerdi, a champion of religious tolerance, imprisoned in Iran. Each is a human rights role model.

We stand today in witness to their heroism and unjust imprisonment and call for their release.

* * *

OLYMPIC CURLING TRIALS

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week in our nation's capital, the Olympic curling trials are under way. Known as the Roar of the Rings, 18 of the best teams in the country will compete to represent Canada at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea.

Curling has always been important to me and my family. My father, Don Duguid, is a three-time Canadian Brier champion, two-time world champion, and long-time curling broadcaster. He was inducted into the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame in 1974 and the World Curling Hall of Fame in 2013.

Manitoba boasts some of the best curlers in the country and the world, and I particularly want to wish the best of luck to the teams from Manitoba competing in this week's trials. Regardless of who emerges victorious on Sunday, I am sure that our country will be well represented at the Olympics. Hurry hard.

[Translation]

WELCOME SERVICE FOR NEWCOMERS IN TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I attended a citizenship ceremony yesterday where 70 immigrants from 26 countries became full-fledged Canadians.

Whether they were part of the 60% of economic immigrants, the 30% of immigrants accepted under family reunification, or the 10% who were refugees, all of these newcomers have one thing in common: perseverance.

As we know, the journey to become a Canadian citizen is long and challenging. However, certain people and organizations have made it their mission to make that journey easier.

One of those organizations is the Service d'accueil aux nouveaux arrivants in Trois-Rivières. Staff and volunteers at SANA have been giving their heart and soul for nearly 50 years to be a friendly face and give a helping hand. I would like to extend sincere and heartfelt thanks to each and every one of them for their extraordinary work.

As for my new constituents, I wish to welcome them again and wish them every happiness in their new home.

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[English]

ORDER OF MILITARY MERIT

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize Chief Warrant Officer John Heffernan from my hometown of Conception Bay South. Last month, John was honoured by the Governor General with the Order of Military Merit.

John began his community involvement at the age of eight as he joined the CLB, where he reached the rank of sergeant major. Joining the primary reserves in the late 1980s would just be the start of John's military career, first as a mobile support equipment operator and, up to present day, where he serves as the regimental sergeant major to the 37 Service Battalion, which operates out of Newfoundland and New Brunswick. He continues his incredible service to his community as the fire chief in Conception Bay South, a job he does with great pride and passion. The exemplary work that John does as an ambassador for wounded warriors, aiding members of his military community, is just one more way that CWO John Heffernan embodies the spirit of the Order of Military Merit.

I invite all of my colleagues to join me in congratulating CWO John Heffernan on this prestigious honour and thank him for his service to our country and to his community.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

THETFORD REGION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Thetford region is changing. It has gone from a one-industry town based on asbestos mining to an example of economic diversification. Today, I am hosting in Ottawa an important witness to the region's transformation.

Nelson Fecteau covered Thetford news for almost forty years for the daily newspaper *La Tribune*. He was a fixture on community television and radio. Nelson knows everything and everyone, and was not beholden to any political party throughout his career. That speaks volumes.

However, retirement is not on the horizon for Nelson, who today is sharing the secrets of the Thetford region's success in his book *Histoires de 30 entrepreneurs à succès*. Comprehensive economic diversification does not just magically happen. Men and women rolled up their sleeves and established businesses, created jobs, and succeeded in difficult circumstances.

That is the Thetford region story. There are still major challenges, and the environmental impact of more than 100 years of asbestos mining is a very heavy burden, but the stories told by Nelson in his book demonstrate the strength of entrepreneurs. Everything is possible when you put in the necessary time and energy and when you enjoy being an entrepreneur.

Thank you, Nelson.

* * *

[English]

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we enter the Christmas season, a time many call “the season of giving”, I wanted to salute and celebrate the many organizations in Surrey that give to the community all year long. For individuals or families in distress, with long-term challenges or short-term difficulties, these organizations, powered by so many volunteers and donors, offer a beacon of hope, from food banks to shelters from the weather or the storms of life. They offer a pathway to a better life in a new country for the many newcomers who settle in Surrey. They open their doors to people of their faith and to those who would otherwise lose faith. So let us all give them something back, a donation perhaps, or some of our time over the Christmas season.

Maybe we can start here, by standing and applauding those folks we all know back home who give and enrich our communities all year long.

* * *

GOOD SAMARITAN DRUG OVERDOSE ACT

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in May, the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act received royal assent. This law is a humanitarian approach to dealing with drug problems, a law that saves lives. Neighbours or friends can now safely call the police if they suspect someone is suffering a drug overdose. As the health minister said, “protecting the lives of Canadians is our most important priority.”

[Translation]

We have to continue to convey this message to Canadians.

[English]

Today, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, the Law Foundation of Ontario, and the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council are releasing a wallet card and fact sheet to help spread this important information.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

The work they are doing will help save lives.

* * *

DAVIE SHIPYARD

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “Strong, Secure, Engaged” is the policy that the Minister of National Defence introduced last June.

This policy states that the Royal Canadian Navy needs at least two joint support ships to protect our three oceans and assist support missions, and yet there is not a single ship that is able to fulfill these crucial functions. Indeed, the unexpected deployment of the *Preserver* and the *Protecteur* has made Canada vulnerable.

Our Conservative government urgently commissioned the *Asterix*, which will soon be completed, but Canada is in urgent need of another ship. It is time that the Minister of National Defence and his policy walk the walk. The Davie shipyard workers are ready and completed the first ship, *Asterix*, on time and on budget.

It is time for the Liberals to award the contract for the *Obelix* before the holidays. The workers are ready and so are the suppliers. The navy needs it and our safety depends on it. Let Davie help Canada.

* * *

[English]

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, fellow Liberal MPs of the Muslim and Jewish faiths sat down to break bread and barriers over a joyful Christmas dinner. We took the goodwill we collected between each other that evening and we paid it forward to a shelter for abused women this morning, bearing gifts and good wishes. Only in Canada do voices of reason and collaboration paramount to remind the world that here we are one, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, and more. We are all Canadians.

Our actions matter, and I urge Canadians on this holiday season to share the love and goodwill in their communities to reaffirm a strong, diverse, and inclusive Canada everyone can call home. On behalf of my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills, I wish everyone a joyous holiday season, a very merry Christmas, and a happy new year.

* * *

● (1410)

CHRISTMAS

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is that time of year again. On behalf of my constituents, family, and staff, I would like to take the opportunity to wish everyone a merry Christmas. It is the season where the power of sharing and loving seems to be in abundance within everyone.

Statements by Members

The great entertainer Mr. Bob Hope summed it up well. “My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?”

Let us make every day be like Christmas, and I promise that in 2018, the lights will continue to glow every day. I wish everyone a happy and prosperous new year. Again, have a merry Christmas.

* * *

VICTIMS OF ANTI-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, violence and bigotry against religious believers has no place in any society, but even Canada is not immune.

On January 29 of this year, six Muslims were murdered and 19 more were injured while praying at Quebec City's Islamic Cultural Centre.

In 2004, Montreal's United Talmud Torahs school was fire-bombed. In 2001, a mosque and a Hindu temple in Hamilton were firebombed by attackers who mistook both targets for Islamic institutions. More than 30 years ago, in 1985, the worst mass murder in Canadian history specifically targeted Hindus; 329 people were killed in the bombing of Air India flight 182.

Canadians rightly condemn this violence and mourn the victims. That is why I am asking all members to support my Motion No. 153 to declare January 29 Canada's national day of solidarity with victims, whatever their faith, of anti-religious bigotry and violence.

* * *

PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE CONSORTIUM

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last May, I was a guest at a partnership for peace conference in Budapest, Hungary, where I presented the Canadian perspective on intelligence reform and best practices. A specific focus was given to areas of improvement and the need to integrate commonly understood ethics with intelligence practices.

The conference was sponsored by the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. Canada is an active member of the organization. The consortium promotes multinational collaboration on security and defence reform. Canada's membership in such multinational organizations helps shape future global security decision-making and promotes Canadian interests and values.

May the House recognize the Partnership for Peace Consortium's contribution in promoting stability, security, and democracy.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ENSAF HAIDAR

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness, but also with a lot of hope, that I rise today to recognize the efforts of Mrs. Ensaf Haidar, a human rights activist and wife of blogger Raif Badawi. I salute her perseverance and her courage, and she has all my support.

Raif Badawi was tortured and imprisoned simply because he dared to express his opinions. His story and that of his family's that lives in Sherbrooke are heart-wrenching. We cannot, in our society, remain silent in the face of such injustice.

It is not the first time I rise in the House to call for Mr. Badawi's release, but every time I hope it will be the last. I also hope that our Prime Minister will finally rise and demand that he be released.

* * *

●(1415)

[*English*]

RETIREMENT OF PREMIER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Saskatchewan says goodbye to one of the most popular and admired politicians in history, Premier Brad Wall.

Hailing from Swift Current, Brad championed the Saskatchewan Party to three consecutive majority governments, including the third largest majority in history, back in 2011. He will be remembered for many things, perhaps most of all leading the province through a decade of unprecedented growth. Under Brad's leadership, Saskatchewan's population grew by more than 160,000 people, finally breaking the elusive one million person mark, back in 2012. During that same time, more than 67,000 full-time jobs were created. During that time, Saskatchewan became a place where people went to, rather than came from.

On behalf of all my colleagues in this place, and most particularly on behalf of all of us from Saskatchewan, I say thanks to Brad. He will be missed.

* * *

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize the legacy and the passing of Nelson Mandela, a heroic role model whose release from political imprisonment and subsequent transformative effort on South Africa as a whole demonstrates the moral imperative and compelling nature of pursuing justice for political prisoners.

Unfortunately, Nelson Mandela is not the only political prisoner of the past, present, or the future. Today at a press conference held on Parliament Hill, I personally heard the stories of six other political prisoners being held captive around the world today. By recognizing the passing of Mr. Mandela, we create awareness of other political prisoners who embody the Mandela ethics, and individuals who are heroic role models in their own right. We all must work together to put an end to these types of injustices.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have committed to implementing new taxes that promise to have a significant impact on the operations of small businesses in Canada. These changes are expected to take effect in less than month. The problem is that there are still no details. We know that small businesses are the backbone of the country. They deserve our respect. They deserve a plan. Will the Minister of Finance and the government please indicate when they will be introducing the changes in specificity?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we share the member's view on the importance of small and medium-sized businesses to the Canadian economy. That is why we are fulfilling an important commitment we made to Canadians by lowering small business taxes from 11% in 2015 to 9% by 2019.

With respect to the specific measures, I assume she is referring to income sprinkling. My colleague the Minister of Finance said they would take effect on January 1, and all of the details will be known, obviously, before that point.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because this is my first opportunity to address the member directly, I want to say that we know full well on this side of the House how much of a fighter he is, and we want to wish him well.

However, I am still going to make him answer tough questions.

The Minister of Finance announced these changes this summer, and he really thought that Canadians would not notice. Unfortunately, what the Liberals encountered were vast protests and huge opposition. However, they are still pressing ahead with this tax increase on January 1, as the minister said.

Today it was reported that the Liberals have spent more than \$2.2 million on talent fees. This kind of overspending is exactly why they have to raise taxes on small businesses. Is the Minister of Finance really raising small business taxes so that he can pay the \$2 million bill for actors they hired to promote their government?

• (1420)

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was part of broader agreements for government advertising. However, it is notable that our government has actually reduced government advertising from that of the Conservative government, of which the member for Milton was a member. In fact, that government spent, during its tenure, almost a billion dollars on quasi-partisan government advertising. Not only have we reduced government advertising costs, but we have also changed the rules to make sure no government abuses government advertising to promote political interests.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only have the Liberals reduced advertising, but they seem to have reduced the comments period as well on small business tax changes.

Yesterday, I was in New Brunswick and talked to local businesses in Mactaquac, Florenceville, and Woodstock. They want this House

Oral Questions

to know that they usually plan their business strategy a year in advance, and now they are faced with 25 days before the introduction of incredibly difficult and complex tax changes. A lot of them are already struggling this year as it is, and now they have this to worry about over the Christmas holidays. Will the Liberals provide the details today so that small businesses have a chance to plan?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her generous comments a minute ago.

I am glad she visited the Tobique—Mactaquac part of my home province of New Brunswick. The constituency is very fortunate to have an outstanding member of Parliament who himself was a small business owner from that community and who has spoken to our government repeatedly about the importance of those small businesses in Tobique—Mactaquac. He was one of the loudest voices encouraging our government to act quickly on the campaign commitment we made to lower the small business taxes for those businesses she met in Tobique—Mactaquac. I am sure she will celebrate that good news with us.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, politicians have a duty to be transparent and to have integrity.

We now have a Liberal government that is opaque and a Minister of Finance mired in conflicts of interest. This is a minister who organized consultations in the middle of summer, when entrepreneurs were relaxing around the pool. This is a minister who refuses to provide more information about the tax reform that will have a negative and catastrophic impact on our economy.

Is there anyone in this government who will finally show a little bit of respect for our job creators?

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

I hope that my colleagues will find it a bit odd to see a member of the Conservative Party talking about the importance of transparency. That is rather new to us.

However, I must say that while my colleague thinks that people were at the pool, we were listening to Canadians, the small and medium-sized business owners who, as my colleague knows, participated broadly in the consultations led by our government. That is why we brought in the changes we will implement on January 1. All the details will be known before that date, obviously.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely surprised to hear the minister lecturing us about transparency while tabling a bill on transparency accompanied by a gag order. That is quite peculiar.

Oral Questions

Let us come back to the file now before us. Business owners across Canada are concerned because a lot will change when the tax reforms take effect on January 1, which is just days from now.

Next week, we will all be leaving Parliament Hill and going back to our ridings, but business owners still have no information about what is going to happen next year, in 2018.

Is there a captain on this Liberal ship?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the captain today. You yourself have served as minister of fisheries and oceans, so you will know all about the Canadian Coast Guard, the captains, and the work they do.

Mr. Speaker, I think you will agree that the entrepreneurs my colleague referred to are fully aware that we will be lowering taxes for them. The tax rate for small and medium-sized businesses will be cut from 11%, the 2015 rate, to 9% by 2019. That is a commitment we have made.

Details about other measures, including income sprinkling, will of course be announced before their effective date.

The Speaker: I am sure the minister does not want to hear the Speaker's opinion on policy.

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

* * *

•(1425)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the United States' decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is reckless and will not only jeopardize the rights of Palestinians, but also scuttle any hope for peace in the region. This decision shows total disregard for international law and has already sparked clashes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

France, Germany, and Italy are among the many countries to have expressed disapproval. Canada seems to have very little to say on the subject.

Will the government join the international community in condemning this totally irresponsible decision?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a steadfast ally and friend of Israel, and a friend of the Palestinian people.

Canada's long-standing position is that the status of Jerusalem can be resolved only as part of a general settlement of the dispute between the two parties. This has been the policy of consecutive governments, be they Conservative or Liberal.

We are committed to the goal of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including the creation of a Palestinian state, living side by side, in peace and security, with Israel.

[English]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reaction to Trump's decision yesterday was swift around

the world, from the UN to the EU, to France and Sweden, to name just a few. The condemnations continue to mount.

However, Canada issued a spineless response that did not even refer to Trump's decision, a decision that will further undermine peace efforts. Is this really the kind of leadership that Canada wants to show on the world stage?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is very proud of its leadership on the world stage. Canada is a steadfast ally and friend of Israel, and a friend of the Palestinian people.

Canada's long-standing position is that the status of Jerusalem can be resolved only as part of a general settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. This has been the policy of consecutive governments, be they Conservative or Liberal. We are strongly committed to the goal of a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East, including the creation of a Palestinian state, living side by side, in peace and security, with Israel.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa will come to order. I am sure there are opportunities to express opinions from all sides on issues like this. Members should wait until they have the floor to do so.

[Translation]

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

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CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the Auditor General's scathing report on the Canada Revenue Agency.

According to that report, half of all calls Canadians make to the Canada Revenue Agency are not being answered, and when callers do get through, they get the wrong answer 30% of the time.

The Canada Revenue Agency is proving just how incompetent it is, and the minister needs to face up to her responsibilities.

When will the minister take this situation seriously and insist that the Canada Revenue Agency serve taxpayers properly?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I read the Auditor General's report, and I support all his recommendations.

In our very first budget, we invested \$50 million in the CRA's call centres. We have already started hiring more agents to respond to more Canadians. We already have an action plan that focuses on modernizing our telephone platform, improving training, and updating our service standards.

[English]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an internal report from the CRA dating from 2014 shows that before the election, 25% of Canadians received bad advice when they contacted the CRA. Now the Auditor General tells us it is 30% under the minister's watch, despite spending \$50 million to respond to this problem. The CRA has shown time and time again that it is more interested in protecting itself than the taxpayer. This needs to change.

As it stands now I have to ask this question, because I really cannot tell. Is the minister controlling the CRA or is the CRA controlling the minister?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just reiterated, I have read the Auditor General's report and completely agree with all his recommendations.

In our first budget, we invested over \$50 million in our call centres, which had been neglected for over 20 years. We hired more agents. We have an action plan in place. We want a more modern telephone platform that can meet our clients' needs. We are going to give training to the people who work in our call centres. We are going to create service standards that will meet Canadians'—

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

* * *

● (1430)

ETHICS

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has become quite skilled at avoiding Canadians' questions.

Yesterday, the House Leader of the Official Opposition asked the minister a simple question. She asked whether he was the one who signed the memorandum to cabinet for Bill C-27. Can my colleagues guess what happened? We are still waiting for an answer.

If the Minister of Finance is unable to answer our simple, softball questions, then I would ask him to issue a press release announcing his immediate resignation.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Minister of Finance has successfully grown our economy at a remarkable rate over the past two years, so no, he will certainly not be resigning.

As Minister of Finance, he has done what needed to be done for Canadians, not only by lowering the small business tax rate from 11% to 9% by 2019, but also by stimulating the economy to create 600,000 jobs in two years. That is much more than they ever did, so the answer to the hon. member for Beauce is no.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's record is atrocious.

The minister initially told Canadians that there would be a small deficit of \$10 billion, and now it is \$20 billion. Even worse, he is racking up untold debt for future generations. There was supposed to be a balanced budget by the end of the government's term, but that will not happen. He is putting future generations in debt, to the tune

Oral Questions

of more than \$100 million. They are going to have to pay off this debt. That is irresponsible for our children and grandchildren.

When will the Minister of Finance resign?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beauce for his question.

It gives me an opportunity to remind members that when we were elected in 2015, our debt-to-GDP ratio was 32.5%. Today, it stands at 30.5%. By the end of our term, it will be lower than it was in the 1970s. That is the best fiscal position of all G7 countries. It is not surprising that Christine Lagarde of the IMF says that the Canadian approach should be emulated and should go viral, because investing when interest rates are low and infrastructure is needed is the right thing to do for Canadians, for the economy, and for our entrepreneurs.

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has become an expert at avoiding giving answers to Canadians. He hid his shares in a numbered company. He hid the date of the sale of some of those shares. Today, new documents show that the minister is continuing his practice of hiding information from Canadians. When asked simply if he as minister signed the memorandum approving Bill C-27, he refused to answer.

If the minister refuses to be transparent about something as simple as this, will he not just resign?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker, the finance minister will not resign, because the finance minister has delivered more for the Canadian economy and Canadians than those members ever did in 10 years.

We are talking about close to 600,000 jobs created in the last two years, most of them full time. We are talking about the fastest growth in the G7. We are talking about a reduction in child poverty in Canada by 40%. We are talking about one million seniors who have seen their revenue go up with the guaranteed income supplement. That is the finance minister's work. That is this government's work.

So no, the finance minister will not resign.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has not answered any of the reasonable and fair questions we have asked regarding his conduct.

What we have discovered is that the minister was actively managing shares in Morneau Shepell while he was promoting Bill C-27, which would directly benefit his family business.

Why will the minister not answer this simple question? Was he the one who signed the memo to approve Bill C-27?

Oral Questions

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to answer the member's question, I believe that constitutes cabinet confidence. On another note, though, I will say that the finance minister over the last two years has done amazingly well at growing this economy. We are very proud of the work he has done to make sure that Canada is prosperous, and that this prosperity is good for everyone and benefits us all.

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TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the finance minister will not resign, hopefully he will stand and answer the question I am about to ask him personally.

Last summer, he launched a direct attack on small businesses. He ruined the ability of farmers to be in their fields, for tourism operators to serve their customers, and for others to enjoy a small break during that time. Now he is doing the same thing right before Christmas. He said he would have legislative proposals on his small business tax increase in the fall. If that is true, when will we see the bill?

• (1435)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to income sprinkling, the Minister of Fisheries has been clear that the details will come forward shortly before the January 1 implementation date. Our goal has always been to bring more fairness to our tax system. We do not think it is fair that a wealthy Canadian can institute a private corporation to save the equivalent of the average Canadian's income per year. We think that we have to have a fiscal system that is fair for all Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that to mean there will not actually be a bill before the measures take effect. Our small family businesses will be forced to follow laws that do not even exist. How does the government expect anyone to run a business with rules that are written nowhere than in a press release, released the night before Christmas?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure the member that the details will be known very shortly. I want to also remind the member that we will have lowered the small business tax rate from 11% to 9% by 2019, because we will always support small businesses. We will always stand behind small businesses. I can reassure the member that our intention has always been that the family business model can continue to prosper, and we will make sure that family members who work in a business can continue to do so and be remunerated for it. That is not the issue here.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to have to remind the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands and the member for Brandon—Souris that the nature of the debate is that one side gets to talk, then the other side gets to talk, and only when we have the floor should we be speaking in the House.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for weeks now, the revenue minister has repeated over and over again that the CRA under the Liberal government has recovered \$25 billion in tax evasion, except no one knows where it comes from and the minister is not able to explain that to anyone. Her own department does not know where this information comes from. There is a difference between money identified and money recovered. How can Canadians believe the minister when her own administration does not know what she is talking about?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is fully committed to fighting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. The revenue agency has a very effective recovery process, which was strengthened by our investments of close to \$1 billion. We now have the tools needed to effectively combat tax cheats. We are on track to recoup \$25 billion as a result of audits conducted over the past two years. Every company and individual affected was notified of the changes to these audits, and new notices of assessment were sent out as needed.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the Standing Committee on Finance, the Minister of National Revenue said that all taxpayer files are confidential, that they would remain so, and that no parliamentarian would have access to Canada Revenue Agency files, or would otherwise face jail time, no less. However, the Prime Minister, a parliamentarian, cleared his friend Mr. Bronfman. He said “we have received assurances that all rules were followed...and we are satisfied with those assurances”.

Can the minister tell us whether the Prime Minister had access to confidential information from the Canada Revenue Agency? If so, when will he face the consequences?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows very well, I will not comment on a specific case, not today, not tomorrow, not ever. The law prohibits me from doing so. However, I can assure my colleague that no one is interfering with agency audits. As long as I am the Minister of National Revenue, that will never happen. Let me be clear: no one is above the law.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister's ethical challenges are very concerning. He is currently under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner for introducing legislation that could benefit his family corporation. He has already been fined for failing to disclose his offshore corporation. The minister refuses to come clean about the contents of his other numbered companies.

How many ethics investigations will it take before the minister just does the right thing and resigns?

Oral Questions

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister, as is expected of all ministers and parliamentarians, has worked with the Ethics Commissioner. We have the utmost trust in the Ethics Commissioner to set the path forward for parliamentarians, which she has done with the Minister of Finance. When he arrived in Ottawa he followed all of her recommendations. He announced a few weeks ago that he would go above and beyond to dispose of all his shares in Morneau Shepell, place all of his assets in a blind trust, so he could continue to the work that he has been doing for two years for Canadians.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's lack of ethics is becoming quite an embarrassment to the government. The person responsible for the country's budget has woven quite a tangled web for himself.

He is refusing to explain why he sold his shares just days before introducing a new tax policy. He is now the subject of a comprehensive investigation by the Ethics Commissioner because he introduced a bill that could benefit his family company.

Considering all of these developments, will the Minister of Finance do the right thing and resign?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the tax policy the member mentioned, which was announced on December 7, 2015, is one that we are proud of. We increased taxes for the wealthiest 1% so we could lower them for nine million middle-class Canadians. That was one of our campaign promises, and that is why we were back in power in December 2015.

Members on this side of the House believe that making our tax system fairer by increasing taxes for the wealthiest 1% and lowering taxes for the middle class was and is a good thing.

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister says that he has done nothing wrong, but he continues to deflect and dodge questions.

The Ethics Commissioner is looking into the sale of shares in his family's company just days before tax changes, he imposed, devalued those shares. He has been fined for hiding his offshore company. He has hid the fact that he was sheltering and controlling millions of shares in a numbered Alberta company.

If he has done nothing wrong, why is the minister refusing to answer simple questions about his behaviour?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister has worked with the Ethics Commissioner and answered all of her questions. He will always work with the Ethics Commissioner to make sure all of the rules are followed, so he can continue the important work he has been doing the last two years, which has been to grow the economy at twice the growth the Conservative Party was able to achieve in the 10 years it was in power, creating more jobs than it ever could in their time in office. That is what the finance minister has been doing the last two years.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance misled Canadians that his assets were in a blind trust when they were not. He hid from the Ethics Commissioner an offshore company. He is under investigation as we speak. To top it off, he refuses to disclose assets in multiple numbered companies.

With a record like that, there is only one thing left for the minister to do, and that is resign. Why will he not?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is becoming quite obvious that the opposition want to talk about anything else but the economy. When we talk about the economy and this government's record, it makes the Conservatives' record pale in comparison. Over the 10 years they were in government, Canada had the lowest growth since World War II. They had high unemployment as opposed to what we have achieved, the lowest unemployment in the last 10 years.

That is why the opposition keeps focusing on playing politics while we work for Canadians. We will continue to work for Canadians.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps saying she would like to reassure all Canadians who receive the disability tax credit that the eligibility criteria have not changed. However, a memo from her office says, "This is to inform you of updates to the current LST procedures and verses relating to adults with diabetes." This means the eligibility criteria have, indeed, changed.

Why does she continue to insult Canadians by insisting updated procedures means they have not changed?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure all Canadians who receive the disability tax credit that the eligibility criteria have not changed. That being said, I am always open to hearing the concerns of all Canadians. If changes to Revenue Canada's procedures are needed, we will have that conversation with the experts who will be part of the committee that I will be making an announcement about tomorrow. We will ensure fairness for all recipients of the disability tax credit regardless of their disability.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a story for you. Once upon a time, there was a Minister of National Revenue who had a fabulous \$25-billion treasure. Sadly, the minister had an overactive imagination. The treasure was all in her head, just like her conviction that her ministry of magic has not changed the rules for people with diabetes. This might be funny if it were just a fairy tale, but the truth is that people are suffering.

Can the minister leave her imaginary world behind and come back to Earth with the rest of us?

Oral Questions

●(1445)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to fighting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. Over the past two years, the government has invested nearly \$1 billion to cracking down on tax evasion and tax avoidance. The Canada Revenue Agency levied more than \$44 million in third-party penalties last year, and there are presently a number of criminal cases under way. The CRA has a full-time dedicated unit focused on offshore non-compliance, and this unit reviews money transfers over \$10,000 that cross borders to and from Canada. In the past two years alone, the CRA has received information on more than \$28 million in money transfers—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Northwest Territories.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Arctic is one of our greatest treasures. As the member for Northwest Territories, I know how precious our coastlines, oceans, and fisheries are for the people of the north and for all Canadians.

[English]

As climate change changes our landscapes and ecosystems, we have a responsibility to protect them now more than ever.

Could the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard please update the House on what the government is doing to protect the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, Canada reached a historic agreement in principle with our international partners to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean. This is the first time an international agreement of this magnitude has been reached before any commercial fishing takes place on a region of the high seas.

We have taken a strong, proactive, precautionary approach to potential fishing activities in the central Arctic Ocean. We will continue to work with our international partners, indigenous groups, and northerners to protect the Arctic Ocean.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Jennifer McCrea is a young mom who was denied benefits while on maternity leave. Recently, she reached out to her local MP, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, in order to seek his help.

In the two-minute meeting that the minister was willing to offer her, Ms. McCrea asked him why Ottawa was continuing to fight sick women, and he replied, “Well, Ms. McCrea, that is the old question, like asking ... ‘When did you stop beating your wife?’”

Could the minister explain to Canadians what was meant by this statement?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to

improving the lives of all Canadians. I recognize that when speaking to people, I tend to be straightforward.

However, I regret my comments as I know they were brash and inappropriate, and I apologize. I remember the conversation with Ms. McCrea. It was a difficult conversation, and that is no excuse. I will take this opportunity to better myself as both an individual and as a parliamentarian.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is straightforward and then there is altogether inappropriate.

We are starting to see a very disturbing pattern emerge here, and that is this. On Tuesday, it was thalidomide survivors and now it is new mothers. The minister released a public statement blaming this young mom for his inappropriate actions.

For a feminist government that claims men must take responsibility for their actions against women, how does the minister justify blaming this young mom for his condescending words? Is this not victim blaming at its finest?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize 100% that my comments were inappropriate, and I apologize profusely for them.

I will continue to work on trying to improve both my individual self and myself as a parliamentarian. I know I will continue to work as hard as I can for my constituents. I know I will learn from this and move forward and better myself.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his comments were inappropriate, but he is the one who thought them.

This government claims to help our most vulnerable citizens, but in fact, quite the opposite is true. First, the Minister of National Revenue is caught taking money away from people with diabetes by denying them their tax credit. Then, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities behaves in a totally condescending way towards mothers who come to him for help by speaking words that I dare not repeat.

It is not surprising that the Minister of National Revenue would go after the most vulnerable when the other minister, the one who is supposed to defend them, makes fun of them when they reach out for help.

Who in this cabinet is going to clean up this mess and give vulnerable people their dignity and their money back?

Oral Questions

●(1450)

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague to repeat the same thing outside the House after question period. I invite him to tell me that I did not respect my diabetic husband, whom I stood by until his final days. I invite him to tell me that I disrespected all my clients when I was a social worker.

I am extremely sensitive to the challenges facing people with diabetes. As minister, my role is to make fair and equitable decisions for everyone.

* * *

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, vulnerable Canadians deserve better. We have ministers going out of their way to attack those who truly need help.

The revenue minister is targeting single moms and denying legitimate benefits. The Minister for Persons with Disabilities is refusing to help, and worse yet, belittling those who dare ask.

Does the minister understand that Canadians who reach out to him for help do not expect to be attacked for simply asking for it?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a parliamentarian, I know my job is to meet with constituents and stakeholders across the country and work as hard as I can to represent their issues. I try to represent their interests in a real and fair manner.

I will work hard to improve both myself as an individual and as a parliamentarian to continue to try and address their concerns. I am taking this very seriously.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, steelhead are in trouble. Specifically, Thompson and Chilcotin runs are in dire straits.

Fisheries and conservation groups in British Columbia have called on the government to issue an emergency listing order under SARA and to investigate impacts of bycatch on steelhead runs. Those calls have largely gone unanswered. It is well past time the government listens to experts.

Will the minister work with the British Columbia government to protect steelhead before it is too late?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we share my colleague's concern with respect to steelhead salmon. I have had the opportunity on a number of occasions to discuss that with the Government of British Columbia. We are working on a comprehensive approach that includes a reliance on science, traditional knowledge, and working with partners on habitat protection and coastal restoration.

We have invested a record amount of money in this. However, we do not think the job is done yet, and we will continue to do what we need to do to protect those iconic species.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yet another iconic Canadian species, sockeye salmon, is now threatened.

While we appreciate the government's response to the NDP's call for a deadline to list a species at risk, it continues to fail in its duty to protect critical habitat. Many of these species are relied on by indigenous communities and other communities for their survival.

Will even more court actions be needed to trigger government action on its duty to protect threatened species?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting all species at risk, including Pacific salmon.

We have worked with Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Province of British Columbia to implement something that I know is very important to my colleagues from British Columbia, 64 of the 75 recommendations of the Cohen Commission. We will continue to work diligently in that regard. We will continue to make the investments in habitat protection, science, and enforcement.

We will restore lost protections in the Fisheries Act, as we committed to Canadians. We will get the job done and we will ensure those iconic species are protected.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety contradicted the Prime Minister when he said that rehabilitating ISIS terrorists was not very likely.

Even though they do not believe that these terrorists can be rehabilitated, the Liberals are spending money on poetry and podcasts. What a joke.

Will the Liberals instead spend that money on resources that will protect Canadians from terrorists?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government obviously allocates significant budgets for the defence, safety, and protection of Canadians, unlike the previous government, which cut \$530 million from the RCMP, \$390 million from the CBSA, \$69 million from CSIS, \$42 million from the CSE, and \$71 million from CATSA. It is the previous government that underfunded the financing of Canada's security system.

Oral Questions

•(1455)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety has admitted publicly that his government cannot rehabilitate hardened ISIS terrorists, yet it is still spending millions of dollars trying to rehabilitate them using poetry and podcasts.

Why is it not using this money to protect Canadians against ISIS terrorists when it knows its strategy has no hope of working?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the people opposite cannot explain the \$1.2 billion that they cut from the security services of Canada. On the other hand, our government uses a variety of tools to combat terrorism, including the Global Coalition against Daesh, security investigations, surveillance, monitoring, intelligence gathering, lawful sharing, collection of evidence, criminal charges, criminal prosecutions, peace bonds, public listings, no-fly lists, hoisting of passports, authorized threat reduction measures, and preventive initiatives to head off tragedies in advance, wherever that is possible. It is a balanced approach that works relying on our security—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Durham.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals appear to be giving up on NAFTA. In China, the Prime Minister suggested that he will work on a Canada-U.S. deal if NAFTA is cancelled. Back home, Canada's chief negotiator suggests that Canada and Mexico will move ahead alone if the U.S. withdraws. The Liberal government appears to be making this up as it goes along.

Will the foreign affairs minister rise in this House today and tell us why the Prime Minister is contradicting her chief negotiator?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our negotiating position is clear and always has been. We will defend the elements of NAFTA that Canadians know are essential to our national interests. We are negotiating in good faith, and we expect our partners to do the same. A winner-take-all attitude is not conducive to the actual results that we all seek in terms of a win-win-win. We cannot and will not accept proposals that put Canadian jobs at risk and do harm to our economy. We will always defend Canada's national interests and stand up for our values.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is making historic infrastructure investments in communities across the country through the 12-year \$186-billion infrastructure plan. We are working with our partners to move their priorities forward and challenging them to be innovative in both the projects they put forward and how they think about community improvement planning resulting in community building.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities please update this House on the government's latest challenge to Canadian communities?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently launched the smart cities challenge in Calgary, encouraging communities to work together to improve the lives of the residents through innovation, data, and connected technologies. We are encouraging our partners to be bold and innovative, and participate in the smart cities challenge in order to build stronger, more sustainable, and inclusive communities, and create jobs and a more thriving economy.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the United States International Trade Commission unanimously voted against the Canadian lumber industry, because of the Liberal government's inaction and failure to get a deal done despite repeatedly assuring this House and Canadians that it was getting the job done. Canadian industry is being held ransom and is facing a lengthy and costly legal battle. Job losses and layoffs are going to be seen.

What does this minister have to say to those hard-working forestry families who are now facing even a more uncertain future two weeks from the Christmas break?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the duties imposed by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the International Trade Tribunal are unwanted, unfair, and deeply troubling.

We recently challenged the countervailing duties under NAFTA's chapter 19, and two days ago we initiated legal action under the World Trade Organization. Our forestry industry has succeeded in every such previous dispute, as has Canada. We will continue to fiercely defend our softwood lumber industry and its incredible work.

* * *

•(1500)

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Netflix agreement is already dead and buried in the eyes of Quebecers. It is over. Everyone, business people from the cultural sector, the National Assembly, everyday Quebecers, everyone rejects this unfair tax break that Ottawa is giving the web giant.

A poll released this morning shows that 72% of Quebecers find the Netflix agreement unfair and 89% find that this agreement can no longer remain secret.

Oral Questions

The Minister of Canadian Heritage is delivering a major speech tomorrow in Montreal. All eyes will be on her. Everyone is expecting her to get things back on track.

Will the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Finance stop passing the buck, admit that they made a mistake, and reconsider these unfair handouts?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our colleague opposite refuses to talk about Creative Canada, our new cultural policy. That is because the Conservatives know that it lines up perfectly with our election promises, which were much more ambitious than theirs, and because they know that we are investing additional billions in culture, something they never could have done.

The NDP lost its credibility when it comes to investing in culture. What is more, last week the NDP lost its credibility when it comes to defending the French language before the Supreme Court.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Rosalie is a caregiver living, working, and helping in Don Valley West. In 2014, needing surgery, she applied for permanent residency, which would have allowed her to have her family come here to help her. She is still waiting.

In 2012, Mary-Ann applied for her PR, asking for my help in 2016. She is still waiting.

Too many live-in caregivers are waiting far too long for their families, while they care for ours. Could the Minister of Immigration tell the House what he is doing to reunite caregivers with their families?

[Translation]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Don Valley West for his question.

[English]

Our government values family reunification. We also value the important services that caregivers provide to Canadians. However, for far too long these people have been waiting to reunite with their own families. Under the mismanagement of the immigration system by the Conservatives, caregivers have been facing wait times of between four and five years.

Our government will eliminate the caregiver backlog by the end of 2018, and we will establish a new processing time of only 12 months for new applications. We believe in doing the right thing. Unlike the rhetoric from the other side, we have taken action. We have put resources in place, and have put the right people in place to eliminate this backlog. At the end of the day, this is about people.

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal defence policy states that the Royal Canadian Navy must have two naval task groups, each with a joint support ship, thus two support ships. That is on page 34. There is a problem. With the loss of the *Preserver* and the *Protecteur*, there is no vessel that can currently serve as a support ship.

The *Asterix* is on its way, but where is the *Obelix*? Provisions were made for the *Asterix*. The contract was awarded to the Davie shipyard.

Why does the government not award the *Obelix* contract before the holidays? Our national security depends on it. The workers—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is acquiring two joint support ships to permanently replace the *Protecteur* class auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel, to equip the navy, and to ensure that it can carry out its mission.

These two vessels will provide the requisite core replenishment, sealift, and ground operations support capabilities. Our government is committed to building two new vessels for the navy and maintaining Canada's naval capabilities in the long term. These contracts were awarded to the Vancouver shipyard and we are examining with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Montcalm.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in December 2016, the interim Conservative leader, Ms. Ambrose, asked the Ethics Commissioner to investigate the Prime Minister's dinner with Chinese billionaires, including the founder of Wealth One bank in Vancouver.

My question is simple: in the documents that the Prime Minister submitted to the Ethics Commissioner, was there a list of the Vancouver donors who donated \$70,000 to the riding of Papineau on July 6 and 7, 2016?

• (1505)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these assertions are entirely false, as confirmed by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Not only that, but the Liberal Party has moved forward with the strongest standards in federal politics for openness and transparency, including facilitating media coverage, advance postings, posting in publicly accessible places, and timely reporting of event details and guest lists. Contrast that to opposition parties, which continue to organize their fundraising events in secret, barring journalists and hiding details about who is attending their closed-door events.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating the fact that preferential access to the Prime Minister was given to Chinese billionaires, including the founder of a bank in Vancouver. On the day that bank received its charter, Papineau received \$70,000. Now we are expected to be satisfied with an answer like that. Canadians deserve respect. They deserve transparency. They deserve an answer.

Did the Prime Minister give the list of Vancouver donors to the Ethics Commissioner, yes or no?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all I can do is reaffirm and reinforce that these assertions are entirely false, as confirmed by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Not only that, but the Liberal Party has indeed moved forward with the strongest standards in federal politics for openness and transparency, including facilitating media coverage, advance postings, posting in publicly accessible spaces, and timely reporting of event details and guest lists. It is open and it is transparent.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent on a point of order.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, earlier during question period, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance referred to the government's tax policy. In order to set the record straight for Canadians, for the seventh time, I ask for the consent of the House to table the following document.

[English]

It is the Department of Finance Canada's Annual Financial Report of the Government of—

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member does not seem to have the unanimous consent of the House.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the government, which will hopefully be answered a little better than the questions were answered in question period, but we will see how that goes.

I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons what the government has planned for the rest of this week and next week before we go back to our ridings for the Christmas break.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, we will continue the report stage debate of Bill C-24, the one-tier ministry bill. Tomorrow, we shall commence second reading debate of Bill C-66, the expungement of historically unjust convictions act.

On Monday, we will call report stage and third reading of Bill C-51, the charter cleanup legislation. Tuesday we will return to Bill C-24 at third reading.

If Bill C-66 is reported back from committee, we would debate that on Wednesday with agreement. The backup bill for Wednesday will be Bill S-5, concerning vaping, at second reading.

On Thursday, the House will debate Bill C-50, political financing. Then on Friday, we will consider Bill S-2, the strengthening motor vehicle safety for Canadians act.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[English]

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed 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, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to rise today to debate Bill C-24, an important piece of legislation.

The opposition has some challenges with the bill. The government was sworn in 25 months ago and yet this legislation has come forward for debate today, December 7, 2017. This particular piece of legislation was tabled in the House on September 27, 2016, and here we are, 18 months later, still dealing with this legislation.

What I find fascinating about this piece of legislation is the fact that these ministers are currently being paid. The question then arises as to how they are being paid their additional salary when the legislation has not yet been passed. I am not the only one who has asked this question. The other place has been quite concerned about this issue as well, and its national finance committee has taken up this very question. Enabling legislation has not yet been passed, yet these ministers are being paid, nonetheless.

The President of the Treasury Board attempted to address this issue at the national finance committee in the other place. I am going to quote from the 13th report of that committee, tabled in the other place in March 2017:

Our committee is concerned about the recurrent practice of using supplementary estimates to pay certain ministers' salaries prior to the enactment of amendments to the Salaries Act, and raises this question in the context of Bill C-24.

Government Orders

Members will recall that I raised this issue in this place as a point of order a number of months ago when the supplementary estimates were being tabled at that time, yet this issue is a recurrent practice of the government. The government is using the supplementary estimates and the estimates process to achieve a legislative objective that is more properly dealt with through legislation. Here we are, 25 months after the Liberals were sworn in, and they are still using the estimates to pay for this process.

I draw members' attention back to the report of the national finance committee of the other place. It quotes Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, 6th Edition. All of us in the House have our preferred authorities and my preferred authority is Beauchesne's. It is a great parliamentary authority.

Beauchesne's states at page 258 and 259 the following point in relation to the estimates and the legislative process. Paragraph 935 states, "A supply item ought not to be used to obtain authority which is the...subject of legislation." Yet the estimates process has been used for the past 25 months to pay certain ministers' salaries before the legislative means has been achieved.

I go back to my point. Here we are December 2017 debating legislation that ought to have been dealt with months ago.

Beauchesne's goes on to state at paragraph 937 that "The government may not, by the use of an Appropriation Act obtain authority it does not have under existing legislation."

There is no legislation. There is a bill before the House, but it has not yet been passed in this place and not yet even been considered in the other place. Here we are after 25 months, with the government still paying ministers certain sums under legislation that does not yet exist.

I have listened with great interest to the debate in the House. Unfortunately, members on the other side have failed to grasp what this legislation would do. They mix terms. They use different words to imply different things that are not even at the heart of the issue. They intertwine and intermingle the words "ministers" and "ministries" and "departments". They seem to be implying that a minister and a ministry go together, but that is not necessarily the case.

As we are well aware, there is no departmental apparatus supporting certain of the ministers of state, or "ministers" as the government now wants to refer to them, in support of those ministers' capacity. There is a difference between a minister who is responsible for a department and a minister who reports to Parliament through another minister, as is the case with many of the ministers' estates.

● (1515)

Certainly there are important functions undertaken by certain ministers in certain capacities, but to imply that all ministers of state ought to be full ministers and paid accordingly belies the issue of there being no equality, of there not being the same legislative function and responsibility on the part of those ministers in all cases. If we were to refer to the Financial Administration Act and the schedules associated with it, the act clearly delineates those departments that are considered to be full departments, those departments with a deputy minister at their apex, a deputy minister

who is accountable to the minister, and a departmental apparatus in support of that.

Certainly on this side of the House, we feel there is great work to be done to support a number of the functions that have fallen under the jurisdiction of ministers of state in the past.

In this connection, one of the issues that keeps being brought up by the Liberal government is the issue of small business and tourism. In my riding, the backbone of our local economy is small business, whether agriculture or other small business. Certainly one of the most important aspects of our economy falls right there. One of the other aspects, of course, is tourism. I am very proud to represent a riding that has strong artistic and cultural attractions, including the Drayton festival in the township of Mapleton, and the Stratford Festival in Stratford and Stratford Summer Music. I am very proud to support small business and tourism and to highlight the important work and economic benefit of those in my great riding of Perth—Wellington.

However, the fact is that simply because we support small business and tourism and see them as a major priority and something that must be promoted, that does not change the fact that under schedule 1 and schedule 2 of the Financial Administration Act, those are not considered to be a department for the purposes of that act. Therefore, when the Liberal government members try to infer that they are making certain ministers full ministers, they forget the fact that the apparatus, the departmental function, of those acts of those ministers is not there to support the minister. They are still ministers of state in the real sense of things, because they do not have the departmental function that goes with every other minister.

I go back to the fact that we are 25 months into the current Liberal government's being sworn in, and yet this bill is all of a sudden a priority in the dying weeks of this session before we go on our Christmas break to our ridings. I am sure that we can infer a number of different reasons why there is a sudden a push to get this piece of legislation to the other place. One might infer that perhaps the Liberal government is eager to prorogue and wants to quickly get legislation out of this place to the other place before prorogation, before it can have a new Speech from the Throne. I am certainly not privy to that information. Maybe you are, Mr. Speaker, but I see you shaking your head.

Certainly the rumour going around this place is that the Liberal government is eager to change the channel, that they are eager for prorogation to restart with a fresh Speech from the Throne to try to take attention away from their ethical lapses on that side. The Minister of Finance's ethical challenges for the past number of months in fact go back to his challenged and mistaken approach to small businesses, in implying and inferring that the hard-working farmers and farm families, small-business owners and those who work hard every day, are somehow tax cheats. That is certainly not the case. Here on this side, we believe in standing up for small businesses. We believe it is important to support our local economy.

This act is really a way for the Liberal government to paper over its challenges and its inability to pass legislation and to have a meaningful impact on the economy and the lives of Canadians. Instead of focusing on the issues that matter to Canadians, the Liberals are trying to give a few ministers a pay raise.

Government Orders

•(1520)

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was talking about how certain ministers are being paid who perhaps should not be paid. The concern might be that if the Liberals are trying to adjust that, they would have to deal with the Phoenix pay system. I wonder if perhaps you might be able to enlighten us about what the challenges might be for those particular ministers.

The Speaker: It is not a serious offence, but I remind the hon. member for Red Deer—Mountain View to address his comments to the Chair. The member for Perth—Wellington was very close, and I can understand why he would say “you” in those circumstances, and I am sure there was no offence taken.

The hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting point the member for Red Deer—Mountain View brings up with respect to the challenge of Phoenix. The issues with Phoenix are so many in number that it has actually become a verb: being “phoenixed”. I have talked to different people, both in the public service and on the Hill, who have been “phoenixed”, who have had challenges. Just yesterday I heard a story from an individual who tried to retire, but he could not retire because of Phoenix. This is someone who spent 35 years working in the federal public service, and he could not retire because of Phoenix. The system would not let him retire.

We know that the Liberal government was the one that pushed the button on Phoenix before it was ready. We are now facing a backlog of hard-working public servants, who serve the citizens of our country, who are not being paid because of the Liberal government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way deviated a bit when he was referring to Phoenix. After deviating, he wanted to pass the blame to the government of the day. I sit right beside the parliamentary secretary, who does a phenomenal job with respect to Phoenix, not to mention the minister. They are trying to rectify a serious mess the Conservative Party put our public servants in by laying off hundreds of people who were responsible for payroll and putting in a system that was not ready. There was no back door for this Liberal government to go back out.

My question to the member is based on the last question. Is there any remorse on the other side for what they are putting public servants through as a direct result of the Harper government's incompetence?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, let us look at the Auditor General's report. It laid the blame at the feet of the current government. The member for Winnipeg North said that Phoenix was not ready, yet the Liberal government went ahead with implementing it before it was ready. Now there are backlogs in cases of back pay. People cannot retire because of Phoenix. That lies solely at the feet of the Liberal government. It was the one that pushed the button. It was the one that implemented a system that was not yet ready. It is the one that is responsible.

The Liberals have been in office for 25 months. The Liberal government is the one responsible for public servants, hard-working Canadians who are providing for their families, not being paid.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was mentioned in debate previously by the member for Newmarket—Aurora that it was unfair for certain ministers to be paid a different amount. I have raised this in the House before. If the Liberals want equity, they could lower the pay of every single minister to another pay scale. Then it would in fact be equal, and the Canadian taxpayer would save money. I would like to hear from my colleague on that.

The second point I want to make is that a minister can have no portfolio. That has happened in this House before. To tie a ministry and civil servants to a minister's pay is absolutely ridiculous, because a government can decide to name a minister without a portfolio. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, in response to my friend and colleague from Calgary Shepard's first point, that is an absolutely great idea. Maybe all the Liberal government cabinet ministers should have their salaries lowered. Perhaps they should be paid on an outcome basis. Those who achieve what they have been mandated to do would be paid what they ought to be paid.

My colleague mentioned the idea of a minister without portfolio. I would assume that some of these ministers do not have portfolios, because we see so few of them actually achieving anything for Canadians. Lately I have become somewhat concerned that perhaps the Minister of Finance is becoming a minister without portfolio, because we hear so little from him in this House during question period. We ask him questions every day, yet we do not hear him respond to those questions. He does not even respond to simple questions. I am quite concerned that the Minister of Finance has become a minister without portfolio.

•(1525)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

As the former minister of Status of Women, I know that this legislation is critical and is fundamentally about equality. Earlier this month, I appeared at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to talk about our new student work placement program. While asking me a question, the member for Langley—Aldergrove referred to my new position as Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour as a promotion from my previous portfolio as minister of Status of Women. To me, this implied that his party and that member did not see that women's issues and gender equality are as important as the portfolio I hold now. His comments also reflected a profound misunderstanding of the significant importance of ensuring women's success as critical to a growing economy.

Government Orders

The Prime Minister decides on the organization and the procedures and composition of cabinet and shapes it to reflect the diversity of Canadians. One of these priorities is the equal status and representation of women in cabinet. Our Prime Minister has created a cabinet in which all members have a responsibility to deliver on our priorities, have an equal capacity to exercise the powers and perform the functions assigned to them, are full members of cabinet, and are fully and appropriately supported in the carrying out of their responsibilities. Bill C-24 would change the current legislative framework, which currently does not provide room for that structure.

As it currently stands, a number of ministers are occupying minister of state positions, which have traditionally been considered and referred to as junior positions. The amendments proposed in Bill C-24 would formalize in the legislation the current ministerial structure.

The bill would do away with distracting administrative distinctions. Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act five ministerial positions that are currently minister of state appointments. The five ministerial positions that would be added 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. These positions that will soon be full cabinet positions are ones that I think all members of this House recognize are integral to the success and prosperity of our country. Let me elaborate further.

The Minister of La Francophonie works with other nations to preserve the vitality of the Francophone world. The Minister of Small Business and Tourism helps support small business and tourism, drivers of the economy, to become more productive, innovative, and export-oriented. The Minister of Science helps ensure that scientific research, both fundamental and applied, is appropriately supported as a driver of innovation and a competitive knowledge-based economy and that evidence-based scientific considerations are integrated into the government's policies and funding choices. The Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities promotes healthier Canadians through sport and ensures greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities. Finally, the Minister of Status of Women works to accelerate change and build a society where women and girls no longer face the systemic barriers they continue to face today. These are important priorities for this government, and in fact, for all Canadians.

There is more. Let me talk about some of the other responsibilities assigned to the ministers who are occupying positions Bill C-24 proposes to add to the Salaries Act.

The bill before us represents the government's commitment to reflect in legislation the importance of la Francophonie, science, sport and persons with disabilities, Status of Women, and small businesses and tourism and the reality of how this ministry works. It is clear that the titled positions Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act carry significant and important responsibilities. This bill would provide a framework that would allow existing departments to support these ministers in carrying out their responsibilities.

The bill would give the Governor in Council the flexibility to ask any department to support the new Salaries Act ministers in carrying out some or all of their responsibilities. This flexibility would mean

that a minister could have access to the expertise and experience of the department or departments best placed to provide full and appropriate support. This would be a streamlined and efficient way to work.

The Salaries Act amendments are administrative, but they are very important. They would update the Salaries Act to reflect the structure of the current cabinet. These kinds of updates are not new. They would reverse a system that has historically disadvantaged women. For decades, 50% of our population did not have a seat at the table. That is unacceptable, and we are changing it.

These amendments look to the future as well. By introducing three untitled ministerial positions to the Salaries Act, future ministries could be more easily designed according to the challenges and priorities of the times. This administrative bill signals this government's recognition that the needs of Canada and Canadians change over time and that governments must be responsive and adapt.

● (1530)

It is appropriate to have legislation that allows these changes to be reflected in the composition of this cabinet and cabinets to come. By ensuring that the ministers of Science, Status of Women, Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Small Business and Tourism, and la Francophonie are full members of cabinet, we are demonstrating our full commitment to these files. The amendments to the Salaries Act would serve us well, not just today but well into the future.

The bill puts behind us any questions that others might have had about the importance of these mandates and the status of the ministers leading them.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments added to the debate by the hon. minister. I disagree with her on two points. First, I see no need to add three more ministers to the House at some future date, yet to be named. I do not want to give that type of leeway to the government. Since the current ministers do not answer any questions, there is no guarantee that future ministers will answer any questions.

The second part of my disagreement is that if we wanted, in the name of equity, to have the same amount of pay for all ministers, why did we not reduce the pay of all ministers to the current pay level of what the supposed junior ministers are being paid? It would be fair, equitable, equal, and fair to the taxpayers, who would then save money. That is my question for the minister.

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Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Speaker, I am happy to talk about cabinet pay and cabinet size. In 2015, under the Harper Conservatives, the prime minister had a cabinet of 40 people. It was tied with only one other prime minister. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney holds the honour of being tied with Prime Minister Harper for having the largest cabinet. Even with all that talent, they could not grow the economy. They could not support job growth or reduce unemployment or approve pipelines. Maybe the member opposite would like to comment on that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the members that they had an opportunity to ask questions. If they have any other comments and questions, they can stand up to do so, as opposed to heckling.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP believes fully in closing the gender wage gap, but what is happening here today is a conversation about doing so only for ministers of the crown, who sit in cabinet.

Considering that the member was a previous minister for Status of Women, how long do the rest of Canadian women have to wait for this type of equality, this type of parity, in our country? I think it is shameful that we are standing here talking about elevating salaries, when women across this country are struggling every single day because they cannot achieve equity in their own workplaces.

Why were more women not assigned as ministers for departments in the first place, which would have eliminated a gender wage gap? When will the Liberal government commit to dealing with the gender wage gap for all Canadian women?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question, and we share the member's concern about the gender wage gap, which currently sits at 28¢. I point again to my colleague across the floor, who clearly has no concern about the gender wage gap, given the fact that the Minister of Status of Women was not a full ministerial position.

To the member's concern, that is exactly why we are moving forward to have a full minister dedicated to the issue of gender equality, and the gender wage gap is one significant concern.

If the member thinks that not having a full Status of Women minister is going to accelerate the process, I am not clear what her suggestion is.

• (1535)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Essex that she has an opportunity to ask a question. If she has any more questions and comments, she can stand up and try to be recognized.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the last exchange reminded me so much of a previous Parliament, when I asked the Conservative government, when it was adding 30 new MPs to our ranks, if it would not make sense to reduce, pro rata, all the salaries of MPs across the board so that the overall budget for MPs would remain the same. I tried this on several Conservatives, and the answer every single time was, “We are

pleased to see that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands does not want her salary.” The other answer was, “This is the price of democracy.”

Sometimes we can become too partisan in questions around pay. This is redressing an inequality that needed to be redressed, and as bills in this place go, it is relatively non-controversial. The bigger question is when we will move on to pay equity for the rest of the women in Canada.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Speaker, that is why it is precisely so important to ensure we have women at the table who are fighting for the equality of women across this country, not just through the position of Minister of Status of Women, but through the positions of all the portfolios that women hold in cabinet.

For the member, I am deeply concerned about the gender wage gap, of which pay equity is one component. That is why we have committed to introducing proactive pay equity legislation for the jurisdiction in which we have control, which is the federally regulated workplaces. We have inspiration from provinces that have already moved forward—notably, Ontario and Quebec—and we believe we can be leaders in addressing pay equity in demonstrating our commitment to do so for federally regulated workplaces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to take part in this debate on Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act. There are two things that lead me to take part in this debate.

First, we must recognize that all ministers are equal. We expect all ministers to be able to participate in cabinet discussions. That is important. It makes no sense to say that some people are more equal than others. If I am correctly interpreting the official opposition's position, they would rather we keep the status quo and allow certain members of cabinet to earn less than their colleagues. Why? That does not make any sense.

We must ensure not only that all cabinet members have legitimacy, but also that they have all the responsibilities of their office and that they are equal to their colleagues. That is why it is important that we rectify the administrative discrepancies concerning the Minister of La Francophonie, the Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and, certainly, the Minister of Status of Women. With the passage of this bill, I hope that all these ministers will become equal to the others.

Second, I heard several members say they are concerned about regional economic development agencies no longer being separate departments and all having to report to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. I have had the privilege of working closely with that department, and I truly believe this is a good thing. For the first time in Canadian history, all of the agencies will fall under the same department and have the same objectives.

Government Orders

There are regional differences, of course, but we will make Canada more innovative and customize regional development initiatives for Atlantic Canada, Quebec, all regions of Ontario, western Canada, and northern Canada.

Essentially, every regional development agency will have the same responsibilities in terms of building a more innovative Canada and making the most of each region's unique attributes. I think that is a good thing, and I think it makes sense to bring all the agencies under the same umbrella.

Those are two excellent reasons to support this bill, but they are not the only ones. There are many more.

• (1540)

For example, there is the position of Minister of la Francophonie. French is not my mother tongue, but I am a francophile. I have a great love for the language and the culture, and I want to see linguistic minorities outside Quebec thrive. Naturally, I want French to maintain its rightful place in Quebec too.

It is also our responsibility to share our know-how with other countries that belong to the francophonie. Since being a French-speaking country is one of Canada's core values, and since we have a minister who handles that and who has all the skills to do so, that person must be equal to all other ministers. That is why elevating this position is so important.

It is the same thing regarding the Minister of Science. After a decade when budgets were slashed and science was not valued in decisions and research so that Canada could remain a world leader in innovation, we must now raise the status of this position. It is pretty clear to me.

Science is so important in the 20th century. Countries that do not invest in science, to ensure that their populations are educated and have the needed skills, suffer because of it. Therefore, if we do not do it, we will lose our place as a world leader. This shows the importance of having a minister of science who is just as important as all the other government ministers.

We are well aware of the importance of small business and tourism in Canada. I have had the privilege of visiting several regions of Canada, including Canada's Far North, and I know how important it is for these communities to have tourism programs to attract people from Canada and elsewhere to their region. We need to appreciate the contributions that these regions make to Canada and promote their special features, whether it is Newfoundland and Labrador, northern Quebec, or New Brunswick.

Madam Speaker, I know that you represent a northern Ontario riding. What a beautiful region of our country! You understand the fundamental importance of tourism in creating wealth and prosperity for your constituents. That is what is important. In short, we need a minister responsible for tourism who is equal to the other ministers.

Last week, I had the privilege of attending a tourism industry awards gala. I saw remarkable projects demonstrating incredible creativity in the tourism industry. It was heartening to see that this type of entrepreneurship has emerged.

In closing, we need to make sure that these five ministers have the same status as the other government ministers.

• (1545)

That is why I encourage my colleagues of all parties to give us their support—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga for questions and comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work in representing his constituents here in the House.

In the first part of his comments, he talked about the regional economic development agencies. This bill would effectively remove the oversight by ministers of those agencies and put all of the control in Mississauga. Liberals are big on consultation, they are big on transparency, supposedly, and they are big on accountability. During the study of this bill, why would they not have at least brought two or more witnesses in to talk about the potential implications of removing the ministerial involvement from the regional economic development agencies?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I am certain it is not the hon. member's normal habit to try to personalize the issue or the debate by making reference to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development being from Mississauga. That might be beneath the normal tenor that I know the hon. member can have when participating in debate. If he will excuse me, I will put that aside and try to deal with the basis of his question.

The fact is that innovation, science, and economic development is an economic coordinative ministry and if a ministry oversees economic development and innovation, it only makes sense that the tools on the ground should be coordinated under this ministry.

[*Translation*]

It makes sense for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions to be included in that, too.

I am getting the signal that it is time for me to leave time for more questions. I think it is important that all of those agencies be brought together under one department.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, unfortunately, we live in a society where women still earn only 72% of what men earn. A lot of work remains to be done for gender parity to be achieved. The Liberal government claims to be feminist and says it wants to achieve parity and all that. However, the only thing it can come up with is to raise ministers' salaries, as though that is going to help the ordinary Quebecers and Canadians in our constituencies.

Rather than giving ministers a raise, why will the Liberals not introduce pay equity legislation?

Government Orders

•(1550)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Speaker, I think the member from Montreal will be very pleased in the near future. We heard the minister responsible say that she plans to introduce legislation in that regard. I hope we can count on my hon. colleague's support. This is certainly something that is very important to me as a member, and I think it is probably important to all members.

There is one question that perhaps I should not ask, since it seems obvious to me. If we do not make status of women a separate department, with the same level of responsibility and status as the other departments, and if we do not do our job and make sure that that department is on an equal footing with all other departments, how can we expect important files that come under that department to be taken up by a government? That is not the only reason, and it is not enough on its own, but that is one of the reasons I think it is important that the department of status of women have the same responsibilities as every other government department.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, as this is probably the last time I will have an opportunity to speak formally in the House before Christmas break, I would like to wish everyone, and especially you, Madam Speaker, a merry Christmas and season's greetings.

It is an honour to rise in this place to speak to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

The bill takes aggressive steps to eliminate the positions of six ministers for regional development. It places all those responsibilities in the hands of one minister. I believe the government operations committee did not hear from a single witness on the issue of regional development agencies. Not one. That is incredible. This is a huge change. I would assume there are plenty of experts from across Canada willing to comment on this matter. To not give them a voice seems unwise.

For better or worse, the federal government has far broader jurisdiction than provinces, and much more expansive taxation powers. This is partially by design, the British North American Act. It reserves the most significant powers for the federal government. Had the BNA's drafters foreseen the massive expansion of government that was to come, with education and health care, they might have been under federal jurisdiction as well. Then of course, they let the natural resources go. That one really got away from them.

However, we are also a huge country. Our population is spread across a massive geographic area. Over time, our country has rightfully adopted a more decentralized approach to governance. Our previous Conservative government certainly respected the importance of a decentralized approach, giving provinces money and letting them make the decisions. However, now it seems the government is taking a step in the wrong direction.

Unsurprisingly, one-size-fits-all solutions are not always desirable. Something that works in the Prairies might not make sense for southern Ontario. Something that works in southern Ontario could be a really bad fit for Quebec. Something that works great in Quebec

could be a disaster for B.C., and the list goes on. Where possible, we want regions to be able to make decisions about their own development, in a way that makes sense for them. In a large, diverse country like ours, we want certain decisions made through a local lens. When there is an opportunity to do it that way, it makes a difference.

The government claims to believe that diversity is our strength. Well, let it put its money where its mouth is and keep diverse regional voices involved in regional development, and at the cabinet table.

I hope I do not have to remind the government that we westerners are especially skeptical of centralized decision making. Us old guys remember the national energy program. That wreaked havoc in the west and Alberta for decades. We have not forgotten that one. We have had a bad experience with decisions being made in Ottawa by people who are not from our region and who do not have an intimate understanding of its needs.

The tax changes are the latest example of decision makers in Ottawa not understanding the unintended consequences of the impacts their policies will have across the country. I have heard time and again at round tables in my riding of Bow River how the government does not understand what its policies will do to rural agriculture and small businesses. The Liberals are taking the Ottawa bubble to a whole new level, and this bill is just another example of their heavy-handed and centralized thinking.

Therefore, I hope my hon. colleagues opposite can understand why getting rid of ministers, like the minister for western economic diversification, and investing their decision making power in the hands of one member at the cabinet table might raise some eyebrows.

Furthermore, I am surprised that more of my colleagues opposite, representing ridings in Atlantic Canada, are not standing up for their region. Why are they not demanding a minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency at the cabinet table? The Prime Minister implied that a Toronto minister needed to handle ACOA because of the "kind of politics" in Atlantic Canada. That is an interesting comment. What kind of politics would incentivize the government to erode regional representation in favour of needless centralization? It just does not add up. It is a major hit to the federal government's ability to allocate funds in a manner that is regionally representative.

A former ACOA president said that many in Ottawa had never liked regional development agencies. Apparently, axing them has been on the agenda for some time.

•(1555)

I think Canadians care that regional representative at the cabinet table has been eroded. I think Canadians in Atlantic Canada will be unhappy to find, as the Liberals' Atlantic caucus subcommittee reported, that processing times have increased threefold, since the employment of the one minister.

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Therefore, Bill C-24 means Canadians no longer have a regional development minister to fight for their region's interest. They will not have a voice for regional development at the cabinet table. Obviously, all Canadian regions will still be represented in cabinet, but those ministers have responsibilities that relate to their specific portfolio, not to the region. When it comes to spending regional development funds, the regions simply will not have the voice they did before. They are being robbed of that voice in cabinet for no good reason.

The bill also lacks transparency. We are being asked to approve the appointment of three mystery ministers. What will these ministers be? Will they be the minister for fancy socks, the minister responsible for selfie procurement, and the minister responsible for remembering French villas? The government should tell Canadians what its plans are. What do the Liberals have to hide?

Bill C-24 also fails to create ministerial equality. Legislating equal salaries does not mean all ministers are treated equally. Do ministers with more junior portfolios have their own deputy ministers? Do they have the same departmental budgets and authority as do ministers with more senior portfolios? As long as the answer to these questions remains a resounding no, I do not see how the government can claim the bill is about ministerial equality.

Moving cabinet members from the Ministries and Ministers of State Act to the Salaries Act would do nothing to change the answer to these questions. It is optics and no substance. Is it about gender equality? Given the ministers still have unequal authority in resources, I do not see how it could be.

We are also hearing some conflicting information from hon. colleagues opposite. Some have said that it is meant to advance gender equality. Some have said that it is not meant to address such issues. Therefore, Canadians have been left scratching their heads. What is this bill about? Does the government even know what it is about? The Liberals cannot seem to get the story straight on this one.

I will quote a University of British Columbia law professor, who specializes in gender equality, on why the bill would not do what some of the members opposite think it would. The professor said:

Pay equity is a piece of but not the whole of gender equality. People want these jobs and women need these positions of leadership, not because of the actual amount of dollars, but because of the responsibility, the profile, the prestige, the authority that those positions command.

That is certainly not a ringing endorsement.

Overall, the legislation is fundamentally misguided. It would take authority away from six regional ministers and would give it to one. It would not meaningfully advance ministerial equality. Even Liberal caucus members do not understand what the front bench's agenda is in introducing it. Needless to say, I will be not supporting this bill at report stage.

• (1600)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the first issue is a bit of a geography lesson. Members from the Conservative Party like to refer to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development as “the member for Toronto”. I think his constituents would be surprised to learn they live in Toronto. Perhaps

that understanding of the GTA is why there are not too many seats from the GTA on that side.

The hon. member was concerned about the Atlantic growth strategy. The members from the Atlantic caucus have been doing an incredible job speaking up for their region. There are diverse projects across Atlantic Canada, including labs in Halifax, the momentum initiative, New Dawn Centre in Cape Breton, Genesis Centre in St. John's, investments in Sydney for processing, and \$750,000 for a facility adding value products for shellfish processing in Nova Scotia. These are just a few things.

Therefore, could the hon. member point to a specific investment made by the government in Atlantic Canada with which he is concerned? The growth strategies look like they are working because we are the envy of the G7.

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comment coming from somebody who is not from Atlantic Canada.

An hon. member: Where are they? There's one.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I want to remind members that we are on a response from the member for Bow River. There should not be any back and forth.

The hon. member for Bow River.

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, it is the sort of strategy I believe makes a real difference. If there is a minister at the table who is representing a region, that is his or her responsibility. Having those voices at the table make a difference. That is why they are cabinet ministers.

Other MPs in their region can lobby and work for all sorts of projects, but having that representation at the cabinet table, representing his or her region, is a significant piece that is missing.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, first, we are spending more time on this bill than we are on the budget, which is really disappointing. There are so many important issues and so many things for which the Liberal government has not accounted. So many Canadians have been left behind. Here we are, talking about something the government could have done when it made appointments to cabinet.

Does my colleague agree with the NDP that the government should have gender parity in cabinet and among ministers of departments, not just ministers?

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, my colleague is a very honourable gentleman and an excellent member in the House.

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I come from a profession where gender equity and gender pay was equal and always has been. I always believe in gender equity and pay. I also believe in the responsibilities that come with it, not just superficial titles but also responsibilities. When ministers stand in those positions, they are equal in all parts of their positions. That is very important.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned that this was really about optics, not substance.

Professor Margot Young from the University of British Columbia, a gender equity specialist, made some comments with regard to Bill C-24. She said:

...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....Really, there's no gender substance, no equity substance on the basis of gender equality, to this legislation.

Could my colleague comment on that, please?

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Speaker, gender equity in the sense of positions, status, and responsibilities, those people in those positions need to have the same responsibilities. As any expert I have quoted has said, people can be given titles, but unless they are given the same responsibilities to carry out, then it is nothing but window dressing.

• (1605)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an absolute honour for me to stand on behalf of the residents of Davenport and speak on Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

As this will probably will be one of my last times to address this House this year, I want to wish everybody in this House a happy holiday, a very Merry Christmas, or whatever members celebrate in this wonderful holiday season.

For those watching at home, whether now or in the future, I want to make sure everybody is clear on what I am talking about on Bill C-24.

The changes being proposed to the Salaries Act would formalize the equality of all members of cabinet and modernize the act to allow for more flexibility. The current act allows for 35 cabinet positions, including the position of the prime minister. The bill would amend the act to include five additional titled cabinet positions, which are the 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.

The bill would also add three new untitled positions to provide flexibility to structure future ministries to reflect the priorities of the government without resorting to minister of state appointments. These changes would not impact the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. Minister of state appointments would remain an option at the discretion of the prime minister. As the Minister of Employment mentioned earlier, allowing us to make these changes would actually provide flexibility for the current and future governments to be able to appoint ministers to various positions depending on the priorities of the government of the day.

Why are we doing this? We want to make sure there is a one-tier cabinet and not have two tiers of cabinet ministers. We want to make sure we only have one tier, and not have senior and junior cabinet ministers. Everybody within our cabinet would be at the same level. Therefore, it would just be ministers working very hard to deliver results for all Canadians. We also want to update the Salaries Act to modernize it, in addition to formally equalizing the status of the government's ministerial team. We want to recognize the equality of cabinet members, and this bill would allow us to do so.

As I mentioned, we would add five additional positions, and I would like to speak specifically to one of them more directly.

I am very proud that we have a Minister of Small Business and Tourism. It is of great importance to Davenport residents that we are putting a huge emphasis on small businesses. We are very proud of the fact that we are reducing the small business tax from 11% to 9%. It will move to 10% at the beginning of January 2018 and then move to 9% at the beginning of 2019. We are very proud about that and all the support we are providing to small businesses.

In addition, there is a wonderful emphasis on tourism as well. Just last week, I was very proud to attend the Canadian Tourism Awards. A group within my riding, SESQUI, won one of the Canadian Tourism Awards. I was very proud to be there to honour them, and the Minister of Small Business and Tourism was there as well. I want to give a shout-out to both Joanne Loton and Andrea Stewart of SESQUI, who won a Canadian Tourism Award. I am very proud of them.

The Minister of Employment mentioned this, but I think it is important to highlight the fact that our government has a very strong feminist agenda. One of our first acts when we came into office, as everyone knows, was to put into place a gender-equal cabinet. We are all very proud of that, and this bill would help to formally equalize all the positions within that cabinet.

I am also very proud of some of the additional steps we have taken. One of the other steps we have taken is to add a gender lens into our budget process in 2017. It is the first time in Canadian history that this was done. Our Minister of Finance is stepping it up and has started consultations with a number of groups. I was at one of the consultations in Toronto to talk about what the next level is in addition to the gender lens. How can we do better in budget 2018? I was very proud that I was part of those discussions that took place in Toronto less than two weeks ago.

• (1610)

Just so people know, by adding a gender lens into the budget process, what we are essentially doing is asking every department to put on a gender lens whenever they make proposals for budget 2018. One of the statements our Minister of Finance made during our consultation with a number of groups in Toronto was that he has told every cabinet member they should only be coming with proposals for budget 2018 if they have applied a gender lens. I very much appreciate the importance he has put on the gender budget lens moving forward. I very much appreciate that he has met with a number of feminist organizations and organizations that work on issues affecting women and girls, both in Canada and abroad. Our 2018 budget will be stronger for it.

Government Orders

I also want to talk for a minute about pay equity legislation. I was sitting in the House and listening to some of the questions, and I know there is great anxiety, which is very well placed, about the fact that we still do not have pay equity in this country. I was very blessed about a year ago to be asked to join the special committee looking at pay equity legislation at the federal level. Unfortunately, we did not have pay equity legislation at the national level. We put a committee in place to look into it. We actually made very strong recommendations, and the title of the report is “It’s Time to Act”.

I know that the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour is about to introduce pay equity legislation at the national level. I very much look forward to that. It is very much based on the hard work the committee did, as well as all other groups and advocates who have been pushing for this for a very long time. It is way past the time that we should be addressing this issue, and I will be very happy when that actually comes into place.

Personally, I am also trying to see what more I can do in terms of larger society and how we, as a national government, can help to ensure that more women get into senior leadership roles, not only in politics but also in business, in addition to ensuring we do everything we can to close the gap around pay equity outside the federal government system.

We have done a lot of really great things. We have a lot more steps to take, a long way to go, but we are making progress. We should be very proud of the steps we have taken.

I want to mention a couple of other things I am very proud of in terms of our feminist agenda. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, and Minister of International Trade have all talked about how they have incorporated the feminist agenda into each of their portfolios. Our Minister of International Development has incorporated the emphasis we are making in terms of the dollars we are giving to organizations abroad, and it is very much focused on women and girls around the world. There is a particular emphasis as well in some of the humanitarian assistance we are giving in the Rohingya state and the situation happening outside Myanmar right now.

I know our Minister of International Trade would say he is very proud we have a gender equity chapter that is part of the Canada–Chile trade agreement. It was a historic agreement from that perspective, and that set the stage for more of these types of chapters to be added to future trade agreements as we move along.

Lastly, I was very proud when our Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated to the world, to Canadians, and to all of us that she is promoting Canada to take on a very strong role to ensure we have more female peacekeepers in the world. By adding more women, we think it will be the next way that Canada can take a leadership role in peacekeeping in the world.

I see that my time has ended. I want to thank this House for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of Davenport.

• (1615)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments. Many times today, the government has referred to gender equity or equality and gender

parity in cabinet. However, the expert that appeared at committee clearly pointed out that there is no substance to that fact in terms of this bill. She said, “Really, there’s no gender substance, no equity substance on the basis of gender equality, to this legislation”, referring to Bill C-24. In fact, she went further than that. In response to a question about whether the Prime Minister’s claim of a gender-equal cabinet was cynical, she said, “I would say it’s dishonest.”

How can my colleagues continue to argue that this is causing gender equity in cabinet when, clearly, it does no such thing?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Speaker, I will mention two things. One is that the very heart of what we are trying to do with this bill is create a one-tier cabinet.

The second thing I would say is that I have been very blessed this year to be able to go to people’s doors and speak to a lot of the residents of Davenport. I can honestly say that from a perception perspective, people are proud that we have a gender-equal cabinet. It is something for young girls and women to aspire to. For those who actually want to get into politics, they feel they can step into one of these roles. Seeing all the beautiful female leaders and cabinet ministers, it is something for them to aspire to. They think it is a wonderful accomplishment of our government.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, in fact, it is not a gender-equitable cabinet. I do not understand why the members keep saying this, when even the experts, their own officials, are saying that they do not deliver that.

What concerns me most is that this government has been in power for two years. It was in 2004 when the pay equity task force called for action on equal pay for work of equal value in the federal civil service.

Again, this is the answer to everything. It is the answer to indigenous children having access to comparable services and to indigenous communities having access to drinking water. The answer of this government always is “eventually we will have equal rights.”

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. I will mention two things. One, I truly believe that we have a gender-equal cabinet. The position of the Minister of Status of Women, to me, is equal to that of the Minister of International Trade. It is what this bill is trying to do. It is at the very core of what this bill is.

In terms of pay equity, I can assure the member that as someone who is actually part of the committee that looked at this, I am very passionate about it. The title of that report, again, was about action now.

Our government is trying to move as quickly as possible. Would I like it to move a little more quickly in terms of introducing this legislation? Absolutely. I am sure we all would, but I know it is about to come. I know that we are going to be able to put it into place, and I believe it is going to be a piece of legislation we are all going to be very proud of.

Private Members' Business

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member from Davenport just said that she sees the Minister of Status of Women to be equal to the Minister of International Trade, yet if we look at the order in council appointing the Minister of Status of Women, it says the following:

to assist the Minister of Canadian Heritage in the carrying out of that Minister's responsibilities

Simply calling a minister a minister without actually changing the enabling legislation or the Financial Administration Act does not put that person at the level of the minister or the departmental apparatus of a minister.

Will the member from Davenport correct her statement to reflect that fact?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Speaker, I think the point he mentioned was that it is only one part of her job. I would say that she is the leading voice on gender equity within our cabinet and caucus. I think from a leadership perspective, she is absolutely at a level equal to all other cabinet ministers.

• (1620)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is the House ready for the question?

The question is on Motion No. 1. A vote on this motion also applies to Motions Nos. 2 to 4.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I request that the vote be deferred until the expiry of the time provided for government orders on Monday, December 11, 2017.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Monday, December 11, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I believe if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ) moved that Bill C-364, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-364, which I hope will have the support of all the parties in the House.

In the House, we are all elected representatives of the people. We are here to be their voice and make choices that reflect their concerns and values. In a way, we are the incarnation of the will of the people. It is both a privilege and a duty that we must constantly bear in mind.

However, the public has been losing confidence in us over the years. We hear it at the dinner table at home, in conversations at the office, in the media, and at the corner store checkout. Disparaging politicians has become as commonplace as talking about the weather or the ups and downs of the Montreal Canadiens.

The public is losing confidence in us. More often than not, politicians are accused of being corruptible. It is thought that we are not here for the right reasons and that we have personal interests and hidden agendas.

Unfortunately, the public has the impression that politicians can be bought and that our decisions are up for sale. Commentators often call it public cynicism. We hear this expression often. However, the public is not cynical. It has a moral compass. It can tell the difference between right and wrong. We are the ones suspected of being cynical and being guided by our own interests. Everything is a matter of public perception and public confidence.

All of us have a duty to restore public confidence. Without it, the very legitimacy of the House is at risk. We have a responsibility to be upright and to distance ourselves from the appearance of any conflict of interest, patronage, or situation where we could be seen as returning a favour.

I am not reinventing the wheel. These are comments that we have all heard in our respective ridings. We have a duty to remain beyond reproach and to be as pure as the driven snow. To achieve that, we must start by taking meaningful action and examining the way federal political parties are financed.

Giving money to a political party is a profoundly democratic act. Citizens can contribute to a political party because they believe in its ideas, or perhaps its ideals. It is more than just encouragement; it is a political gesture that implies engagement.

Private Members' Business

When the foundations of political financing are attacked by diverting funds from the objectives, when political financing is used for personal gain, to put something straight into someone's pocket, it is a direct attack on the very foundations of democracy and our responsibilities.

When it comes to political party financing, the more a party plays fast and loose with the rules, the less popular and accessible it becomes and the more dubious it appears. How are people to believe that everyone has an equal voice in a democracy when political parties are filling their coffers by hosting exclusive parties at \$1,500 a head? How can we convince people that decisions are being made solely in the public interest?

Middle-class Canadians do not have access to these private \$1,500-a-plate dinners with the Prime Minister, for example. Even people interested in politics see a problem with that. As for our respective party supporters, those who believe in us enough to give of their time and come up with \$100, \$200, \$300, or \$400 out of their annual budgets, what opinion do you think these people have of politicians when they see them hamming it up with the elites in the hopes of raking in big cheques?

Here is a good example. On May 19, 2016, at a private \$1,500-a-plate dinner, the Prime Minister met Shenglin Xian, a businessman who wanted permission from the government to create a bank, Wealth One, catering to Vancouver's large Chinese community. On July 7, 2016, the government gave the go-ahead to open the bank. Now, 48 hours before the official announcement, the Prime Minister received \$70,000 in contributions, all of it in cheques made out for the maximum legal amount of \$1,500.

• (1625)

The Prime Minister received \$70,000 for his Montreal riding of Papineau, with practically all of the cheques coming from wealthy Chinese-Canadians from the Vancouver area.

This is quite an extraordinary coincidence. It breeds cynicism. By all appearances, the Prime Minister received payback for creating the Wealth One bank.

We may wonder whether it is moral and whether it is a good idea to have lobbyists in such a close relationship with our nation's leader. We can even wonder whether political donations can help fast track certain projects and whether government decisions can be influenced. There is one thing we can be sure of, and that this is legal. Yes, the practice I just described is 100% legal under the current system.

That is how the major parties get financing these days, since public funding for political parties was eliminated. It made sense for the two major political parties in Canada to eliminate public funding. They have excellent contacts in all the big firms, in all the major banks, and in all the corridors of power where the big deals are done. They do not need donations from ordinary people who want to contribute as much as they can because they believe in protecting the environment, they believe in social justice, or they want to create their own country for their nation.

Fierce competition between major donors is good for the major parties. This gives people the impression that power can be bought. It is important to remember that it was Jean Chrétien, a former

Liberal prime minister, who brought in public funding for political parties. In the aftermath of the sponsorship scandal, he understood that in politics it is important to maintain an image of absolute integrity, because the people see that as critically important. This Liberal government could learn a thing or two from that.

With public funding, political parties receive stable funding based precisely on the number of votes they obtain. In that respect, public funding is an incentive to vote, because even though voters know that a candidate will not be elected, every vote received will benefit the party that voters support. Everyone can rest assured that they have not wasted their vote and that their vote counts. It is democratic, and above all ethical, and it is particularly healthy for our democratic values.

With public funding, there is no need to court the elite in the hope of a rich payoff. The big fundraisers for major parties, especially the party in power, often have a direct influence on public policy. They have preferred access to members' caucus, cabinet, and the prime minister's office. The lower the contribution ceiling, the less influence fundraisers have, and the less room there is for lobbies, private interests, and the friends of government.

Also, with public financing, all political options, whatever they are, obtain funding based on the number of citizens who support them. This means, as I said earlier, that citizens know that their votes count. They know that they can choose the political party they want, the one that represents their values, rather than having to mark an *x* beside the name of the least objectionable candidate for Prime Minister, for example. It is unfortunate to be elected by default because our highly cynical electorate voted for the least objectionable choice.

In one fell swoop, this would encourage a diversity of political opinions and allow small parties to be heard, and even better, this could eventually help usher in a new party, which is in itself very healthy and democratic for a society such as ours.

We are not reinventing the wheel; we can essentially bring back what the Liberals left us. If we restored the old rule, the Liberal legacy, the cost of public financing would be insignificant compared to what the current system costs us.

When political party funding is tied to votes, taxpayers understand that a minuscule share of the taxes they pay to finance political parties essentially goes to the party they supported.

• (1630)

Under the current system, when a rich donor gives \$1,500 to a political party, he or she receives a tax credit of \$650, which we all pay for collectively. A small portion of our taxes goes to fund parties we do not support. By lowering the limit and bringing back public funding, we are restoring the balance between the voter's will and the taxpayer's contribution. A larger share of our taxes goes straight to the party that stands up for our beliefs. That system is far less costly than the current funding model. The cost of the current system is the legitimacy of Canadian democracy.

Private Members' Business

I therefore ask my colleagues from all parties to spare a thought today for the women and men they represent in the House. They know them well, and they know who they are dealing with and what kind of values they hold.

I ask them to think about what these women and men expect of them. I ask them to honour the founding values of the House in a meaningful way. I ask them to vote in favour of my bill, of restoring public funding to political parties, of probity and honesty among elected officials, of strong political morality, and of freer democratic expression.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Terrebonne for introducing this bill and for his intervention.

At the beginning of his speech, he suggested that all politicians are for sale, because they request contributions.

My question is simple: why is he proposing lowering the contribution limit from \$1,500 to \$500, instead of eliminating it completely and prohibiting all private fundraising?

• (1635)

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Madam Speaker, the goal with that is to achieve consensus, to compromise, because we know there are parties in the House that are bound and determined to keep the current system in place.

Essentially, I think this gets us closer to a more democratic, more grassroots way of doing things. We have also given some thought to how this will affect major federal parties logistically. Unlike us, they have more expenses, so if we tried to make party financing as simple as possible, we would be unlikely to reach a compromise with certain members of the House.

We are also acknowledging the economic reality of party operating costs and simultaneously reducing the likelihood of outside influences by two-thirds, which is a step in the right direction compared to what the situation was before and what it is now.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Terrebonne on his speech and his bill.

I think that any move to clean up politics and reduce the influence of money, the wealthy, and the powerful on the political scene is progress. We will be very honoured to support the member for Terrebonne's bill.

I find it kind of funny that the Bloc Québécois is championing the Liberal legacy today. I hope the Liberals will champion the Liberal legacy too.

Would the member for Terrebonne accept an amendment to his bill such that the per-vote subsidy would be contingent on reaching a minimum threshold of votes provincially or nationally, as in the legislation introduced under Jean Chrétien?

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Madam Speaker, what we are proposing is moot, because essentially the part dealing with the limit in question remains untouched and is still currently in effect, as far as reimbursement is concerned. The response is therefore redundant. We are not changing anything. It is already on the books.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Terrebonne.

I am absolutely in favour of this bill. The process for a bill such as this affords me my only opportunity in the House to speak at second reading stage.

It is clear that public funding is the best way to finance political parties. It is also clear that this bill will put in place a system where everyone knows that their vote counts.

[*English*]

I urge my Liberal colleagues to pass the bill, so we can get it to committee. This is the system that was put in place by the right hon. Jean Chrétien. It was removed by Stephen Harper. We were told that it was removed because taxpayer funds should not be going to political parties. There are three ways that taxpayers' funds used to go to political parties. Stephen Harper removed the one that was fair, directed by taxpayers, and required the least amount of public funding.

Does my friend, the member for Terrebonne, have any indication that we will have support within the House, across the aisle, to restore the system put in place by the right hon. Jean Chrétien, even with some amendments that I would want at committee?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Boudrias: Madam Speaker, I hope so. Virtue, good deeds, and good political decisions are not the exclusive domain of a single party. I think that good ideas can come from across the spectrum and that we must draw from what is good and what was good in the past. With regard to the legislation that was passed by the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, I think that it transcended party lines and was a good measure and a good way to break free from the unfortunate situation with the sponsorship scandal. Today, I cannot speak to the government's intentions, but I know that my colleagues have a great deal of interest in and attachment to democratic values. Regardless where they come from, good ideas and good bills transcend party lines.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time allowed for questions and comments has expired.

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 member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Poverty; the member for Courtenay—Alberni, Indigenous Affairs; the member for Beauport—Limoilou, Government Appointments.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise on Bill C-364 to discuss election financing law.

To start with, I will not be supporting this bill. That is not because I do not believe in a stronger role for public financing; I do believe that. It is because the alternative is a stronger role for private financing.

Private Members' Business

The key question I want to address in our democracy is a complete re-evaluation of political fundraising itself. Is fundraising necessary, and if so, what should it look like? Conventional wisdom is that it is. However, I want us to ask the question honestly and objectively.

Political parties need funds to operate and campaign. That is a given. However, what is a fair way to achieve that funding?

First, parties and riding associations should not have to fundraise in competition with each other. The fundraising should come from the riding, with a share sent to the party in order for it to remain a part of the party, with the specific details left up to each party or riding association to figure out. A party is not a party, after all, without ridings and representatives. The parties themselves are only meant to exist as a vehicle for like-minded members to work together, not as a means for members to become like-minded. That is a discussion for another day.

I disagree with the current fundraising model of 100% private funds, coupled with non-refundable tax credits and expense reimbursements that do not give equal ability to all members of society to participate, which is a fundamental tenet of any democracy. Those who have money can participate and get tax credits. Those who do not have money to participate are not eligible for the tax incentive to do so. Therefore, having less means that each dollar costs less fortunate individuals more in absolute terms, and prohibitively more in relative terms. Once again, those who need are at a disadvantage compared to those who do not, and politicians, with their insatiable need for funds, must necessarily gravitate toward those who have.

Many donors donate because they believe in the cause. However, I think it is naive to believe that all donors do. I am sure most of us have received an angry email or phone call at some point from someone who has given money to either our riding or our party saying, "I am a donor and I am angry." Personally, I do not take well to this kind of message. I want people to donate because they believe in what we are doing and want us to continue, not in order to tell us what we need to do. If they are angry, I want to know that, not because they are donors but because they are citizens. I want that fact detached from the comment, and I want people who did not donate to express themselves with equal fervour. I am here to represent and work for all of my people to the best of my ability, not just those who supported me or may do so in the future.

I also disagree with the concept of annual per-vote funding, the primary objective of Bill C-364, for the simple reason that how people voted in 2015 may not reflect where they want their financial support to go. At that, it may not be the same in 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019. If people vote for a Liberal candidate to block a Conservative candidate when they actually support the Green Party, why should the money go to the Liberals and not the Green Party in that circumstance? It does not make sense. If we do have per-vote funding, we should also have a preferential ballot so that the money we assign goes to our first pick, even if we have specified additional choices in order to prevent the unfavourable results that can sometimes come from not voting strategically.

On the other hand, I also do not believe that just because one has registered a political party it is automatically entitled to some funding or an equal level of funding as all the others. It must be tied

to that party's actual support in some way. Giving the Rhinoceros Party \$18 million simply because it is registered may not necessarily serve the interests of democracy, and providing per-party financing may motivate some people to register political parties for the purpose of simply collecting the money without any actual interest in the electoral process. I think these risks are fairly self-evident.

While I know I am very much in the minority on this, my preferred model for addressing all these concerns is to put a question on the tax returns of Canadians that would go something like this, with the numbers being completely arbitrary for the sake of demonstration here today.

With respect to let us say tax return line number 500, an answer to this section is required for my tax return to be accepted as complete. Therefore, the questions might be, "Question 1, I am entitled to direct \$25 to a party registered in my riding or to be held in escrow for an independent candidate to be returned or forfeited if the candidate I name does not register to run in the next election: a) Yes, I would like to exercise this right, or b) No, I do not wish to contribute to any political party or independent candidate at this time." If we check off no, then we are finished and have met our obligations under this section of the return. If we answer yes, that we do wish to direct \$25 to a political party, we have three more questions to answer.

The first question would be, "The party or independent candidate I wish to support in my riding is", then there would be a blank space or drop-down menu with data provided by Elections Canada for electronic filers. The second question would be, "I would like this money to: a) come from general revenues, or b) be added to my own tax assessment." The final question would be, "I would like the origin of this contribution to be: a) disclosed to the party or independent candidate receiving it, or b) kept anonymous and confidential."

Splitting up the questions like this allows those who believe it must be their own funds that contribute to political parties to put their money where their mouth is. However, more importantly, it means that someone who does not have two cents, and someone who is a millionaire, have the same weight in the fundraising process.

Everybody has the option but not the requirement to do so anonymously, so the data cannot be automatically used by political parties. Allowing people to say no to donating at all, and not knowing who, should help force all parties to retain a more positive message. Divisive dog-whistle fundraising will not work on an anonymous tax-assessment-based fundraising model. Being negative would serve to discourage people from contributing to political parties overall, with them answering no to the question of whether to give before seeing the options of who to give to.

Private Members' Business

•(1645)

The pie can be pretty big if Canadians all have a positive view of political parties, rather than the negative views promulgated today by some elements of our political system to sew division and make people hate, rather than to want to work together.

While the Canada Revenue Agency will no doubt be less than excited to get involved in this manner, and there must be careful and specific controls to protect the privacy of the responses to this question, in my view it is the fairest possible way to ensure that political financing is put on an equal basis by all citizens for those they support here and now, at all times, in all parts of the country.

There are no doubt other models and solutions that could be looked at, but I firmly believe that the question must be asked, and I thank the member for Terrebonne for bringing public financing reform forward for us to discuss.

This legislation also reduces the fundraising limits significantly in conjunction with the reintroduction of per-vote funding. The amount of the donation cap is largely irrelevant if there is still an inequity between donors who have means and donors who do not, and so the cap at \$500 or \$1,500 is largely immaterial to me. Someone who makes enough to pay taxes giving \$400 is still out of pocket only \$100, while someone who does not make enough to pay taxes giving \$400 is out of pocket the full amount, not to mention possibly out of a home or a few meals. Therefore, I find the particular change proposed in the bill to be fairly meaningless. It would not solve any existing problem.

Finally, the member for Terrebonne's bill has an absolute rather than relative coming into force provision. Given that the bill is only at second reading here in the House and has yet to get through the Commons committee, report stage, third reading and referral to the Senate, second reading at the Senate, Senate committee, Senate report stage, Senate third reading, and royal assent, it is not realistic to suggest that the bill could be in force 24 days from now.

Over the past two years, we have made strides forward on these matters. I do not believe my views on fundraising reflect those of very many of my colleagues on any side of the House, but we are seeing changes both here and in several provinces.

Conservative Bill C-23, the so-called Fair Elections Act, reformed fundraising in a whole lot of ways that were detrimental to democratic society, including removing fundraising costs from capped expenses in an election campaign, and upping the donation limit by 25%, and then indexing it by \$25 per year instead of by an inflation-based formula.

I do not wish to re-litigate that particular bill. As the assistant at the time to the Liberal critic for democratic reform, I had more than enough sleepless nights trying to grok every word of that act once, and it certainly contributed to my motivation to seek a seat in this place so that this kind of abuse of democracy could not happen again.

Our own government's Bill C-50 brought in strict reporting requirements for fundraising events involving the key power brokers of government, and those working hard to replace them, which I think is genuinely important.

The thing about fundraising, and public financing of political parties, of course, is that there is no such thing as a perfect answer, only a balance of imperfect solutions. What I am sure of, though, is that Bill C-364 does not address the fundamental inequalities within our existing fundraising and public financing structure for our political system.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, I found the comments and proposals by my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle to be a good deal more interesting than those in the bill we are discussing. We sit on the procedure and House affairs committee together. I am not sure I want to admit this, but I am the longest-serving member of that committee. My service there goes back 15 years. People voting in the election were still in short pants when I got on the committee, one of whom, I think was the member. His youthfulness is matched by his intelligence and enthusiasm. I will make this observation.

I have had a number of unconventional positions throughout my career as a member of Parliament and I made an effort to put them on paper and get them published the quasi-academic journals that circulate around this place, *Policy Options*, for example. I suggest that the ideas the hon. member suggested in the first half of his remarks would have a suitable home in a publication like that and then could become part of the ongoing debate over something which, quite frankly, will never be an issue that is resolved. It will always be an issue that is subject to further refinement. That is the nature of our political system, it is the nature of our rules in the House of Commons, and it also is the nature of our laws applying to elections and, in particular, fundraising.

I want to talk a bit about the bill itself. That is, after all, why we are assembled here today. This bill is, in a sense, a set of proposed solutions in search of a problem, and I will explain what I mean.

In general, the political financing structure we have now is better than it has ever been before. As one consequence of my Methuselah-like longevity in this place, I am able to look back to a distant time, a land that time forgot, as it were, when dinosaurs ruled the earth or, at any rate, ruled fundraising. When I was first elected, there were no fundraising limits at all.

An hon. member: The Conservatives.

Mr. Scott Reid: Someone suggested that the dinosaur connection is to the Conservatives, and I would point out that the Liberals at the time closely resembled trilobites.

At that time, the dinosaurs who ruled were the vast institutions, companies that could contribute large amounts of money, phenomenal amounts of money, federally regulated companies, like the banks, for example, that would donate massive amounts of money to parties and expected preferment in return. It was an inherently corrupting system, though I do not think the people who engaged in it were intentionally trying to be corrupt.

Private Members' Business

I was one of the participants in that system. I can remember setting up fundraising dinners, for which companies would buy tables. All the parties did this. I am happy to say that Jean Chrétien, to his everlasting credit, changed the way this worked in 2004. He introduced a \$5,000 limit, which took effect in that year.

When the Harper government came into power, it lowered that limit to \$1,000 per year and, additionally, all forms of corporate and union donations, which had been capped by the Chrétien government, were banned entirely. That number has since drifted up to \$1,500, and my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle explained exactly how it would escalate in the future.

The combined effect of limits on donation amounts and bans on corporate and union giving was to change the fundraising incentives for our parties fundamentally. Instead of pursuing a small number of donors with a large number of dollars each, we now had to pursue a large number of donors with a small number each, that cap being, depending on the year one looks at, somewhere between \$5,000 under Chrétien, \$1,000 under the initial Harper rules, and the \$1,500 that prevails today. Compared to infinite, these are very small numbers, and the effect has been enormously beneficial on the politics of our country.

We have a much cleaner democracy and a populist fundraising system. The Conservatives have done the best at the populist fundraising in dollars measured, but we can see the Liberals are figuring this out, too. It is having an effect not merely on the way they raise funds, but on the way they engage in policy to make themselves attractive to people who might potentially make donations. Those people are not the executives of giant companies; they are the people who make donations of \$1,000 or \$1,500 and, in some cases, \$40 or \$50.

• (1650)

I thought the old system turned money into a kind of poison, but with the caps that exist today, it is a very different thing. When we pursue donations, we are pursuing donations from people who are typically our own voters, and sometimes they can be outside of our riding, but they are people who feel strongly. We all get one vote. If I feel strongly about an issue, but my colleague does not feel so strongly about it, we both get one vote and are equalized out. However, donations allow for a bit of variation, up to \$1,500 worth. They do not allow for someone, let alone a company, to have \$100,000 or \$1 million worth of variation, which was possible in the past, but they do allow people to follow up and show the depth of their commitment, which is entirely reasonable, I submit.

Now, that is the issue of caps, but the issue of the per-vote subsidy needs to be addressed. It had a very specific purpose when introduced. It was introduced to allow the parties to adjust. If we were going to a small per-capita amount, we were eliminating the giant amounts of money from banks, Bombardier, airlines, and federally regulated companies that wanted very specific benefits in return for their donations. They got rid of the system that used to exist when Brian Mulroney was in power. I remember, as a Reform Party researcher, looking this up: x amount would be given to the Conservative government of the day, and a smaller amount, over and over again, one donation after another, somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of that went to the Liberal Party. One was the bribe to

get the policy one wanted and the smaller amount was the bribe to be quiet about that first bribe. This was a terrible system, and it is gone now.

Transitioning from that system to \$5,000 per capita, at the time, was something that could have left parties in the lurch. The solution was the per-vote subsidy to allow parties to have time. However, what was intended to be temporary became permanent, in part because it had the effect of rewarding the party in power disproportionately.

If party A winds up winning more votes than party B, it gets paid more. This is not a level playing field. It was a danger I expressed back when Paul Martin was prime minister, and the expectation was that he would win 250 seats of the 300 in the House when he was described as a juggernaut. I said the Liberals could wind up getting, say, 50% of the votes, which is half the per-vote subsidy, and the other parties would be splitting their half among themselves and would not have been able to conduct campaigns. This would lead to an inertia where all the serious politics is essentially about which internal faction of the Liberal Party one supports, because they would always be in power, and if in the next election they won 55% or 60% and then 70%, we would be on our way to a one-party-plus state, as Stephen Harper described it at the time in a paper he published.

I was always adamant that we must get rid of the per-vote subsidy because it had that pernicious effect, potentially. In fact, if we look at the history, the per-vote subsidy, which was opposed by my party, had the curious effect of giving far more money to my party, which won the next few elections and then got rid of the per-vote subsidy. Bringing it back, I submit, would lead to wildly unfair results being reintroduced. I am very glad to see that gone.

There is another consideration here that needs to be mentioned. There is one party in this place that is absolutely, critically dependant upon a per-vote subsidy because it has not been able to raise funds, and that is the party of the sponsor, the Bloc Québécois. The system kept the Bloc Québécois on life support, despite the fact that, in the last year, it raised less than the amount that is in my own riding's war chest. This is a problem of that party. It cannot generate enough support from its potential donor base. While I have some sympathy for its members, the job is to make themselves appeal to their potential voters to the extent that their potential voters will give them the funds to follow through. This a reasonable expectation. The New Democrats do it, the Greens do it, the Liberals do it, my party does it, and the Bloc Québécois should do it too.

In conclusion, I do not support the bill before us. I think it contains several bad ideas. Finally, I do think, in general, regardless of the government that has been in power for the last decade and a half, that we have been trending in the right direction, and that makes me very happy, on the whole.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise in the House today to support the bill introduced by my colleague from Terrebonne. It is an excellent bill that could improve our democracy in tangible ways.

Private Members' Business

I am always very moved when we speak of the quality of our democratic systems and the way societies are structured to provide citizens with the greatest amount of power so they can make decisions that affect them, their communities, their families, and their collective life. It reminds me of something that the French historian Henri Guillemin said, that despite all its shortcomings, democracy is the system of hope. It is the system of hope because we can always tell ourselves that by working together, we can change our society and accomplish big things, because nothing stands in the way of the future. The future is not ransom to a dictator or monarchy. Democracy is the system where all citizens are equal and can choose the representatives that will speak on their behalf in the House and will vote, draft, or change the laws for society. Debates are always extremely important. That is key.

That is why we should all take this opportunity to reflect on the quality of our democratic life and figure out how to make sure that our democratic system, our electoral system, are truly about the people and that they are the ones making decisions, not this country's bankers, oil companies, or millionaires. I think that is the true intent behind the member for Terrebonne's bill. We really need to think hard about that, because it changes everything in a number of ways.

The first, of course, is that it reduces the influence that money, the elite, Bay Street, and millionaires have on how political parties shape their platforms and their agendas and the choices they make when they are in office.

Just look at our neighbour to the south. In the United States, the influence of money has reached staggering proportions. That is why we must avoid such a situation at all cost. That is why it is important to lower the personal limit for donations to political parties. That is why public funding for political parties is important. When we look at the U.S. Constitution, we can see that in theory, there is a good system in place, with plenty of checks and balances. In theory, it should be a perfect republic, but it has been blighted for years by the influence of money, by the fact that Republicans and Democrats are forced to beg for hundreds of millions of dollars, year after year, for their election campaigns. Under this system, members of Congress and presidents are hopelessly beholden to people with deep pockets.

I took a course on the American political system at McGill University, and the first thing our professor told us was that we might think there are two political parties in the U.S., but in fact there are 436. There are 435 members of Congress, 100 senators, and one president, and each of them is their own political party, making decisions based on what donors in their own ridings want. That is the scenario we hope to avoid by reducing the influence of money.

It is surreal to hear the Liberals and Conservatives, who used to be such great pals, saying today that there is nothing wrong with our system. I do not know what planet they are living on. I would like them to make me a list of all the people in their ridings who can afford to write a \$1,500 cheque to a political party every year. I am sorry, but middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join them do not have \$1,500 to give to a political party. Only those who are very well off can afford to do that. I think the proposed compromise of lowering the maximum to \$500 is perfectly reasonable. That is already a lot of money.

● (1700)

That is already a lot of money for people earning \$30,000, \$40,000, or \$50,000 per year. I do not know what planet the Liberals and Conservatives live on. There must be unicorns and Care Bears there. It is fantasy land, completely ridiculous.

Perhaps the Liberals and Conservatives have a lot of friends able to cut \$1,500 cheques. Real people, in real life, cannot afford to do that. Obviously, the Conservatives and Liberals are connected to the world of Bay Street bankers, stockbrokers, stock traders, and speculators who drive others to ruin.

Obviously, they are not going to do anything to protect the pensions and retirement plans of people like Sears employees, but they will continue to have an electoral system where the wealthiest can have influence.

It is the same old story. That is not what the Liberals told us during the election campaign. They wanted to restore trust, put Canadians first and clean up democratic institutions. Oh yes! They also wanted to bring in electoral reform. What happened to that again? It disappeared.

When it is not to their advantage, the Liberals break their promises. The Prime Minister, with his hand on his heart, said that they would not back down just because something is difficult.

In the end, it was quite difficult. It was so difficult that the Liberals did not realize that there was a consensus at the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, that the four opposition parties were in agreement, and that there was a proposal on the table. However, as this was not in the interests of the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party, it was scrapped.

Today, there is an opportunity for the government to redeem itself. We are giving it the opportunity to show that it is prepared to do what is right for democracy and for our electoral system. I suspect that we are going to have to give the Liberal government a failing grade for a second time because they will choose to keep the existing system, which has considerable advantages for the wealthiest Canadians.

What the member for Terrebonne has put on the table would reduce the influence of money and also make it possible to have a plurality of voices and greater diversity of viewpoints in the House.

Of course, a proportional voting system would be the best way to ensure that every vote is represented in Parliament. It would also encourage people to vote because they would be convinced that if they were to vote, their point of view would be represented in Parliament. At this time, the current system encourages strategic voting, which means always voting for what is least objectionable. This leads people to stay home because they do not believe it is worthwhile voting for a small party, as their vote will be wasted.

A proportional voting system would be the best way to pave the way for a parliament that truly represents the will of the people. That is what democracy means. It is supposed to represent the will of the people.

Private Members' Business

Public financing of political parties is also an interesting method, because getting two dollars for every vote allows small political parties to continue to exist, since they do not get money from multimillionaires or from electoral fund reimbursements. Since the party did not spend much last time, it does not have access to reimbursements either. Those two dollars would allow small parties to continue to exist, to promote their ideas and their point of view, and to shake things up.

This is important for our democracy, to prevent it from getting stale and turning into more of the same all the time, which unfortunately has been the case at the federal level for the past 150 years. Having multiple parties encourages people to go out and vote. Even if they know that their candidate is not going to win, they know that for four years, those two dollars will help the party that represents their point of view, their values, and their principles.

In closing, with the little time I have remaining, I will appeal to the Liberal members to vote in favour of the Liberal legacy, to vote in favour of the rules put in place by Jean Chrétien, with a relatively low limit on personal donations and public financing of political parties, in order to respect the intention that the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien had at the time, namely to clean up public standards and prevent money from influencing politics. I urge the Liberal members to vote in favour of the Liberal legacy.

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address an interesting bill, I will say that much.

Electoral reform, finances, and the election finances act always make for an interesting discussion. My colleague and friend has had a number of discussions on this particular issue. There are individuals in this chamber who I know like to have that debate on the direction we should be moving and how political entities are in fact financed. It will be one of those never-ending debates. There are always ways that we might want to look at making some changes.

The direction we have been moving in the last 20 or so years is somewhat encouraging. I have an immense amount of respect for Elections Canada. Many established democracies around the world and countries who want to establish democracies look at Canada as a case in point. Even though we might be a relatively young nation at 150 years old, there is a sense that we have it right, and that we do not want to be stagnant, but want to continue to look at ways we can improve the situation and do not take things for granted.

The government does not take the issue of finances for granted. We have a fantastic Minister of Democratic Institutions who has brought forward legislation that will see substantial changes. At the end of the day, this government and, maybe not quite as much, the Harper government, but governments in general have attempted to modify our Elections Act and election finances act to strengthen our democracy. Sometimes there is a little step back, but all in all, we have been moving forward. That really applies to the area of finances.

We have seen a significant shift. When I was first elected at the provincial level, and it would apply in the same manner at the federal level, politicians would go to some fairly well-financed individuals or corporations to pony up hundreds of thousands of dollars to a political entity. We look at it from that perspective. I can remember my 1988 election campaign, when a lot of money financing that election, at least for some, came from outside the province of Manitoba. That same thing could be seen in Canada as well. There was a point in time when people could actually raise money that would come indirectly from outside Canada.

All in all, when we look at it, we have moved significantly forward. We have a healthier democracy today than we had in previous years. I choose to believe, through discussions such as the one we are having this evening, such as the fine work that the procedure and House affairs committee does, and the work of other individuals who have a keen interest in this subject matter, that we will continue to evolve and look at ways to improve the system.

I want to reflect on the legislation that the Minister of Democratic Institutions has brought to this House. With respect to leaders, leadership candidates, the Prime Minister, and all ministers, when they have fundraising events, we have committed as a government that when a ticket costs in excess of \$200, the names of the attendees have to be publicized. We have talked about having a publicly accessible facility. There are things that the government has recognized it would be nice to move forward on. We have taken action on those.

• (1710)

We are asking our friends in the Conservatives and New Democrats and in particular their respective leaders, to look at that and maybe not wait until the legislation is actually proclaimed but indicate and send a strong message to Canadians that they too believe in the type of transparency and accountability that we are talking about on the government side.

It needs to be emphasized for my friends in the Bloc and the New Democrats that to try to give the impression that the elections are not publicly financed is not entirely true. There is substantial support for our federal elections and candidates. I as a candidate, for example, can attempt to raise money and those fine people who decide to donate to me, or to the Liberal Party through me, will get a tax credit. If people give a \$100 donation, they will get \$75 back. Those across the way talked about \$1,500 donations and so forth. In my case and I know in my colleagues' case it is very rare that I would get a \$1,500 donation. I have no objection to taking a \$1,500 donation but to make it very clear, whether someone gives me a \$1,500 donation, which is the limit according to the law, or a \$100 donation, I appreciate both donors, or if it is a \$10 donation. My vote is not for sale. I am not going to be bought by \$1,500 so it is wrong for others across the way to try to give an impression that a member of this House could be bought by a \$1,500 donation.

Private Members' Business

In fact, I tell individuals that my campaign is not just about money. They can volunteer in the campaign. I value my volunteers, the ones who come and knock on doors with me, the ones who put up signs, the ones who circulate brochures and do all those wonderful tasks that are so important in having a campaign where we are trying to communicate with the residents whose support we want. I value their efforts just as much as I value the individuals who say they cannot go out and do door knocking with me but will give me a \$100 donation. Both are of great value to me. For people to think that they can give me a substantial donation or put in a phenomenal number of hours or put up 500 signs and they are going to be getting a favour or something in return from me, that is just not true. That is not the way it works. Democracy is a wonderful thing, and I honestly believe that I am not alone, that all members of the chamber are honourable members and they cannot be bought for \$1,500.

We have taken away big companies, corporations, and unions and the manner in which they used to finance political parties. We have put it back to individuals. The greatest growth in donations to the Liberal Party of Canada, I understand, is through those small donations that are coming from tens of thousands of Canadians every year. It has been growing as Canadians recognize good sound policy that is coming from the government, how this government is supporting our middle class and those wanting to be a part of it and those who do not have the financial means. They see the positive things that are being done by this government and a number of them want to participate in the democratic process by ensuring they continue to support us.

Whether they support us as a party or they support the Conservatives or even the New Democrats or the Greens, democracy is very important to us as a nation. It takes money in order to finance it. There is nothing wrong with individuals giving donations to political parties. We have fantastic independent institutions like our ethics commissioners and our lobbyists. We have good Elections Canada rules in place to protect our democracy and the integrity of this House and I have full confidence in our current system. No doubt over the coming years, we will see some positive changes.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. I had the opportunity to work with him on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I would not want to hurt his feelings today, but I have rarely heard him give such an unfocused speech.

I think that we should pay serious attention to one particular witness I heard at the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. He is considered a leading expert on electoral laws. His name is Jean-Pierre Kingsley. I asked him a very simple question about the link between political party financing and a more equitable electoral system. He said that the per-vote public subsidies to political parties should be restored as soon as possible. Liberals and Conservatives should put that in their pipe and smoke it. That is what Jean-Pierre Kingsley says. He is not some kind of dinosaur, he is someone who deeply cares about the vitality of democracy.

That is what we are talking about, the vitality of democracy. We are not trying to determine if the Bloc Québécois is in financial

trouble, if the Green Party and the NDP are in financial trouble or if the Conservative Party has more or less money now than when it was in government.

The Liberal Party was once in favour of electoral reform and a return to a per-vote subsidy for political parties, but now that its coffers are full and it is in power, it no longer sees the need for reform. Why is that?

Certain ideas kept coming up during meetings of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. We did not end up reforming anything, but things were said, and some of those things had to do with the ruling in Figueroa. A true democracy enables true democratic debate. True democratic debate is predicated on a plurality of positions. That is the purpose the per-vote subsidy serves.

The question that came up was why citizens would bother going to the polls. We have heard statements such as, “Fewer and fewer people vote” and “People are cynical about democratic institutions”. The truth is that people will go to the polls out of a sense of conviction.

A modicum of electoral fairness can only be achieved through a per-vote subsidy. Of course, a proportional ballot would have been even fairer, and would have brought electoral pluralism to the House of Commons.

Canadians will go to the polls to vote out of conviction and they might vote for the Green Party, for example. They know that by voting for the Green Party, \$1.75 will be given to that party so that it can continue advancing its cause between elections, as part of the democratic debate in a democratic society, so that when elections are called, all parties can participate from the outset in a fair and democratic electoral debate. That is how a real democrat sees it, unlike a Sunday democrat such as the Liberal Party deputy leader. On this side, we are no Sunday democrats. It has nothing to do with our coffers being full or not. It has to do solely with our sense of democracy. I appeal to the sense of democracy of all members so they stop letting the executive control them for a moment.

We know that, when you are in government, it is easy to raise cash with cocktail parties attended by a cash-for-access minister. That issue was raised in the House. The Prime Minister had to answer for that. When this kind of thing happens, it reflects badly on all parliamentarians. Those people are saying they want to continue doing things the same way.

I will have the opportunity to speak to it again, but I want to say for now that my colleague has just introduced a balanced bill that provides for public financing of political parties. That is how we can engage citizens in the democratic process and get them to vote. That is what is at stake in this bill.

● (1720)

I would be very disappointed if parliamentarians moved to kill this bill before it can be considered clause-by-clause, amended and improved.

Why would this bill not pass first reading and then be improved by all the real democrats in the House?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Montcalm will have five minutes to finish his speech when the House resumes debate on this motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1725)

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for thousands of years, salmon has been the foundation and main food source of the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations. Over the last eight years, their basic right to catch and sell fish on their traditional territory has been upheld by the B.C. Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of Canada. After promising not to fight first nations in court, the Liberal government is still refusing to honour this right.

I just want to run down the timelines so that it is on the record here in the House.

On November 3, 2009, Justice Garson, of the B.C. Supreme Court, ruled that the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations have an aboriginal right to harvest and sell all species of fish found within their territories. Justice Garson ordered Canada to negotiate with the nations on how to accommodate their right within its management of the fisheries.

In July 2010, the nations developed community-based fishing plants for a rights-based fishery.

In August 2010, DFO rejected the nations' proposals.

On May 18, 2011, the B.C. Court of Appeal unanimously affirmed the right of the five Nuu-chah-nulth nations to harvest and sell any species of fish on their territories, with the exception of geoduck clams.

In August 2011, Canada applied to the Supreme Court of Canada for permission to appeal the decision of the B.C. Court of Appeal.

In March 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada did not grant Canada's application for leave to appeal but sent the case back to the B.C. Court of Appeal for re-examination, in light of the recent court ruling of the *Lax Kw'alaams Indian Band v. Canada*.

Later, in July 2013, the B.C. Court of Appeal unanimously affirmed that the nations have aboriginal rights to harvest and sell all species of fish, except geoduck clams.

In September 2013, Canada asked for leave to appeal the 2009 decision to the Supreme Court of Canada.

In January 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada denied the application, meaning that the declaration of aboriginal rights is final

and the nations' rights are protected under section 35 of Canada's Constitution.

On March 9, 2015, the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations returned to court for a justification trial, at which time Canada attempted to justify why the Nuu-chah-nulth nations were not previously or historically given the right to harvest and sell all species of fish in their territories. Canada provided evidence first, and Nuu-chah-nulth witnesses gave their evidence after.

On October 28, 2016, the justification trial ended after 144 days. Here we are in December 2017, and the nations are awaiting the trial decision.

Throughout this whole period, the Nuu-chah-nulth first nations have demonstrated patience. They want to be fishing. They do not want to be in court.

I am going to quote from a media release from today, and it is from the T'aaq-wiihak fisheries. It refers to fishing with the permission of the Ha'wiih, the hereditary chiefs. The news release is about their frustration with inaction by the government. It is from the lead negotiator for the Ahousaht nation Cliff Atleo. He said:

Our fishers have been waiting since 2009 to fish and sell all species in our territories, which the courts, all the way to the Supreme Court, confirmed is our right. This government has been in power for two years now, and we have yet to see any real evidence of the "new relationship" promised by [the Prime Minister].

The Liberals talk a lot about reconciliation with first nations. Well, it is time to prove it. The government says its most important relationship is with Canada's indigenous peoples. Why is it fighting them in court?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that I was born in Comox and it was my pleasure at the invitation of the member opposite to visit Courtenay—Alberni, go back to Vancouver Island, and meet with local, municipal, community, and indigenous leaders.

Indeed a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership is a top priority for our government.

The federal government is supportive of the rights of the five Nuu-Chah-Nulth first nations and remains committed to the consultation and negotiation process and accommodating and implementing the rights of first nations.

In its decision dated November 3, 2009, as the member opposite referred to, the Supreme Court of British Columbia found that the five Nuu-Chah-Nulth bands on the west coast of Vancouver Island have an aboriginal right to fish for any species of fish within their fishing territory, which extends offshore nine miles, and to sell that fish.

On appeal, the Court of Appeal for British Columbia excluded geoduck from the scope of this aboriginal right. The decision also found that the first nations have a right to fish using their preferred means, which the courts characterized as community-based, localized fisheries involving wide community participation and using small low-cost boats.

Adjournment Proceedings

Consultations and negotiations with the five first nations have been ongoing since 2010. Following the establishment of the right, the parties set up a substantive consultation and negotiation process that was modelled on treaty negotiations with a main table for negotiations and a joint working group for technical discussions to work with the first nations to address outstanding fisheries issues.

The matters that are the subject of negotiations are inherently complex. One of the significant challenges of these ongoing negotiations is that there is a different view on the scope of the right, which was described by the court as a right to sell fish into the commercial marketplace but not on an industrial scale.

Since 2010, significant fishing access has been provided to the first nations. For example, in 2007, first nations had 23 commercial licences and they now have access to over 126 licences and additional quota.

In 2015, to help guide the discussions, an evaluation framework was developed to continue implementation of the court's decision and enable DFO and the first nations to further test and evaluate the accommodation of preferred-means fishing through local small-boat fishery approaches for chinook salmon and other species of interest to the first nations.

At the request of the five Nuu-Chah-Nulth first nations, a new negotiating process was launched in March 2017. The five first nations and federal officials have completed a framework agreement in order to initiate and guide the negotiation of a reconciliation agreement. These reconciliation negotiations are without prejudice and are intended to assist the parties in more freely presenting their interests and exploring potential solutions.

The recently established process will help develop a common understanding of our respective views and is assisting us in finding mutually agreeable resolutions to outstanding issues.

This government is committed to working with the first nations through the current consultation and negotiation processes to accommodate and implement the rights of the five Nuu-Chah-Nulth first nations.

• (1730)

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank the member for coming to my riding. He did come and it was great. He heard from people and from the nations how important these rights and this settlement are to the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people. He heard how much we need coastal restoration funds in the Somass. What we received was nothing for coastal restoration funds for the Somass. What the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people received was nothing in terms of something concrete at the negotiating table and they are still waiting for that.

The speech that I just heard actually minimizes the rights and again diminishes the call to action from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people. I really hope that the member is actually listening, that I am here on behalf of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people who asked for their voice to be brought to the House of Commons.

I will read a quick statement from the chief of the Hesquiaht First Nation who said:

Well, two years in government is long enough to back up their words with real action that will make a difference to our communities. We have been patient and willing to work with government. Our fishers and communities are living in poverty

with unacceptable levels of unemployment. Yet right out in front of our communities are fishing jobs waiting for our people, if this government will get on with it and do the right thing, like they keep saying they want to do.

It will make a difference. I hope the member is really listening today. The first nations are saying nothing concrete has been put on the table.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Speaker, a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership is a top priority for our government. Our government remains committed to the consultation negotiation process and accommodating and implementing the rights of the five Nuu-chah-nulth first nations.

At the request of the five Nuu-chah-nulth first nations, a new negotiating process was launched in March 2017. Through this process, the five first nations and federal officials completed a framework agreement, which will guide the negotiations of a reconciliation agreement. These reconciliation negotiations are without prejudice, and are intended to assist the parties in more freely presenting their interests and exploring potential solutions. The matters that are the subject of the negotiations are inherently complex, but I can assure that this government is committed to working with the first nations through the current consultations and negotiations process to accommodate and implement their rights.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 22, I rose in the House to ask a question about the anti-poverty strategy. This government committed to meeting specific targets to help people living in precarious situations. However, the poverty reduction strategy seems very poorly targeted.

The situation is critical. The latest report from Citizens for Public Justice revealed that nearly five million Canadians are living on a low income, which amounts to one in seven people. Worse still, Campaign 2000 estimates that nearly one in five children lives in a family struggling with poverty and that one in three indigenous children living on reserve is poor. This is unacceptable.

The numbers I just gave are more than just statistics. These are human beings, children, families, real people who need our help. We simply cannot allow people to continue to suffer every day in a country as wealthy as ours, just because we have a government that refuses to take action on this file. The Liberals have been in power for over two years now, and still nothing concrete or effective has been done to help the poor.

A report from the parliamentary budget officer himself shows that this government's efforts to fight poverty are hitting a wall. The report shows that no performance analysis was done for the tax expenditures. It is impossible to know whether the money that this government chose to spend is really helping to reduce poverty. How can this government help the least fortunate if it is not taking the right approach? It is so wrong.

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The recommendation from the parliamentary budget officer is clear: setting appropriate and consistent objectives is necessary, but more importantly, a much broader strategy is urgently needed. Proposing half measures instead of focusing on the real causes of poverty is not viable. It is also necessary to include support measures that are universal in nature. Some groups, such as people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and newcomers, are extremely vulnerable to poverty. Newcomers in particular are more likely to have precarious jobs and consequently a lower income.

These are not just numbers, they are individuals. They have the right to live in dignity, without the tremendous daily stress of wondering how they are going to pay their bills. The government must act swiftly to help them, and that is currently not happening.

I spend my constituency days meeting with the people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale, be it the low-income earner, the single mother, the undereducated young man, the person with a physical or intellectual disability, the 50-year-old who has lost his or her job because of restructuring, or the senior coping with a loss of independence. This has really shown me that the fight against poverty must be a priority.

Fortunately, there are many organizations in my riding that do tremendous work for people in need every day, including La Chaudronnée in Acton Vale, Comptoir-Partage La Mie, the volunteer centre in Saint-Hyacinthe, and La Moisson Maskoutaine. I want to take the time to thank them in the House for their dedication and their efforts. No one is immune to poverty, and it is time for the government to take action without further delay.

My question is simple: when will the government implement a real and concerted anti-poverty strategy?

All Canadians, including workers, families, children, the unemployed, indigenous children, people with disabilities, and refugees, are waiting.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

This issue is a priority for our government, and it is very important for the country. The NDP's anti-poverty policies are very important. I thank the member for asking this question this evening.

[*English*]

More than three million Canadians live in poverty, and this is completely and totally unacceptable. That is why our government is focused on eliminating poverty in all its forms.

However, poverty is very complex. It impacts people differently depending on which region of the country they live in and based on their gender. Racialized people and, in particular, the racism faced by the black community is a fundamental problem and challenge the country has to face. The issues are not just economic; they are human rights issues that must be challenged. We have put programs in place to do just that.

Let me talk about some of the ways we are working toward a national poverty reduction strategy.

One is by talking about the programs we have put in place now, not waiting for them to be introduced formally. First and foremost, I will talk about the issue closest to my heart.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

That issue is the national housing strategy. It is important for ending poverty, particularly for the homeless people living on the streets of Canada.

[*English*]

The national housing strategy is perhaps one of the most important things we are doing. It is a new program. It is \$40 billion over 10 years, the longest and largest investment in supportive housing, public housing, social housing, and affordable housing for those in the private market. This program alone will have a dramatic impact. Close to half a million Canadians will be lifted out of core housing needs and that will put them on a path to solving some of the challenges poverty brings to their lives. However, we have not stopped there.

We have consulted straight across the country.

[*Translation*]

We travelled all over Canada, talking to academics, researchers, stakeholders, service providers, indigenous partners, and people who have lived in poverty.

[*English*]

This government has been consulting, talking, listening, and supporting round tables across the country to get the best advice it can from people on the front lines, the researchers, the universities, and listening to indigenous peoples and organizations as we formulate a policy.

In the interim, it was not just the national housing strategy that saw us take action. We have also taken deliberate action around child poverty. I would argue, and I think the facts present themselves, that the Canada child benefit, which has lifted 300,000 children out of poverty in the first two years of this government and has recently been indexed by this government, is a commitment we have made to solve and resolve poverty as it impacts some of the most vulnerable people in our country, children.

We have also addressed the issue of seniors. There are 900,000 vulnerable seniors living this experience across the country and our improvements to GIS has lifted 13,000 seniors out of poverty, the bulk of them, 90%, women. This is part of our gender-based approach to modelling our programs so we do not just talk about poverty in general but target specific individuals, demographics, and sub-populations that require our help.

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Additionally, we have invested \$7.5 billion in day care and early learning child care. These, again, are investments, partnering with the provinces, that will deliver significant change to people's lives that are defined by poverty. Sometimes the lack of child care is equivalent to not getting a job. Again, building stronger capacity in people's lives is part of the way we do this.

When we add this all up, when we add the new housing with the new child care support, with the new child benefit, with the new guaranteed income supplement, the measures we have made to cut taxes, and the additional steps we will see in the budget in the year ahead, we do not see a government that is waiting for a national strategy to address poverty. We are seeing a government that is acting now to alleviate the pressure and dynamics in far too many people's lives.

This government is committed to eliminating poverty and coordinating it through a national poverty reduction strategy. This government is already taking action of which we are very proud. This has helped Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals have a strategy, why are they not giving it to us? They have yet to clearly present a real, concerted strategy for reducing poverty.

The member said himself that poverty is a crosscutting issue that requires broad-based action. That has been widely documented for the past 30 years. The first resolution to eliminate poverty dates back to 1989.

Last year, when the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was conducting its study on poverty, researchers told us that this was widely documented. As the member himself said, the NDP has been proposing very clear solutions for fighting poverty for 60 years now. The time for talk is over. People are poor right now. We are lagging behind other OECD countries.

I was pleased to hear the parliamentary secretary mention human rights in relation to poverty. That was one of the aspects of my bill, to recognize social condition as part of our rights. They voted against the right to housing. Targeted strategies are not enough. We need to look at the big picture and develop a comprehensive and concerted strategy.

● (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, the strategy is emerging even before it has a formal title or has been introduced as a formal policy. That is because our commitment on housing, on seniors, on children, and on indigenous transformation of social circumstance is already invested. In fact, we doubled the housing budget in the very first year we were in office. Now we are adding \$40 billion over the next 10 years.

We have rejected some of the simplistic slogans that have been presented by other parties. A right to housing means nothing without a housing system to access. Getting a house in Chicoutimi means nothing if someone is trying to work and live in Victoriaville. We have ensured we frame our policies with any human rights framework and we ensure we can deliver real housing to real people in real time. That is the goal of many of our programs.

As I said, we have been criss-crossing the country, sitting down with front-line workers, people with lived experiences, organizations, municipalities, and provincial services. We have been talking to those people who we need to talk to in order to deliver this policy.

One of the things we missed was because of the previous government's refusal to do an in-depth census. The real data we needed to transform the definition and action and motivate real accomplishment just has not been there. The previous government did not even care about the poor. It did not count them. We have had to go back and do that work. We are doing that work.

In the interim, billions of dollars have been invested in alleviating poverty. I am proud of this government's achievement on that. I am proud to say that the poverty strategy will be on its way shortly.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

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 5:47 p.m.)

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