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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the parliamentary budget officer entitled “Bill C-342—Cost of carbon pricing deduction from GST”.

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[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many people who are watching or how many members of Parliament know that there is a committee of parliamentarians from the eight Arctic nations. We meet four times a year. We just had a meeting in Iceland, the first country to get 100% off of fossil fuels. We discussed things like black carbon in the Arctic.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation to the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the meeting of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, from October 11 to 13.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages entitled “Ensuring Justice is Done in Both Official Languages”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

I would like to take a moment to thank all the members of all political parties who worked on the report, as well as the clerk, Christine Holke, and the analyst, Lucie Lecomte.

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I present the report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, I want to acknowledge the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, who has made a significant contribution to this report.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security concerning Bill C-66, An Act to establish a procedure for expunging certain historically unjust convictions and to make related amendments to other Acts. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade, entitled “Priorities of Canadian Stakeholders Having an Interest in Bilateral and Trilateral Trade in North America, Between Canada, United States and Mexico”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I would like to add that we have a wonderful committee. We work hard together on trade for Canadians. I would also like to thank our clerk and analysts, and the good people when we travel, those in our embassies and consulates in the United States.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our committee was tasked with studying the trade priorities of Canadians, but recommendations from certain stakeholders were not reflected in the final report. The Conservative members of the Standing Committee on International Trade would like to offer this supplementary opinion, which includes testimony given by various stakeholders whose recommendations seem to have been overlooked.

Privilege

We have included recommendations based on the evidence presented by various witnesses and stakeholders, and we encourage the Liberal government and the Minister of International Trade to read these recommendations and to actually listen to the trade priorities of all Canadians.

* * *

LATIN AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH ACT

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC) moved that Bill S-218, An Act respecting Latin American Heritage Month, be read a first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am truly honoured to table and sponsor Bill S-218, an act respecting Latin American heritage month. I am particularly honoured because the legislation, which recognizes the significant contributions to Canada's social, economic, and political fabric by our Latin American community, was created and lovingly fashioned by our late colleague, the hon. Senator Tobias Enverga.

Senator Enverga, a champion of multiculturalism, believed that diversity was Canada's greatest strength. It was Tobias's firm belief, before his untimely passing just last month, that Latin American heritage month would be a meaningful way to remember, celebrate, and educate fellow Canadians about a unique and important element of our country's significant diversity.

I urge all members on both sides of the House to support Bill S-218.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

ALGOMA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to table a petition for the Minister of Transport.

The Algoma passenger train was the only safe, affordable, all-season access into the Algoma wilderness rail corridor for over 100 years. The petitioners indicate that the few industrial roads are only maintained when and if industries need them and are not for public use. Alternate ways of access are not reliable, safe year-round, or non-existent. They also indicate that this has caused substantial hardships for residents, businesses, and other passengers.

The petitioners ask that the Minister of Transport put the Algoma passenger train back on its tracks and that the government fulfill its mission, which is to serve the public interest through promotion of a safe and secure, efficient, and environmentally responsible transportation system in Canada.

The petitioners are from Wawa, Echo Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Bowmanville, Whitby, and Campbell River, B.C.

● (1010)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition that has a long preamble, which I will summarize.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to permit Christians to robustly exercise their religious beliefs and conscience rights, both in private and public acts, without coercion, restraint, or discrimination by amending section 241 of the Criminal Code and to enact a policy to provide a review of any new legislation that may be brought forth in the future by the government to ensure it does not impinge upon the rights of Canadians in accordance with the historic continuance of the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition calling for an end to corporate pension theft given that working Canadians rely on their pensions and benefits to have a dignified life and retirement. Canada's inadequate bankruptcy laws currently allow corporations to take money intended for their employees' pensions and benefits to pay CEOs, banks, and investors. Canadian workers are calling on the Government of Canada to fix our bankruptcy laws to prevent corporations from putting shareholders, banks, and creditors before their retired employees when they enter into restructuring proceedings or bankruptcy. The petition is signed by the citizens of my riding, Salaberry—Suroît.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

The Speaker: I received notice from the Minister of National Revenue who would like to present arguments with respect to the question of privilege raised by the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

The hon. Minister of National Revenue.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF REVENUE REGARDING THE DISABILITY TAX CREDIT

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a few more remarks I would like to make regarding the question of privilege raised by my colleague, the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

The member referred to recent articles and believes that they contradict the statement I made to the effect that the eligibility criteria for the disability tax credit have not changed. Accordingly, he is accusing me of knowingly misleading this House.

I stand by my previous statement. The eligibility criteria for this tax credit, as defined in paragraph 118.3(1)(a.1) of the Income Tax Act, have not changed.

My colleague's question of privilege has more to do with the letter of clarification that the Canada Revenue Agency started sending out in May to communicate with health care professionals in cases where agents require more information to complete a file.

It is very important to me that this issue be resolved today, not only to clarify the matter here in the House, but also to ensure that Canadians have accurate information on the disability tax credit for the benefit of those who apply for it.

The letter of clarification sent by the agency sought to clarify the interpretation of the information relative to the 14-hour rule set out in the legislation. The purpose of the letter was never to change an eligibility criterion. However, it became obvious that the clarification letter had an unintended consequence with respect to the assessment of the claims. That is why I announced on Friday that the agency would immediately stop using the content of the May clarification letter and would resume using the previous letter. The agency will also reassess the claims that were denied during that period.

In order to ensure that the agency's administrative changes help improve our service, I also announced the return of the disability advisory committee. From now on, the views of Canadians with disabilities will be an integral part of the agency's decision-making process.

Although I stand by my previous comments that no changes were made to the eligibility criteria, I will admit that the agency's efforts to clarify the criteria had unintended consequences. For that, I offer my most sincere apologies.

I am convinced that, thanks to the announcement we made last week, the agency's decisions will be better informed. The committee will play a key role in the administration of tax credits for persons with disabilities and its recommendations will be made public.

• (1015)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. Minister of National Revenue for her comments. I will consider her arguments and those presented by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby, the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, and the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, and get back to the House with my decision.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SALARIES ACT

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.) moved that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the

Government Orders

Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to how Bill C-24 will formalize in legislation the one-tier ministry of this government and ensure that the government and future governments have the flexibility to deliver on their commitments to Canadians.

[Translation]

As you know, the government introduced this bill to amend the Salaries Act on September 27, 2016.

[English]

Bill C-24 would amend the Salaries Act by adding eight new ministerial positions to the act, five of which are currently minister of state appointments, and three of which are untitled; removing the six regional development positions from the Salaries Act, for a total increase of two positions that may be paid a ministerial salary out of the consolidated revenue fund; creating a framework within which any of the eight new ministerial positions, if occupied, could be supported by existing departments; and changing the Salaries Act title of Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs to Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, including in the Financial Administration Act to better reflect the responsibilities of the position and to reflect the fact that the Prime Minister has taken on the role of minister responsible for intergovernmental affairs.

A historical look at the cabinets of the past confirms what we already know: priorities change. In 1867, there were 14 men around the country's first cabinet table. Among them, a minister of militia and defence, a postmaster general, and a secretary of state for the provinces.

• (1020)

[Translation]

The position of Secretary of State for the Provinces disappeared in the second ministry, and the third ministry saw the introduction of a Minister of Railways and Canals. Trade and Commerce was a new ministerial position in the fifth ministry, Immigration and Labour appeared in the eighth, and Soldiers Civil Re-establishment in the tenth.

[English]

Health came later and so did environment, natural resources, and infrastructure.

The first female cabinet minister, the hon. Ellen Fairclough, took her seat at the cabinet table in 1957 and the changes go on.

When the Ministries and Ministers of State Act was introduced in Parliament in 1971, the sponsoring minister remarked that the pace of change imposes a constant challenge on Parliament and the government to be as efficient as possible in doing those things that are vital to the welfare of Canadians. He said that both institutions must be flexible. Both must adapt their procedures and structures to respond effectively to the changing needs of society in a changing world. Those observations are as apt today as they were in 1971.

Government Orders

Modernizing the legislative framework related to creating the ministry is part of the government's determination to enhance its capacity to deal effectively with the changing priorities of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Yes, Bill C-24 is an administrative and technical bill, but it will enable an adaptable flexible ministry, now and into the future. It deserves Parliament's support.

[*English*]

For the benefit of members, I would like to provide a bit of background. The appointment of ministers is a crown prerogative. The Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister may appoint any number of ministers to any office including officers that are not referred to in legislation. This is a common feature of Westminster democracies.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister decides on the composition, organization, and procedures of the cabinet, shaping it to reflect the priorities of the government and to respond to the particular needs of the citizenry.

[*English*]

However, there are two key considerations related to each ministerial appointment. First, under what authority can a minister be paid, and second, how can the minister be supported by the public service in carrying out his or her responsibilities?

Here Parliament has a supervisory role. Even if the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister appointed a whole host of ministers under the crown prerogative, they could not be paid except under the authority of the law. That too is a common feature in Westminster countries. The salaries of ministers must be authorized by law.

These laws may set out the maximum number of ministers that can be provided a salary. In Australia, for example, there can be up to 30 salaried ministers. In the U.K., there are several tiers of ministers. There can be as many as 109 positions that can be paid a salary, including the senior tier ministers of up to 22 and junior members in minister of state and parliamentary undersecretary positions.

[*Translation*]

In Canada, Parliament has authorized two ways to pay ministerial salaries, specifically via the Salaries Act or through Appropriation Acts. The Salaries Act authorizes payment of a ministerial salary from the Consolidated Revenue Fund to individuals who have been appointed to ministerial positions listed in that act.

The Salaries Act currently lists the Prime minister, 34 specific ministerial positions, and ministers of state who preside over a ministry of state.

[*English*]

When it comes to carrying out the responsibilities, the Ministries and Ministers of State Act provides authority for ministers of state to use their resources, facilities, and services in existing departments.

Therefore, we come to November, 2015. Five positions that the Prime Minister wanted in his ministry and cabinet were not positions listed in the Salaries Act. Other prime ministers have faced this challenge as well. Sometimes they have managed by appointing individuals to Salaries Act positions whose legal titles did not match their responsibilities, sometimes they have been satisfied to appoint a minister of state, and other times they have successfully brought forward amendments to the Salaries Act, including most recently in 2013. There are other instances where they have taken all three of these steps.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, in November 2015, the Salaries Act could not accommodate ministerial positions for important priorities of this government, namely promoting science, supporting small business, promoting health through sport and creating opportunities for persons with disabilities, advancing gender equality, and preserving the vitality of the francophone world.

[*English*]

Therefore, five ministers were appointed pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. These ministers are paid under appropriation acts.

[*Translation*]

This was to be the arrangement until legislation could be updated. This was always the plan. There was no plot to deny full status to five ministers. They were provided with what was possible within the legal framework that existed on November 4, 2015, and the Prime Minister made a commitment to bring forward legislation to formalize his one-tier cabinet.

[*English*]

Bill C-24 fulfills that commitment. It would revise the list of ministerial positions in the Salaries Act to afford certain priority areas the status they deserve. The five new title positions that Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act carry significant and important responsibilities. Those positions 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.

This government has said from the beginning of its mandate that there are no junior ministers and senior ministers. In practice, that is the way the cabinet has operated since day one of this government.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister created a ministry in which all members are full members of cabinet, have an equal capacity to exercise the powers and perform the functions assigned to them, and have leading roles to deliver on the important priorities of this government.

Government Orders

[English]

These ministers are appropriately supported by existing departments. This reflects the government's commitment to a different style of leadership, including close collaboration among cabinet colleagues. The ministry works in that spirit, with strong portfolio teams that share departmental resources and facilities to pursue its goals.

This arrangement would continue under the amended Salaries Act. Bill C-24 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 means that a minister could have access to the expertise and experience of the department or departments best placed to provide them with full and appropriate support.

The amendments proposed by Bill C-24 would modernize the legislation to reflect the current one-tier cabinet. No new departments would need to be created as a consequence of this bill. This bill is designed to help the legislative framework catch up to the reality.

[Translation]

The proposed amendments will also include three new untitled positions. This will provide a measure of flexibility to this Prime Minister and to future prime ministers to appoint ministers to portfolios that reflect changing priorities of the day.

[English]

Some members have questioned our government's intentions here, suggesting something nefarious and non-transparent. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Salaries Act has been amended several times in the past. It simply makes sense to build in a degree of flexibility for the future. I encourage the members of this House to support Bill C-24. It represents an attempt to improve the way our system functions by enabling greater flexibility in cabinet design.

[Translation]

I will end where I began. Priorities change. A prime minister must have the flexibility to adjust his or her ministry to respond to those changing needs. The new titles that Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act speak to the priorities of our times, just as ministerial titles of the past spoke to theirs.

[English]

As society changes, Canada's needs will continue to evolve. It is important that we provide prime ministers with the flexibility to respond to these changes. This bill represents another important step in that process, and I urge members to support it.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question for the government House leader is this. She is a part-time House leader and a part-time minister. What makes her think she should be paid the same as a full-time minister?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, we are elected in this place first as members of Parliament. I am the full-time member of Parliament for the riding of Waterloo.

The Prime Minister asked me to be part of his team around the cabinet table. He made me the full-time Minister of Small Business and Tourism. The Prime Minister recognized the important work that

I did, and our team does, and asked me to take on additional responsibilities as the full-time government House leader.

The comments of the member opposite do not advance the work that we are trying to do in this country. She can use the words she chooses, but she very well knows that every member of Parliament works to his or her maximum potential on behalf of Canadians. I will continue to do the important work that I was elected to do. I will continue to do the important work the Prime Minister has asked me to do. I encourage all members to continue working hard on behalf of all Canadians.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the minister if she could comment on the fact that this is a bill that we have been debating forever in this House, it seems. I think we have debated it more than we have debated the budget, yet it is a bill about nothing. It is a bill that accomplishes nothing. We could have done everything in this bill without it. We could have raised the salaries of these minor ministers to levels that are the same as real ministers with departments. However, it seems that this bill is only designed to fix a problem that the Liberal government had because it wanted to say it had a gender-parity cabinet, when in fact it only achieved that by naming six women to these minor minister of state positions. It wanted to paper that over, and we have been spending hours in this House debating a bill that really accomplishes nothing, except fixing a minor problem for the government. I wonder if she could comment on that.

• (1030)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, I am a little surprised at the member's words. Women contributing to the workplace is not minor. Small business and tourism is not minor. Status of women is not minor. Canada has two official languages, and La Francophonie is not minor. The list goes on.

We talk about the importance of maximizing the potential of our workforce. The Prime Minister made a conscious decision to have gender parity at the cabinet table. For the first time in the history of our country, we have the same number of men and women at the cabinet table. That is not minor.

The only way the country will continue to advance and recognize that we need to change the way we do things is by seeing leadership. That is the leadership that our Prime Minister is demonstrating today. For the first time in the history of our country, 150 years, we have a woman in the role of government House leader. I was shocked to learn that. It took 150 years for a woman to occupy this post. It should not have taken 150 years. I will not wait another 150 years. This legislation is important.

I must say this quickly. It is true that we could legislate—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt, but I have to call for more questions. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Thornhill.

Government Orders

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to my hon. colleague's remarks. I look to the day when a future government returns to the traditional position of minister of state, an honourable junior minister with appropriate compensation.

My question is prompted by my colleague's reference to the Prime Minister's authority to appoint and assign responsibilities.

With regard to the government House leader's assignment to lead the search for a new ethics commissioner, whom we will examine at committee today, and that she has been the prime defender of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance in the face of the investigations by the Ethics Commissioner, does she not think she might have recused herself from that responsibility assigned by the Prime Minister?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member that it has to be related to the position itself. I will allow the government House leader to respond.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, in regards to an earlier question on the importance of debating this legislation, Bill C-24 is important legislation to debate. I continually ask the opposition how much time is needed to debate legislation, and if we can all figure out how much time is needed for all members to be able to speak, I will allot time accordingly. I know that all members want to raise points.

In regards to the member's question, Bill C-24 proposes a one-tier ministry, in which a minister is a minister is a minister. Minister of state positions can always be filled by future governments if they so wish. Our Prime Minister and this government recognize the importance of these positions and of their having equal voices at the cabinet table. Each of these ministers has been provided with a mandate letter, just like every other minister. For the first time, these mandate letters were made public so that Canadians will know what a minister's mandate is.

It is true that today at committee the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner nominee will be able to answer questions. I am sure that will be a fruitful conversation.

•(1035)

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, a short time ago in the House a member of the opposition referred degradingly to the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism as half a leader because of the two positions she holds. I am not sure if it was said because she is a woman.

Could the hon. government House leader and Minister of Small Business and Tourism tell the House how she is fully capable of managing to do such a great job in both roles?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that excellent question. Just like you, Madam Speaker, I am hard-working. All women, in fact all people, are hard-working.

We have teams of people that work with us. This government recognizes that it is not about me, but about we. It is about how we can all work together. How do we maximize the potential of our team? How do we ensure that we are serving in the best interests of our constituents, of our stakeholders?

It is unfortunate that people make such remarks. These remarks do not better the level of discourse in this place.

Yesterday on the news there was a story of a child who had been bullied. He asked why do people bully? I sometimes question why people feel they need to make those kinds of remarks, because it does not improve the debate and the discourse. Canadians elected us to increase the level of discourse in this place to ensure that we represent them well. Name-calling does not really improve that. I would expect better from hon. members.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals cut short the debate on Bill C-24 because it is a purely cosmetic bill.

We are not talking about equality for all women here. We are talking about raising the salaries of the ministers of state on the pretext that the Prime Minister made a mistake when he appointed the members of his cabinet. He said that the appointments were fair and that they represented all women, but he forgot that many of the women he appointed were in minister of state positions, and they do not have the same responsibilities. Now, he wants to make the salaries equal but not the responsibilities. Equal pay for equal work. We do not understand what principle the Liberals are following because that is not what is happening here at all.

Pay equity does not just affect the ministers, who are just a handful of people in Canada. Pay equity should apply to all Canadians.

Why have the Liberals still not introduced a bill on pay equity when they were supposed to do so in 2016? The report and recommendations were tabled in 2004.

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the diversity of opinions in this place, and even within each of our caucuses. Her own colleague is saying that we have been debating this for too long, while she is upset that we are rushing this debate. That speaks, once again, to the diversity of opinion.

She is right. The bill is not just about pay equity. It is about recognizing the importance of the positions we are making into full ministerial ones. For example, the bill recognizes the importance of small business and tourism as a full ministerial position, and importance of a minister of science as a full ministerial position.

When it comes to equal responsibilities, every minister has a different responsibility because of their portfolio. Each of them has different responsibilities; hence, different portfolios. We all have mandate letters, given in exactly the same way.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to remind the member for Salaberry—Suroît that she had the opportunity to ask her question without being interrupted. We ask that the House leader be shown the same respect and that she be allowed to respond without any interruptions.

*Government Orders***MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE**

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed Bill S-210, An Act to amend An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, to which the concurrence of the House is desired.

* * *

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Madam Speaker, as usual, I would like to say hello to the people of Beauport—Limoilou who are tuning in today. Unfortunately, I have to tell them that we are debating Bill C-24 at third reading this morning. This is one of those typically Liberal bills designed to satisfy special interest groups that support Liberals and lend credence to their ideological views.

I found it particularly interesting to see the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons champion the bill so passionately, but I do have questions about some of her arguments.

First of all, I wonder if, in defending the bill, the minister is putting on an act or if she truly does not understand the difference between ministers, who are responsible for portfolios crucial to the nation, and ministers of state, who are there to lend a hand and support other departments of national importance.

Five major federal ministers have always had a seat at the cabinet table, namely the Minister of Finance, the Treasury Board minister, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, and the Minister of National Revenue. Those five cabinet positions have always existed, and they have always been important to the government's ability to govern well.

The minister also said repeatedly in her speech how important Bill C-24 is for gender equality among cabinet ministers. That is not exactly how many of her colleagues seem to understand it. At the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which I was honoured to serve on for over a year in 2016 and 2017, many Liberal members thought that, on the contrary, Bill C-24 was not about achieving gender equality.

When the committee was hearing from witnesses for the bill's study, the member for Newmarket—Aurora said:

I'm not sure the purpose of this bill was at all to express gender equality...I don't think it's meant to be a tool that's going to address gender inequality, pay equity, or any of the other issues you raised...

The member for Châteauguay—Lacolle, who also serves on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, thinks that ministries of state should be called emerging ministries. This is another example that illustrates that the Liberals do not seem to understand the difference between ministries of state and

departments critical to good governance, such as the Department of Finance.

The hon. Liberal member from Don Valley East told the witnesses:

I was as confused as you were about why we are even talking about gender equity...I thank you for being here, but I don't think we have the relevance to our study for Bill C-24...Let's not be disingenuous and try to say that [Bill C-24] has anything to do with gender equality...

I simply wanted to mention these small details to show that despite the speech by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons today at third reading stage of Bill C-24, a number of her colleagues expressed an opposite view in committee, that the bill had nothing to do with gender equity. It is just a tool to take up the House's time and distract from other awful realities that this government would rather not talk about, namely its capacity to break promise after promise since it was elected in 2015.

● (1040)

For example, the Liberals broke their promise to run a deficit of \$10 billion a year. That is well known in Canada. Now they are running deficits of more than \$20 billion. They also broke their promise to balance the budget by 2019. That has been put off indefinitely. They do not even have the honour or decency to announce a target date for balancing the budget. Then they broke their promise to move forward with electoral reform and to change the Canadian electoral system, which was a key election promise. They also broke their promise to restore home mail delivery for all Canadians by making Canada Post review its policy to stop home mail delivery. They also broke their promise not to introduce omnibus bills, which have been piling up over the past two years. As a matter of fact, we debated an omnibus bill in the House just yesterday. They also broke their promise to give veterans the option of choosing a lifetime pension by restoring the system that was in effect before 2005, or before the new veterans charter was introduced.

Those are just a few examples of the Liberals' broken promises. That is this government's track record. I am pointing that out because Bill C-24 is yet another attempt to hide another broken promise, the promise to have true gender parity in cabinet. When the Prime Minister formed his cabinet two weeks after winning the election in 2015, he was very proud to announce to the media at a press conference that he had a gender-balanced cabinet. When he was asked why, he responded "Because it's 2015". It is already mind-boggling enough that a prime minister would not have a better explanation than that, but in the months that followed, journalists, Canadians, interest groups, and women's rights groups slowly became aware of something that the Prime Minister was trying to slip past them. His cabinet was gender balanced with regard to the number of men and women at the cabinet table, but not with regard to the importance of the positions they held.

Government Orders

At the beginning of my speech, I named Canada's most important government departments. For example, the head of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is a man. The same is true of the Treasury Board, the Department of Finance, and the Department of National Defence. The only other department that is undeniably important to the government is the Department of Foreign Affairs. Of the five major departments, only one is led by a woman.

Women were chosen to head a few other departments, such as the Department of Indigenous Services and the Department of Health. However, all of the other women in cabinet are ministers of state. It is not that they are less important, but they do not lead real departments with an office building, thousands of employees, a minister's office, and the tools needed to properly manage a major department.

In practical terms, Bill C-24 would do two things. First, it would eliminate the positions of the ministers responsible for Canada's economic development agencies. Second, it would create eight new federal minister positions. Five of them would be ministers of state who would receive the same salary as full ministers, thanks to an amendment to the Salaries Act that is supposedly intended to ensure parity within cabinet.

We Conservatives have no choice but to oppose Bill C-24, if only because abolishing the positions of the ministers responsible for economic development agencies would have such a detrimental effect on the well-being of Canada and all of its regions.

• (1045)

Regional economic development agencies play a pivotal role in Canada. They help thousands of projects get off the ground in every province and major region. Canada is divided into five regions: the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, the western region, and the Pacific region. Each of these regions has its own economic development agency, whose job is to determine the basic needs of its small and medium-sized municipalities and large urban centres.

The Liberal government's decision to eliminate the positions of the ministers responsible for these six economic development agencies is a clear attempt to centralize power in Canada. Every time the Liberal Party comes into power, its goal is to centralize power in Ottawa, within the federal administration. That is what it tried to do with the health agreements it recently negotiated with the provinces, when it made their funding subject to conditions. Now it is doing the same thing on a bigger scale by abolishing the positions of the ministers responsible for regional agencies.

For example, Mr. Denis Lebel, who was our political lieutenant for Quebec, was responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. Every year, the agency distributes roughly \$200 million only in Quebec, specifically to revitalize municipal neighbourhoods, provide small and medium-sized businesses with new tools, and finance concrete projects in small airports to help local businesses get much faster access to major centres and even to other countries.

A minister in charge of a regional economic development agency is a bit like an MP. As members, we visit our ridings to understand the daily needs of our constituents. We participate in events and

do canvassing, not to mention the work we do in our offices, where we welcome constituents. This enables us to hear what they have to say about bills and government politics, and especially about pressing, local needs. A minister who represents a regional economic development agency has a similar job, but they do it for the designated region as a whole. In this case, I am speaking of Quebec.

Denis Lebel was the minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. His duties as a minister and political lieutenant included visiting companies and making ministerial announcements. He travelled all over the province, meeting citizens and entrepreneurs and visiting small and medium municipalities, entrepreneurial communities, or even community development organizations, in order to determine what they needed.

Like an MP, a minister responsible for an economic development agency must come back here to Ottawa and report to cabinet about the region he or she represents.

• (1050)

When Parliament is sitting, we are all expected to come to the House every week, whether it is fall or spring. We are expected to come here and report to the House or to our national caucuses on what our constituents, the various orders of government in our regions, our municipalities, and our ridings need. Collaboration and synergy between the different orders of government is always a good thing.

The work we do in the House is exactly what the ministers responsible for regional economic development agencies do in reporting to cabinet and ultimately to public servants and the Prime Minister. These people provide an essential link between the needs on the ground and the whole governmental and bureaucratic apparatus in Ottawa.

Every department that is responsible for allocating funds for projects across Canada is part of an extremely complex state system that is like an endless bureaucratic web. It involves 300,000 public servants in Canada, and the decisions they make often take a very long time.

The work of the ministers responsible for economic development agencies was therefore central to the actual funding allocated for projects, because they were there in Ottawa to establish a connection between the needs on the ground and government priorities and to navigate administrative and bureaucratic processes.

For example, the minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the regions of Quebec at the time, Denis Lebel, was handed a list of projects several times a month, and he had to approve the really big ones. His role and responsibility was to ensure that what he was hearing on the ground informed the public service's administrative priorities so that the most important projects got done as quickly as possible.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, the Liberal government cut cabinet positions associated with various economic development regions in Canada and put one person in charge of all the economic development agencies in the country. That person is the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, an MP from Toronto who already heads up a major department. He is now responsible for being up on what is going on with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, for example. He also has to be aware of what is going on with economic development agencies for western Canada, Quebec, and Ontario. He is the person who is supposedly going to be familiar with the issues affecting every little community and every region across Canada and who is going to make sure they get money for the projects that matter most to them.

It is hard to understand how the Liberal government was unable to find one person among the 30 members from Atlantic Canada with the right skills and who would have been honoured to head the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

We can already predict what will happen. Projects submitted to the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency were generally authorized or would move forward after about 30 days or so; we now see delays of more than 90 days. This centralization will have a major impact on how money is allocated to the communities and regions of Canada. It is impossible to believe that a minister from Toronto will be able to single-handedly grasp all of Canada's regional concerns.

As far as the gender-balanced cabinet is concerned, the Liberals are once again getting taxpayers to foot the bill for one of their political mistakes. The Liberals led Canadians to believe that theirs was a gender-balanced cabinet, but it is balanced only in terms of numbers. It is not balanced in terms of ministerial importance. To fix their mistake, the Liberals are telling Canadians that they will give every minister of state the same salary as “real” ministers.

• (1055)

Again, taxpayers are paying for a Liberal mistake.

• (1100)

[*English*]

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Madam Speaker, opposition members repeatedly suggest that this bill is about something it is not. They keep talking about gender parity. That is not what this bill is about. This bill is about recognizing and giving importance and equality to certain areas, such as science, although I know that the opposition wanted to muzzle scientists; disabilities; la Francophonie; and small businesses. All of these are equally important. Does the member not agree that these people are equally important? For example, should the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, who is male, have a different or lesser voice at the cabinet table, not because he is male but because he represents sport and disabilities?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Madam Speaker, I am quite surprised by the affirmation of the member across the aisle, because the House leader emphasized throughout her speech, just three minutes ago, that on the contrary, the purpose of this bill is gender equity. It would show Canadians how important gender equity is to the government.

I would say that the member is wrong. The Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, for example, is not as important as the

Minister of Finance. That is exactly why the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities is a minister of state and the salaries are not the same. The reason is quite simple. Real ministries have buildings, employees, and a ministerial cabinet with about 40 staffers. They must make sure that governmental responsibilities and goals are brought forward, which is not the case for ministers of state, who are there to support bigger ministries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. He has once again reminded us of our duties. He wants to ensure that each one of us remembers how this Confederation works and the type of exchanges we should have in Parliament. I appreciate that very much.

I know that he was speaking to his constituents at the beginning of his speech and I believe that it is very healthy for an MP to remind people of what we are supposed to be doing as their representatives.

He also clearly pointed out the role of regional ministers as representatives. We are actually evolving into a top-down organization even though what we really need is the opposite. He reminded us of how pathetic it is that we are once again wasting parliamentarians' time in this chamber covering up the government's mistake, simply because during the election campaign the Liberals promised the moon and the stars on about everything. For the past two and a half years we have spent a good part of our time in this place covering up their mistakes.

Does my colleague believe, for example, that there will be a new bill to cover up the finance minister's mistakes, a bill that will condone the type of privilege extended to him and his family? Does he believe, for example, that the Minister of Small Business and Tourism might consider it a good idea to pass legislation to ensure that there is no GST or provincial sales tax on online sales to mess up all the small businesses she has to represent?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Madam Speaker, I agree completely with my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

The Liberals have been doing a terrible job over the past year. The softwood lumber crisis is still ongoing, although it should have been resolved when President Obama was still in power. The member for Papineau said he had an excellent relationship with the American president, so he should have taken advantage of that to resolve the situation before a new president was elected.

There is also the NAFTA file, which, by all accounts, is a mess. It is still unresolved. We will probably have to wait until the summer of 2018 to find out whether NAFTA can be saved.

Government Orders

Today in the House, instead of having a dialogue about how to reach a deal, how to make sure NAFTA is salvaged and Canadian interests are protected, or how to make sure the softwood lumber crisis is resolved, something that is very important to Quebec and B.C., we are debating a bill to increase ministers' salaries, which means, once again, that taxpayers will have to pay for this government's political mistakes.

• (1105)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I heard my colleague's speech, in which he, in a way, criticizes the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, and I just wanted to defend the minister.

I very much appreciate the member and his party's new-found interest in our regions. Perhaps it would have been a good idea for the Conservatives to take such an interest when they were in power.

[English]

My colleague opposite seems to have a problem with the minister for ACOA being from Mississauga. In the province of Prince Edward Island, after 10 long, lean years, we now have a subsea cable to New Brunswick that will substantially aid our economic development. We now have substantial investments at the University of Prince Edward Island. We now have waste water systems being built in Prince Edward Island that will substantially aid our future. We now have substantial investments in incubators, which we never, ever saw under the previous government.

From his perch in Quebec, would the member like to reconsider his critique of the value of the Minister of Innovation to Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Madam Speaker, I have the utmost respect for every single member in this House. That is not the question. I did not question the competence or goals of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. Of course he wants good things for Canada and wants to make sure that all regions can access the money necessary for their economic projects.

I was referring to pragmatism, rationality, and the necessity of having a minister responsible for a specific region who comes from the region, who knows, almost by heart, the needs of the people and is sensitive to the needs of the region. It should be someone who has grown up there and lives there now and knows the place, knows the ground, and knows the people and goes there every single weekend after a week of work here in the House of Commons. That is the goal of having ministers responsible for economic development agencies. Those people know the regions, because they are from the regions.

I am not questioning the competence or the knowledge of the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development concerning Canada, but he does not have specific knowledge of each region. He does not have the time to go to each region to hear about people's concerns and needs.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate the member for his very thoughtful comments, which support why a Conservative caucus will not be supporting this bill.

The effect of the bill is that five members of this House are going to be getting a \$20,000 Christmas bonus. It is not just a bonus; it is a \$20,000 raise. My constituents will be horrified. Will his?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Madam Speaker, yes, of course. I was knocking on doors two weeks ago, and I spoke about the bill to some of my constituents. They were a bit mad, I would say, since they see all the different issues coming to their door more and more.

The Prime Minister went to China for no apparent reason. Well, he said he had a reason, but his own reason, the free trade agreement with China, has not come to any result. There is the softwood lumber crisis, which has not been dealt with. We also have the NAFTA negotiations, which are in disarray. The government does not seem to be putting any strategy forward to make sure that it does not fall apart.

Now we have this bill that would basically close down representation of all regions of Canada in cabinet. As well, it would increase the salaries of ministers of state to that of ministers. However, ministers of state do not have the same amount of responsibility as ministers. That is why their salaries have not been the same. It is all about competence and equality of responsibilities.

• (1110)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madame Speaker, here we are again debating a bill that has the dubious distinction of leaving things as they are, with one notable exception, which is to tie the hands of future governments with respect to being able to have independent, separate ministers for each of the economic regional development agencies. In our view, this is not a good idea.

The only thing the bill would really accomplish is something the government ought not to be doing. The Liberals have selected one model, which is to have one minister oversee all the regional economic development ministries. That is their option under the current legislation. We do not think it is a good one, but it is what they have chosen to do. Canadians can judge them accordingly. What does not make sense is for them to tie the hands of future governments by requiring future governments to adopt that same approach, rather than leaving it open to future governments to make other decisions. That is the one thing the legislation would actually accomplish. It is not a very good thing, so there is very little to support such legislation.

Certainly, if not in the flagship speeches then in the questions and comments, Liberals have been making the argument from time to time that this is somehow about gender equality. I even heard some members come at the NDP asking how we could possibly disagree with Bill C-24, or not support Bill C-24, when it is about a better place at the cabinet table for women and pay equity for women. The odd thing about that argument is that it has been contradicted a number of times by Liberals themselves on the record at committee and just earlier, in the House today, in a question in response to a Conservative colleague who had just made a speech.

Government Orders

I wish the Liberals could get it straight in their own minds what the bill is about. Is it about gender equality, or is it not? If it is, it is too bad that the bill would fail to do anything real in that respect. In fact, all the expert testimony we heard at committee made that case.

Margot Young, from the Peter A. Allard School of Law at UBC, was very clear. She said:

The...point I want to make is that 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.

In response to that testimony, the member for Newmarket—Aurora said, “I don't think it's meant to be a tool that's going to address gender inequality, pay equity, or any of the other issues you raised in your opening.”

The member for Don Valley East said, “I thank you for being here, but I don't think we have the relevance to our study for Bill C-24”. She also said, “I was as confused as you were about why we are even talking about gender equity.”

We heard the same comments echoed by a Liberal in the House just this morning.

As far as I am concerned, the arguments against the bill doing anything for gender equality are decisive. They are backed up by expert testimony at committee, they are backed up by Liberals at committee, and they are backed up by Liberals in this very House on this very day. Therefore, let us move on from Liberals trying to pretend that not supporting this bill is somehow not supporting women or not supporting gender equality at the cabinet table.

If they want to do something for women at the cabinet table, we are happy to sit down and discuss ideas about how they could have a real, meaningful, and fair sharing of power and responsibility and authority at the cabinet table, instead of just calling women ministers, when they have the duties of a minister of state, and paying them the same. That is not real gender equality.

Of course, the question then becomes, and we have visited it before, if the bill is not about gender equality, what is it about? We have heard from the government that the bill is about updating the law to reflect the current practices of government. In one sense, that is true. As I remarked at the beginning of my speech, the Liberals are updating the legislation to reflect what we think is the bad practice of not having separate ministers for the various regional economic development agencies. In that sense, it reflects a practice of the government, albeit not a very good one. However, in other ways, it does not. For instance, the current government apparently thinks there is an issue of principle at stake when there are ministers of state. The Liberals think that when they have ministers of state, they create a two-tier cabinet. That is their language, not mine. That is what they say, that it creates a two-tier cabinet. Therefore, they are not doing it, because they think it is wrong, because they think it does not give due importance to various issues and various people around the cabinet table.

•(1115)

One would think, then, that if the Liberals wanted to update the legislation to reflect current practice, in particular practice that is informed by principle—not just a haphazard practice but a principled

practice of having a one-tier ministry, whatever that means, and I will come to that—then they would take this opportunity to update the legislation. However, they are not, because they leave ministers of state in there.

We heard the government House leader say earlier that they think it should be up to future governments whether they use ministers of state. Why they would leave that up to future governments and not leave future governments the option to have separate ministers for the various regional economic development agencies is a mystery, so far unanswered. Unfortunately, I do not believe it will be answered by the time the bill passes third reading in the House. Hopefully, members in the other place will be able to compel an answer to that question, which the Liberals have not been willing to volunteer in this place.

If the bill is about modernizing legislation to reflect the current practices of the government, it fails. If it is about gender equality, it fails, by the government's own admission. What else could it be about? It could be about an ephemeral sense of equality of ministers around the cabinet table. It is not really clear exactly what that means. However, we get a sense of it in the comments of Liberal members during debate about whether or not the NDP and other opposition parties take the issues that have been assigned to ministers of state seriously. They suggest that somehow we do not take seriously the status women, small business, or all these other issues. I do not want to call it an argument, but it is just a weird comment, a weird thing to say.

By the logic of this argument, if the only way we could be deemed to take an issue seriously is to have a full minister responsible for the issues, then why does the government not have a minister of housing? Clearly, by its own logic, the government does not take housing seriously. I note it also does not have a minister for seniors, because apparently the government does not care about seniors. If it cared, it would have a full minister dedicated to seniors, and if it cared about housing, it would have a full minister dedicated to housing, but it does not, so obviously it does not care about those issues. If that sounds stupid, that is because it is, but that is not my line of argument. That is the line of argument put forward by the Liberals themselves in this place. It is a strange situation for them to put themselves in, to say that somehow we must have dedicated, explicit ministers, and call them a minister—not a minister of state or anything else—in order to show we take the issue seriously.

Government Orders

We take housing seriously. In fact, we have a housing critic. We take seniors seriously. We have a seniors critic. However, we do not think that, just because it does not have an explicitly named critic or minister, somehow the party automatically does not take these issues seriously. Likewise, if there is a minister of state for a certain subset of issues, that is not to say that the government does not think it is important. What it really means is that the government does not have a full department with all of the assets and staff that implies. That is okay, because there is a difference between the capability required for defence and the capability required to promote small business in Canada. That is okay. I would be distressed if the government invested as much in the promotion of small business and tourism in Canada as it did in the Department of National Defence. I would think that something had gone wrong in government if those two budgets were the same, in either direction. If it cut DND funding to be the same as the budget for small business and tourism, I would be concerned. If it raised the budget of small business and tourism to equal the budget of the minister of national defence, I would also be concerned.

This idea that somehow we need to call everyone the same thing, and they all have to be ministers in order to take the issues seriously to the appropriate degree, is obviously false. These ministries will not be resourced to the same degree, nor should they be, and that is okay. By extension, if we have different titles to recognize that very real administrative distinction, that would continue under this legislation. Notice it says it will make all ministers equal by making them the same, except it is actually creating two kinds of ministers, which did not exist before.

• (1120)

Up to now, there has only really been one kind of minister, but now there are going to be ministers, full stop, and ministers for whom a department is designated. In the legislation, interestingly, for all of the sub-components for a minister for whom a department is designated, the language reflects largely the language that already exists for ministers of state. They are going to be resourced in the same way.

They are creating a two-tier ministry by actually creating two types of ministers. It is just not going to be obvious on the letterhead because they are going to have the same short name, as they have had for the last two years. They have been paid the same for the last two years which, I think, again speaks to the fact that this legislation is not necessary.

If it is not administrative equality, it is not gender equality, and it is not updating the law to reflect the current practices of the government, what is it? We have heard to some extent that they want all ministers in the Liberal government to be equal around the cabinet table. We need to call them all “minister” because somehow, if some are called “ministers of state” and others are called “ministers”, the Liberals have implied very clearly that they would not be taken seriously to the same extent around the cabinet table as the Prime Minister. Incidentally, I do not think that is something that can be cured legislatively. It has more to do with the dispositions of the Prime Minister than it does anything in legislation. I find it passing strange that the Prime Minister would name people to his cabinet whom he would not take seriously except if the law were changed to call them ministers. Why are they at the table, in the first

place, if the Prime Minister needs legislative help to take them seriously?

It also makes me wonder, if it is the case that the Prime Minister will not take them seriously unless they are designated ministers in law, how it is that the Prime Minister could possibly be thought to be taking any of the other members of the Liberal caucus seriously. They certainly are not ministers, and unless we are going to have legislation calling parliamentary secretaries “ministers”, and committee chairs “ministers”, and backbench Liberals “ministers”, then I think what we are to infer from that is that the Prime Minister will not be taking them seriously.

There are certain members in this House on the Liberal benches who I think are not always taken very seriously. There are various reasons for that.

A great defender of this bill has been the member for Winnipeg North. One wonders how he could defend such legislation when an important component of this legislation is to say, if a member is not called a “minister”, then that member is not taken seriously by the government. He has been up on his feet defending that principle. Well, news flash, he is not a minister. He is a parliamentary secretary. I find it odd to hear the member for Winnipeg North on his feet so often defending the idea that, unless a member is called a minister by law, then that member should not, and will not, be taken seriously by the Prime Minister. That seems to be a pretty direct implication of his argument.

Some people in the House do not often take the member for Winnipeg North seriously because there is a bit of a white noise effect. We learn to tune certain things out, as we did in the spring with the construction. Every once in a while there is a particularly loud boom or shake and we look up from what we are doing, but soon return to what it was they were doing. I think others have spent some time listening and ultimately concluded it is not worth the investment. For others, I think they would like to see a better quality of argument.

I have tried to show the extent to which the arguments that the member for Winnipeg North, and other members of the Liberal caucus, have been making about Bill C-24 are really not worth our time, just as the bill is not worth our time. What I understand from this debate is that, all of those other good reasons notwithstanding, the Prime Minister's reason for not taking the member for Winnipeg North seriously is that he is not called a minister. Until such time that he is called a minister, I suppose, he will not be taken seriously, just as the other Liberals will not.

I think we should have a government where the prime minister does take his backbench seriously. We should have a government where the prime minister can use what is a perfectly fine, acceptable tool in cabinet composition, which is ministers of state. I hear some Liberals arguing for self-promotion among the Liberal ranks now that they realize that they have not been taken seriously all along—the sounds of distress from the other side. However, I will not let that distract me from making the important point, which is that we should have a prime minister who is able, willing, and understands the tools of cabinet composition already available, particularly with respect to ministers of state.

Government Orders

Part of the idea of ministers of state is to have some flexibility with respect to naming new kinds of ministries that may not be around forever. It may be that a particular focus is required because certain issues of the day come up. Some of them have been lasting without being made full departments, but that is a choice of the government of the day. We would welcome, for instance, the Liberals actually wanting to do something meaningful in terms of concretizing the status of women and looking at creating an actual department. That would be something interesting that has merit and is worth looking at. That is not what they are doing. They are just coming up with another way of naming ministers of state; namely, ministers for whom a department is designated.

I have tried to address some of what I think are really bad arguments by the government for what the point and purpose of this bill is. As we watch the members chase their tails on this bill, what becomes evident is that this bill is not going anywhere. We just keep running around in the same kind of argumentative circles. They bring up gender equality, and frankly, those arguments get demolished, whether it is by people in this House or all the expert witnesses who came to testify on this particular bill.

The Liberals then change tack and say that it is about modernizing. Then we show that the bill does not actually modernize the legislation to reflect even their current practices, and so then they say that it is about a one-tier ministry. Then we ask if it is a one-tier ministry in terms of administrative responsibility and department size, and they say no. Then we ask if it is a one-tier ministry in the sense of equal voices at the cabinet table, they say that is not it and that it is really about gender equality. Now we have completed the circle. We see how this debate has been going from second reading to report stage. Now we are back at third reading and we still do not really know what the point and purpose of this bill is, not by virtue of the comments made by members of the Liberal Party. That is for sure.

Anyone who wants to take a step back, as many have in the course of this debate, realizes that a commitment of the Prime Minister during the election was to have gender parity in cabinet, and that when he named his cabinet, all the junior posts at that time were filled by women and none of them by men. He was called out in the media for that. It was embarrassing, and he ought to have felt embarrassed about it. He should have done the right thing, said it was a new government and did not totally appreciate what all the options were. Then he could have said that he was really committed to gender parity in the cabinet, that they would make some changes, shuffle those positions around, and/or add some positions in order to address other important issues like housing and seniors, which do not have a ministry. He could have said that, if it created those as junior roles, the government would put men in them, and if they created them as senior roles, it would put women in them because it wants to try to get to a point where the power, authority, and responsibilities of cabinet are equally shared between men and women. That would have been a way to handle it.

Instead, the government invented this dog and pony show that we have been at for the better part of two years now, wasting time in this place. As it goes over to the other place to waste more time, one wonders why, when we have suffered time allocation on other bills that actually did something. I mean, that is what is unique about this

bill. With the exception of the question of tying the hands of future governments with respect to separate ministers for regional and economic development agencies, whether one opposes or supports the bill, the fact is that the bill actually does not really do anything.

As a colleague of mine pointed out earlier, we have spent more time debating that in this House than some of the budget implementation bills, and certainly more than the Canada infrastructure bank, which is going to oversee some \$35 billion of taxpayers' money and arguably put it in the pockets in some of Canada's and the world's richest investors with very little accountability. We have hardly had a chance to talk about that at all in the House.

However, here we are talking about this again. The one good thing about third reading, either way, is that this debate can finally end in the House. God willing, we will get on to something important.

• (1125)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know I will get an opportunity to address this matter in a more thorough way shortly, but I would like to pick up on my colleague's last comments.

Some members of the New Democratic Party want to talk more about the bill, while others just want to see the bill disappear. It seems that diversity is good, even that kind of diversity on the New Democrat benches. However, the member seems to want to focus on the Prime Minister having different types of standards for different members of the Liberal caucus.

I want to assure the member that whether one is a cabinet minister, parliamentary secretary, committee chair, or an individual member who sits on a committee, all members of the Liberal caucus are treated with an immense amount of respect by the Prime Minister. We have an opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister if we want to, and constant dialogue takes place. We have a Prime Minister who genuinely encourages his members of Parliament to represent their constituencies here in Ottawa, as opposed to representing Ottawa in their constituencies. That is a good thing.

Let us contrast that to Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the New Democratic Party. There was an interesting kerfuffle when Jagmeet apparently did not confer with his caucus in regards to bilingual appointments. I wonder if the member could indicate to the House whether the NDP caucus has worked out what role Jagmeet has in making decisions on policy matters, because I know that issue was a little sensitive the other day. Could the member comment on how and what kind of relationship Jagmeet has with his NDP caucus?

• (1130)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I made a number of arguments during my speech. I find it interesting that the one that highlighted the insignificance of the member for Winnipeg North in the government is the one that caught his attention most.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his eloquent speech.

Government Orders

Bill C-24 is simply smoke and mirrors. We do not know whether the Liberals are referring to pay equity or parity in cabinet. In fact, the bill is not really about either of those things. The Liberals are contradicting themselves.

Something else that does not make sense is the fact that, if all the Liberals wanted to do was give their ministers of state a pay raise so they earn the same as ministers, there was no need to introduce a bill. We do not understand why we are discussing this, when all of the experts agree that this bill is not about gender equality or pay equity.

I have been repeating ad nauseam that, if the Liberals really wanted to be feminists, they would talk about the recommendations made as part of the pay equity study that was shelved in 2004. The Liberals promised a bill on pay equity by 2016. It is now the end of 2017 and they have put it off until 2018, if it happens at all.

What does my colleague think about all this commotion for something that does not even require a bill?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I also thank her for raising an issue that I think is really important and that I wanted to talk about in my speech. Experts have said that Bill C-24 does either very little or nothing at all for women in cabinet, and they have also said that it is dangerous to claim it does do something. There are real issues around pay equity, and we want to tackle those issues. We have been waiting since 2015 for this self-styled feminist government to introduce a bill that will achieve pay equity, but we have not seen one yet. That is not because the government is busy with important bills. After all, here we are debating Bill C-24, which is not an important bill. We still do not know exactly why this bill exists. Even though there are obvious reasons why we need a bill that directly addresses pay equity, we still do not have such a bill. I think that is a shame.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to compliment my colleague for his very thorough speech, particularly in detailing the many excuses the Liberal government has made to defend this terrible piece of legislation. Personally, I see it as a long, expensive, time and resource-consuming exercise to correct the Prime Minister's original goof when he created a cabinet and suddenly discovered that his junior ministers, his ministers of state, were women, and that they were paid somewhat less, as is the Westminster tradition for secondary jobs supporting major ministries.

My question has to do with another element of this legislation, which two years later finally formalizes another inexcusable mistake the Liberal government has made in eliminating the regional development ministers and replacing them all, and their expertise in the regions they represented, with a single minister who is familiar mostly with the development requirements of Mississauga in the greater Toronto area.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Thornhill for coming back to this issue, because the only thing of substance happening in this bill is probably this strange tying of the hands of future governments, which might quite reasonably decide

they want to have separate ministers for each of the regional economic development agencies. The Liberals made a choice. They decided to consolidate all of those under one minister, one individual. That was their choice. It was a choice available to them under the law as it stands right now. The law, as it stands now, also allows a future government to make a different choice. I do not understand the desire to take that choice away from future governments.

The Liberals have their arguments. I do not think they are particularly good arguments. I do not think it is believable that someone from Mississauga will understand the regional economies of B.C., Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, or Quebec as well as he or she does the issues in southern Ontario. That is not because the person is not competent or well-meaning, but just because this is not plausible. The idea that it is not worth—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Maybe the member will be able to finish his thought in his next response. There is only enough time for a very brief question. This is questions and comments. I would hope that people keep their questions short.

Questions and comments. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, a brief question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just want to assure the member across the way, because he is definitely confused. If we read the legislation, it is not about gender equality. That is something the NDP have brought in, and I will expand upon it.

Can the member comment succinctly on why he believes there should be different tiers of ministers? This legislation equalizes the different cabinet ministers, something that we support and the New Democrats do not. Why do you not support that?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again, I remind the member to address the Chair.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, a brief answer, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, if the Liberals believe in a one-tier ministry, they should know that the structure of Global Affairs very clearly puts the Minister of Foreign Affairs above the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of International Development. It is clearly a hierarchical relationship. Those ministers report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The idea that we are going to have a one-tier ministry after this is just absurd. If they believe in a one-tier ministry, they ought to address exactly what that means, whatever it is.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we do believe in it. We do believe that all ministers are equal and that is what this legislation is all about.

Government Orders

I have been here for the full debate, whether the introduction of the bill or the second reading followed by what took place at committee, the report stage, and now third reading. It seems that the longer the bill is discussed, the more the speaking points of the Conservatives and the NDP have converged, and have now become one in essence. The unholy alliance has united on this piece of legislation.

The opposition members talk about regional and gender issues. We could take a New Democrat speech and say this is a Conservative speech, and vice versa. It is encouraging to see the opposition members come together on important issues, but I would suggest this is not something they should be opposing. It is fairly straightforward legislation.

Some members on the opposition benches ask why we are debating this, why we do not just get through it and allow it to come to a vote. Then others want to debate it endlessly. Believe it or not, I suspect there might be some who might like to see the debate never end on this piece of legislation.

The opposition members try to say to the government this is all about gender equality. They say there are members in the chamber who have talked about gender equality. Yes, I too, in addressing this legislation talked about gender equality.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Why?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: The member across the way heckled “why”. Let us go back to the reason we have the legislation. The Prime Minister made a commitment that if a member sits at the cabinet table, all ministers will be equal. That means that a minister of small business, or democratic reform, or defence, whatever it might be, will each have an equal vote at the table. There is one vote for each member, and each member has the opportunity to be engaged around the cabinet table as equal peers. That is a positive thing.

Stephen Harper had 40 cabinet ministers, compared to 30 in this government. One of the arguments members raise is that we increased salaries for some of those ministers. Our cabinet is far smaller than the Harper government's, but sometimes the NDP use that Conservative line also.

If we look at what the legislation will do, there is only one conclusion that can be drawn. It will ensure that there is more flexibility not only for today's Prime Minister, but also for future prime ministers in making up a cabinet and recognizing one important component, that all ministers are equal.

Members across the way say that the Minister of Finance has a much bigger treasury to work with than the Minister of Small Business and Tourism. Therefore, they are not equal. It is true there is a difference in the bottom line dollar amount, but to assert they are not equal is wrong. I would argue that the minister responsible for small business and tourism is of critical importance to the Government of Canada. How many times do we hear members across the way ask questions about small businesses? We hear it a lot. That may be one of the top four or five questions asked.

As the government day in and day out fights to protect and expand the interests of Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part

of it, we look to small businesses as the backbone of the economy and one of the driving forces of job creation.

● (1140)

Many government policies over the last couple of years have fed into supporting Canada's small businesses. The minister responsible for small business plays a critical role in developing good sound policies.

I and small businesses across Canada were delighted when we heard the formal announcement of the reduction of the small business tax to 9%, which is quite significant. It will contribute to the growth of the Canadian economy.

Members across the way say that the minister should not make as much money as the Minister of Democratic Institutions. They say that the minister responsible for small business is junior to the minister of democratic reform. Hogwash. That is what I say to the joint opposition, the unholy alliance of Conservatives and NDP members.

We recognize the importance of small businesses. More important, the Prime Minister understands and appreciates the importance of equality among the individuals who sit around the cabinet table. Only the opposition is giving the impression to Canadians that this is bad legislation. How can those members oppose equality?

An hon. member: It's not.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member across the way says “It's not”. Those members need to read the bill.

The members want to talk about gender equality, so I will talk about gender equality and how the opposition has tied that into the legislation.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: You don't need to, Kevin. We only brought it up because you did.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member for Elmwood—Transcona seems confused, so I would like to clarify it for the member. The reason why gender equality is often talked about in relation to the legislation is because of the opposition's attitude when cabinet ministers were appointed. The Prime Minister announced that all cabinet positions were equal, that all individuals who sat around the cabinet table were equal. He told us legislation would come forward on this.

For the very first time, a historic announcement was made which stated that our Liberal government had a gender equal cabinet. Not only did this historic announcement hit news wires in virtually every region of our country, but it went international. It was about time Canada had a Prime Minister who recognized the importance of a gender equal cabinet.

I heard many stories, some from my daughter, some from my constituents, about how wonderful it was that we had a feminist Prime Minister, a prime minister who made a strong statement while at the same time ensured we moved forward on an important file.

Members across the way, as well as the member for Elmwood—Transcona, might have laughed at these appointments but Canadians received them quite well.

Government Orders

The NDP and their friends in the Conservative Party could not come up with anything to criticize, but they wanted to be critical the appointment of the new cabinet. Therefore, they said that small business was not as important as democratic reform or other cabinet positions. They said that the position of Minister of Status of Women was not worthy of being recognized as an equal player sitting at the cabinet table. That was the best they could come up.

I have news for the opposition. When government does something of that nature, there is nothing wrong in saying that it is a good announcement. It would be advantageous for those members to recognize that when announcements of this nature are put into place, they acknowledge them for what they are. In this case, it was a positive historic announcement that would ensure gender parity in the national Government of Canada. It was a powerful announcement, and I think the majority of Canadians received it that way. Criticism is not necessary.

• (1145)

Let us look at what followed from that. This legislation would ensure that all cabinet ministers would be paid the same. However, that is not the only change being made by the legislation.

There is a change to the title of the infrastructure minister. We all know this government has a huge focus on Canada's infrastructure. For many years, the Harper government did very little in terms of real investment in infrastructure. The legislation that the NDP has been conned into supporting with the Conservative Party also makes a change to infrastructure. The title of Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs will be changed to Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

There are two things worth noting. One is that the Prime Minister of Canada is taking on the responsibility of intergovernmental affairs. For years, as the Liberals sat in opposition, we saw the lack of effort by the Conservative government in reaching out and encouraging intergovernmental affairs. The Government of Canada at the time virtually ignored our partners and did not reach out or encourage anything to take place. In two years, there has been significant improvement in that area. One of them is the fact that the Prime Minister is going to lead on that front. We have realized tangible benefits by doing that. I will provide a couple of examples.

We can talk about the Canada pension plan. Workers today will contribute more toward a national program, which Canadians love. When they retire in the future, they will have more money. Why? Because we have a government today that worked with provinces and was able to achieve an agreement.

That is not the only thing. The former minister of health went to every province and territory, and an accord was reached. The previous accord, which was signed back in 2003 or 2004, lasted for 10 years but the Harper government did not renew it. If members ask their constituents, they will find that health care is the number one issue, at least from my perspective. People love our Canadian health care system. We now have a government that understands this and it has taken direct action to improve it. The accord has been renewed and more money is being put into health care. Why? Because we have made changes in this legislation that says the Prime Minister needs to play a stronger role, especially after the years of neglect by the Harper government.

A third example would be the price on carbon. The Prime Minister went to Paris where an international agreement was reached. He came back to Canada and worked with the provinces on a pan-Canadian price on carbon, to which the provinces agreed. Many governments around the world understand the need for that. Provinces understood the need for that. At the time, only the Conservative Party opposed it, and still opposes it today, which is most unfortunate.

• (1150)

I would encourage my New Democratic friends to stay away from the Conservatives on that issue. They do not want to fall into that trap.

The other component to that change in the legislation is the renaming of infrastructure. Now, through this legislation, we will have the minister responsible for infrastructure and communities. Two things come to mind there. First, is the historical amounts of money, the billions of dollars, that are going into Canada's infrastructure. Every region of our country will see a positive impact. This government recognizes that we need to invest in our country. We need to invest in our infrastructure. Doing that will assist our country in continuing to grow into the future. That is worthy of having the designation being about infrastructure and communities.

When I hear the argument from the other side about the regional agencies, I think about it and compare it to infrastructure. We will be spending literally hundreds of millions of dollars, going into billions of dollars, over the next few years. I am surprised members opposite do not ask why we do not have a regional whatever to ensure those regional concerns are dealt with through the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, after all, a lot of money will go into the communities.

I say that because I want to highlight the importance of individual members of Parliament. At least within the Liberal caucus, we have individuals who constantly lobby for regional interests for the area they represent. I am an advocate for the province of Manitoba. I love the province of Quebec. I am a nationalist first and foremost. I believe in a sense of equality for all regions of our country. However, I ensure, as much as I can, that Manitoba is well represented when it comes to infrastructure.

We pose the questions. When it comes to P.E.I., Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, we all get our fair share of infrastructure dollars. We can look at the numbers. I think Canadians will feel good knowing that every region is getting its fair share of infrastructure dollars. This will be in good part because we will have a minister who is responsible for that and that alone, building our country, ensuring the national interest is served.

I do not hear criticism coming from the opposition on that issue. However, when it comes to the regional economic development issue, the NDP has joined the Conservative forces to say that we need to have a bigger cabinet. After all, Harper had six additional ministers dealing with regional economic development, so we should also have those six regional ministers.

Government Orders

I hope Jagmeet Singh and the leader of the Conservative Party, when door-knocking in the next election, tell their constituents that they will increase the size of cabinet, by adding an additional six members with responsibilities in regional development. I look forward to having that debate with my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona. How will he defend why the western diversification fund did as poorly as it did, in particular why Winnipeg did poorly, while Harper was in government? If we look at the allotment of money and if we look at the minister responsible for western diversification at that time, Winnipeg did not do well. However, the member across the way will argue that this is the ideal situation. I disagree.

• (1155)

I believe that there is a national interest and that our member from Mississauga and the minister responsible for the development of our nation cares passionately about the national interest, and we will ensure that the appropriate expenditures are being done in the communities that need that support.

I appreciate the words, and I look forward to some questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy listening to my colleague from Winnipeg North. His words are tremendously inspiring, particularly when he is wrong, because that gives me an opportunity to refute his statements.

• (1200)

[*English*]

My question is quite simple. The hon. member said a few minutes ago that the Conservative Party of Canada would like to create six more cabinet positions to be responsible for each and every region in Canada. That is not exactly the reality. When we were in office, our minister had other responsibilities than this one. Let me give this example, a great example I might say. The former member for Lac-Saint-Jean, who was a senior cabinet minister in the Harper government, was also responsible for the Quebec area.

Would the member explain to me why he said something that was wrong a few minutes ago?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I always appreciate the contributions from my colleague and friend across the way. At times, when we get into the heat of debate, we might at times refer to designations. Listening to members from the New Democratic Party and some of his own colleagues talking about the importance of these regional ministries and these regional representations, many would have inferred through the comments that they would need to have cabinet ministers who have that sole responsibility. I would attribute those comments toward this. Ultimately, as I said during my comments, I would welcome my opposition colleagues, both New Democrats and Conservatives, to go to the doors saying that we need to have regional ministers, period. Whether or not they choose to do that would be up to them. My best guess is that they will not.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Winnipeg North for demonstrating for anybody listening at home who thought that I might have been unfairly partisan in my remarks the fundamental incoherence of the Liberal position when it comes to Bill C-24. We saw that very tail chasing that I was talking about earlier in my speech. I want to thank the member for putting that in evidence.

I want to say, with respect to some of his comments about the Prime Minister as the minister responsible for intergovernmental affairs particularly with respect to the health accord, that what was noticeable was first of all it is not an accord and it certainly was not a renewal of the old accord. It was a series of bilateral deals. To somehow pretend that prime ministerial leadership got it done when the premiers wrote him a letter asking to have a meeting about a health accord and he refused them and would not have that meeting, is totally egregious. Therefore, let the record show that this Prime Minister, who apparently, according to the member for Winnipeg North, is providing leadership on intergovernmental affairs, particularly health, would not have the meeting on a health accord requested by the premiers and instead sent his Minister of Health out to conclude a bunch of bilateral deals.

I also said in my remarks earlier that I hoped that the Liberals would back off of the argument that somehow only by having a minister for something is it possible to take issues seriously. We do take all sorts of issues seriously. We have a critic for housing. We have a critic for seniors. I think that is kind of a silly argument, and I have said as much. Given that the member for Winnipeg North seems quite committed to debasing us all by continuing on this line of argument, I have to put this question to him. Why is it that the Liberals do not have a minister for housing and for seniors if their position is that the only way to take something seriously is to have a minister for it and to give him or her a full ministerial salary and title? Why is it then that we do not have a separate minister for housing and for seniors? I do not get it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that we could probably easily identify 40 or 50 really important issues facing our nation. If the member opposite is arguing that in order to address each of those 40 or 50 issues we should create a cabinet position for it, then I would suggest that the member opposite is wrong.

The member referred to the issue of housing. It was just a couple of weeks ago that we had the minister responsible for housing stand up and share with Canadians a historical document on a national housing strategy that incorporates billions of dollars over the next 10 years. I would suggest that many New Democrats and people of all political stripes have recognized the value of this national housing program that is being brought forward. I suspect I will be afforded opportunities in the future to expand on that particular program, because it is an outstanding national housing strategy.

The point is that ministers are assigned many different issues, and they are quite capable and able to deal with them. What this proposed legislation would do is make all those who are classified as ministers equal as ministers when they sit around the cabinet table. They all have mandate letters and certain responsibilities and they should be treated equally, which is what this proposed legislation would do in most part.

Government Orders

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I ask my question, I would like to announce to the House that my wife and I became grandparents again this morning. My daughter Chantal and her husband Mathieu had a second child whom they have named Lucas, a little brother for my granddaughter Maëlle. I am very proud of that this morning.

[English]

My question to my colleague for Winnipeg North has to do with our government's decision to change the composition of cabinet, where we have amalgamated the responsibility of the regional development agencies with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. Can the member please share how this would ensure strong representation in regions in this country?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of this House, I congratulate the member on being a grandfather again with the birth of his second grandchild.

On the member's question, I will read something very specific, because I think it is an important point related to the question. "Reporting through the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development highlights the importance RDAs play in the regions and permits a more integrated and whole-of-government approach to economic development issues."

Our current minister, who is a very strong nationalist, understands the importance of his responsibilities not only for the region of Mississauga but, indeed, for the country as a whole. When we come to this chamber, we all love our own ridings to death. Having said that, I choose to believe that we all would ultimately do what is in the national interest, and this particular minister is second to none in wanting to do just that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my Liberal colleague a question, because the other member left.

If gender equality is the goal, we need to give men and women equal space.

I think the debate we are having today is somewhat meaningless. The Liberals would have us believe that they want gender equality, but they cannot seem to make up their minds over on the other side of the House. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism said that this was meant to promote gender equality, although one of her colleagues said it has nothing to do with that.

I would like to know why the Liberal Party opposite is wasting our time with such a bill, when the Prime Minister himself refuses to make room for any of his ministers when he is here in the House answering all the questions.

I am a woman and I have always felt equal to men, and sometimes even superior to men, but that is another debate. I want to know why the Liberal Party introduced this bill, which is purely cosmetic. The Liberals cannot even agree on one explanation or one way of thinking about this.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, the bill is not about gender equality. It is about establishing that one tier of equal cabinet ministers when they sit at the table, as I talked about. That is really what it is about, along with the infrastructure reference I made in my speech.

All cabinet ministers in this government are equal. It elevated certain positions, such as small business and tourism into the same ranking as the minister of defence, or the minister of democratic reform. Those are all equal. That is a good thing. It is not about gender equality.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

[English]

Perhaps one day we will have just one word for each and every riding.

I am very pleased to rise today on Bill C-24. On behalf of all my colleagues, we will be opposing the bill because it is all wrong. I will say why, based on three elements.

First is the fact the Liberals want to cancel very important portfolios, especially ministries that are important for each and every region of Canada. Second, because they create new ministries for which there is no necessity. Third is the so-called debate about salary equality for women and men. That was the cosmetic debate, as was so well said by my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. She said a few minutes ago, this is a cosmetic bill, basically because this is the "selfie" bill.

[Translation]

I have three points to make on this issue.

First, the bill eliminates the positions of ministers responsible for regional economic development. The government is making a huge mistake in getting rid of these positions.

Let us think back to better times, all the way back to 1921, under the Right Hon. William Lyon MacKenzie King, when Quebec had a political lieutenant in cabinet, namely the Hon. Ernest Lapointe. Thereafter followed dozens of strong, influential men and women who were essential to our democratic process and who did a fine job of ensuring Quebec's prominent role within Canada and cabinet.

Obviously I am talking about Quebec because it is my home province, but the same could be said about the other regions of Canada as well. I would even quote people with whom I do not necessarily or naturally share the same philosophical outlook. For example, there is the Hon. Marc Lalonde who played a vital role within the cabinet of the Pierre Elliot Trudeau government and who ensured that Quebec was represented. From my perspective, it was not necessarily the right way, but Quebec was very actively represented under the Hon. Marc Lalonde.

Government Orders

The Liberal government has decided to get rid of economic development ministers for the regions. That is a mistake. First, I must mention that this bill was introduced after the fact. Members will recall the swearing in ceremony at Rideau Hall and the pretty picture of these new ministers going to Rideau Hall, getting off the bus with the spouse, the kids, and everyone else. However, the reality is that, once again, it was about appearances and not substance, because they could have very well said right then what changes they were going to make. The changes were announced a little later.

Why is it important to keep regional ministers? With all due respect to the member from Mississauga, who is currently responsible for Canada's economic development, he is from Mississauga. That is not a shortcoming in and of itself. We realize that he knows every corner of the riding of Mississauga. I have no doubt about that. However, can he distinguish between Trois-Rivières and Sherbrooke? Does he know the difference between Ajax and Flin Flon? Can he tell us exactly what is the difference between Victoria and Vancouver, and what subtle differences there are between Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles?

A person has to be from the area to understand those differences. That does not take anything away from who the member is as an individual, on the contrary. I am certain he does great work and that he knows his region like the back of his hand. However, that is the sticking point. He knows his region. Geographically speaking, our country is the second largest country in the world. Obviously, in our hearts it is the best in the world. However, the fact is that Alberta's reality is not the same as that of Atlantic Canada, and people in British Columbia have their own needs that are not the same as those of the people in Quebec. That does not make one region's needs any less important than another's.

That is why we need strong personalities in cabinet to advocate on behalf of the regions, people who know what is best for the region in question. In the past, Quebec was well served by people such as the Hon. Denis Lebel, the member for Lac-Saint-Jean, who provided strong leadership. The mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, can attest to that. About a year ago, he said, and I am quoting from memory, that when he had a problem, he called Denis and they talked and figured things out.

The Prime Minister of Canada and the Minister of Economic Development do not have time to call each and every one of the mayors who have concerns. That is the job of the minister responsible for the region. We have been very well served in the past, and I am convinced that we would have been very well served by one of the ministers from Quebec.

• (1215)

Why get rid of this arrangement? All the power will end up in the hands of a single individual, who will naturally be biased towards his or her own province and region, or perhaps even his or her home town.

Need I remind the House that the government refused Bombardier's request for a handout of \$1.3 billion of taxpayer money for the development of its C Series aircraft? It did eventually agree to a \$135-million loan for the C Series, but also, surprise surprise, a loan of \$200 million for the development of Global 7000. The C Series is

manufactured in Mirabel. Does the House know where the Global 7000 is manufactured? Right near Mississauga, in the minister responsible for Canadian economic development's own backyard. There is no way this could be a coincidence. That is just one point I wanted to make about this. This is why it is important to have ministers responsible for regions who promote economic development and report to cabinet on behalf of their region, because they know what they are talking about.

I will move on to my second point. This bill turns five ministers of state into senior ministers and creates positions for three other ministers. However, we do not know exactly what they will be ministers of. I will call them phantom ministers to be polite, but others might say they are ministers of nothing. That is the wrong message to send. No one knows who the three positions created by this bill are for, or why they are being created, or what their portfolios will look like, but this bill wants to create them anyway. Come on. It is absurd.

The other thing this bill does is turn ministers of state into full or senior ministers. For what it is worth, this is where we see the ugly side of this selfie government, this image-obsessed government, this government that reacts to an image it does not like by changing course and forging ahead.

When the current cabinet was sworn in at Rideau Hall, the Prime Minister was quite proud to say that, for the first time in Canada's history, in 150 years of life in our beautiful and great country, we had a gender-balanced cabinet. He was asked why and said, "because it's 2015". Everyone thought that was just great, the crowd cheered.

However, a few days later, at closer inspection people began to realize that this gender-balanced cabinet was a bit lopsided. The fact that ministers of state do not have the same power, the same salary, or even the same responsibilities as the other ministers knocked this parity off balance a bit. Surprise, surprise, the five ministers of state were women. There was no parity there.

The ministers of state, whom we can politely refer to as junior ministers, were women only. The Liberals realized that that was not good for their image and decided to fix that. Instead of appointing women to important cabinet positions, the Liberals changed the ministerial titles. They sharpened their pencils and crossed out the word "state" to end up with just minister. Then there is the matter of equal pay for equal skills and equal responsibilities. Skills are subjective, but people should get equal pay for equal work.

Not to diminish anyone's work, but we know that ministers of state do not have the same responsibilities as full ministers. That has always been the case and remains so today. It is almost insulting to regular ministers, if we can call them that to distinguish from ministers of state. There is nothing wrong with being a minister of state. On the contrary, it is a privilege. Here, we are not ashamed because we are in opposition and not in government. Though we may be many, all 338 of us represent the public equally.

Government Orders

People see that everyone has their responsibilities and that a minister of state does not have the same responsibilities as a full minister. For the Liberals' image, it is not a good thing because, as it so happens, the five ministers of state are all women. Quick, let us rename the position before anyone notices. That is not the way to do it and it shows without a doubt that this government is literally obsessed with its image. As a result, the government makes ridiculous decisions.

Bill C-24 is a perfect example. It does away with regional ministers, it gets rid of the title of five ministers of state and replaces them with three phantom ministers. We are not too sure who this bill is for, what the whole point of it is or what it will look like in the end, but this government's image takes precedence above all else. That is why we are going to vote against this bill.

• (1220)

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for reminding Canadians of the many different ways the government has tried to defend the bill. I was thinking today, as I walked up to the House after the latest winter snowfall, of the different ways of looking at winter.

[Translation]

For example, Gilles Vigneault sang “Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver”, which translates to “my country is not a country, it's winter”. However, Robert Charlebois sang “L'hiver fret et blanc, fret et blanc comme un lavabo”, which translates to “winter is cold and white, cold and white like a sink”.

[English]

Those two very different visions of winter can be compared to the government, which first defended this bill as about gender equality, and then not about gender equality but something like *Animal Farm*, where all ministers are equal except some are more equal than others.

Could my colleague again address the flawed logic in the government's defence of this bill?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I pay my respects to my colleague from Thornhill, who was a journalist like me. However, he was a journalist before I was born, so I will not repeat that publicly. Luckily, I have protection in here and can say whatever I want, and he cannot pursue me, but I will repeat it outside. I can assure everyone that I will not sing, as my colleague did a few minutes ago.

[Translation]

My colleague from Thornhill raises a very important point, namely, that we should all respect one another, men and women alike. There is no problem with someone being appointed minister of state. Just being here is an exceptional and extraordinary privilege, so anyone who can serve their country even further within cabinet should feel really good about that. In the past, I used to always like to say that I would have been happy to serve in the rafters of the House of Commons or the National Assembly. We are remarkably privileged.

Why remove the word “state” to secure the limousine and salary that goes along with the promotion? Because the Liberals realized

that those five individuals were women. If anything, this is an insult to women, because the Liberals are actually changing course. Would they have done the same thing if it were five men?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: There we go, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix has answered the question.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very specific question for my colleague across the way regarding, let us say, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism compared to the Minister of Democratic Institutions. I know that my friend across the way is very much involved with the economy, given the many economic questions he asks during question period. What does the legislation do to those two departments? In essence, it does one thing: it makes them equal. What we are saying is that the minister responsible for small business and tourism is equal to the minister responsible for democratic reform.

Does the member agree that should be the case?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that when ministers sit at the cabinet table they are all equal, and that is a real privilege. We are very honoured to be here in the House. Three years from now, if I am selected by my leader, I am sure I will be very pleased to serve as a cabinet minister.

Seriously, that is where decisions are made. What more is there than that? Being a minister is having to make decisions on one's file in one's department. When one runs a department of thousands of people like the defence department, Global Affairs, or the finance department, or all of those other departments, one is responsible to sign each and every decision taken. That is not the case for ministers of state. They are different. We are not talking about quality, but about responsibility. There should be equal pay for equal work and equal responsibility. In that case, there is a huge difference between a *ministre d'État* and a senior cabinet minister.

• (1225)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a big task to fill the shoes of my colleague who just spoke. He obviously has a great grasp of the effects of this bill.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act. This bill has been touted by many members across the way as just a simple bill that must be passed as quickly as possible. They would like members of this House to believe that there is nothing controversial in this bill and that everyone should be on board. My hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, even went so far as to say that this bill is indeed a simple and straightforward housekeeping bill. We all know it is more than that, and I respectfully disagree with that statement.

Government Orders

Bill C-24 is much more than a simple piece of housekeeping legislation. There are numerous changes in this bill that would have lasting impacts on a number of regions in Canada. Today, I would like to set the record straight. I would like to explain the concerns I have with this bill, as well as my concerns with the way the government has rushed this bill through the process by trying to make people believe that the bill simply contains housekeeping measures.

First, my major concern with this bill is that it would formally eliminate the positions of the six ministers for regional development agencies. As we know, the previous government maintained a system of six different development agencies, with a minister of state assigned to each. The agencies represented six unique regions of Canada and included one for Atlantic Canada, one for Quebec, one for the north, one for southern Ontario, one for northern Ontario, and one for western Canada. These agencies were tremendously successful in ensuring that regional economic interests were represented at the cabinet table.

The Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development website even states the following:

Canada's Regional Development Agencies help to address key economic challenges by providing regionally-tailored programs, services, knowledge and expertise that:

- Build on regional and local economic assets and strengths;
- Support business growth, productivity and innovation;
- Help small- and medium-sized businesses effectively compete in the global marketplace;
- Provide adjustment assistance in response to economic downturns and crises; and
- Support communities.

Despite all of the important work that I just listed, the Prime Minister has stated that he believes that regional development agencies represent a bad kind of politics, whatever he means by that. I know that the Prime Minister and I disagree quite a bit when it comes to politics; that is not really a state secret. However, there is a difference between politics and governance, and I, for one, believe that having a regional economic development minister at the cabinet table fighting for his or her regions of interest is a very effective way to govern.

Rather than having individual ministers represent specific regions through the regional development agencies, the Prime Minister has opted to concentrate this power within one minister, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, a minister from Mississauga—Malton, a minister for everything. How can the Prime Minister honestly expect that a minister from the GTA will be able to effectively fight for Atlantic Canada, western Canada, the north, Quebec, and the list goes on?

We are already seeing that the Prime Minister's new system is not working. For example, just last fall, the government awarded \$150,000 in funding that was earmarked for northern Ontario to a company based in, get this, southern Ontario, Mississauga—conveniently, I might add, in the riding of the minister for everything, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and member for Mississauga—Malton. When did it become part of northern Ontario? The Bruce Peninsula is a three-hour drive north of there, and we cannot even get it designated as

part of northern Ontario. I think maybe the compass might have been a little faulty in the Prime Minister's Office.

Furthermore, in Atlantic Canada it has been reported that there has been a threefold increase in processing times at the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, known as ACOA, since the Prime Minister put the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in charge of the agency. Quite simply, the system is not working. It is pretty clear. I do not believe that the government has the right to give anyone lessons when it comes to the kind of work that our regional economic development agencies do for Canada. While these agencies work hard to deliver funding and ensure that businesses have what they need to succeed in their regions, the Liberal government calls business owners tax cheats, comes up with schemes to tax small businesses, and cannot seem to get any money out the door for important infrastructure projects.

● (1230)

For anyone in rural Canada, and I am one of those MPs who represents a large rural area, infrastructure is non-existent. It is just not there. Major transit projects—and I have nothing against those—get funding in the big cities, while rural Canada gets shafted again.

In fact, in rural Ontario in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, there is a certainty of feeling that we are being forgotten. Important projects are being left on the back burner while the government focuses solely on big city initiatives. FedDev Ontario, the federal economic development agency for southern Ontario, consistently worked to deliver important funding. By the way, the previous government filled that void and put FedDev in there, because there was nothing for southern Ontario before. With this government's inability to get infrastructure out the door, as I said, and now the elimination of FedDev, I am very concerned about what the passage of this bill would mean for rural infrastructure.

Another concern I have with this bill is in regard to the three ministerial positions that are created in the bill but not yet filled. Bill C-24 would create a total of eight new Liberal ministerial positions. In part, this is to accommodate the five minister of state roles that were filled after the 2015 election. However, there are three new positions created with no one to fill them. It really begs the question: Why create positions that are not needed, unless this government has a plan to fill these positions?

Government Orders

If it is the government's plan to fill these positions, I do have some suggestions. For example, let us put in an associate minister of finance. This would be very helpful. That way, the Minister of Finance could actually recuse himself from conversations about pension legislation that directly benefits his family company. We could also use a Minister of International Trade. My apologies, but with the bungling of NAFTA, the stalling TPP negotiations, and the embarrassing fiasco in China last week, I almost forgot that we already have one. Perhaps we could use a minister for rural affairs, instead of a minister of everything from Mississauga—Malton, though I'm not sure the government cares much about communities with a population less than 50,000. In fact, I am very positive about that. The government should be open and transparent and tell us what these mystery positions are all about.

Finally, I would like to conclude by stating that I am very concerned about the pace at which the government is moving on this legislation. I am told that, when the government operations committee studied this legislation, the only two witnesses were the government House leader and one professor. There is no partisanship there, is there? I have been involved and have chaired a number of committees over the years. I can say that having only two witnesses appear before any committee is simply unacceptable and it is certainly not the norm. In no way would it be possible for the committee to complete a full study of this bill or any bill.

Furthermore, I have learned that the topic of regional development agencies was not even discussed at the committee stage. What was the study about? This is unacceptable, and again shows that the government has no intentions of actually talking about this or consulting, whether it is through committee or the public. All they are about is trying to push this bill through as fast as possible.

With that, I am happy to take questions from my hon. colleagues. Before I do, I may not have another opportunity before we break for Christmas, so I would like to take a brief moment, Mr. Speaker, to wish you, your staff, and all my colleagues and members of this House a very merry Christmas and wish everyone all the best in the upcoming year.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for my colleague on the other side, I wish him the same merry Christmas and happy new year.

I just want to touch on one part of his speech, particularly toward the end where he was talking about the openness and transparency of government and how he did not feel as though that was the case. I think this government has demonstrated time and time again that it is willing and sees its role to be one that is open and transparent by default. However, as it relates to this particular legislation, let us talk about the mandate letters to the ministers. Those were open for the public to see. Those mandate letters, by being open by default, have given the opposition the opportunity to be critical of them. The truth of the matter is that we did not see that over the preceding 10 years under the previous government. It chose the opposite. It chose to keep those mandate letters hidden and secret from the public.

How can he suggest that this government is not being open and transparent? This one example that I am giving is such a great example as to how this government is demonstrating that.

● (1235)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank my disoriented colleague across the way for his question.

The bottom line here is that, if he wants to talk about accountability, openness, and all of that, which was in his question, all he has to do is be present every day from 2:15 to 3:00 in the House. He will find out all about that. That is what is unofficially known as “non-answer period”.

Maybe before he stands up and makes a statement as he just did, he could view or sit in on that, and shake his head like the rest of us when no questions are answered. The finance minister has been asked a number of questions in this House. He never answered them when he was present, and now he just does not come to the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind the hon. members that there is a certain level of respect in the House, and when we refer to our colleagues in the House, I would ask you all to not be derogatory to each other.

Also, please do not refer to the presence of a member in the House.

The hon. member for Thornhill.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for another speech getting directly to the point. I thank him specifically for pointing out that example of regional economic funding, which was aimed at northern Ontario but went to the minister of everything's riding in southern Ontario.

This is just another element or outcome of the government's decision to strip the regional development ministers across the country, which is proven by the more than \$2 billion that was meant to go out the door in infrastructure spending that the government could not get out the door and has had to be profiled for later investment.

I know the speaking time is always limited, but I wonder if my colleague would like to amplify on some of those remarks that he made, criticizing the government for removing the regional ministers.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Thornhill for a great question and his obvious understanding of the issue.

I mentioned the project that was approved under the auspices of northern Ontario but actually benefited a company in southern Ontario, in Mississauga—Malton. It does not matter how the letters are moved around on that, it all adds up and spells “inappropriate”.

Mr. Speaker, you come from northern Ontario and you know how important this kind of funding is in rural, isolated, northern communities. When we are trying to help these municipalities, the last thing we would do is give that kind of project to somebody nowhere near the area. It just smells a little when it comes from the minister's own riding.

I know the minister, and I have a lot of respect for him. However, if he and I were standing and talking in the House, even he would say this does not look good. I would call it downright inappropriate.

Government Orders

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise again, this time at third reading, to speak in support of Bill C-24, an act to update and modernize the Salaries Act. I would like to focus my comments on the five positions Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act, positions that are currently minister of state appointments.

The bill would update the Salaries Act to reflect the structure of the current ministry by adding five titled positions. The five positions to be added under the Salaries Act are already occupied by ministers, ministers who are working on important priorities for this government and for Canadians: science, small business and tourism, status of women, la Francophonie, and sport and persons with disabilities. The amendments fully recognize that these are full ministers who lead on important matters and are directly accountable to the Prime Minister and Parliament for results.

The speakers who oppose the bill have said that the ministers of state are “junior ministers”, “little ministers”, or not “full ministers”; that they assist other ministers with their responsibilities and report to the ministers they assist; and that they cannot bring forward memoranda to cabinet without senior ministers sponsoring those items. They have remarked that the five ministers whose positions would be added under the Salaries Act were appointed as ministers of state and assigned, by order in council, to assist other ministers. They have asserted that this is evidence that the Prime Minister intended these ministers to be junior ministers, and they say that this should remain their status. They say that this bill would simply paper over a blunder when the ministry was originally put in place and would give junior ministers an undeserved raise in the bargain.

I understand the origins of this misperception. Conventionally, that has been the role of ministers of state, sometimes called secretaries of state. They have most often assisted other ministers with their portfolio responsibilities. They have not often been members of cabinet, and they have not been able to bring matters to cabinet for consideration on their own.

Ministers of state were not given, in previous governments, statutory authorities to exercise in their own right or statutory duties for which they were directly accountable. Instead, they were assigned to assist a senior minister in carrying out that minister's responsibilities. The senior minister retained the statutory authorities and accountability. The salaries of the ministers of state reflected their supporting roles.

These were policy choices former prime ministers were entitled to make in the exercise of their prerogative to design their ministries in a way they judged would accomplish the government's priorities and properly oversee the day-to-day governing of the country.

The former prime ministers relied significantly on ministers of state. Specifically, under Prime Minister Harper, there were 13 in office at the dissolution of that government. Some of those former ministers of state who are still in this House have said during the course of the debate on this bill that in that role, they worked on important matters. When invited to cabinet, they had an equal voice at the table. They said they considered it a privilege to serve in that capacity. I have no doubt that all of that is true. I am certain that past ministers of state were valued and contributing members of their ministries.

Successive prime ministers have favoured two-tier ministries, and current legislation allows for that kind of structure. Ministers have a significant workload between their portfolios, cabinet, and parliamentary and political duties and have responsibility for increasingly complex and quickly developing files. This workload burden can be shared by developing supporting teams for ministers that include ministers of state.

The appointment of ministers of state has served various purposes in the past. They can support other ministers on general or specific files; with particular tasks, such as taking a lead role developing a policy falling under another minister's authority; or in day-to-day functions, such as meeting with stakeholders. These assignments can both help alleviate a minister's workload and highlight areas of priority for the government's mandate.

Minister of state appointments have also been useful in rounding out the skill set for a portfolio. For instance, the minister might benefit from the assistance of a minister of state who has a background in a particular sector or profession. Minister of state appointments can be used to give a minister a supporting role in policy development or in stakeholder relations that fall under the mandate of another minister. For example, the former minister of employment and social development was cross-appointed as minister of state to assist the minister of Canadian heritage in relation to multiculturalism.

● (1240)

In a compact ministry, ministers of state can be paired with ministers who carry significant workloads. They can function as generalists, offering support on functions or files as requested. In a larger ministry, where ministers have a single portfolio and a defined set of priorities to pursue, there may be less need for the support of a minister of state. Still, having a small number of ministers of state focused on particular priorities might be helpful.

In short, the position of minister of state and the Ministries and Ministers of State Act offer useful options to a prime minister in designing his or her ministry. Bill C-24 does not eliminate the position or repeal the act. I note that I said “options”. That is because the appointment and roles of ministers of state in any particular government are decided by its prime minister.

In launching his ministry, this Prime Minister determined that he did not require a group of ministers to take traditional supporting roles as ministers of state. Rather, he preferred to have a group of ministers who led their own files and were accountable to him and Parliament for results.

The Prime Minister decided that his government's priorities would be delivered by a one-tier ministry. He created a ministry in which all members are full members of cabinet, have an equal capacity to exercise the powers and perform the functions assigned to them, and have leading roles to deliver on the important priorities of government.

Government Orders

However, in November 2015, five of these positions the Prime Minister wanted in his one-tier ministry were not positions listed in the Salaries Act. As has been explained, because the Salaries Act could not accommodate those priorities at the time the government took office, the five ministers were appointed pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. That act offered a way for these ministers to begin their important work right away, to be paid under the Appropriations Act, and to be fully supported by existing departments in carrying out their responsibilities until legislation could be amended. In other words, they were provided with what was possible within the legal framework that existed in November 2015. However, it did not properly reflect the intended status, and the Prime Minister made a commitment to introduce legislation that would. Bill C-24 would fulfill that commitment.

As speakers before me have pointed out, these ministers have statutory responsibilities vested directly in them, and they are accountable to the Prime Minister and Parliament for results. The Minister of Science is responsible for the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

The Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities has policy and program responsibilities under the Canada Disabilities Savings Act. The minister is also responsible for the sport component of the Physical Activity and Sport Act.

The Minister of Small Business and Tourism is responsible for the Canada Small Business Financing Act, the Small Business Investment Grants Act, and the Canadian Tourism Commission Act, including Destinations Canada, the federal crown corporation that works to sustain a vibrant and profitable Canadian tourism industry. As the member of Parliament for the Niagara area, I know the importance of a successful tourist industry.

The Minister of Status of Women presides over the federal department known as Status of Women Canada.

Let me be clear. Those are just statutory responsibilities. They do not represent the sum total of the significant policy and program work in which these ministers are engaged. I list these items simply to make the point that these ministers are not in conventional junior minister roles and were never intended to be. The Prime Minister worked with the legislative framework he had in November 2015 and committed to updating it to reflect the current one-tier ministry.

The point has been made that these updating exercises are not new. The list of Salaries Act ministers has been amended several times in the last decade, most recently in 2012 and 2013. In each case, the changes aligned with the priorities of the times and with the then prime minister's preference with respect to the composition of his ministry and the organization of the government's administration. Perhaps in 2012 and 2013 changes to the Salary Act did not receive due attention from Parliament because they were included in long omnibus budget bills. This government prefers to be more transparent.

Some members have suggested that the scrutiny of Bill C-24 is not a good use of Parliament's time. With respect, I disagree. The ministerial system is essential and characteristic of our form of

government. Its development should be a concern of Parliament. That is why this government brought forward these changes in a stand-alone bill, and I appreciate the lengthy engagement on the bill.

● (1245)

Let me anticipate a question my remarks might prompt. As I have said, the bill would not repeal the Ministries and Ministers of State Act. We think it would offer a useful degree of flexibility for the Prime Minister and future prime ministers in designing their ministries, just as the three untitled positions Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act would.

Why then are we removing regional development positions from the Salaries Act? Do they not offer flexibility to a future prime minister too? As one member put it, how can the government put forward a bill that eliminates the possibility of appointing a minister responsible for the development of a particular region that has its own unique issues?

To be clear, the bill does not do that. There will continue to be a need to appoint ministers to oversee each of the regional development agencies. The bill would retain two options to do that and would add a third.

First, as was the practice in the former ministry, a minister can be cross-appointed to a regional development position, assisted by a minister of state. Second, a minister of state can be appointed as the responsible minister. Finally, and this is the new option Bill C-24 would add, a minister could be appointed under one of the untitled positions to oversee one or more of the regional development agencies.

In this government, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development has been appointed to oversee all the regional development agencies. We think that makes good policy and operational sense. Others have spoken on that point.

The removal of the regional development positions would not affect the agencies themselves, which would continue to exist as separate entities located and working in the regions they serve. It also would not eliminate the requirement for ministerial oversight of them. What it would do is safeguard the installation of an oversized cabinet. The proposed increase in the number of Salaries Act positions would be offset by the removal of the regional development positions. The maximum number of ministers that could be appointed under the Salaries Act, including the Prime Minister, would increase by two positions, from 35 to 37.

Government Orders

In closing, I believe that our government has been clear in explaining that the legislative framework in place on November 4, 2015, prevented the appointment of full ministers to lead on five important priorities. Use of the Ministries and Ministers of State Act allowed ministers to be appointed to these positions and to get to work on the priorities of this government and the priorities of Canadians on day one.

The Prime Minister committed to introducing legislation that would formally equalize the status of all members of his ministry. This bill would fulfill that commitment. When it comes into force, the orders in council that appointed these ministers as ministers of state to assist other ministers would be repealed. They would be in law, as they are in practice, full ministers.

• (1250)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for a worthy defence of what we in the official opposition consider this legislation to be: damage control of the Prime Minister's original flawed decision.

Because this amends the Salaries Act, I wonder if he could address the fact that the mistake was made more than two years ago now, and these newly minted ministers will have been paid, in effect, with post-dated cheques until this legislation is actually passed.

• (1255)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, as my speech discussed, from day one the Prime Minister wanted an equal, one-tier ministry. These are priorities that are important to Canadians, priorities we ran on. For example, science is a significant part of what we ran on and what Canadians expected from their government. After a decade of a government that did not always listen to scientists and may have put their work under the table and closed it off to the public, this became a priority.

Using the tools available, the Prime Minister used those tools. That being said, these are priorities that were important to the Prime Minister. Mandate letters are public, which the member of Parliament for Kingston and the Islands highlighted as an important tool for transparency. This has been the goal of the Prime Minister from day one. It recognizes the importance of the work cabinet does and the equal level cabinet members maintain.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rather agree with my Conservative colleague that we are once again spending time passing legislation in support of a decision that has already been made. These ministers of state already receive the salary usually paid to ministers. We are now covering up the tracks and amending the law to address a broken promise made during the election campaign and to let the Liberals cloak themselves in righteousness, which is something they do very well.

This state of affairs is summed up by the term “entitlement”. It has resulted in the Liberals coming to power and using this chamber's time to cover up their mistakes.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister indicated that the Liberals would not make Canadian consumers pay more taxes even though companies like Netflix and Amazon do not charge the GST. This mistake will hurt our own businesses. It is hurting people like Peter

Simons, who invest millions of dollars, hire hundreds of employees, and then are at a complete disadvantage because of it.

Are you going to amend an act to justify the unjustifiable here, too?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to remind members to direct their questions through the Speaker and not directly to members.

The hon. member for St. Catharines.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question, but it went a little off topic of this particular bill.

The hon. member mentioned a promise that the Prime Minister made during the campaign. The promise was to have an equal cabinet, a one-tier cabinet, and those coming forward to the table would speak with equal voice and should be recognized as such. The roles they have, the files they represent, and the policies they are bringing forward are significant priorities for this government.

Previous governments considered these positions, such as status of women, science, and persons with disabilities, to be junior roles, and in any government that is shocking. These roles are important, significant priorities for this government and should be accorded full ministerial status in one equal-tiered ministry.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. Catharines for his excellent speech. Perhaps the most disappointing part of it was when he said “in conclusion” towards the end, because I could have listened to that all day.

The member touched on the efficiencies of this government and this cabinet. I find that particular discussion very interesting, because the Conservative Party, which touts itself as being the efficient and cost-cutting government, had 40 members of cabinet, which is 10 more than what the current cabinet has.

I wonder if the member for St. Catharines could comment on the fact that this government is taking a more efficient and strategic approach to cabinet and to government.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kingston and the Islands for his kind and very sincere words.

It is surprising. I have been here a number of times during this debate at various stages, and we have heard from opposition members, especially those on the Conservative side, about their concerns with the bill, but one thing that they have remained silent on is the fact that the previous ministry was the largest in Canadian history with 40 members of cabinet.

Government Orders

This bill would clarify things and make a more efficient ministry. As the hon. member just stated, and stated earlier, we have a Prime Minister who has decided to make a more transparent cabinet and is showing the public the mandate letters, which is something that no other government has done before. It would allow Canadians and the opposition to hold the government to account on its priorities, promises, and mandate. This is just another step in that road of being transparent.

I have heard from NDP and Conservative MPs who think that this bill is a waste of time to debate, even though they keep standing up and giving speeches on the subject. However, as I mentioned in my speech, the ministry is an important role. It should be debated by Parliament. Its composition should be discussed, and it is important to discuss. Despite the fact that the opposition may not think so, we are here on the umpteenth day to continue to discuss it. Therefore, I think those members do believe that it is important to discuss, and I would like to thank them for their attention on this matter.

• (1300)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on a couple of the member's thoughts as they related to the whole issue of consultation and listening to Canadians.

When this committee was formed it did not listen to one person testify on the wisdom, or not, of removing ministers from the regional economic development agencies. The Liberal government continually champions its record on consultation, but it would not even listen to one witness on whether or not ministerial oversight of the economic development agencies should be discontinued. I am wondering if my colleague could comment on that.

I would also point out something that was said in the Liberal caucus subcommittee on innovation on May 15 of this year, "There is a perception among some that standard processing times at ACOA have increased approximately threefold over the past year and a half, and that requiring ministerial approval unnecessarily delays the process." For example, a 30-day processing time now takes 90 days.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on the lack of efficiency and the lack of consultation as this process moves forward.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, the first part of my hon. friend's question as to what consultations took place in regards to the appointment of a minister is a bit curious. I would be surprised if that hon. member rose during the previous Parliament suggesting that Prime Minister Harper should consult with the general public at large. I do not expect that has happened in any other government but I will leave that aside.

In terms of the work by the innovation minister, the results speak for themselves, along with the work of the Minister of Finance, and along with this government's plan and priorities. Canada's economy is the envy of the G7.

Looking at the election results last night, Canadians have spoken as to how they view this government. I hear some laughter on the other side, but I would have expected to see tears. It was an excellent turnout last night. Canadians spoke in terms of the direction they see this country going in.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, following the swearing-in of the Liberal cabinet after the 2015 election, the Prime Minister responded to a question regarding equal gender representation in cabinet with "because it's 2015". It is now 2017 and the government's cabinet is no more gender equal today than it was then.

Professor Margot Young, a University of British Columbia law professor specializing in gender equality issues appeared before the government operations committee on Bill C-24, and said:

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

I have said it before, and it is worth repeating now. This Liberal government is all style and no substance. The Liberals spend more time focusing on their appearance than they do on substantive matters that are important to Canadians, and this case is no exception. The Prime Minister would like Canadians to believe that his appointed Liberal cabinet is gender-balanced, but this is far from the truth. What the Prime Minister kept secret from Canadians is that several of the female ministers were not full ministers, but rather ministers of state.

Mr. Speaker, I neglected to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Of course, once the opposition and others pointed out this reality to the Liberal government, the Prime Minister quickly tried to cover his tracks. He introduced Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act. The bill would make several changes to aspects of ministerial roles and designations. These include the creation of new positions, the removal of several important positions, the creation of legal backup for departmental support for these new ministry positions, and the transfer of authoritative powers.

In the bill, the Liberals are attempting to justify changing the title "ministers of state" to full ministers. They say that changing the names of the positions and increasing the income of each minister of state, with no added responsibilities for these ministers of state, somehow makes them equivalent to full ministers. This amounts to nothing more than a shell game, and in the process the Prime Minister is getting rid of regional economic development ministers and creating positions that will be determined later. What happened to openness and transparency?

I do not want to spend any more time discussing the Liberal's PR game of claiming to have a gender-balanced cabinet but in reality not having any such thing. I will leave it up to my hon. colleagues on the opposite side to try to square that circle.

Government Orders

Over the past two years, the government has shown it is unable to manage a national economy. Its top-down style of governance is no better exemplified than in the elimination of regional development ministers, leaving all regional development decisions in the hands of the innovation minister from Mississauga. I have served with the hon. member for Mississauga—Malton on a committee in previous Parliaments, and I know he is a very hard-working member and represents his constituents. However, he does not live, experience, and know the very real and unique needs that exist in our different regions, from Atlantic Canada to Quebec, to the Prairies, to British Columbia, and especially our northern areas, both in the territories and in our provinces.

To make things worse, when studying this piece of legislation in committee the Liberals refused to hear from a single witness about the plan to scrap regional economic development ministers. This, from a government that claims to make “evidence-based” decisions, a government that prides itself on consultation, a government that repeatedly says it wants to hear from Canadians. This is all style and no substance.

Regional economic development ministers played a very important role in our previous Conservative government's ability to weather the global economic crisis and come away with the strongest economy in the G7, all while balancing the budget and leaving a surplus. That is why, unlike the Liberals, Conservatives will fight for appropriate regional representation and accountability. The Liberals are ignoring the diversity of Canada's regions. So much for championing diversity. So much for championing consultation.

• (1305)

We need to include people from the regions in the decision-making process because it ultimately affects their full participation in our national economy. Indeed, the harmful effects of this decision are already noticeable. Take these examples, for instance. Last fall, \$150,000 in northern Ontario economic development funds were given to a company based in the innovation minister's Mississauga riding. Apparently, this is the preferred kind of politics the Prime Minister had in mind. Members can correct me if I am wrong, but as a member whose riding is a short drive down the 401 from Mississauga, I would not consider our region of Ontario as being part of the north, by any measure.

Furthermore, just this spring, the Atlantic Liberal caucus subcommittee reported that it had heard of a threefold increase in processing times at ACOA since the appointment of the Toronto minister. The Liberal subcommittee noted, “centralized decision-making is viewed unfavourably as impeding the agility of programs. The Subcommittee was asked to advocate for regional decision-making in order to better address regional needs.” I sure hope that the Prime Minister and the innovation minister are taking the time to listen to their colleagues in their own Liberal caucus on this issue.

As previously mentioned, Bill C-24 seeks to ask parliamentarians to approve the appointment of three future mystery ministers. This is neither transparent nor accountable. We know that after two years of mismanagement of appointments left, right, and centre, the Liberal government cannot be trusted to handle any appointments, let alone secret appointments, to cabinet. I would ask my hon. colleagues opposite what exactly they are trying to hide.

Allow me to summarize. The Prime Minister set this legislation into motion after he was trying to look good for the cameras but had a reporter ask him about the so-called gender parity in his cabinet. He doubled down when he included in this legislation the removal of regional economic ministers, and then tripled down when he expected opposition parties to blindly support his creation of new cabinet positions that are to be determined in the future.

Conservatives do believe in equal pay for equal work. This bill does not deliver that. Ministers with more junior portfolios will not have their own deputy ministers, will not have the same departmental budgets, will not have the same responsibility or authority as ministers with more senior portfolios, and yet their salaries will increase. In fact, the salaries will increase by roughly \$20,000 each for these ministers, with no added responsibilities or authority.

If the Prime Minister wants to put his words into action, I hear that the finance minister has been in a bit of trouble recently with the Ethics Commissioner. This could be an opportunity for him to promote one of his female members of the House to the position of finance minister. At the very least, the Prime Minister needs to listen to the advice of his Liberal backbenchers and immediately reinstate regional economic ministers. Enough of this top-down approach where Ottawa knows best. It is not working and it has created headaches across the country, especially in Atlantic Canada. In fact, all areas of Canada have been affected and have spoken out against this ill-conceived move to eliminate regional ministers from the economic development agencies.

There is a quote from *La Presse* in Quebec from November 2015, which states:

“It was always an important minister, like Denis Lebel, who was in charge,” said Mr. Forget [the current president] of the Quebec Chamber of Commerce. “It meant that business leaders had an attentive ear to discuss Quebec's economic issues. We'll have to see how things go in the coming days and weeks.”

We do not hear anything from the Liberal Quebec members speaking out against this change.

The *Cape Breton Post* has stated that “The change in tactics to support business growth was flagged as a potential concern for job-starved regions such as Cape Breton.”

From the CBC, Donald Savoie, a Canada research chair in public administration, has said that the lack of an ACOA minister from the region is a return to when former Liberal industry minister John Manley was responsible for the economic development agencies during the Jean Chrétien government. He says, “I would remind Atlantic Canadians that ACOA used to report to John Manley at the Department of Industry. Would I call [the current appointment] ACOA's heyday? No.”

That is not exactly a ringing endorsement of this plan.

Government Orders

• (1310)

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed what the member for Kitchener—Conestoga had to say because it really reflects the strong difference between our respective governments. I would like to alight on the idea of the Minister of Science and her ministry not being viewed as a strong one, or that the work of the Minister of Science has not changed. We just appointed a new chief science advisor. This person will be working with the Minister of Science. Could the member expand on how he sees the lack of value they place on science compared to how the Liberal government sees the promotion and valuing of science as a bigger source of strength?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I devalued science or the science minister. In fact, I applauded the current innovation minister for his hard work for all Canadians. However, what I did say is that regardless of how great these people are, regardless of how great ministers or members they are, they cannot have an intimate knowledge of the regions across our country, whether Atlantic Canada, Quebec, the Prairies, northern Ontario, or our territories. That is where the big problem comes in. It is not diminishing the value of a person or his or her portfolio. It is saying that we need the regional representation of ministers who have their ear to the ground in their own areas and can address those issues in cabinet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Liberals are unable to agree on whether this bill pertains to pay equity or parity in cabinet, could my Conservative colleague tell us whether the responsibilities of ministers of state are equivalent to those of full ministers, given that ministers of state do not have to manage a department?

Does he think that simply giving ministers of state the same salary as ministers is sufficient to say that we have now achieved equal pay for equal work and parity in cabinet?

Is it not a bit simplistic to talk about gender equality only in terms of salary?

Does he think that this bill is necessary since these salaries have already been adjusted without any need for such a bill?

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, my colleague really gets to the heart of the issue. For the government to address this simply in terms of salary, by increasing a minister of state's salary to a full minister's salary, is very inappropriate thing to do. It is inappropriate to increase the salary of someone who has not been given any additional responsibilities, does not have any additional authority, and does not have a department under him or her. In fact, in many cases ministers of state report to their senior minister. Therefore, to somehow suggest there is equal responsibility and authority is disingenuous at best.

The tragedy here is that to fulfill a statement that was made immediately following the swearing-in of cabinet, the Prime Minister has had to backtrack and make it look like all ministers are equal in this cabinet. Certainly, they are all of equal value in

terms of their humanity, but their responsibilities are far from equal, and so in that respect it is inappropriate for them to receive the additional \$20,000 a year for doing nothing extra.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to this particular issue, the arguments being made by the government are the height of absurdity. The Liberals want to use the legitimate importance of the specific areas covered by the sub-ministers as the basis for suggesting that these are in fact equally important issues to those that full ministers deal with. However, if the Liberals simply took the time to observe their own orders in council when they appointed the ministers, those orders clearly say that those ministers are subject to the authority of full ministers. For example, the minister of state for the status of women is formally in place to assist the minister of heritage in carrying out the latter minister's responsibility. Therefore, these secondary ministerial positions are not secondary because of the importance of the work they are doing; they are secondary because they are formally or administratively subject to the authority of someone who is a full minister. That is why traditionally they have been paid less. Members should understand that and members who are debating this issue should know that. Does my colleague have any comment on that?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to issues of administration and the law, I will certainly defer to my colleague any day of the week. Again, he gets to the heart of the issue, in fleshing out what was said by Margot Young at committee: "Really, there's no gender substance, no equity substance on the basis of gender equality, to this legislation." Furthermore, in response to a question about whether the Prime Minister's claim of a gender-equal cabinet was cynical, she went further and stated, "I would say it's dishonest."

I think we have a lot of reckoning to do in helping Canadians recognize that what the government is doing is simply trying to call these ministers equal, when in fact all of us in this House know, including my colleagues on the other side of the House, that there really is no such thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga for his excellent speech. I recognize his qualities as a person. He is a very caring individual who has a lot of respect for people. I think it is important to point out the kindness that he shows people every day.

Since the end of the session is just a few days away, I would like to wish a happy holiday season to all the staff who work with us here in the House and in our offices, all members of the House of Commons, my family, and the people of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. We are going to spend some quality time with our family and friends and exchange gifts.

Speaking of gifts, since this government was elected two years ago, it has been trying to give gifts to those who donate to, support, and serve its party. Now, the Liberals have introduced Bill C-24. I am wondering whether this bill is just another way to do favours for certain people. I have some serious doubts about this bill, and the Liberals are the ones who have planted those seeds of doubt in my mind over the past two years.

Government Orders

Nowhere in the many pages of the mandate letter written by the Prime Minister's team and addressed to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is there any mention of introducing this kind of bill. Here again, the Liberal government seems to be winging it. I do not know what the objective is. Usually, when I go through a bill, I find objectives. The official document I have here talks about Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, but does not identify any objectives. What is the purpose of this bill? I certainly do not see a real answer to that question, and it is not even written in the bill.

They say this is about equality between men and women, but as usual with this government, it is all sizzle and no steak. Interestingly, the ministers with the three most important portfolios, the defence minister, the innovation minister, and the notorious finance minister, are all men. The Liberals say they want parity, but when it comes to giving mandates to female ministers, they seem to have little faith in women's abilities. That is why I have serious doubts. I do not understand what the government is trying to accomplish with its act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

Thanks to the government's improvisations over the past two years, it now has to look for loopholes, because it has deviated from its agenda. It decided to table a bill that would eliminate the positions of ministers responsible for regional development and entrust all decisions to a very busy minister. I will not talk about this minister's professionalism, but every human being, male or female, has their limits. He will have to take over the duties of the ministers responsible for Canada's six regional development agencies, which cover the entire country. There is one out east, one in Quebec, two in Ontario, one up north, and one out west. Now, however, the government will be making decisions about what is best for the people of the Atlantic region out of an office on Bay Street in Toronto.

• (1320)

From now on, people in Toronto will be deciding what is in the best interests of people living in the north.

The agencies were created because the regions face different realities. We are here to help the regions cope with their realities and find solutions that are appropriate in their circumstances. Some regions have very high unemployment. Fortunately, the Quebec City area has very low unemployment, but that is not the case across Canada.

When the minister, way up in his ivory tower, decides to apply a law or program, he obviously will not take into account the different features of each region. That shows a lack of respect towards our regions. It comes on top of the finance minister's lack of respect towards SMEs, which drive the economies of Canada's regions.

The Minister of Finance launched consultations in July. Since he does not have the same schedule as Canadian workers, he may not have realized that small businesses and company managers are worn out in July and take a few days off.

The Liberals say they want to consult, they put their reform out there, they make the announcement, and off they go. Then the

opposition comes out swinging to defend the interests of Canadians and Canadian business owners. The government backtracks, but only halfway. Now it is going to let businesses pay a 9% tax, but not until 2019. That 9% was in the works before the Liberals took office, but they got rid of it because it was a Harper government initiative.

They have no real plan. They react, they change course, they make it up as they go along. Now, for the sake of gender equality, the government wants to give everyone a raise. It wants everyone to get a minister's salary, and it is taking ministers away from the regions.

Where are we going? How can anyone respect a government that does not respect the businesses in our regions?

I am not very comfortable with that. I am not an expert, but Norman Spector, a former ACOA president, has told many people in Ottawa that the Liberals never liked the regional development agencies and that eliminating them has been on the Liberal agenda for some time now.

The Liberals are removing competent people, centralizing power for themselves, and governing in the interest of their Liberal friends, not in the interest of all Canadians.

This government has been in power for two years, and I cannot name a single concrete measure it has introduced in the real interest of Canadian workers. This is just more window dressing. The Liberals are trying to impress the international community, but they are doing nothing meaningful.

Instead of working on this bill, why are we not investing our energy in putting negotiators in place to make sure the government concludes the NAFTA negotiations, solves the softwood lumber crisis, and respects our SMEs?

The new corporate tax reform comes into effect in 18 days. I do not know what the government is playing at, but if I can see that it is not respecting our SMEs, I am not sure how it can interpret its position.

Is the government respecting our SMEs? Is it respecting our regions? Is it respecting Canadians?

We are wasting our time on this bill. It is unacceptable. It does not take a rocket scientist to see that our Prime Minister is trying to shut us down, create a distraction, and pacify us.

• (1325)

The Prime Minister and the government need to take this a little more seriously.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it does not take a rocket scientist, only a good head of hair.

My colleague talked a lot about SMEs. With all the backpedalling the Liberals do, making decisions and then changing laws accordingly, would he not expect them to come here with some sort of legislation? I would like to see them put in writing that we are gearing up to shortchange our small businesses and retailers so we can blithely give major international corporations a tax break on GST and provincial sales tax.

While they are at it, they should put in writing that they prefer to help American giants.

Government Orders

●(1330)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert for the question.

He is quite right. I must say I have no idea what to expect from this government. The Liberals wait until the House is wrapping up its work to table the business tax reform that comes into force on January 1, 2018. How incredibly democratic and transparent of them. This government is incapable of assuming its responsibilities. It creates distractions. It must be anxious for the session to end because once again, it is tarnishing its own image.

Oh well, 2019 is just around the corner.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who represents a riding that includes Bay Street, I once again rise to my feet in the House to ask members to stop taking shots at parts of our country. The way in which it is demeaned, the way in which it is described do not reflect the street, the people who live there, and the businesses that operate there. They are all good Canadians and, like many people in Toronto, they often come from someplace else. Quite often that is one of the members' ridings.

Therefore, when members take a shot at Bay Street and say that people from Bay Street have no right to be in the House to make decisions with other Canadians about the future of the country, I find it profoundly insulting. I wish the member opposite, having just made a speech about the necessity for diversity in the House, could reflect on those words and please retract the shot he just took at part of my riding.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I have no problem admitting when I am wrong and apologizing.

However, in this case I will not apologize, because I have always had respect for Torontonians. Instead, I would ask the government to show some respect for Canada's regions.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for speaking up for Quebec.

I have a quick quote from the former president of the Quebec manufacturers and exporters, who says, "We have quite a few development programs with them in areas such as innovation and skilled labour. We are afraid they'll get mixed up with a national policy that won't necessarily work for Quebec. If we have to deal with officials as far away as Toronto or Ottawa to get the government to pay attention to problems with the Quebec economy, we're in trouble."

Is my colleague surprised by the fact that none of our colleagues on the other side of the House from Quebec are speaking out against this move away from economic regional development ministers and is aware he of the quote from the former president of the Quebec manufacturers and exporters?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague. As I mentioned earlier, he is an exceptional person. I thank him for the question.

There are 40 members across the way who have forgotten about Quebec and do not get up in the morning to defend Quebec. We do not even have a minister representing Quebec. It is quite extraordinary to see a government like this one, which has been in power more than two years, act this way.

I would like to come back to the comments of my colleague opposite. Once again, I have nothing against Toronto. However, Toronto represents the centralization of power by the Liberal government. That is why we are using the term "Toronto". I probably have much more respect for the people of Toronto than my colleague can have for Canada's regions.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill C-24. This is my second opportunity to speak to this bill, and I take great pride in it, as it is one I wholeheartedly endorse.

Assembling a cabinet is one of the first responsibilities of an incoming prime minister. The overall design of cabinet, the selection of ministers, and the alignment of their responsibilities determine how the government will marshal its individual and collective strengths under the prime minister's leadership to accomplish its priorities and oversee the day-to-day governing of the country. All these decisions are at the prerogative of the prime minister, as we know. The selection of members of cabinet is both vitally important and highly personal.

The Right Hon. Jean Chrétien writes in his memoir, "Building a cabinet is perhaps the most private and personal duty a prime minister has to perform." The Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson writes in his, "In choosing my Cabinet, the decisions were mine and I did not ask anyone to share that responsibility." The prime minister of Canada has considerable flexibility in exercising his or her prerogative for assembling the ministry and cabinet. Although a number of ministerial offices are created by statute and must be filled, the prime minister has room to design the ministry by cross-appointing individuals to more than one position, changing ministers' working titles to reflect their roles in advancing the priorities, and assigning responsibilities to the ministers through changes to the machinery of government.

The prime minister can also recommend the appointment of ministers of state to assist other ministers. These ministers might assist a minister with particularly heavy responsibilities or with a specific responsibility requiring special attention. Ministers of state can also receive statutory powers, duties, and functions. When they do, they are accountable to the prime minister and to Parliament directly for the manner in which they exercise them. The prime minister decides whether ministers of state are to be vested with statutory authorities in their own right and whether they sit in cabinet.

Government Orders

There can be parliamentary secretaries as well, as we know. These discretionary positions are not members of the ministry and do not normally play a role in cabinet. They are appointed under the Parliament of Canada Act to assist ministers with their parliamentary responsibilities, including interacting with caucus members and opposition counterparts, and assisting with the shepherding in of legislation.

Although the prime minister has considerable flexibility, there are rules underpinning the structure of the ministry too. For example, the Salaries Act, the legislation that authorizes the remuneration of ministers, lists 34 specific ministerial positions in addition to the prime minister. Many of those ministerial positions are statutory offices that must be filled. A few are discretionary.

While the governor general, on the advice of the prime minister, can appoint any number of ministers, only individuals appointed to positions listed in the Salaries Act can be paid a ministerial salary out of the consolidated revenue fund. The number of ministers of state whom a prime minister can appoint is unlimited, but it is subject to the requirement of Parliament's agreement to appropriate the necessary monies for that purpose under the annual appropriation acts.

The number of parliamentary secretaries that may be appointed cannot exceed the number of ministerial positions listed in the act. This mix of flexibility and rules reflects a fundamental constitutional principle. It is the crown's business to organize itself for the proper administration of the affairs of state, and it is Parliament's business to guide and supervise that administration through the granting or withdrawal of authorities and funding to the executive.

The size of the Canadian ministry has changed significantly over time, reflecting the development of Canada as a country and the growing complexity and range of issues under the federal government's purview. At the time of Confederation, the fledging government carried over seven federal organizations from its predecessor government, six departments and the Geological Survey of Canada. However, by the time of the first anniversary of Confederation, there were 15 organizations with 12 departments, the Geological Survey, the Dominion police service, and the office of the governor general's secretary.

Today, the prime minister must organize upward of 190 federal government entities into portfolios, each to be managed by ministers who are accountable for results. Over the course of the last 50 years, ministries have varied in size, from a low of 30 members in the Clark ministry, to at one point a high of the prime minister plus 39 other members in the Harper ministry.

● (1335)

The current ministry is composed of the Prime Minister and 30 ministers. It has not grown in number since its swearing-in on November 4, 2015. On that day, 26 individuals were sworn into ministerial positions listed in the Salaries Act. One of those 26 ministers, the Minister of International Development, and four other individuals were sworn in as ministers of state and assigned by orders in council to assist other ministers pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act.

The Ministries and Ministers of State Act was used in four cases because the positions are not listed in the Salaries Act and those ministers could not be paid or supported by the public service in carrying out their responsibilities. The Minister of International Development is paid under the Salaries Act. In this case, the Ministries and Ministers of State Act offered a way for the Minister of International Development to assume Canada's responsibilities for La Francophonie from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to be supported by Global Affairs Canada in that role.

The legal title of ministers appointed under the Ministries and Ministers of State Act is "minister of state". They are paid under the appropriation acts. The orders in council assigning these ministers to assist other ministers are necessary because of the legislative framework and the decision to have these ministers supported by existing departments in the exercise of their authorities and performance of their duties.

When the ministry was sworn in, a number of observers wondered why five of its members were appointed as ministers of state rather than simply as ministers. They concluded that the Prime Minister's gender-balanced cabinet was not really that at all.

In an interview with iPolitics, for example, the member for London—Fanshawe said she did not understand the technical reason for making the positions ministers of state rather than full ministers. At the time, the positions were all filled by women. The member has been a powerful champion of women's rights and women's voices in politics. She said she was disappointed and sad. However, she need not be, and she was right: the reason is a technical one.

The appointments as ministers of state and the orders in council under the Ministries and Ministers of State Act allow these ministers to be paid and supported by existing departments in carrying out their important mandates. They were provided with what was possible within the legal framework that existed on November 4, 2015.

The Prime Minister made a commitment to introduce legislation that reflects the composition of his one-tier ministry. Bill C-24 fulfills that commitment. It would revise the list of ministerial positions in the Salaries Act by adding five titled positions that are currently minister of state appointments: namely, 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.

It would add three untitled positions to provide a degree of flexibility for this and future prime ministers to adapt their ministries to respond to priorities of the day. It would offset the increase in ministerial positions that may be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund by removing six regional development ministerial positions from the statute. This would have no impact on the regional development agencies or the statutory requirement for ministerial oversight of them.

Government Orders

Bill C-24 would also create a framework within which any of these eight ministers can be supported by existing departments, meaning that no new departments need to be created as a consequence of the bill. Also, it would change the legal title of Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs to Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to properly reflect the responsibilities of that position.

Why is the bill important? Why not just continue with the current arrangement under the current legal framework? We want to send a strong signal to Canadians that all ministers in this cabinet are equal. In Canada, we like to treat people equally. The ministry is the reflection of that value. We want to remove distracting distinctions, which even after two years and even after we debate the bill, have some members insisting that they are junior ministers and that they should stay as junior ministers.

• (1340)

The Prime Minister's team is a group of equals. We need to make this legislative framework a reality. In this ministry, there are no junior ministers or senior ministers. There are no first-tier and no second-tier ministers. There are just ministers, working together to deliver results for Canadians.

We would be shortsighted if we did not look to the future now. We need to modernize the legislation to allow for sufficiently varied and flexible ministerial structures, which can adapt quickly to the contemporary challenges of complex issues, changing priorities, and big government.

I urge my fellow hon. members to join me in supporting Bill C-24.

• (1345)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for my colleague.

The orders in council by which the ministerial positions were created on November 4, 2015, established that the ministers of state would be subject to the full authority of other ministers; for 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 responsibility.

I have simple questions for my colleague. Have those orders in council changed? Would this legislation change those orders in council?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, and I touched on this in my speech, this is about making ministers equal.

We are attempting, in this legislation, to address one of those technical details that was preventing that from happening before.

If there is opportunity in the future to further fine-tune this and to make sure of any other technical requirements that need to be addressed, then I am sure the government will take the opportunity to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague opposite if the bill simply validates something that already exists. As far as I know, ministers of state already receive this salary.

If we are here to validate decisions that you have already made, I can suggest other bills, such as bills on charging and collecting taxes and the GST that undermine our entrepreneurs.

If you want to change things to suit you and put the House at your service, say so right away.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure that the hon. member does not want me to respond when he says “you”. I believe he is referring to the member for Kingston and the Islands.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I would love to hear your personal perspective on this at some point.

To answer my colleague, that is what we do in this House. We review and amend legislation. That is what we are doing here today. That is what we do on an ongoing basis.

Are we doing that now? Are we looking at the Salaries Act to properly reflect progressive changes that we are seeing with the government and with Parliament more generally? Absolutely, that is what we are doing here today. That is what we do on a daily basis.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Kingston and the Islands for his historical overview and the context in which he has put his comments this morning to help us better understand the importance and need for Bill C-24.

The question I would like to put to the member is with respect to the point he made about what this is really all about, and that is equal voices in cabinet. He mentioned the five ministries: la Francophonie, sport and disability, status of women, small business and tourism, and science.

Could the member comment on why it is so important that ministers who hold these portfolios have an equal voice at the cabinet table?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question, because it goes to the heart of this.

What this is all about is making sure that all ministries are treated equally. There are a variety of different issues that the government faces on a day-to-day basis, and there are different issues that are important to different people throughout the country at all times.

We need to take seriously all issues as they relate to the changes in cabinet members.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I find this legislation remarkably inconsequential. I am torn about how I should vote on it quite honestly.

I really do have a philosophical problem with the idea that we do better in attracting people when we pay more. I frankly think every minister and every member of Parliament should be paid less. We would attract better people. We would attract people from the NGO sector who are used to working for poverty wages. We need civil service and public service to be foremost in our minds.

Government Orders

I do not know if we are going to say all members are equal. The salary of the Prime Minister should come down and ministers' salaries could come down. We could all work in a way that reflects to the Canadian public that we experience lives closer to the lives they lead.

● (1350)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the way is absolutely correct, and that is what this is all about. I had an interesting conversation with a family member over the weekend who was a provincial cabinet minister. I mentioned this debate to him and he seemed surprised to hear that all ministers at the federal level are not paid the same, because in Ontario provincial ministers are.

This is about everyone at the table who helps to make the decisions being valued the same and remunerated the same. It is that simple.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Edmonton West will have 10 minutes. He will make his speech and then he will have his questions when we return to this topic.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Now I have nine and a half minutes, Mr. Speaker, but thank you.

I am pleased to rise today on Bill C-24. I spoke to Bill C-24 in an earlier reading at which time I named this legislation “the Seinfeld bill”, because it is a bill about nothing. As my colleague the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said, this is an inconsequential bill.

The bill goes back to 2015, when we had a freshly elected government that, with great fanfare, announced its gender-balanced cabinet. Someone in the media pointed out that five of the 15 women cabinet ministers were so-called junior ministers, ministers such as the Minister of Status of Women, etc., so it really was not gender balanced. The government immediately said they are all equal and they are all going to get paid the same.

At committee we asked the government House leader about this and her comment was that all 30 members already receive the same salary and this has been the case since the first day in office and it will not change with this legislation. I then asked why we are bothering with the bill. We were told that without the bill, ministers of state would not be full ministers and would not have equal voices at the cabinet table.

The Prime Minister spends a lot of time overseas and when he is not busy showing off his new socks, he is talking about how he is a feminist prime minister. As partisan as I am, I cannot believe that the Prime Minister sits at the cabinet table and ignores good ideas from someone who is a minister of state just because of a title. So again, why do we have this legislation?

Maybe it is about gender equality. I am all about a gender-balanced cabinet but what I am not about is having a quota system that forces the government to ignore better qualified MPs and pushes them to the back to fill the front benches with unqualified men, such as the defence minister.

Think where we would be without a quota system. We would not have a defence minister who claims to be the architect of someone

else's work. We would not have a defence minister who has so badly bungled the purchase of fighter jets. First, he is not going to allow F-35s, so we are going to buy sole-sourced Boeing until Boeing gets into a trade conflict with Bombardier, so we are not going to buy Boeing. Instead, we are going to buy used Boeing. That makes sense.

The defence minister bungled shipbuilding. There was delay upon delay. Every single month, according to the parliamentary budget officer, it costs taxpayers \$250 million.

If we did not have a quota system, maybe we would not have the finance minister, the same gentleman who is under an ethics investigation for proposing Bill C-27, which would just happen to include the same changes he lobbied for as a private citizen that would have benefited him. He tabled that legislation in the House.

We would not perhaps have the sport minister, the same minister who insulted victims of thalidomide, the same minister who said he hopes they die 10 years from now because it would be less of a burden on the government.

What did Liberal MPs have to say about this legislation? On second reading the Liberals framed Bill C-24—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am going to interrupt for a moment.

It is nice to see everyone in a festive spirit and talking among themselves, but there is a member giving a speech. We want to give him all the respect he deserves and allow him to give his speech. I want to remind everyone that if they have something to say to take it outside for a few moment and then come back and listen to this very interesting discourse.

The hon. member.

● (1355)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board said, “This government is also committed to ensuring that pay equity extends to the cabinet table...” A Liberal colleague in the operations committee with me said that we have chosen “to say that women deserve equal pay and equal voice at the cabinet table.”

It is very clear that the Liberals wanted to message this proposed legislation as an equality bill. They must have been absolutely giddy with joy at the operations committee when my colleagues from the NDP brought forward a witness, the only witness we were allowed to bring on the bill, who was a gender studies professor from UBC. Unfortunately for the Liberals, who thought it would be someone who would reinforce their view, it turned out to be more like Festivus with an airing of grievances from the professor.

The expert witness led by saying:

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

She continued with:

Statements by Members

...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...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.

In response to a question on whether the Prime Minister's claim that the gender-equal cabinet was cynical, she replied, "it's dishonest."

The Liberal members of the operations committee immediately tried to walk back from the previous statements made by many Liberal MPs in this very place to say that Bill C-24 was not about gender equality. The member for Newmarket—Aurora said, "...I don't think anyone was proposing that this was a gender equity bill."

The member for Châteauguay—Lacolle tried to submit that Bill C-24 was a good step, until she got beaten back by the expert witness. She then tried to reframe it by asking if the junior ministries were more like emerging ministries. Yes, all ministers are equal, but some are more emerging than others it seems. The member for Don Valley East said that the witness's testimony was disingenuous, because Bill C-24 was nothing about gender equality.

We know that it is not about gender equality, and it is not needed to do anything the government has not already been doing for the last two years, whether it be pay or how it terms cabinet ministers. What is it for? Well, maybe Bill C-24 is all about eliminating the regional economic ministers, such as the minister for western diversification, and moving it all under the purview of the Minister of Innovation, the member for Mississauga—Malton.

I guess the member for Mississauga—Malton leading ACOA or western diversification is good as it allows a whole-of-government approach, we are told. Now, it is a whole-of-government approach of doing nothing for Alberta, as the western diversification minister for Mississauga—Malton sat around doing nothing while unemployment in Alberta reached levels not seen since the NEP, and a whole-of-government approach of turning deaf ears for help within Alberta with the orphaned wells. Where was the whole-of-government approach when dealing with energy east and watching the energy east pipeline get destroyed? Well, the whole-of-government approach was busy handing out subsidies to Bombardier instead of helping out Alberta.

We brought this up in committee, and the leader of the House said:

Regional expertise with national expertise is a way for it to work better together to create a synergy, to take a whole-of-government approach.

Good Lord, what does this mean?

What could we have done instead of looking at this wasteful Bill C-24? Well, we could have been studying useful legislation, such as was tabled in the report from the operations committee for the whistleblower act, which we know needs to be updated.

When we studied the whistleblower act, we heard from many witnesses whose lives had been destroyed by government. It does not matter if it is the current or past government, these people have come forward to do their best for Canadians, for taxpayers, and their lives were destroyed by government for being whistleblowers. The operations committee put together a very good report, which was unanimous, supported by the NDP and the Liberals, that would have

brought substantive changes for whistleblower protection in the public service as well as, for the first time, extending it outside the public service to people working on private contracts doing work on government jobs.

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I must stop the hon. member. What we will do is come back with his two minutes after, and he can wrap up then. By then it will be a bit quieter in the House, I am sure, and a little more conducive to questions.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

INTERESTS OF QUEBEC

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, never has Quebec been so weak as it is in this government. Quebec is asking for time to legalize cannabis, but Ottawa is saying no. Quebec wants its fair share of contracts for its shipyards, but Ottawa is saying no. Quebec is asking the government to tax Netflix, but Ottawa is saying no. Quebec is asking the government to maintain the ban on knives on airplanes, but Ottawa is saying no. Quebec passed a bill on religious neutrality, and Ottawa wants to challenge it.

Quebec's interests are always being sacrificed, and the 40 Liberal members from Quebec are letting it happen so as not to displease Canada. Quite frankly, the only interests that always count are those of the friends of the Liberals, the friends of Morneau Shepell, KPMG, and Bay Street, people who hide their money in tax havens and attend \$1,500 dinners with the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the government will not give the time of day to our cultural community, our small business owners, our farmers, or our forestry workers. Our take on this government is that the same old Liberal Party is back, but with a Quebec that is weaker than ever.

* * *

[English]

BLOOD DONATION

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as many of the members of the House may be aware, a blood donation is known to be a life-saving gift. This is why I am thrilled to share that just recently I gave my 100th blood donation at Canadian Blood Services in Guelph.

I was honoured to be joined by members of the Guelph community who also gave blood, and Ward 1 Studios that recorded the big day. Its fantastic video is on my Facebook page, and I encourage everyone to check it out.

The members may have noticed I rose in the House with a new red lapel pin to mark my 100th donation. I challenge hon. members to get one too.

In this season of charity, I encourage all Canadians to consider donating blood and giving the gift of life. It is easy. Simply call 1-888 2 DONATE, or visit blood.ca to book an appointment. Remember, it is in us to give, and we have the power to save a life.

* * *

RAY RECKSEIDLER APPRECIATION NIGHT

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, December 9, my wife Judy and I were honoured to attend the Ray Reckseidler Appreciation Night in Delburne, as Ray's community showed its gratitude for his 31 years of service.

Both my professional career as a teacher and my lifelong political journey were forged from Ray's example, advice, and mentorship. This is something I will always cherish. I long admired Ray's skills at listening to those searching for a community voice, creating a strong business environment in his community so social issues could be realized, and working within a budget, as mayor, so tax dollars were respected.

On behalf of the Delburne community, central Alberta, and indeed a grateful nation, I want to thank Ray Reckseidler for his 31 years of community service. I also want to thank his wife, Sheila for her service as the strong supportive partner of this hard-working and dedicated politician, a calling that is seldom recognized.

From the Dreesen family to the Reckseidler family, I thank them for being our friends.

* * *

[Translation]

YVON DURELLE

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Yvon Durelle, who is also known as the Fighting Fisherman, was born in the small Acadian village of Baie-Sainte-Anne in my riding of Miramichi—Grand Lake. Like many others of his generation, he left school at an early age to work on a fishing boat. However, Yvon developed a love of boxing and quickly earned a reputation as a tough opponent with a hard punch.

[English]

Capturing the Canadian middleweight championship in 1953, Durelle defeated opponents throughout Canada, the U.S., and Europe. Then came what was known as one of the most memorable fights in boxing history as he battled the great Archie Moore at the Montreal Forum in December 1958.

Boxing experts agree, Durelle was robbed of the world light heavyweight title that evening, but he gained the admiration of the boxing world and became a Canadian legend. I invite everyone to look up the fight and judge for themselves.

Yvon passed away in 2007, but his memory and story of perseverance lives on, as a billboard of the fighting fisherman welcomes everyone entering the community of Baie-Sainte-Anne.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the proposed government changes to pensions, as laid out in Bill

Statements by Members

C-27, would allow defined benefit plans in federally regulated businesses to be converted to targeted benefit plans. In other words, the financial risk would be shifted from employers to workers.

These changes represent a serious risk to the retirement security of Canadians, and the proposal was met with an outcry of opposition from my riding of Kootenay—Columbia and from across Canada. As one of my constituents said, "It is important for Canadians to have security in retirement, because poverty in retirement creates a myriad of social problems."

The NDP presented a motion calling on the Liberals to withdraw this attack on Canadian pensions, but to no avail. At this special time of year, filled with peace, joy, and love, the best present the Liberal government could give Canadians is to take Bill C-27, put it in a box, and return it to the Minister of Finance, stamped "Bah humbug, return to sender, no postage required".

* * *

●(1405)

[Translation]

180TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF SAINT-EUSTACHE

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 180th anniversary of the Battle of Saint-Eustache.

On December 14, 1837, as the rebellions of 1837-38 raged, Saint-Eustache was shaken by cannon fire and gunshots. The facade of the Saint-Eustache Church still bears the scars of this battle. On this day, let us remember what the patriots were fighting for.

Their demands were manifold, and their impact on our parliamentary system can still be seen today; among other things, they called for responsible government and appealed for fair representation between Upper and Lower Canada.

As the celebrations for the 150th anniversary come to a close, I urge all of my colleagues to honour a page in Canadian history that shaped the nation we know today. I want to wish everyone happy holidays, merry Christmas, and a happy new year.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, we reflected on the status of global human rights.

Human Rights Day was established in 1948 in the shadow of the Second World War, and commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration sets an international standard for fundamental rights. Events of 2017 have reminded us that these are far from guaranteed for countless people around the world.

Statements by Members

In Myanmar, violent ethnic persecution has forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, with little hope for a safe return, their crime being nothing more than their identity.

Throughout 2017, members of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights have studied the genocide faced by Christians and Yazidis; human rights violations in Burundi, South Sudan, Latin America, and Somalia; as well as the disturbing trends of human trafficking and child slavery.

These atrocities and many others cannot be pushed aside with the new year. Canadian leadership is needed now more than ever.

* * *

[Translation]

HANUKKAH

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the nights are growing longer and the winter solstice is almost here, but tonight, many of our homes will be full of light as the Jewish community starts celebrating Hanukkah.

[English]

Lighting the candles on the menorah is one of my favourite holiday traditions, especially as I drag out my grandmother's old menorah that still plays *Rock of Ages* on its music box.

However, my favourite part of the holiday is food, and Hanukkah is the best because of that deep fried food, like latkes and doughnuts.

[Translation]

Every December, and only December, I get out my deep fryer and fry up some delicious food. When I put it away again on January 1, I am already looking forward to next Hanukkah.

[English]

As I begin my celebrations and get ready to make doughnuts, I ask everyone here for some help. Please send me their best doughnut recipes. They can send them on Facebook or Instagram, but for the next week I will be at my deep fryer, making doughnuts.

The Speaker: I can feel the weight being added just listening to that.

The hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge.

* * *

H2 HOCKEY STRAPS

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Wayne Gretzky once said, “You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.”

[Translation]

I rise today to speak about two young entrepreneurs in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

[English]

David and Adam Nascimben, ages 12 and eight, had the determination to take the shot of a lifetime. Through their passion for hockey, the two brothers developed the H2 hockey straps.

[Translation]

To Canadians, hockey is not just a sport, it is a way of life.

[English]

For those of us who have played the game, we know the nightmare of using hockey tape.

David and Adam brought their original idea of replacing it with velcro to CBC's *Dragons' Den*, impressing the dragons and making our entire community proud.

[Translation]

I want to congratulate David and Adam on their success.

[English]

Their goal was to score a deal, and the boys scored big.

Mr. Speaker, and colleagues and fellow hockey lovers across this land, please join me in recognizing these innovative young entrepreneurs from my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

Merry Christmas, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was encouraged to hear that the B.C. government had decided to go ahead with the construction of the Site C dam. Located in my riding and just outside my home town of Fort St. John, this important project will have a positive impact on the local economy through the jobs created, the growth of local businesses, and the overall sense of confidence in the community.

This project was initiated by the B.C. Liberal government and in 2014 was approved by the federal environmental assessment process following the consultation based on scientific evidence. BC Hydro was provided with over 80 conditions to be met over the course of the project.

I personally have been asked by many residents about the future of Site C and I am happy to say that this project has been given the green light and will now continue. I, along with Senate colleague Richard Neufeld, join with them in congratulating British Columbians and all Canadians on the continuation of this environmentally sustainable green energy project.

At this time, I would like to wish you, Mr. Speaker, and all residents of Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies a very merry Christmas.

* * *

●(1410)

LIBYA

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring the attention of the House to the tragedy occurring in Libya. Recent reports have cast a light on the issue of desperate migrants from Africa being forced into the slave trade. In 2017, that is unacceptable.

Statements by Members

I join our Prime Minister and many leaders across the world in condemning these horrific atrocities.

We must always remember the painful lessons learned in our past so we may never repeat them. The slavery of innocent men, women, and children is happening as we speak, and we cannot remain quiet in the face of this great injustice. I support the United Nations' call for investigation into these allegations and it is my hope that those responsible will be brought to justice.

I call upon my colleagues to join me in denouncing these violations of human rights.

* * *

[*Translation*]

DAVENPORT

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary, I had the honour of presenting leadership awards to citizens of Davenport.

Over the years, these exceptional people have done their utmost to make Davenport a better community.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the Hon. Jean Augustine for attending and giving an inspirational speech on leadership. I also want to thank the first-ever Davenport Canada 150 Award recipients Michelle Gay, John Keating, Spiro Koumoudouros, Dyan Marie, Dave Meslin, Matteo Severino, Giuseppe Simonetta, Margaret Smith, Enzo Torrone, Florence Watt, Matthew Correia, Celina de Melo, Angela de Mesquita, Steve de Quintal, Fernando Costa, and Jack Eustáquio.

I thank them for all they have done to make Davenport a truly unique community and, in turn, Canada a better country.

[*Translation*]

I thank them all for making Davenport a truly unique community.

* * *

[*English*]

EDA ROJIET EZI

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Yazidi people will observe Eda Rojiet Ezi, a three-day fast that all Yazidis are expected to observe. Fasting occurs from dawn until sunset, and the nights are given to family time and prayer.

This is a time for Yazidis to connect with the divine, celebrate, and spend time with family and friends. During this time, Yazidis will also give back to those less fortunate and, I am told, will spend time reflecting on their many blessings.

To acknowledge that the Yazidi community has been through much in the last three years does not do justice to the atrocities that have been committed against the Yazidi people and that are ongoing. However, it is in defiance of their oppressors that many Yazidis will celebrate the feast this year. I have been told that this year it will be celebrated as a declaration that the Yazidi people have not, and will not, be defeated.

In this, I ask all Canadians to share this message and to stand behind the Yazidi community in solidarity and love as it marks this feast.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, the international community marked two solemn events: the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and UN Human Rights Day. Both occasions serve to underscore the entrenchment and advancement of global norms and laws regarding human rights, human security, and human dignity, a process of which Canada has always stood at the forefront.

As chair of the all-party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity, I urge all members to join me in marking these twin occasions by celebrating the important strides we have made, while also recognizing important work remains to be done to safeguard human rights across the globe.

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●(1415)

ABITIBI—BAIE-JAMES—NUNAVIK—EYYOU

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

[*English*]

It is perhaps fitting, Mr. Speaker, but I rise today to share the beauty of winter in Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. As the snow falls, even though the winds howl sometimes, an extended silent calm comes to Eeyou Istchee.

For us, as we say in Cree, *biboon* is a time to listen and learn from our wise people and from the strength of our forest. We move inward toward warmth, family, and friends. We share generously so that everyone can be well. We reflect. Needless to say, we eat a lot of good wild meat and fish. This winter, I hope everyone enjoys *biboon* like we do.

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

[*English*]

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BATTLEFORDS—LLOYDMINSTER

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Rosemarie Falk, the incoming member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, on her by-election win. Her win was momentous. Seven out of 10 voters cast their ballot for Rosemarie to be their new representative in Ottawa.

Saskatchewan sent the Prime Minister a clear message last night. It wants no part of his carbon tax, nor does it support his agenda of higher taxes and out-of-control spending. Saskatchewan has in no way benefited from the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

The incoming member for Battlefords—Lloydminster is excited to join the fight for hard-working Canadians who are fed up with having their taxes raised to pay for the Liberals' billion dollar deficits.

On behalf of my caucus colleagues, I congratulate all of our Conservative candidates for the campaigns they ran, delivering our positive Conservative vision to Canadians.

* * *

BY-ELECTIONS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday thousands of Canadians in four provinces turned out to take part in the democratic process and choose representatives to succeed the dedicated men and women who served before them. I congratulate all of the candidates for a hard-fought campaign, and thank the countless volunteers for their tireless spirit, energy, and dedication to their communities. A campaign is built in no small part on the efforts and enthusiasm of volunteers. It is thanks to them that we have the privilege to serve in this place.

Just like every other member of this House, I remember the passion and pride necessary to knock on doors and listen to as many constituents as humanly possible. I have no doubt that the new members for South Surrey—White Rock, Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Scarborough—Agincourt, and Battlefords—Lloydminster will each serve their constituents equally well with passion and drive. I look forward to working with them for all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister went to China to launch free trade negotiations, but the Chinese regime had something else in mind, even though the Prime Minister did everything he could to appease China and speed up takeovers of Canadian companies by waiving security reviews. The Prime Minister clearly has zero credibility when it comes to China.

How are Canadians supposed to trust this Prime Minister to act in their best interest?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to answering my colleague's questions, but first I would like to congratulate the four new members who were elected last night and who will be joining us here.

[English]

I also want to highlight the 24 people who stepped up across the country to put their names on ballots in the by-elections. All of us in this place know what it takes to put your name on a ballot. I congratulate all of them, and all of the volunteers who underpin the strength of our democracy.

I again look forward to congratulating the four new members when they arrive in this House. This was a good day for Canada, and a good day for our democracy.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course we congratulate all of those who presented their names in the by-elections, but it is interesting that the Prime Minister does not want to answer this question, because it is so embarrassing for him to have to come home empty-handed. He insulted Japan, Australia, and other trusted Asia-Pacific partners when he did not even bother to show up to meetings during the trans-Pacific partnership talks.

Now the message from our closest Asia-Pacific partners was clear: Canada has betrayed us. The Prime Minister's erratic behaviour has threatened Canadian jobs, hurt our credibility, and again showed his incompetence on the file. Why does the Prime Minister not come clean and admit that he just does not believe in free trade?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very hard to get trade deals that work for the good of Canadians. That is exactly what we focused on, in repairing the neglect that government had left the CETA deal in. We managed to close the deal by putting forward progressive elements that ensured that environmental rights, labour rights, and health standards will be respected. That is exactly what we are moving forward with NAFTA in ensuring that it will be good for Canadian workers and small businesses. This is why we are engaged in trade negotiations toward Asia, whether it is the CPTPP, whether it is China, whether—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not serve Canadian workers' interests when the Prime Minister keeps coming home empty-handed.

That said, it is being reported that in response to concerns raised by a disabled veteran's wife, the then minister for veterans affairs told her that, in his view, the Liberals had no obligation to help her because it was her choice to marry her husband. This minister, in typical fashion, is now denying any responsibility and is blaming the widow for his comments. Can the Prime Minister tell us who he believes: the veteran's widow or this minister?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes the concerns of Canadians very seriously. We have been working over the past two years to deliver to veterans and their families the kinds of support they need and deserve and, quite frankly, they did not get for 10 years under the Conservative government. On this issue, the minister takes these allegations seriously and has responded to them and apologized.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no shortage of examples of incompetence and mismanagement with this Prime Minister. Over a year ago, he said we urgently needed to fill a so-called capability gap and replace our Royal Canadian Air Force fighter fleet. However, instead of opening a bidding process to replace our 30-year-old fighter jets, he now wants to buy more 30-year-old fighter jets. Our military personnel need this new equipment now, not two elections from now.

What is he waiting for?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that our military personnel needed these new fighter jets years ago. The Conservative government was unable to deliver the equipment that our forces needed. That is why we are launching an open and transparent process to replace our entire fleet of fighter jets. In the meantime, we will need interim jets to fulfill our NORAD and NATO responsibilities. That is a reality that the Conservative government left us to deal with.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this Prime Minister who has changed the process so many times, and it is our men and women in the armed forces who are suffering for it. In 2012, Australia's auditor general identified numerous issues with the F/A-18 Hornets. They would require significant structural upgrades and repairs just to see service in Canada, and it is far more likely that we will spend billions of dollars just for spare parts. It is not just me who is questioning these decisions. Even the Australians cannot understand why we are buying their old planes rather than doing what they are doing, which is buying new planes.

If the Prime Minister is so keen on buying fixer-uppers, will he come over, because I have an old minivan I would love to show him?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the previous Conservative government failed over the course of 10 years to give the men and women of our armed forces the equipment necessary to do their jobs. It so completely botched the fighter jet procurement—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I know that the members are excited about used car sales, but I ask them each to take their turn, to listen when others have their turn, and to only speak when they have the floor.

The right hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

•(1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous Conservative government made such a mess of buying the needed fighter jets that we can no longer meet our NORAD and NATO obligations, which is why we need an interim fleet replacement while we proceed to the open and transparent competition that it should have held almost a decade ago.

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised an open, transparent, and merit-based appointment process. However, after dragging their feet for months, they appointed a second official languages commissioner because the first one was too partisan, a lobbying commissioner who had actually applied for the position of information commissioner, and a conflict of interest and ethics commissioner who has already been severely rebuked by the Auditor General.

How can the Prime Minister tell Canadians that these are the best candidates when the process is so flawed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we established a merit-based appointment process for choosing officers of Parliament and making government appointments that better reflect the diversity and quality of what Canadians have to offer. After 10 years of partisanship, we are proud of the process we have created, and we have great confidence in all our appointments.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says the process is open, but we know nothing about the government's selection criteria. He says it is transparent, but we know nothing about who is on the selection committees. He says it is merit-based, but we know nothing about the candidates.

Basically, what he is doing is giving the opposition a piece of paper with a name written on it that came out of nowhere, and then he wants us to comment on that name for seven days. This is what he calls a consultation.

Could the Prime Minister show some transparency and tell Canadians who was on the selection committee and who the candidates were?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ. We have built all kinds of transparency mechanisms into our appointment processes so the public can have confidence in the process.

We have made new appointments from coast to coast to coast to ensure that people interested in running for positions in the Senate, on the Supreme Court, or as officers of Parliament are free to do so as part of a process that was far too closed and partisan before we came along.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am beginning to suspect that the Prime Minister does not know what the words “open and transparent” actually mean. The law requires the Prime Minister to meaningfully consult with the other party leaders. What did the Liberals do? They sent us a “take it or leave it” letter with one name on it for a new Ethics Commissioner. That is not consultation; that is a sham. Canadians are starting to worry that this Prime Minister does not even care.

Oral Questions

For a Prime Minister who is actually under an ethics investigation, does he finally understand that we need a credible process to hire the watchdogs who work on behalf of all of us?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nominating an officer of Parliament is an extremely important process that we are glad we have engaged in with the members of the opposition.

We will continue to consult and ensure that the highest quality of people come forward, and are encouraged to apply, to make sure that our officers of Parliament, and indeed, nominations across the government, whether it be senators or Supreme Court justices, reflect the full skills and diversity this country has to offer.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he says “engaged”, but then he sends us a letter that says take it or leave it. New Democrats actually offered the Liberals a solution to this appointments mess, and it would actually help Liberals keep their campaign promise. Do members know what the Liberals did? They voted against it.

Let me remind the Prime Minister of Canada one more time: these watchdogs do not work for him. They work for Parliament on behalf of all Canadians. Will he pull the names, restart the process, and finally show a little respect for this place?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the officers of Parliament have the confidence of this House. If the officers of Parliament we have appointed do not have the confidence of the New Democratic Party, let it say so.

* * *

• (1430)

TAXATION

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 20 days, the new taxes on small business take effect. These changes promise to have a significant impact on businesses, on their operations, and ultimately, on their bottom line, which means in the new year, owners of businesses are going to be making the choice between raising prices for customers or laying off hard-working employees. New year, same old Liberals.

With 20 days to go, will the finance minister stop trying to avoid the scrutiny of Parliament and finally disclose the details of his new tax?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know how important it is for small businesses to plan. What we can say, importantly—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier and the other members to refrain from heckling and interrupting other members. Everyone has to wait their turn.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we know how important it is for small businesses to plan. What is really important

is that on January 1, they will be able to plan for a reduction in small business tax rates. One hundred per cent of small businesses in this country will have a reduction in taxes starting January 1.

Tomorrow we are going to announce, for that 3% of small businesses that split revenue with other family members, how they can do this very simply. We are looking forward to that, but most importantly, we are looking forward to helping small businesses.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister originally announced these changes in the dead of summer. Here we are, six months later, and this is the first time we are hearing when the details are going to be coming out. He said very soon in the fall, and today he is saying tomorrow. I do not know whether we can put actual stock in what we are going to be hearing tomorrow.

First he ruined summer, and now he is ruining Christmas for small business owners. When will the finance minister truly release the details of his tax plan and stop being such a Scrooge?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say, again, that 100% of small businesses will have a tax reduction starting January 1.

For that very small percentage, the 3% of small businesses that pass revenues to their families, of course they can do that, starting January 1, with simplified rules. Their taxes, which will be due in April 2019, I think they will have adequate time to work out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is what Robert Bernier of the École nationale d'administration publique had to say in response to all the conflicts of interest involving our Minister of Finance: “The Minister of Finance showed a clear lack of judgment”.

This is the same Minister of Finance who is imposing tax measures today that will negatively affect businesses and their employees, the transfer of businesses to the next generation, and all jobs across Canada.

When will the Prime Minister do the right thing and call on his finance minister to step down?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say that 100% of small and medium-sized businesses in this country will get a tax cut starting January 1, 2018. That is very important. As for the 3% of small and medium-sized businesses that currently split their revenues, we have an announcement for them tomorrow regarding the rules that will allow them to continue doing so in the new year.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the minister were in a classroom, he would be failing miserably.

Oral Questions

New measures will be effective January 1, which is just around the corner, and today we are learning that businesses will get the information tomorrow. January 1 is in a few days. These people plan, they create jobs, they work incredibly hard every day.

When will Canadians finally have the minister they deserve? Will the Prime Minister take responsibility and relieve the Minister of Finance of his duties?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, in a few weeks, on January 1, all small and medium-sized businesses in this country, 100% of SMEs, will enjoy a tax cut. That is very important.

The 3% of businesses that split revenue with other family members will hear the rules tomorrow. They will have a little over a full year to work out their tax return for the next year.

•(1435)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the finance minister took office, the small business tax rate was already at 9%. He raised it back up to 10.5%, and now he expects us to congratulate him for reversing his own tax increase, but he has another tax increase to come. He is going to bring in new rules for families that share the work and the income of their businesses. Tax court judges say it will lead to battles in court.

How much time is he leaving them to prepare? It is less than three weeks. While he is on a sunny island somewhere, small businesses will be scrambling over Christmas. Why?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to start with the facts. When we came into office, the federal tax rate on small businesses was 11%. It came down to 10.5%. We are now reducing it down to 10%, so it will be lower for every small business in this country.

What we are going to do tomorrow is make clear, for the 3% of small businesses that are passing revenue to their family members, clear rules so that they actually will not have to work with the Canada Revenue Agency. That will help them. For that number of businesses that are passing revenue to family members not in the business, that will cease in order to make our tax system more fair.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in reality, the minister, when he first took office, took the gifts from under the small business Christmas tree. He raised the tax rate from 9%, which it was set to be at, right up to 10.5%. Now he expects us to give him a cookie because he is putting those same gifts back under the tree that he took away in the first place.

The minister has tried to raise taxes on diabetics, on people with autism, on small businesses, and now, with the GST, on his very own carbon tax. When will he stop taking so much money from the people who pay the bills in this country?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to talk about the reductions in taxes we have made across this country for nine million Canadians as our first act of government. We lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians. Nine out of 10 families saw a significant change of \$540, and of course, \$330 for an individual.

What is going to happen on January 1, 2018, is that every single small business in this country will get a reduction in its tax rate from 10.5% to 10%. That is important. The following January, it will go down again, from 10% to 9%. These are efforts to make sure our tax system—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix file is a complete shambles. One in two public servants is affected, which is half of the public service. Students, pensioners, executives, family members, no one is immune.

These people are not statistics. Actual people are losing their homes and experiencing tremendous financial strain. Public servants and unions have been speaking out about the system for two years now, but nothing much has been done to fix this fiasco.

Is the government waiting for all public servants to be affected before it takes action and finds a solution?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, resolving this situation is my top priority. It is unacceptable that people are not being paid. We are doing everything we can and leaving no stone unturned. We are doing things that the previous government did not do.

[English]

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is a time to help those less fortunate, and our federal public servants traditionally give generously to charity through payroll deductions. However, with the Phoenix boondoggle, federal employees are nervous to enrol for deductions that can lead to more errors. Last year, payroll deductions for charity fell significantly.

The Liberals' inaction is not only affecting our public servants, it is also hurting our charities. How much has the ongoing Phoenix mess cost charities this year?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member that resolving this is my top priority. We understand the difficult position we have put public servants and their families in, and we are leaving no stone unturned to make sure that we resolve this as quickly as possible. In the meantime, public service employees have access to emergency pay services. They have access to their managers, and they are doing whatever they can. The public servants at Miramichi are working hard to resolve this for their colleagues.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two million families in Canada have jobs that rely on trade with the United States and Mexico. The Liberals' priorities for NAFTA announced this summer did not even mention the auto industry, the softwood lumber industry, and thousands of jobs in the agricultural sector. These sectors were ignored completely until midway through the rounds in the fall. With NAFTA on the brink of failure, how is the government now changing its strategy to protect these jobs dependent on trade?

• (1440)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not changing our strategy one iota, because we entered the negotiations with a clear plan, and that plan is to defend the Canadian national interest with fact-based arguments. To defend the auto sector and to defend the natural resources sector, we are at the table this week in Washington putting forward fact-based arguments. We will always stand for the national interest and for Canadian values.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only clear plan we can see from the government is NAFTA failing. The only clear plan we see on TPP is Japan, Australia, and other countries furious with us. The only plan we see on China is a Hail Mary pass from that Prime Minister that came up many yards short.

When will the Prime Minister remove himself from Canada's trade file, get out of the way of the minister, and start standing up for the jobs that depend on trade?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud and privileged to work closely with our fine Prime Minister and our outstanding trade negotiators on this crucial issue. I would like to remind the member opposite that it was our government and our team that brought home CETA, the biggest trade deal Canada has done in two decades. We did that by working hard and by being tough where necessary, and that is the approach we are taking with NAFTA.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I have heard a lot today from the member for Abbotsford, although he has not had the floor. I would ask him to try to restrain himself. I know there are subjects that are very dear to his heart, but I know he knows the rules, and I know he will want to contain himself, despite his enthusiasm.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all free trade in Canada, including CETA, is an accomplishment of the former Conservative government.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal government is racking up failure after failure on international trade. NAFTA is falling apart, the trans-Pacific partnership is not being taken seriously since the Liberals do not even bother to attend important meetings, and while we still wait for a softwood lumber agreement, our industry has been penalized with countervailing duties for over a year now.

Will the Liberals stop behaving like amateurs and take action once and for all on all of these issues?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to once again talk about our approach to international trade, particularly where NAFTA is concerned.

We have the best negotiators in the world, and I am very proud of their work. The national interest is Canada's top priority, and we will defend our national interest and our values at the negotiating table.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister failed to get a deal on softwood lumber when he had a chance to with President Obama. He put TPP in jeopardy by failing to show up for a meeting, which was a slap in the face to our trading partners. Despite giving the Chinese free reign on purchasing Canadian companies, he still could not get a deal done with them. The current Liberal government has made mistake after mistake on trade. How can Canadians trust this Prime Minister to protect their interests?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do you know why Canadians can trust us? Canadians can trust us, first and foremost, because Canada has the best professional negotiators in the world on trade, and I am proud to work alongside them.

Canadians can trust us because we are 100% committed to defending the national interests in trade negotiations; first and foremost, in the NAFTA trade negotiations.

I would like to say for the Conservatives that capitulation is not a negotiating strategy.

* * *

• (1445)

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lack of communication between the Liberals and public servants on Phoenix is extremely frustrating. In my riding, I currently have about 30 open cases to resolve Phoenix issues, and someone is even owed \$30,000 in back pay. Many have serious concerns with the year end approaching, and it is especially chaotic for public service pensioners who are retiring before their pay issues are ever resolved.

Will the Liberals address these glaring concerns and help Canadians suffering under this horrible system?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the difficult position our public servants and their families are in, and we are putting in place a number of measures to help them along the way. First, there are emergency pay services they have access to. We are improving technology. We are working on our governance. We are improving our policies. We are taking steps, and had they been taken in the first place, we would not be in this position.

Oral Questions

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, representatives from PSAC met with MPs from all parties to highlight the many problems public servants continue to face. The Auditor General has confirmed that Phoenix is a disaster, with no end in sight.

Where is the government's plan? We know it appreciates them, but where is the plan?

With the holidays and tax season approaching, many public servants will be in for another period of uncertainty and stress. Will the government commit to, at least, covering the tax implication for Phoenix errors for all public servants?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate that, as the holidays approach and as the year end approaches, it puts our public servants in an incredibly difficult position, given the realities of Phoenix.

We are working on improving the technology. We are working on our governance. We are taking the steps necessary both to resolve it in the short term and also to have a state-of-the-art pay system in the long term.

We are doing what we can, and quite frankly, we are working very closely with the unions, because this problem will be solved by public servants for public servants.

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INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Internet is not a luxury but a necessity in today's world. While it is important to invest in infrastructure and support access to Internet service, we also need to maintain equal access to information provided to it. We need net neutrality.

Just this past weekend, the member from Beauce said we needed less net neutrality and the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka said he disagreed. It seems the official opposition cannot take a position.

Could the minister clearly reiterate the government's position on net neutrality in Canada?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if the leader of the official opposition could provide clarification on what its position is, because the member for Beauce, who is the official innovation critic said one thing and the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka says he disagrees with him.

Let me be clear. Our government stands to support net neutrality. We support an open Internet. We support the CRTC framework for net neutrality, because we know an open Internet is critical for our economy and our democracy.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not have lap dogs on this side. We have people who think.

Speaking of really important issues, the Liberals are buying rusted-out fighter jets from Australia, even though the defence minister actually said they would never buy used planes. We know these eighties-era jets are rusted out because a 2012 Australian report said corrosion was so bad that the number of active flying days had to be cut.

This is not a bucket of bolts. This is a bucket of rusted-out bolts. Why are they going back on their word?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated before, I appreciate the member's enthusiasm for providing for the Canadian Armed Forces, but if this were true, they would have solved this problem a long time ago.

Today, along with my colleagues, I was very proud to stand up and announce the start of the competition. It is a full, open competition to replace our fighter fleet with 88 fighter aircraft, not 65, as the previous government had put out.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the government promised that it would have new fighter jets in our country by 2021. Now the announcement today is that we will not see them until at least 2025. That was the Liberals' promise. It had nothing to do with the previous government; that was their promise.

Why do they not move ahead immediately to have a real procurement, so we can get some real fighter jets, instead of this bucket of bolts from Australia?

• (1450)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is a good day for Canada. We announced that, for the first time in 30 years, we are going to make a significant investment in the Royal Canadian Air Force. First of all, we announced the start of the process for a full fleet replacement that will have fighter jets in place between 2025 and 2030, and in the meantime, we are supplementing our existing fleet with an interim CF-18 purchase from Australia.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Canadians tell me frequently how much they are fed up with people heckling in this place, so I would ask members to keep that in mind and have a little respect for this institution.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants to purchase a fleet of eighties-era Australian jets. The Australians no longer want them. They do not want to put one more red cent into repairing them, they are such garbage.

Everyone says there is no capability gap. We have spent the past year and a half proving that there is no capability gap. The last thing we need is more reckless spending from this government. The minister himself said in February that he would not buy second-hand jets.

Why buy 18 old, used, utterly useless clunkers?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, if the previous government had taken this seriously, it would have replaced our fighters a long time ago. We do have a capability gap and we cannot meet our NORAD and NATO commitments simultaneously; hence, the reason we will be supplementing our fleet. However, more importantly, we are launching a full competition, an open competition, to replace the entire fleet with 88 new aircraft.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the only one who believes what the defence minister is saying is the defence minister himself. No one else believes him. The situation is clear. We are going to spend \$500 million on a bunch of old Australian clunkers to fill a fictional capability gap that the minister invented and that is completely false. Furthermore, we have learned that the tender process is going to begin in 2025, whereas the Prime Minister himself said we would have our planes by 2021. I do not want to hear him answer that we did nothing. We did plenty for the Canadian Forces, including the Galaxy aircraft, the Cyclones, the ships, and the *Asterix*. The Conservative government worked hard for the Canadian Forces. Those folks over there are skating around in circles.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a capability gap and we are talking about other capability gaps. There is one with supply ships. If a capability gap is not fixed, it turns into a capability loss, and that is exactly what happened with the previous government with our joint supply ships and did not replace them properly. With our new defence policy, a fully funded defence policy, we are going to make sure that our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces are well looked after.

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*[Translation]***PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ms. Boisvert retired from the CRA in April 2016. On June 15 of that year, she got a paycheque by mistake, and now she is being told to pay back the gross amount even though deductions were taken. She has taken steps to resolve the matter, but the full gross amount is being withheld from her severance pay. My office has been trying to reach someone since February to clean up this Phoenix mess, which comes on top of so many others, but nobody even acknowledges our communications.

When will the minister help Ms. Boisvert and admit that her pay system is broken beyond repair?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are doing our best to make things better for public servants who are suffering because of Phoenix. People not getting paid is unacceptable. We have procedures in place to help public servants. If the member gives me the individual's name, we will do our best to fix the problem.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix pay system has been a disaster for Parks Canada

employees. Even while working hard to help Canadians celebrate Canada 150, they found themselves going months without proper paycheques. Adding even more injury to this insult, these workers have been without a contract since 2014.

When will the government fix this Phoenix fiasco for our public servants, and when will it show Parks Canada employees respect by bringing a fair offer to the bargaining table?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have tremendous respect for the important work done by our hard-working public servants. We have actually re-established a culture of respect for our public servants. When we formed government, all collective bargaining agreements had expired with Canadian public servants. Some had been expired for four years. We negotiated in good faith, to the point that today 90% of public servants in Canada have collective bargaining agreements. That has been done in good faith with our public servants, and we will continue to work hard to serve Canadians with our world-class public service.

* * *

● (1455)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier in question period the Prime Minister claimed that his minister had actually apologized to a disabled veteran's wife who was insulted by the minister. Now that turns out to simply not be true. The CBC is reporting that, in fact, he is attacking her for speaking out against him and has not apologized.

I want to give the Prime Minister an opportunity to correct the record. Will he admit that his minister has not apologized, and will he start showing Kim Davis the respect that she deserves?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes very seriously the responsibility of responding to Canadians' concerns and helping our veterans and helping Canadians with disabilities, and we will continue to.

The minister responded to those particular allegations and he apologized for earlier ones.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, instead of apologizing, the office of the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities used Facebook screenshots to discredit a citizen.

Let us review the facts. The minister insulted thalidomide victims. He was condescending toward a young mom. He was rude to the wife of a veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder by telling her that she chose to marry him.

When did blaming the victim become the norm for this government? When will the minister show some compassion? When will he take responsibility for what he did and show that he is worthy of his title?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to improving the lives of veterans and their families.

We are aware of the concerns of Ms. Davis. That is why we have improved financial security. That is why we have improved the front-line services. That is why we have opened offices. That is why we have improved caregiver benefits.

I am working on meeting with as many Canadians as we can to improve their lives. I am also working on myself to improve interaction on a go forward basis.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about what has happened here.

First, the minister said the Liberals have no duty to a disabled veteran's wife. Then, his staff tried to shame and discredit her when she spoke out by sending to the media multiple screen shots of her personal Facebook posts in a veterans support group. Instead of being compassionate, the minister launched a taxpayer-funded political attack on a veteran's wife.

Why did the minister order his staff to publicly humiliate Kim Davis instead of telling them to do their jobs and help veterans and their families? Why is the PM okay with it?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with Kim Davis some two years ago, and I thanked her and her husband for their tremendous service to our country. I went to the fact that our government was increasing financial security, that our government was opening offices, that our government was improving their lives, that our government was going to improve the outcome of the caregiver benefit. These were a result of direct conversation with veterans and their families.

I too remember specifically thanking Ms. Davis, particularly for her and her family's service to country. I told her that we would work as hard as we could to benefit both her and her family.

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*[Translation]***HUMAN RIGHTS**

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday was International Human Rights Day, the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

[English]

Could the hon. Minister of Justice please update the House on the very important work she is doing to promote and protect human rights in Canada?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, along with my colleagues the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, I had the honour to host the first summit on human rights with my colleagues from the provinces and territories, the first summit in almost 30 years.

Meeting with civil society and indigenous leaders, we discussed how we can work together to ensure that Canada continues to comply with its international human rights obligations, as well as to ensure that we remain a leader in the world with respect to human rights.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, women who have undergone female genital mutilation suffer infections, difficult urination and childbirth, pain during intercourse, and more. Raising awareness of FGM is a core part of the fight against it. This is why it is listed in Canada's citizenship guide as a practice that Canada does not tolerate. No one can put nuance around the violent removal of a woman's clitoris, and if they try to, we should not listen to them.

Will the minister end his consultations and decide today that warnings about FGM belong in Canada's citizenship guide?

● (1500)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that FGM is an abhorrent practice. It is against the laws of Canada. I can assure members of this House that the new guide will reflect Canada's diversity and laws, including the laws on gender-based violence. It will highlight and include, in a better way than the previous government, visible minorities, LGBTQ2 communities, the contributions of women, francophone communities, and indigenous peoples. We will listen to the experts. We will produce and introduce a non-partisan guide, unlike the previous government.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Essex, my office has been busy trying to help the many people who have not been paid because of the Phoenix pay system debacle. In one case, an employee was hired in 2015, and has worked so hard for the government that she has been promoted twice. Not only does she have more responsibility and a heavier workload, she has also not been properly compensated in over two years and is owed over \$12,000 in back pay. It is disgraceful. The Liberals keep telling my office that the case is under third-party escalation, but there have been no changes and absolutely no help for this woman.

When will this minister stop blaming the Conservatives and fix this shameful mess the Liberals have made?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are completely committed to resolving Phoenix. Fixing this is my number one priority. Make no mistake, this was mishandled from the beginning when it was treated like a cost-cutting measure instead of the complex business transformation initiative that it should have been treated as. We are getting to the bottom of the technological, governance, and policy mishaps that happened because of the decisions made by the previous government, and I can assure everyone that we are on top of this.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 10th anniversary since the motion on Jordan's principle was unanimously passed in this House. It highlighted the need for a child-first principle when it came to jurisdictional disputes involving the care of first nations children. The previous government completely ignored this motion, failed to take action, and in doing so, first nations children continued to be forgotten.

Can the hon. Minister of Indigenous Services please update this House as to what is being done on Jordan's principle.

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago today in this House, a motion was passed in honour of Jordan River Anderson, a first nations child who was denied access to care because of jurisdictional disputes. After almost a decade of inaction, we are making sure that no first nations child goes through what Jordan did. To this date, I am pleased to report that we have approved 29,000 requests for care, an approval rate of over 99%. We will make sure that every first nations child has access to the care they need.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many reports suggests there are up to 100,000 Canadians on the no-fly list. The Liberal government is silent on the actual number of innocent Canadians who are impacted by this. Canadians, including children, on the no fly-list face repeated travel hassles despite being cleared time and again by federal agencies. After two years, we have a lot of Liberal promises but little action.

Will this minister finally commit to a real, immediate, and fair redress system so that parents can travel with their children this Christmas?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the research reports today are highly speculative, but the point is simply this. We are dealing with a flawed system that was implemented about 10 years ago by the previous government, and we are trying very hard to fix that system. It requires new legislation, new regulations, and a new computer system built from the ground up. The first step, the legal authority, is contained in Bill C-59, and I am sure that all members of Parliament will want to vote for this legislation.

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although we are in the middle of the busy holiday shopping season, sales are going to be down for some merchants this year.

As everyone knows, more and more people are shopping online. When it comes to shops, all merchants are subject to the same rules; online, however, that is not the case. Quebec businesses have to pay taxes, but foreign companies do not. If this continues, all of our shops are going to die off.

Why is the Canadian government working against local businesses?

• (1505)

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that e-commerce is critical to our economy. Overall, we are investing in small businesses. That is why we reduced the tax rate for small businesses.

We are making sure that we are also investing in innovation to create opportunities for small businesses to grow in scale, so they can provide more opportunities and more jobs. That is why the unemployment rate has dropped from 7% to 6.4%. That is why over 600,000 jobs have been created. We are focused on job creation and growth, and better outcomes for consumers.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 72% of Quebecers, the Government of Quebec, our artists, our producers, the union, and management are all opposed to the special treatment of Netflix by the Minister of Canadian Heritage quite simply because this precedent is a threat to our culture.

However, as we saw at yesterday's meeting with the Minister of Finance, no one from anywhere else in Canada wanted to address the issue.

Is the Minister of Canadian Heritage jeopardizing our distinct culture in the name of the Canadian consensus?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of protecting culture and that is why we are taking concrete action.

We have invested \$2.3 billion, the largest investment in 30 years by the federal government, in our creative industries and the protection and support of the production of French and English content.

We also decided to have the courage to modernize our system. Our laws date back to 1991, before the advent of the Internet. We will modernize the Broadcasting Act to ultimately protect our culture in the digital age.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of a delegation of ministers of justice from across Canada: the Honourable Andrew Parsons, Minister of Justice, Public Safety, and Attorney General for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador; the Honourable Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Yukon; the Honourable Louis Sebert, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the Northwest Territories; and the Honourable Jeannie Ehaloak, Minister of Justice for Nunavut.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROYAL ASSENT

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

December 12, 2017

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada, will proceed to the Senate Chamber today, December 12, 2017, at 5:15 p.m., for the purpose of giving Royal Assent to certain bills of law.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Wallace

* * *

EXPUNGEMENT OF HISTORICALLY UNJUST CONVICTIONS ACT

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On behalf of the Minister of Justice, I would like to table, in both official languages, a charter statement on Bill C-66, An Act to establish a procedure for expunging certain historically unjust convictions and to make related amendments to other Acts.

While I am on my feet, I want to express the appreciation of the government to all members on all sides of the House who have facilitated the prompt procedure of this legislation through the House of Commons.

Government Orders

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[English]

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin where I was before I was cut off by our wonderful question period.

I will go back to what had me screaming “serenity now”, which was the quote from the House leader regarding the elimination of the regional economic ministries. She said, “Regional expertise with national expertise is a way for it to work better together to create a synergy, to take a whole-of-government approach.”

At first, I thought this was a bill about nothing. It kind of codifies what the government has already done, which is eliminate the regional offices, such as the western diversification ministry. The government tells us not to worry, that the Minister of Innovation from Mississauga will look after Alberta's needs. However, it is very clear that this is not happening.

In Alberta, since the government has taken over, we have not seen unemployment such as this since the national energy program. In Alberta, we have not seen issues like we are right now with the economy since 1981 with the national energy program. However, on this side of the House, we have put forward some policy suggestions to address this issue. We put forward an Alberta task force.

Normally, in the old days, we could have a regional minister to look after Alberta's interests. Currently, we have three Liberal MPs to do that. We used to have four, but there were issues and one moved on. However, we have three left, and, unfortunately, all three have been as silent as crickets when it comes to defending our energy program.

We put through a motion asking the House to support energy east. The three Liberal MPs sat quiet and did not vote to support energy east. We saw what happened just recently, when energy east was killed by the government. The National Energy Board, under direction of the government, moved back the goal posts time and again. Unlike any other industry in Canada, it was decided that upstream and downstream emissions had to be measured.

We subsidized Bombardier with its wonderful planes, and I hope we finally get the C Series. For Air Canada, if it is listening, I am tired of taking the Embraer E-190 back to Edmonton. Hopefully we will get that C Series soon. However, these are carbon emitting, pollution emitting planes, yet we subsidize them. Recently, we saw money being given to Ford, which makes cars. These cars are not running on pixie dust. They are running on gas, which emits pollution. There is a hypocrisy in that Alberta oil is bad, but pollution emitting industries in Quebec and Ontario are good. This is why we need a western diversification minister from Alberta standing up for Alberta rights.

Government Orders

One of the things we also asked for, but did not get, was money for orphaned wells. I think the PBO has estimated that it will cost about a billion dollars to clean up the orphaned wells. People walked away from developing these wells because of various regulations brought in by the federal government and the rates-monopoly NDP.

What did we get? In committee for estimates, my colleague for Calgary Shepard asked the finance minister about the government giving \$30 million to the Alberta government. We asked if this was money from the federal government or if the NDP Government of Alberta asked for it. The finance minister was not even able to answer that question. He was not able to justify why it was only \$30 million. He could not even answer why the money was being given. Who asked for the money? Was it a federal government initiative or provincial government initiative? Again, having the regional minister for western diversification based in Mississauga is not doing Alberta any good.

Obviously, this extends to northern gateway. This pipeline would have gone through British Columbia up to the Kitimat area to get our oil to market. It was supported by reams of first nations, cleared by the NEB, counselled by the government. Again, Liberal members from Alberta sat quietly. We have also seen Liberal members in committee for the report on ACOA after these changes, where the waiting time for a response was tripled without a regional minister. It is very clear that having the Minister of Innovation, great guy that he is, no doubt, representing Atlantic provinces, western diversification, northern Ontario, and Quebec is not working despite the government desperately trying to claim that a whole-of-government approach will fix things.

• (1515)

I was talking earlier about the bill, Bill C-24, being about nothing, and what we could have done with this time instead. I mentioned that the operations committee put through a very thorough study, with recommendations, on updating the whistle-blower act.

At committee, we heard horror stories of people's lives being destroyed when they came forward. We heard from Allan Cutler, famous of course for being the whistle-blower who led to the sponsorship scandal under the Chrétien and Paul Martin governments. He was basically run out of town for daring to bring to light that money was being taken from Canadian taxpayers and funnelled through sponsorship agencies to the Liberal government.

We heard of a gentleman, a contractor who was fixing bathrooms in a prison in British Columbia, who discovered asbestos. He brought it forward to the government and he was basically investigated by the government and had his contract taken away. He apparently has now been blacklisted by the government from working on any other jobs for it. This is a gentleman who came forward not only for the protection of his staff, but also the inmates and public workers in the prison. He has been blackballed, his life has been destroyed, and his company has been taken away.

We heard from a lady who worked in the foreign service about 20 years ago. She had brought to light the fact that hundreds of thousands of dollars was being spent in the foreign service. Even though we have perfectly good diplomatic housing, mansions almost, that money was taken away to spend on other apartments, which was a waste of money. Maybe if there were 10 of them we

would have had enough to build another ice rink. This was half a million dollars, probably in 1980's dollars, that was wasted. When she brought this forward, the government fired her and destroyed her. It actually sued her for bringing to light government ineptness and corruption.

Therefore, it is very clear we need a strengthening of the whistle-blower act.

What did we end up with? We ended up with a unanimous report. We worked very close with the NDP and our Liberal colleagues. We put together a report. It was widely praised by the who is who of the whistleblowing community in Canada. Ian Bron, Allan Cutler, David Hutton, Joe Friday, the Integrity Commissioner, all stepped forward and said that this great work needed to be followed up.

Unfortunately, what happened was the Treasury Board president took the report and basically threw it in the trash. He sent us a response saying that he agreed with the opinion of the committee, the witnesses' disclosures, and I continue with my *Seinfeld* theme, yada yada yada, the usual stuff. Then he said that he would not follow up on any of the legislative items. Of the 25 recommendations we put through, I think 15 required legislative change, but the Treasury Board president did not want to do that. Instead, he is going to update a web page and ensure there is a bit more training for supervisors. All the stuff we currently have, which does not protect public servants, he is just going to do a bit more of.

This is interesting as well. He is going to have the head of HR for the Treasury Board follow up a lot more and be a bit more partisan. This same person from HR, who is theoretically the head of all HR for the public service, told us at committee that it was more important for her to protect ADMs and deputy ministers and not actual whistle-blowers. Therefore, we basically have the fox in charge of the hen house in this case.

Government Orders

I bring this up because it is an example of the items we could have looked at instead of Bill C-24. One of the Liberal colleagues at committee asked why we did not follow up with the whistle-blower act. We were told there was no legislative time. However, we have legislative time to look at a bill to codify issues that the government has been operating under for the last two years. We are spending time at committee studying it. We are at third reading today, rushing through things, to study the elimination of the minister for western diversification, which the government has been doing since day one anyway. Why are we wasting our time on a bill about nothing when we could be working on substantial legislation protecting whistle-blowers?

I am going to read a couple of comments from some of the whistle-blowers with respect to the actions of the Treasury Board president.

• (1520)

Allan Cutler, who was the whistle-blower behind the sponsorship scandal about money awarded to Liberal Party-linked ad firms to do no real work and then funnelled back into the Liberal Party, said:

The Committee and the vast majority of witnesses recommended changes. The decision to not take action is the decision to do nothing. It makes all the committee work and testimony meaningless. The question now should be asked, "Why did the government even undertake the review when it knew it would ignore the results?"

Why are we bothering with Bill C-24 when it is codifying stuff that the Liberals are already doing and does not need to be written law, but ignoring whistle-blowers?

The Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, Joe Friday, commented, "I am disappointed that the Government response to the Committee's report, tabled in Parliament on Monday, October 16th, proposed no legislative changes". While he welcomed and supported any and all administrative and operational changes, he was, "disappointed that the opportunity was not taken to make formal legislative changes to improve the whistleblowing system at this time."

Again, we have witnesses saying that this is important legislation, the gentleman who is headed the Integrity Commission is saying that, yet the government does nothing. I am sure members on that side of the House are saying, yes, we understand Bill C-24 is a complete waste of time, not that there is anything wrong with that. However, there is a lot wrong with this. It is time that is taken away from proper legislation, such as trying to address issues of whistleblowing and other issues that the government passed by.

I am disappointed. I am sure Canadians who are looking for changes in the whistle-blower act are disappointed as well.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member for Edmonton West took the opportunity, in discussing Bill C-24, to launch personal attacks against certain ministers on this side of the House. However, I am glad he has acknowledged that this is not about gender parity or equality. Some of his colleagues on the other side do not share his view, but I will let that division in his caucus remain.

I have two questions for the member. First, does he not believe that equality of voices is important, as well as the portfolios that are represented, and that Bill C-24 would give equality to the voices?

Second, if he thinks this legislation is a waste of time, why has he spent the last 20 minutes talking about it?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry if my hon. colleague disagrees with us pointing out the horrible actions of the sports minister, insulting and attacking people who are suffering from thalidomide, an issue that arose so many years ago, or bringing up the fact that the finance minister is being investigated by the Ethics Commissioner. People from the Liberal government have stated that the bill is about equality. We heard that at committee until the NDP witness, a gender studies professor, told them the bill was dishonest by pushing gender equity.

I fully believe we should have equality of opportunity and I am perfectly fine with a gender balanced cabinet. What I disagree with is that Bill C-24 has been somewhat a bill about nothing. Everything the government is currently doing, whether it is paying ministers of state more, calling them full ministers, or eliminating the various regional minister's roles, has been done since day one.

Why are we taking up all this time when there are so many other more important items that we are not addressing? Again, there is the whistle-blower act. We were told by one of the government members that there was no legislative time. Why is the priority codifying issues the government does not need, while ignoring more important legislation?

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with what my colleague said. If he did not think it was worthwhile the legislation, why did he talk about it? For most of his speech, he criticized what the Liberal government had been doing over the last two years. He even went back to the Chrétien days to try and throw in some criticism.

How can the member square that with the results last night in four by-elections? His party happened to lose what used to be a strong Conservative seat to the Liberals. Does he really think his criticism today, and in the months previous to this, has paid off well for the strength of not just his party, but for the leadership of the party?

• (1525)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me a chance to address the previous comment about waste. Talking about this is a waste. This is a democracy and this is called debate. I realize the Liberals believe that only they are allowed to have ideas. Disagreeing with their ideas seems to send them into an apocalyptic mood, that only their ideas matter. It does not matter what we are talking about, debate is debate. If I disagree with the bill, and that is why I am sent here, I will mention that I disagree with it. Whether it is horrible legislation or a waste of time legislation, it is my right and my duty to speak to it.

Government Orders

I am very happy to mention that across the four by-elections, our popular vote went up considerably, but their popular vote did not. The Liberals dropped in Newfoundland where they lost the ACOA minister. They dropped in Scarborough where they got rid of one of the regional ministers from northern Alberta. They dropped in Saskatchewan where, funny enough, they also lost the western diversification minister.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was able to get here in time to hear my colleague talk about the loss of regional ministers. Could he further expand and provide some more context to the centralization of the government? It is similar to what I saw in a New Democratic government in Manitoba when it was looking at tracking everything back into the city of Winnipeg.

We have a very centralized situation for development across the country, where it appears as if one area has much more knowledge about how the rest of Canada would operate than it does on the ground in those areas of those regions, not necessarily provinces but regions of Canada. I would like him to have the opportunity to expand on that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his hard work on the file. There is value to having the economic ministries. I look again at Alberta. We are in crisis. In Edmonton, the unemployment rate is 8.2%. In Calgary, it is 8.3%. People are suffering. We have Uber drivers, with two different engineering degrees, who cannot find work. The usage of our food bank in Edmonton is up 80,000 customers a month.

Thankfully there is some good support and we are stepping up to help those people, but we are in need in Alberta. We need a voice for Alberta and that could have been served previously by someone like the western diversification minister. It is not being served by the current senior Liberal minister, the MP for Edmonton Mill Woods. For example, for infrastructure transit funding, Alberta gets underfunded 14% per capita. The infrastructure minister is based in Alberta and we are underfunded.

Energy east was steamrolled and crushed by the government constantly changing the goal posts. We have no one in Alberta inside the government at the cabinet table representing Alberta and western interests, standing and saying these are jobs for Alberta, these are jobs for western Canada. These regional ministries do have a value and they have been taken away by the government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have news for the member across the way. Under the Harper regime, the province of Alberta did quite poorly with respect to the western diversification fund. Obviously the member across the way has not actually looked at the numbers.

The legislation does say that we do not need those regional ministers. Instead we want to have a minister who has a national perspective, a national focus on developing our country, much like we have a national minister of infrastructure, ministers who are quite capable and able of doing the right thing for all regions of the country.

We have members of Parliament advocate for their regions. Cabinet ministers have a broader picture of the national interest and they are quite able and competent to so, ensuring that through their

departments, the regions are working together to build a stronger, healthier economy in all regions.

Would the member not agree that the net benefit of Canada is of utmost importance?

• (1530)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his long statement and short question.

The benefit to Canada is utmost, which is why we need a strong Alberta. A strong Alberta allowed his province, under the Harper era, to be highest recipient of equalization payments, mostly from the province of Alberta.

I have to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for pointing out how poorly the three Liberal MPs from Alberta are doing. Instead of actually saying “look at the great job”, it is “oh, they are actually representing everyone else”. He has made it clear they are not representing Alberta at all, which makes clear why we need a western diversification minister to represent their interests in Ottawa, rather than the three MPs we currently have striving to represent Ottawa in Alberta.

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act. This is a technical bill, and it would fulfill the Prime Minister's commitment to formalize the legislation to ensure that there is a one-tier ministry. As I think we all understand by now, the Salaries Act authorizes payment, out of the consolidated revenue fund, of a ministerial salary to individuals who occupy the positions listed in the act. The act currently lists the positions of prime minister and 34 specific ministries.

When the government took office in November 2015, five of the positions that the Prime Minister wanted in his ministry and in his cabinet were not positions listed in the Salaries Act. That meant they could not be paid for their ministerial responsibilities under the Salaries Act and they could not be supported by the public service in the carrying out of their responsibilities. The five positions are 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 the Minister of Status of Women. Because the Salaries Act could not accommodate the priorities of the government, the five ministers were appointed pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act and they are paid under the Appropriation Act. Their legal title is minister of state.

Government Orders

Historically, ministers of state have often been considered as junior ministers. They have not always been members of cabinet and when they have not, they could not bring matters to cabinet for consideration on their own, a cabinet minister had to sponsor them. Ministers of state were most often not given statutory authority to exercise in their own right statutory duties in relation to which they were directly accountable. Instead, they were assigned to assist a senior minister in the carrying out of that minister's responsibilities. The senior minister retained all the statutory authority and accountability. For some prime ministers, that was an arrangement that worked. It was the prerogative of former prime ministers, as it will be the prerogative of future prime ministers, to appoint ministers of state as junior ministers, to assign them as assisting roles only, and to decide whether they would sit as members of cabinet. I am certain that past ministers of state were valued and contributing members of the ministry, but they were not always members of the cabinet and they were not equals of the ministers they assisted.

It is the prerogative of the prime minister to decide on the organization, procedures, and composition of cabinet, shaping it to reflect the priorities and values of the government and to respond to the particular needs of citizens. This Prime Minister has created a ministry in which all members have leading roles to deliver on important priorities. They have an equal capacity to exercise the powers and perform the functions assigned to them and are full members of cabinet, and are fully and appropriately supported in the carrying out of their responsibilities. The Ministries and Minister of State Act provided a way for five of the ministers to be appointed, paid, and supported by existing departments in carrying out their responsibilities until legislation could be updated to accurately reflect the structure of the current ministry. Bill C-24 is that update. It would formalize in legislation the current ministerial structure and would do away with distracting administrative decisions.

Bill C-24 would add to the Salaries Act five ministerial positions that are currently minister of state appointments. It bears repeating the important issues that the individuals appointed to these five positions are working on: preserving the respect of the francophone world; helping small businesses and tourism; supporting scientific research and making sure that scientific considerations inform the government's policy and funding choices; promoting healthier Canadians through sport and ensuring greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities; and working to build a society where women and girls no longer face systemic barriers. These ministries have been assigned statutory responsibilities including responsibilities for important federal organizations, including the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Destination Canada, and Status of Women Canada.

• (1535)

These ministers are responsible for legislation and program delivery related to matters as diverse and important as science research funding, small business financing, and individuals with disabilities. These responsibilities are vested directly in the ministers, and they are accountable for their results. These issues are important to the government and to Canadians. This is why ministers have been assigned to lead on them, and why those ministers have seats at the cabinet table with equal voices.

Bill C-24 also adds three untitled positions to the Salaries Act. These positions are not filled in the current ministry. They will provide a degree of flexibility for this Prime Minister and future prime ministers to design their ministries to respond to the priorities of the day. This bill is not about growing the ministry. The current ministry has not grown in numbers since it was sworn in two years ago. At 31 members in total, it is below the limit of 35 that the Salaries Act sets now.

Bill C-24 would also remove the six regional development positions from the Salaries Act. This amendment would not dissolve or consolidate the regional development agencies. It would not diminish their importance. It would not mean the ministerial oversight would be gone. The regional development agencies would continue to exist in the regions they serve. They are essential delivery partners in the government's plan to foster economic growth, and they will continue to work with local communities and economic development organizations to promote local growth.

There is nothing novel about not listing these positions in the Salaries Act. Four of the regional development agencies existed for many years before associated ministerial positions were added to the Salaries Act, and that in no way affected the operations of the agencies or the appointment of ministers to be responsible for them. Ministerial oversight of the regional development agencies would still be required by the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. He is responsible for all six regional development agencies.

Bill C-24 makes another change to the list of ministerial positions in the Salaries Act. It amends the title of Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs by dropping the reference to intergovernmental affairs. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities does not have overall responsibility for federal, provincial, and territorial relations. The Prime Minister has taken on that role. The change in the title avoids further confusion.

Bill C-24 does not dissolve or create any new departments. Instead, it establishes a framework that allows the Governor in Council to designate any department or departments to support the new Salaries Act ministers in carrying out some of or all of their responsibilities. That means that the new Salaries Act ministers will have access to the expertise and the experience of the department, the best place to support them.

Much has been made about the fact that no new departments are being created for new ministers. Presiding over a department is not a necessary feature of being a minister. The ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and International Development and La Francophonie all use the facilities and resources in a single department, Global Affairs Canada. The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour both rely on the resources and facilities of the department of Employment and Social Development Canada in the carrying out of their responsibilities. This is a proven and efficient way to work.

Government Orders

Bill C-24 generates no incremental costs with respect to the current ministry. The ministers currently appointed as ministers of state receive the same salary as their cabinet colleagues, and have office budgets that match their responsibilities. Bill C-24 does not change that. The legislation increases the number of ministerial positions that could potentially be paid under the Salaries Act by two, from 35 to 37, including the position of Prime Minister.

Ministers currently receive additional remuneration of \$82,600 a year for their ministerial duties. If all 37 Salaries Act positions were filled by separate individuals, the total incremental cost would be \$165,200 a year. We are below the limit now. The current ministry is composed of the Prime Minister and 30 ministers. As I mentioned earlier, the ministry has not grown since its swearing in on November 4, 2015.

• (1540)

Bill C-24 would also have the consequential effect of increasing the number of parliamentary secretaries that may be appointed by two, from 35 to 37. There are currently 35 parliamentary secretaries, and if the two additional positions were filled, the total incremental cost would be \$34,000 a year.

I began my remarks by saying that this was a technical bill. Let us summarize for everyone in the House.

Bill C-24 would amend the Salaries Act by adding eight new ministerial positions, five of which are currently minister of state appointments and three of which would be untitled, and therefore, flexible. It would remove the six regional development positions from the Salaries Act without affecting the status of regional development agencies themselves, for a total increase of two positions that would be paid ministerial salaries out of the consolidated revenue fund. It would create a framework within which any of the eight new ministerial positions could be supported fully and appropriately by existing departments. It would change the title of the minister of infrastructure, communities and intergovernmental affairs in the Salaries Act to the minister of infrastructure and communities, and it would amend the Financial Administration Act to change the title where it appears in that statute to better reflect the responsibilities of the position.

I hope we can all agree that this bill is worth supporting.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Brampton East for his contribution to this debate.

We started this back in June. I heard the member say that this bill would have no monetary change, which is really unfortunate, because I think this was an opportunity for the government to actually reduce its costs. Instead of raising the pay of these five ministers, I propose in this chamber that we reduce all ministerial pay to the pay of these other five ministers who seem to be selected, so to speak. It is a misfortune they find themselves in that the government did not plan ahead and did not ensure that all ministers were paid to the level they believed they would be.

I think there is an opportunity here. Will the member agree with me that we could save some taxpayer dollars by reducing all ministerial pay to that of a minister of state?

Mr. Raj Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Calgary Shepard for the question and for his passion for those in cabinet and those working hard to join it.

Bill C-24 would ensure that we have legislation in place. It is very much a technical bill, as I said, to ensure that all cabinet ministers are treated equally. Our government was elected on a pledge of ensuring that we would have gender parity in cabinet and that all cabinet ministers would have equal roles, responsibilities, and, most important, accountability. The incremental cost would be minimal to ensure that ministers had the resources to deliver for Canadians.

Ministers are delivering for Canadians. That is why the opposition is so frustrated on a daily basis. We have created 600,000 jobs in this economy in two years. We have the fastest growing GDP in the G7. We have an unemployment rate that has gone from 7.2% to 5.9%. I understand my colleague's frustration.

This bill is a technical bill that is going to ensure that ministers have the responsibilities, resources, and accountability that goes with their portfolios.

• (1545)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for Brampton East on his apparent knowledge of the bill and to somewhat probe that extensive knowledge of Bill C-24 and the Salaries Act.

One of the things he mentioned about the problem with ministers of state was that the government was not able to pay them under the Salaries Act and that they were not capable of being resourced by the public service to the extent other ministers are.

Given the member's familiarity with the act, I am sure he will know that ministers of state who are supported by a ministry of state, which is another cabinet-making tool of the Prime Minister, are actually mentioned in the Salaries Act. They are actually required by law to be paid the same as full ministers. Ministries of state essentially act as departments responsible to those ministers of state, a situation that would actually afford them more independence than the Minister of International Trade has from the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

With respect to the goal of creating a one-tier cabinet and properly resourcing ministers of state, would it not have been a more effective option to establish these ministers of state with a ministry of state? In that case, they would be paid the same under the existing Salaries Act, before Bill C-24, and would be resourced appropriately from the public service, while maintaining their independence as ministers,

Government Orders

Mr. Raj Grewal: Mr. Speaker, that is a very technical question. The crux of Bill C-24 is very much to ensure that all cabinet ministers are equal. What the bill would do is ensure that all ministers have the resources, responsibilities, and independence to bring issues to cabinet.

They are full cabinet ministers. The fact that they are using the same resources is an efficiency. It is a proven model that has worked.

I can give the member an example. The Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development are all sourced out of the department of economic development. It is a great model to ensure that all three ministers, through Bill C-24, would be able to be paid and would be able to share these resources.

This is very much a technical bill to ensure that going forward, prime ministers would have the flexibility to change the types of ministries they need to serve Canadians. As we have a rapidly growing economy, this kind of flexibility will be needed by future prime ministers. That is what this bill would do.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the minister of infrastructure, communities and intergovernmental affairs, the bill would actually change that name to minister of infrastructure and communities. That reflects the fact that the Prime Minister has taken on the role of intergovernmental affairs minister. I wonder if the member could comment on the importance of that name change and how he feels about that name change.

Mr. Raj Grewal: Mr. Speaker, the name change is important to ensure that it accurately reflects the responsibilities of the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. He is no longer responsible for intergovernmental affairs. The Prime Minister has taken on that role, and he is doing a phenomenal job of ensuring that we have a great confederation moving forward.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is doing a great job too. We see that from our rapidly growing economy. Especially in the city of Brampton, our local councillors and mayor are so happy to have a federal government that finally understands that municipalities are partners and that infrastructure is important to economic development across the country. It understands the process to get the money flowing from the federal government right to the cities, because cities know best how to manage those funds to invest locally and help our citizens. It is what the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is doing, and we applaud him for his great job so far.

• (1550)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, rumour has it that this is our second to last day in the House. This is a government that has underperformed, relative to any other new government, in relation to how many new pieces of legislation it has introduced in the House. We have a number of bills, almost as many as nine of them, introduced but not debated at all and not given any time in the House. The government still has not restored judicial judgment in sentencing. It has not removed the ruinous mandatory minimums the Conservative government brought in. It has not legislated pay equity. It has not fixed the navigable waters protection act. It has not fixed the Fisheries Act.

How does the member feel about this being the highest priority for these final two days for the government: paying cabinet ministers better than they are already?

Mr. Raj Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from the NDP for the question. It gives me an opportunity to mention the legislation the government has passed.

When we were elected, the first thing we did was reduce taxes on the middle class. We increased the Canada child benefit, which gave more money, after tax, to more Canadian families across the country. We have added 600,000 jobs in two years from coast to coast to coast. We have reduced the unemployment rate from 7.2% to 5.9%. We have increased the working income tax benefit. We have introduced a housing strategy for the first time in Canadian history, a housing strategy that is going to help ensure that all Canadians have access to housing. It is about quality legislation, not quantity.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when my colleague talks about quality legislation, is he not concerned about the fact that the housing strategy is spread out over 11 years? It will take a long time to put in place and will not help anyone for at least the next two years, when thousands of people are living in under-housed or precarious situations. How does he feel about the fact that they are forgotten and that very little is going to happen until after the next election?

Mr. Raj Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I can only hope that the next election is as good as the by-election results yesterday across this country.

To the member's question on housing, our government has done more on housing than any previous government in Canadian history. We already have money flowing from the 2016 budget. The one thing the member failed to mention was that all Canadian municipalities asked for this. We stepped up to the plate and made that pledge. We are ensuring that for the first time in our history, there is a national housing strategy to ensure that all Canadians have access to housing.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with the intention of speaking about Bill C-24, which would formalize in statute the one-tier ministry of this government. We are ensuring, through this bill, that the current and future governments will have the flexibility required to meet their commitments to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

As we know, the government introduced this bill to amend the Salaries Act on September 27, 2016.

Government Orders

[English]

The Salaries Act authorizes the payments out of the consolidated revenue fund of a ministerial salary to individuals who have been appointed to ministerial positions listed in the act. There are currently 35 ministerial positions listed in the Salaries Act, including the position of prime minister. The Salaries Act was first introduced into statute in 1868 as “An Act respecting the Governor General, the Civil List, and the Salaries of certain Public Functionaries.”

This act has changed countless times throughout our country's history, modified always with the intention to align with the priorities of the government of the day and each prime minister's preferences in how he or she composes the ministry. Our change in Bill C-24 is hardly new. In the last dozen years, we saw legislation to amend the list of ministries in the Salaries Act three times. It was enacted in 2005, 2012, and of course, 2013.

I would now like to take the opportunity to summarize the proposed changes that Bill C-24 would bring to the Salaries Act. First, the legislation would provide for including in the Salaries Act the five ministerial positions that are currently minister of state appointments, thereby doing away with the administrative distinctions this government has had to employ under the Ministries and Ministers of State Act.

Previous cabinets have seen ministers of state considered to be junior ministers because previous prime ministers have determined that such ministers of state should be appointed to assist other ministers with their portfolio responsibilities. Our current context does not agree or find this way of thinking to be operational or suitable. Our Prime Minister's intention has been to create a one-tier cabinet, and the distinction of ministers of state as junior ministers fails to reflect the importance of the subject matters at issue, as well as the value of equality that this government holds in the highest esteem.

The five new ministerial positions to be added to the Salaries Act are minister of la Francophonie, minister of small business and tourism, minister of science, minister of status of women, and minister of sport and persons with disabilities. The five ministers will continue to advance the priorities of the government that were established by the Prime Minister and set out in their mandate letters and legal instruments. These are important positions, with roles and responsibilities becoming of full ministers.

The minister of la Francophonie pursues Canada's strong and sustained commitment to all 80 member states and governments of la Francophonie. Together, these constitute more than one-third of the United Nations' membership and account for a population of more than 890 million people worldwide, including 220 million French speakers.

The minister of science plays the key role of ensuring that Canada is competitive in the global knowledge-based economy through being responsible for supporting scientific research and integrating scientific considerations into the government's investments and policy choices. The minister is also responsible for portfolio organizations, including the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Canada Foundation for Innovation. Furthermore,

the minister of science is the lead minister for a number of science-related funding programs, including the Canada research chairs. Our government holds innovation as a key priority, and it is through scientific innovation that we will continue to build an economy that is both environmentally sustainable and prosperous.

The minister of sport and persons with disabilities works to promote healthier Canadians through sport and recreation and, further, is responsible for work that ensures greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities. The current minister has been tasked with developing legislation to transform how the Government of Canada addresses accessibility. The minister leads on a number of important funding programs, including the enabling accessibility fund and the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities, and is responsible for the Canada Disability Savings Act.

The minister of status of women champions equality, addresses issues of gender-based violence, advances the prosperity and economic security of women, and works to increase the representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles. The minister presides over the federal department known as Status of Women Canada and is involved in key projects such as gender-based analysis to guide government policy-making decisions and budgets.

In her role as Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the current minister supports Canada's small businesses, the backbone of our economy, by helping them to grow through trade and innovation in order to create jobs, support communities, and launch world-class companies. She is also working to grow Canada's tourism industries by promoting Canada as a world-class destination for international tourists. She is, furthermore, the minister responsible for Destination Canada.

● (1555)

As we see, these portfolios are important to our economy, to Canadians, and to the government. Formalizing the status of these five appointments as ministers in full standing reflects the importance of these five positions and the expectations placed on their incumbents. Once these positions are added to the Salaries Act with the adoption of Bill C-24, the orders in council that assign these ministers to assist other ministers would be repealed and these ministers would be in law what they already are in practice, which is full ministers.

I would be remiss if I were not to mention the key issue of cost. The enactment of Bill C-24 would not change the cost of the current ministry. All that would change are the payment mechanisms. Ministers whose positions are listed in the Salaries Act receive their ministerial salary under the authority of that statute and out of the consolidated revenue fund. Ministers appointed under the Ministries and Ministers of State Act receive their salary under the appropriations acts. That has been the legislative framework for more than two decades, but once Bill C-24 is passed, the former ministers of state would be appointed to the new Salaries Act positions and be paid under the authority of that act.

The Prime Minister's ministerial team already receive the same ministerial salary, regardless of the administrative distinctions of ministers and ministers of state. This equal pay has been the case since our first day in office, and we will not change this through the enactment of the bill.

Government Orders

Bill C-24 further provides the framework to permit these ministers to continue to be supported by existing departments in the carrying out of their responsibilities. The bill does not propose the creation of any new departments, but rather streamlines the responsibility of existing departments to these ministers.

I would like to further note that Bill C-24 would increase the number of ministers who could potentially be paid a ministerial salary under the Salaries Act from 35 to 37 including the Prime Minister, representing an increase of two ministerial positions that could be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund.

The bill would also have the consequential effect of increasing by two the number of parliamentary secretaries who could be appointed under the Parliament of Canada Act. Let me point out, however, that even before bringing forth the bill to the House, the Prime Minister currently has 34 ministerial positions available to him under the Salaries Act but has appointed only 30 individuals to the ministry. The bill is not fundamentally aimed at growing the ministry. Its goal is to formalize in legislation the government's current one-tier ministry and to modernize the act to enable more flexible and more adaptable ministries in the future.

We are not just concerned with addressing our government's priorities in the immediate term through the amendments in Bill C-24. Rather, we want to ensure that future ministries can be best equipped with all the necessary tools to be structured in ways to meet the emerging priorities of the time. By adding three untitled ministerial positions to the Salaries Act, Bill C-24 would enhance the flexibility of government. Such positions would be titled at the discretion of the prime minister, to be based upon the priorities of the time, whatever those may be. In this way, the prime minister can adjust his or her cabinet and its positions to respond to changing priorities or challenges facing the country.

The alignment of all regional development agencies under one portfolio, especially under the minister responsible for national economic development, is another example of this.

One of our government's priorities has been to see regional and national expertise working together under one roof. We have done so to create better synergy and opportunities for greater economic progress, and this coherent whole-of-government approach to regional development provides the flexibility needed to make a real impact in communities right across Canada.

The regional development agencies will continue to fulfill their mandates of supporting small and medium-size enterprises in becoming more innovative, productive, and export-oriented. They will continue to work with communities and economic development organizations to identify and generate opportunities for local economic growth.

The regional development agencies will continue to provide excellent programs and services to entrepreneurs and communities right across the country, building on the distinct competitive regional advantages that exist in different communities.

Working together, the regional agencies will enhance cohesion between them and help grow the economy and deliver results to Canadians in all regions of the country. The important role, which economic development plays across Canada's regions, is only

strengthened and highlighted by having the regional agencies all report to Parliament through the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

Finally, the legislation would also change the legal title of the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, to reflect the fact that the Prime Minister has taken on the role of intergovernmental affairs minister himself.

These changes formalize what has already been the practice of the past two years. The Prime Minister's cabinet is one tier. We have taken all the non-legislative steps available to us to recognize this. These amendments address an administrative constraint in the current legislation and catch it up with the structure of the ministry as it operates today.

• (1600)

I would like to end my remarks with a nod to history. As we are all proudly aware, Canadians across this country have been celebrating a very special milestone this year, the 150th anniversary of Confederation. A century and a half ago, the Fathers of Confederation gathered to create something very special, something we all cherish.

As the story goes, upon arriving at the Charlottetown Conference in 1864, future prime minister John A. Macdonald was checking into a hotel. The ledger presented to him for registration included a column asking for occupation. Rather than write lawyer, he picked up the fountain pen and he wrote cabinetmaker. It was a joke, but at the time a very prescient one, because upon assuming the role of Canada's first prime minister he acknowledged that one of his most significant challenges would be to bring the right people to the cabinet table to help the fledgling country find its feet. As former prime minister Macdonald liked to tell people, cabinets do not just happen; cabinets are constructed. Over the years, that construction has taken different forms.

In 1867, there were just 14 ministers around the cabinet table, 14 men from relatively similar walks of life. They were responsible for portfolios such as militia and defence, inland revenue, and the post office. One hundred and fifty years later, we have a diverse, accomplished, gender-balanced cabinet working on so many important priorities for Canadians, and that cabinet reflects the diversity of Canada. Let us get on with enacting this bill and putting behind us any question that others might have had about the importance of these mandates or the status of these ministers who are leading on these files and others.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: Before we get to questions and comments for the hon. parliamentary secretary, I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed certain bills.

Government Orders

●(1605)

SALARIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask a question similar to that of other members. I am looking for a Christmas miracle. I am looking for an opportunity to save the taxpayer a bit of money ahead of Christmas, or Hanukkah for those who prefer. I have asked this question before, so some members opposite are informing the member what it is going to be.

In this debate, the great misfortune the government has had is that it changed its talking points over time. The argument has gotten better. It has actually gotten more structured over time in trying to defend what I find indefensible. Instead of raising the pay of five ministers in the name of equity, why not lower the pay of all ministers so they are all equal at the same pay level? That is my question for the member. It is pretty darned simple. Will we have a Christmas miracle? Are we going to save the taxpayers a bit of money?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the way we have saved the taxpayers money is by cutting taxes. The way we have saved the taxpayers money is by appointing a cabinet that is much smaller and more efficient than the previous cabinet, which had almost 40 members. What we have also done is produce a cabinet that has produced some of the strongest economic results the country has seen in the last 20 years. As a result of that, taxpayers are really happy.

In fact, if the member wants to know what the Christmas miracle was, it happened in Surrey last night. That was the government's taking yet another seat from the opposition party, whose members are focused on personal attacks and slogans and a kind of politics that does not produce results for people, that just produces a lot of sound and fury and really does signify nothing.

We can see the way Canadians are responding. It is why they gave us the gift of a new member of Parliament for Quebec. It is why they responded so positively in Surrey. What Canadians are saying right across the country is, "Give us more; if more Liberals produces more results, we will take it." In fact, that is what they have sent to us, and we continue to see that when we deliver on our election promises, like the national housing strategy that was just mentioned, what happens is that Canadians are better off. When Canadians are better off, Parliament is rewarded with the respect it deserves.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that one of the main themes for the government with respect to this bill is the idea of a one-tier ministry. It keeps coming up. We have tried and I have tried in various stages of debate on the bill to try to figure out what exactly that means and what the relevant sense of equal is for the government when the Liberals talk about a one-tier ministry. It seems to be an important principle for them. If the idea of all cabinet ministers being equal at the table is a really important and motivating idea for the government, why would Bill

C-24 leave ministers of state in the legislation? If ministers of state are objectionable in principle because they create two tiers, why are they left in the legislation? Why is it that the Department of Global Affairs continues to be defined in a hierarchy, and puts the minister of foreign affairs above the ministers of international trade and international aid, who can only act with the concurrence of the minister of foreign affairs?

Why is it that Bill C-24 would create two types of minister, a minister for whom a department is designated and a minister, full stop? If the idea of Bill C-24 is to create one tier of ministry, would it not make more sense to be reducing the taxonomy of ministers as opposed to expanding it? I just am looking, finally at third reading, at some of the last speeches on the bill to get some clarity as to how it is that a bill that is supposed to be promoting one tier leaves so many hierarchical relationships between ministers and actually creates mechanisms to produce more.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is very simple. I am the parliamentary secretary in a ministry that is quite complex in the diversity of files it oversees. There are two ministers within that department who work on very different files. However, those files are connected. Employment insurance is a perfect example of this. There is both the policy development side, as it fits into a series of other social policies that support Canadians when they need help from their government via a delivery mechanism, but there is also a policy design mechanism. They need to work in concert with a whole series of other benefits that Canadians receive. We also have in that department a housing benefit that is about to emerge and support Canadians as they seek to find safe, adequate, and affordable housing. That has to fit into various other departmental components to make sure that the programs fit together like a jigsaw puzzle so we do not have cracks and spaces between programs where Canadians, unfortunately, sometimes fall.

The goal is not to create a hierarchy of ministries, but rather a relationship between ministries that creates a coordinated and sympathetic approach by having many different ministers work together on certain files. In some departments we may see two or three ministers, in others it is a single ministry, and sometimes it is a cabinet committee, and sometimes it is all of cabinet. The idea is not to have any single minister responsible for any one policy but rather to engage all of cabinet, in very particular ways inside some ministries, in developing policy.

What we see in Parliament is that it also works with the parliamentary secretaries when they have work to do on each other's files or files that are related to each other when someone is outside the ministries. I experienced this when I was the parliamentary secretary for intergovernmental affairs to the Prime Minister, working on the housing file. I had to go up through the hierarchical structure of the Privy Council Office, then across to another ministry, then down into the ministry, with permission to get information and share information in a way that was timely and allowed us to develop good, strong policy. It was inhibited by the structure of the act that we are now changing.

Government Orders

Putting certain ministers together equally, and putting them around the table as equals, shows that we have a collective approach to managing this country's challenges. This act accomplishes that. It puts people on the same salary scale but also within the same ministerial structure. That creates a much more efficient and collaborative approach to government, one that we would think a party like the NDP would support and understand.

● (1610)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for allowing us to see a bit more of what the real inspiration behind this is. We had a pay equity issue, and from the comments he has made, we can see that this is really covering up what has been a responsibility gap.

I have listened to the member justify this. He does not have to justify to me why a minister of state for status of women becomes a minister. What I find disingenuous is that there is no ministry of state. There are no departments being added. Therefore, for the member to suggest he is surprised that the NDP is a bit shocked by this hypocrisy is alarming to me, because another part of the explanation we just heard is about all of the synergy required.

For regional development, the member said we need to build on the distinct competitive advantages of communities to have a real regional impact. I find it alarming. I wonder if the member can maybe talk a bit more about this. Does he realize that this bill is removing the possibility of appointing a regional economic minister specifically, while he is justifying at the same time these ministers of state not having departments so they can work together? It is counterintuitive. I am wondering how he is justifying that in his mind.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I am not justifying it in my mind. I thought I had explained it. The ministers have departments. They are co-located departments, with the same supports that other ministers have, but done in coordination with other issues across the file.

A colleague just raised the issue of regional ministers. Let us take a look at the infrastructure supply chain by looking at the way street cars are supplied to Toronto. It may be an investment in southern Ontario that creates the new street car line and puts the new street cars on the tracks, but the steel is from Hamilton, which is located in a different part of the country. The trains themselves come from Thunder Bay and the northern part of Ontario.

Instead of having regional ministers carve up and sectionalize the approach to economic development, our party sees the interdependence of and coordination between regions. We see that being done better as a coordinated approach, with ministers around the table who are engaged on the file and working together. We also see all of them being inside the same department as advantageous, so that confidential information can be shared seamlessly in an efficient way as policy is developed, and therefore that we do not have to navigate a bureaucracy to get a quick response to a challenge that may present itself.

It is good government and I have seen it work really well in the roll out of infrastructure dollars and the development of good, strong social policy. The Canada child benefit comes out of one such ministry.

I do not see the need to have stand-alone, separate bureaucracies just to elevate the status of a certain department. I would rather see good, strong policies coming out of a department. That is exactly what we are seeing as a result of this structure. We are just formalizing it in legislation today.

● (1615)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to again join the debate on this bill, one that I believe we started back in June.

Before I continue, I just want to say merry Christmas to the pages, the table officers, all members of Parliament, as well as the PPS service who keep us safe in this House, and all of those in the administration. I may not get a chance to say it another time, if another bill is brought forward and I am not recognized to speak to it, so merry Christmas and happy Hanukkah to all, and a good night to all.

I have been listening to the debate so far, and the member for Elmwood—Transcona raised a couple of good points on the technical side of this bill. The government keeps saying that these are all just technical changes and will not cost more money, but lead to more synergy, to more all-of-government decision-making, like the changes to small business taxation and electoral reform, I might add, and many other issues the government has just fizzled out on and completely dropped the ball on.

Indeed, we heard from the Liberal member for Brampton East, whom I served with on the finance committee, that it is all technical and that there is nothing to see here, that it is an easy bill that should pass right away.

I have repeatedly said to members that we should be trying to save some money by lowering the pay of all cabinet ministers down to the pay of a minister of state. That would reach all of the stated goals put forward by the government thus far.

On that, the argument on the government side has changed over time. That is one of the great misfortunes that members on that side have borne in defending this bill. "Misfortune binds together" is a Yiddish proverb that comes to mind. I think it very much applies here.

I also want to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Brandon—Souris. I do not want to rob him of his opportunity to make a contribution to the debate here, as well.

It is the government's misfortune that the argument has changed. Its initial argument framed in terms of equity lends itself easily as well to the argument that we should lower everyone's pay because everyone is equal, and then we can move on. If the argument is about the technical side of it, then every single order in council passed by the Governor General with the recommendation put forward by the Prime Minister has to be redone.

Government Orders

I will just refer to one here, dealing with the minister of state to be styled the minister of la francophonie. It is stated in the order in council that the new minister is to assist the Minister of Foreign Affairs in carrying out that minister's responsibilities, effective November 4, 2015, two years ago now.

The government has gone to great lengths and pains to try to explain that this is only technical fix for something that happened maybe two years ago and that there is really nothing to see here. However, that is exactly the point. What we should be debating are issues that actually impact Canadians directly, not a Christmas salary increase for cabinet ministers.

We should be talking about small business taxation. It will be interesting to see what the actual rules will be that small business owners will have to live by starting January 1. We could delve further into the disability tax credit, and find out more about what exactly happened in the department in that regard. The minister has claimed repeatedly in this House that nothing changed, that there was no policy direction given, that nothing new had happened. Now, last week, we saw the government reversing to a previous position. What changed? That would be an interesting debate to have in this chamber.

We could also perhaps debate more globally the general financial, fiscal, public budget process. We heard the member for Spadina—Fort York, I believe it was, claim that the government has been lowering Canadians' taxes, but it has not done that. The Liberals lowered taxes for every single member of Parliament, but not for the vast majority of Canadians. The way that tax brackets work is that people have to maximize their presence in their bracket. They have to earn almost \$90,000 before getting the full value of that 1.5% deduction. Every single member of Parliament got the full value. We got the biggest tax reduction. Merry Christmas to us, courtesy of the Government of Canada.

Now the government has raised carbon taxes and payroll taxes and nickel-and-dimed Canadians. In fact, the Fraser Institute has done studies on this, showing that the average Canadian family is paying \$800 more in taxes than before. There is not an actual tax reduction. It is something completely different. However, here we are, debating Bill C-24, a tax hike on Canadians, who will pay more to finance these salary increases. We already have a \$20 billion deficit that we are running.

My simple question has been repeated to members on the opposite side. Why do we not just reduce the pay of cabinet ministers down to the pay of ministers of state? I think we would find a great deal of support for that, especially on this side, and I daresay perhaps the New Democrats would join us in supporting that.

• (1620)

It would achieve the initial goal, the first argument the government made when the bill was tabled, which is equity, that all ministers would be treated equally, with equal pay for equal work.

From my time in human resources, I know in the province of Alberta there really is no great issue. For the longest time in Alberta, we were just happy to get someone who had the qualifications to do the job. There was great desperation. We would take anyone from across Canada, the United States, anywhere in the world. It did not

matter who they were, or where they were from, as long as they could do the job safely, efficiently, and effectively, to maximize the value they brought to the organizations they were working in.

Two years into this mandate and the government has not really succeeded in the construction of these pipelines that are so important to the province of Alberta. We have approvals on the table, but we still have political issues with getting them constructed. The private corporations that have to build them are still struggling. There is still a lot of uncertainty in the market.

However, here we are debating a salary increase for cabinet ministers, instead of debating the great issues of the day. This chamber was built for debating the great issues of the day, not salary increases for cabinet ministers, a mere two weeks before Christmas. That is the wrong approach.

The government decides what we debate. It decides the issues of the day. It gets to put forth legislation and then decide which bills we will debate. Now, we are here debating Bill C-24, to amend the Salaries Act, and give pay increases to cabinet ministers. As I said, if the stated initial goal was equity, we could have lowered everyone's pay and moved on to something else.

I hear an argument being made now that it is a technical amendment that would allow ministers to work better together. Then every single order in council is going to have to be amended once again. Titles are not how decisions are made. When ministers sit around the table they do not look at each other's titles and say, "You have a more important title, so we'll listen to you more than another person". At the end of the day, it rests on the leadership of the prime minister to choose between the different options and the best arguments made at the table. Titles do not matter.

From my time working in human resources, that was the thing I heard the most from directors of human resources in various organizations. They repeatedly said that titles do not matter. It is what they bring to the table, their ideas, their arguments, the work they have put in before coming to the table to make a decision.

What the government is saying is that some ministers, in its own government, are unable to do their jobs if they do not get a salary increase and a title bump. That sounds ridiculous to me. It does not even sound reasonable. That is an issue internal to the cabinet then, if they are unable to make decisions without looking at each other's titles. Perhaps we could pass a piece of legislation that removes all of their titles. Perhaps we could create a system by which no minister would know what another minister is saying without being able to ascribe to them a particular argument. It would go to the ridiculous, but so is debating this legislation, a pay hike for cabinet ministers, ahead of Christmas.

Government Orders

It is not about the status of different ministries, because we know this legislation would create three new ministers. Ministers can be appointed without portfolio. A minister's role is not necessarily connected to the department they oversee, serve with, or direct. Ministers have been appointed in the House before with no portfolio. The two issues are completely separate. The title of a minister, the functions they fulfill, are not necessarily dependent on their ministry. Likewise, neither should their salary be dependent on it.

If we want to go a step further, perhaps we could introduce a pay for performance. That would probably be the best system we could have. Certain ministers have performed well. Others have performed abysmally, especially the Minister of Finance.

The addition of these three new ministers also lends itself to my final argument. If the government is looking for ideas on what types of ministers to appoint, let me suggest a minister for seniors. The government took that away. It was a priority of the previous Conservative government. At the time it had a minister for seniors. We do not have that right now. When I held a round table in my riding with widows and seniors, all women, the number one issue for them was they did not have a champion in government. They said it was difficult for them to manoeuvre through government bureaucracy, to figure out what types of benefits they and their spouses were entitled to.

• (1625)

Bill C-24 will undoubtedly pass in the House. It is a great mistake. We have done a disservice to Parliament to be debating this legislation ahead of Christmas when we should have been debating the great issues of the day, issues such as reducing the deficit, paying down the national debt, and ensuring that the next generation is not saddled with unnecessary debt.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the interventions of my friend across the way.

The government's ultimate objective is to raise the quality of life for all Canadians.

We hear often from members on the other side about what a terrible job the finance minister is doing. I had asked for some specific information from the Department of Finance with regard to incomes. The information revealed that real wages, or hourly earnings, increased 1.4% between November 2016 and November 2017, which was significantly higher than the .3% growth registered in the year up to November 2016. That is the general look. What was really amazing to me was to see the growth of 3.5% of less-skilled workers who are now engaged in more employment in many fields that require something under a Ph.D.

Despite the comments about the finance minister, would my friend across the way not agree that the evidence shows that not only is he working well but that the entire cabinet is working well and therefore deserve compensation?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the member is partially implying pay for performance, which is one of the last examples I gave on how ministers can be compensated for the work that they do.

Likewise, if someone like the Minister of Finance is going to take charge and claim all of the credit for the last two years for Canada's

growth in economy or changes in jobs or the changes in the average weekly earnings, we just need to look at the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, who spent \$2 billion less than what was intended to be spent by the department. In the province of Alberta alone, fewer than 30 out of 174 infrastructure projects have been completed two years into the Liberal government's mandate. That is a terrible record. By comparison, between 2006 and 2008 the previous Conservative government had completed 100 projects in the province of Alberta.

We can pick and choose which ministers are performing well depending on what type of metrics we wish to use but in general the government is not meeting its own stated goals and its own financial budgets that it keeps tabling in the House.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Alberta brought up an interesting point about seniors. Seniors in this country have little or no voice and they feel left out by the Liberal government. Every day the government tells us how much it is doing for seniors but we do not hear that. My colleague from Alberta held a round table and I held a round table. We did not hear that. Other than going through opposition MPs, seniors feel that their voices are not being heard right now.

I would like to ask my colleague about the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the minister responsible for seniors, because many in this country feel they are being left out.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I hosted a round table in my riding specifically for widows because they find themselves in a particular situation. They are bereft over the loss of a spouse, that special person they shared their entire life with, and are left to their own devices to manoeuvre through government bureaucracy to figure out every benefit that they are supposed to get as well as figuring out how to close their old files.

Many constituents have come to my office to tell me that a mistake has been made, or that the government is paying a benefit that it should not be paying. In one particular case the government believed someone was deceased. I told the gentleman that it was obvious that he was still alive. Obviously the Canada Revenue Agency had made a mistake in his case.

Seniors find themselves in a situation where they have no champion within the government. Nobody is specifically looking at how seniors interact with the government, for example, how are they doing in terms of the cost of living.

We are talking about seniors in their retirement years, the golden years, as they are called. The majority of them live on a fixed income. Things like the carbon tax or an increase in the rate of inflation eat away at their savings. Seniors bear the brunt of government decisions, such as the decision on a carbon tax, a punishing new tax that will take away the most from those on fixed incomes.

Government Orders

•(1630)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, The Environment; the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope, Taxation; the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît, Health.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-24 this afternoon in the House.

I want to thank my colleagues for the fine work they have done this afternoon in speaking to this bill, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

I will start, as my colleague from southeast Calgary just did, by saying that as we near the end of the session sometime this week, I want to wish a merry Christmas and happy new year to everyone in my constituency, as well as all Canadians, all members of the House, and the support teams who keep us safe and work for us on a daily basis in the House.

It is pretty important that opposition members speak out about what we hear in our communities and parts of rural Canada. My colleagues from urban areas have spoken on this already. The government has now brought forward a bill that would create eight new Liberal ministerial positions. A number of my constituents wrote to me and called me to indicate that they do not want me to support this bill. I will provide several reasons. One of them is what I just said, the eight new Liberal ministerial positions being formed, five of them being ministers of state roles filled in the 2015 election, plus three Liberal ministers yet to be named. It is a bit of a stretch, but I will get to that later.

Bill C-24 would also amend the Salaries Act to allow for equal pay for all ministers, ensuring that ministers with more junior portfolios are paid the same as ministers with larger and more senior positions. I have always felt there should be equal pay for equal work involved in all ministers' portfolios, but, as described by the government itself, junior ministers do not have the same responsibilities as senior ministers because they do not have any new responsibilities. It is a bit of an oxymoron for the government to want to provide someone with more salary, but not expect the person to do any more work than what was being done in the junior minister position. That is one of the clearer drawbacks in this bill.

There were five ministers of state in the House for a number of years, but they were paid at a different level. This bill would create three new ministerial positions. The Prime Minister could obviously have put new ministers in place when he announced his cabinet in the first place, and Canadians question why he would have to put that clause in a bill like this.

I had experience with regional development agencies when I was in provincial politics and as a farm leader, before I became a federal MP four years ago. The government has placed the responsibilities of six former ministers in the hands of one minister, who is in Mississauga in this case, the Minister of Innovation, Science and

Economic Development. I am all for innovation, but feel strongly that innovation should, at least in a supportive manner, go to regional ministers that we had for development. My colleague from southeast Calgary has indicated that western economic diversification was one of those portfolios. That situation was adept in having action on the ground. When there are ministers in various parts of Canada, as I said earlier in my question, we do not necessarily end up with a minister in every province, but certainly one in each of the regions in Canada. I believe we would have British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario and Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces.

•(1635)

They would be much more in tune with the things that are happening in their areas by having someone designated strictly for that. That would be their responsibility. It would be a full-time job in those areas, but the government has indicated that those roles were not as demanding as some areas.

There is concern about our finance minister these days and his credibility. I believe that many of the portfolios, such as international trade, are the things Canada is known for on the international stage. We had a government that had great credibility in finance, under former finance minister Jim Flaherty. I would like to point that out as an example of how when governments change, credibility can be undermined as well.

We need to be very careful when we are looking at the establishment of new ministries, as the government has done, and then saying that it will develop three new ministers. It does not know what they are going to do yet. There are no portfolios, but it has put them in the bill. As I pointed out earlier, it did not need to have those in the bill.

The Liberal dominated committee that studied Bill C-24 did not hear from a single witness about the plan to scrap these regional development ministers. It was not an acceptable kind of politics. That was the government's claim. If the reason it is pulling this back is that it did not like the politics, the Liberals may want to listen to some of their own colleagues and the things they have said about the bill. A lot of the Atlantic folks in ACOA were upset when this portfolio was taken over by one minister in Mississauga. A number of them spoke out. I quote from a committee report:

Generally, centralized decision-making is viewed unfavourably as impeding the agility of programs. The Subcommittee was asked to advocate for regional decision-making in order to better address regional needs.

The subcommittee of the Atlantic members caucus came together, and this was one of the recommendations. This comes from a May 15, 2017, report:

Long processing times dilute business growth, and create inefficiency and uncertainty.

Some businesses have had to obtain bridge funding while waiting for ACOA funds. These circumstances are disruptive to business development.

Government Orders

We have certainly seen how the government has been very disruptive to business development. It has provided uncertainty. There are only 20 days left to the end of the year. The Liberals backtracked all fall on the small business taxes they announced in mid-July. They tried to hoodwink people into thinking they were actually going to do something for small businesses, when all they are really going to do is the same thing they did with the Conservatives' climate change plan. It was so bad, they adopted it as their own. I believe we had strength in that plan.

We had strength in our economic plan. We had strength in the development of our small business plan to reduce taxes to 9%. This is a government that said it would do that, but it froze them in its very first budget at 10.5%. Now it is coming out after a lot of pressure not just from us but from the public, opposition members, our colleagues in the New Democratic Party, and others as well. The Liberals finally realized that they had to further emphasize the work that was still needed to make sure that they did not negatively impact small businesses in Canada any more than they already have. What they have done is leave complete uncertainty, three weeks before the implementation date of January 1, 2018, about the small business tax.

I want to close by saying that there is a complete lack of transparency. Having three future mystery ministers is unacceptable. There is a need to create ministerial equality in these roles, but it has to come with the performance of the ministries that are being asked to do this.

● (1640)

I will leave it at that. It is unheard of for a government to give lip service about wanting to improve these areas and then demonstrating a complete lack of accountability when it comes to the implementation of a number of these bills, such as licensing marijuana, never mind not having looked at the accountability and the enforcement of it. It was the same thing with the small business tax.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, you are doing an excellent job. Merry Christmas.

I would like to thank the member. I have a great deal of respect for him. We sit together at the committee for Arctic parliamentarians representing eight Arctic nations. We are non-partisan and work collaboratively. I really appreciate his input. He is very co-operative and we have a great working relationship. Also, my thanks for the Christmas card he just delivered to me.

I ask the member this. He talked about how good the Conservative climate change plan was. Could he outline for the House some of the items in that plan that would reduce greenhouse gases?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I have enjoyed working with him as well. We are the only two members at that committee of the Arctic parliamentarians.

We had a plan to reduce greenhouse gases. Of course, under the Conservative Party, greenhouse gases were reduced more than any under any other Prime Minister in Canadian history.

There needs to be an opportunity here to discuss those things and debate them. Some of them were in the areas of water management. I know about that personally. We were looking at using air, land, and water as a better means of enforcement, to hold back water and

prevent flooding. Anyone living in Manitoba at the bottom of the basin coming from the south, the west, or the east knows to make sure that there is a good plan in place. I believe that was the case under former prime minister Harper.

I can give a few examples with respect to the diking that was done on the Souris River and the Assiniboine River, to prevent cities like Brandon and Winnipeg from being washed out. Portage la Prairie could have had major problems as well. In smaller towns like Souris, Melita, and Wawanesa these situations have been taken care of, mainly by the Conservative government.

I know that there is still work going on. As soon as we see some of the infrastructure dollars from the government come out, there may be more finalized. Some of those projects have overlapped and are not done as yet.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter with respect to Bill C-24 is this. Two years ago, the Liberal government decided they were going to do what they wanted to do and remove the six economic development ministers, to instead pay the junior ministers the same as the senior ministers without any parliamentary oversight whatsoever, showing a total disdain for this House. This bill, then, is just trying to cover up what they did two years ago.

It is very insulting to come to this place and see the disregard of the Liberal government for parliamentary process. Could the member comment?

● (1645)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, it is inappropriate for the government to move forward with a bill like this. That is the accountability that I was speaking about. The Liberals have three new ministers they want to put on paper without knowing what they are going to do yet, and five more members in minister of state roles. The government wants to pay them the same, without more work. It is a matter of the Liberal government being totally unaccountable.

As well, when the hon. member talked about economic development, the government does not really care about that. It would like to see some economic development happen. Perhaps some of the best economic development it could do would be to stay within its budget, like the Conservatives did when we implemented 1.2 million full-time jobs under then prime minister Harper at a time when we were balancing the budget.

Now we are not anywhere close to that many jobs under the Liberal government, but we do have a \$30-billion deficit this year with \$8.8 billion of money that the Liberals kind of found. Maybe the American economy is picking up. They still have a deficit of \$19.8 billion.

There is a great difference between the Conservative side of the House and the Liberal side. The Conservatives balanced the books and still created 1.2 million full-time jobs, while the Liberal government has not done half of that. When added together, we are over \$30 billion in debt so far. Heaven sake, no, these totals add up to more than \$60 billion, which is an unaccountable position, as far as I am concerned.

Government Orders

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act. This is a technical bill that would fulfill the Prime Minister's commitment to formalize in legislation his one-tier ministry.

As I think we all understand by now, the Salaries Act authorizes payment from the consolidated revenue fund of a ministerial salary to individuals who occupy the positions listed in the act. The act currently lists the position of prime minister and 34 specific ministers.

When the government took office in November 2015, five of the positions the Prime Minister wanted in his ministry and in his cabinet were not listed in the Salaries Act. This meant that they could not be paid for their ministerial responsibilities under the Salaries Act, and they could not be supported by the public service in carrying out their responsibilities. Those five positions are 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 the minister of status of women.

Because the Salaries Act could not accommodate those priorities of the government, the five ministers were appointed pursuant to the Ministries and Ministers of State Act, and they are paid under appropriation acts. Their legal title is "minister of state".

Historically, ministers of state have often been considered junior ministers. They have not always been members of cabinet, and when they were not, they could not bring matters to cabinet for consideration on their own. A cabinet minister had to sponsor the item for them.

Ministers of state were most often not given statutory authorities to exercise in their own right or statutory duties in relation to which they were directly accountable. Instead, they were assigned to assist a senior minister in carrying out the minister's responsibilities. The senior minister retained all the statutory authorities and accountabilities.

For some prime ministers, that was an arrangement that worked. It was the prerogative of the former prime ministers, as it will be the prerogative of future prime ministers, to appoint ministers of state as junior ministers, to assign them assisting roles only, and to decide whether they could sit as members of cabinet. I am certain that past ministers of state were valued and contributing members of the ministry, but they were not always members of cabinet, and they were not the equals of the ministers they assisted.

It is the prerogative of the Prime Minister to decide on the organization, procedures, and composition of cabinet and to shape it to reflect the priorities and values of the government and to respond to particular needs of citizens. The Prime Minister has created a ministry in which all members have leading roles to deliver on important priorities. They have an equal capacity to exercise the powers and perform the functions assigned to them. They are all full members of cabinet, and they are all fully and appropriately supported in carrying out their responsibilities.

The Ministries and Ministers of State Act provided a way for five of the ministers to be appointed, paid, and supported by existing departments in carrying out their responsibilities until legislation

could be updated to accurately reflect the structure of the current ministry. Bill C-24 is that update. It would formalize in legislation the current ministerial structure and 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. It bears repeating the important issues and the individuals appointed to these five positions.

• (1650)

They are preserving the vitality of the francophone world; helping small business and tourism; supporting scientific research and making sure that scientific considerations inform the government's policy and funding choices; promoting healthier Canadians through sport, and ensuring greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities; and working to build a society where women and girls no longer face systemic barriers.

These ministers have been assigned statutory responsibilities, including responsibilities for important federal organizations, including the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Destination Canada, and Status of Women Canada. These ministers are responsible for legislation and program delivery related to matters as diverse and important as science research funding, small business financing, and disabilities. These responsibilities are vested directly in the ministers, who are accountable for the results.

These issues are important to the government and to Canadians. That is why ministers have been assigned to lead on them and why those ministers have a seat at the cabinet table and an equal voice there.

Bill C-24 also adds three untitled positions to the Salaries Act. These positions are not filled in the current ministry. They will provide a degree of flexibility for this Prime Minister and future prime ministers to design their ministries to respond to the priorities of the day. This bill is not about growing the ministry. The current ministry has not grown in number since it was sworn in two years ago. At 31 members in total, it is below the limit of 35 that the Salaries Act sets now.

Bill C-24 would also remove the six regional development positions from the Salaries Act. This amendment would not dissolve or consolidate the regional development agencies. It would not diminish their importance. It would not remove ministerial oversight. The regional development agencies would continue to exist in the regions they serve. They are essential delivery partners in the government's plan to foster economic growth, and they would continue to work with local communities and economic development organizations to promote local growth.

There is nothing novel about not listing these positions in the Salaries Act. Four of the regional development agencies existed for many years before the associated ministerial positions were added to the Salaries Act, and that in no way affected the operation of the agencies or the appointment of ministers to be responsible for them. Ministerial oversight of the regional development agencies will still be required. The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development is responsible for all six regional development agencies.

Bill C-24 makes another change to the list of ministerial positions listed in the Salaries Act. It amends the title of the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs by dropping the reference to intergovernmental affairs. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities does not have overall responsibility for the federal, provincial, and territorial relations. The Prime Minister has taken on this role. The change in title avoids confusion.

Bill C-24 does not dissolve or create any new departments. Instead, it establishes a framework that allows the governor in council to designate any department or departments to support these new Salaries Act ministers in carrying out some of their responsibilities. That means that the new Salaries Act ministers will have access to the expertise and experience of the departments best placed to support them.

Much has been made about the fact that no new departments are being created for the new ministers. Presiding over a department is not a necessary feature of being a minister. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of International Trade, and Minister of International Development and La Francophonie all use the facilities and resources of a single department, Global Affairs Canada.

The Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour both rely on the resources and facilities of the department of Employment and Social Development in carrying out of their responsibilities. This is a proven and efficient way to work.

Bill C-24 generates no incremental costs with respect to the current ministry. The ministers currently appointed as minister of state receive the same salary as their cabinet colleagues and will have office budgets that match their responsibilities. Bill C-24 does not change that.

• (1655)

The legislation would increase the number of ministerial positions that could potentially be paid under the Salaries Act by two, from 35 to 37, including the position of the Prime Minister. The current ministry is composed of the Prime Minister and 30 ministers. As I mentioned earlier, the ministry has not grown since its swearing-in on November 4, 2015. Bill C-24 also has the consequential effect of increasing the number of parliamentary secretaries that may be appointed by two. That would be from 35 to 37.

I began my remarks by saying that this was a technical bill. Let me summarize.

Bill C-24 would amend the Salaries Act by adding eight new ministerial positions to the act, five of which are currently minister of state appointments and three of which are untitled and therefore flexible; removing the six regional development positions from the

Government Orders

Salaries Act, without affecting the status of the regional development agencies themselves, for a total increase of two positions that may be paid a ministerial salary out of the consolidated revenue fund; creating a framework within which any of the eight new ministerial positions could be supported fully and appropriately by existing departments; and changing the Salaries Act title of the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs to Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and amending the Financial Administration Act to change that title where it appears in that statute to better reflect the responsibilities of the position.

I hope that we can all agree that this bill is worth supporting.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (1700)

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred to the end of the time provided for oral questions tomorrow, Wednesday, December 13.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, December 13 at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, I think if you seek it you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

CHILD HEALTH PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.) moved that Bill S-228, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (prohibiting food and beverage marketing directed at children), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to stand here today as the sponsor of Bill S-228, the child health protection act.

I would like to begin by commending the hon. Senator Greene Raine for introducing this bill last fall, and for her tireless efforts to support healthy choices for our children.

This bill was grounded in the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology's own study on obesity in Canada, published in March 2016, and was debated by that committee during its review of the legislation.

It has long been established that advertising works. What I mean by this is that advertising is an effective tool for influencing potential customers' attitudes and behaviours. If this were not true, then advertising would not be a long-standing multi-billion dollar industry. This principle applies to all potential customers, including children. Now, more than ever, our children are exposed to a barrage of advertisements for unhealthy foods and beverages. It therefore follows that those who are marketing their products to children will be affecting children's eating decisions. In fact, recent trends confirm that this is indeed the case.

One in three Canadian children is either overweight or obese. We know that obesity is linked to chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. During my career as a physician, I witnessed these trends first-hand on a regular basis. I noticed more of my patients who presented were overweight or obese, and I was seeing instances of heart disease and type 2 diabetes in younger and younger people. Public health data across many countries confirms that this trend is widespread. Alarmingly, whereas 20 years ago type 2 diabetes was a disease primarily of older adults, this diagnosis is increasingly being made in children. It is obvious that we need to take bold action now. Our children's health and lives are at stake, and they deserve better.

This issue falls squarely within the Minister of Health's mandate to introduce new restrictions on the commercial marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children.

The extent to which our children are exposed to the advertising of foods and beverages that are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fats cannot be overstated. For example, according to a recent study of the 25 million online food and beverage ads that Canadian children see every year on their favourite websites, 90% are for unhealthy products. As a result, our children are eating fewer fruits and vegetables than recommended and more unhealthy foods and beverages.

Taking action today to restrict the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages means that we can help children have a healthy start in life, based on a foundation of healthy eating choices, and

protection from the influence and manipulation of those who would market unhealthy foods and beverages to our children. Bill S-228 serves to provide such protection.

If Bill S-228 is to give our children the protection they deserve, it is imperative that, before being passed into law, we take steps to ensure that this legislation will withstand any legal challenges that may come about. This is why I will be introducing amendments to this bill.

The first amendment would change the definition of "children" from under 17 years old to under 13 years old. Although some stakeholders have expressed reservations with changing the age, it must be understood that there is a very real potential that this bill could be challenged in its present form under the law.

In recent months, as Health Canada has consulted with stakeholders, it has become increasingly obvious that any regime built on restrictions aimed at older teenagers would be subject to considerable legal risks associated with the restriction on freedom of expression under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are risks I cannot ignore, because a court loss could jeopardize this entire effort. The proposed change will allow us to take bold action to protect our most vulnerable populations now.

There is a strong precedent for defining a child as under 13 years of age in the context of advertising restrictions in the province of Quebec. In fact, the Quebec legislation withstood a charter challenge and was fully upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada. That clear precedent supports the decision to amend the definition of children to those under 13. However, I will not stop there.

• (1705)

Recognizing there is evidence showing the vulnerability of teenagers to marketing, as well as the experience in Quebec where industry shifted marketing efforts to teenagers when restrictions were imposed on younger children, I will move an additional amendment to Bill S-228 at committee. Specifically, I will move an amendment to require Parliament to conduct a mandatory review of the legislation, with a particular focus on the definition of children, within five years of the act coming into force.

The objective of the parliamentary review will be to monitor whether the lower age limit results in increased advertising to teenagers and whether any provisions of the act need to be adjusted to ensure the continued and full protection of our children.

I have also been informed that the Minister of Health has instructed Health Canada to invest significant resources over the next five years and to work closely with the health stakeholder community to ensure the necessary research is undertaken to determine whether new forms of advertising are impacting children and whether teens are being exposed to more marketing as a result of restrictions on marketing to younger children. I applaud the minister for her leadership in this area.

Private Members' Business

Through the parliamentary review of the legislation, the government will also be obliged to report publicly on compliance with the bill and on progress toward our common goal of healthier children of all ages. This work will ensure that, if necessary, we will have the data needed to support a broadening of restrictions at a future date.

While parents have an important role in choosing what their children eat, it is difficult for them to compete with or to completely control their children's exposure to marketing. Parents and caregivers deserve a supportive environment where children are not constantly targeted by unhealthy food marketing.

Bill S-228 is but one effort to tackle the epidemic of obesity and chronic disease in our country. If anyone doubts my resolve or the resolve of our government, he or she need only look at the comprehensive suite of measures we have under way. These initiatives range from restricting marketing to children; to new front-of-pack labelling to flag foods high in sugar, salt, and fat; and to a revamped Canada Food Guide.

One of the fundamental responsibilities of a government is to protect its most vulnerable citizens and few citizens are more vulnerable than our children. I expect that everyone in the House can appreciate how significant Bill S-228 is for the health of our children today and for generations to come.

We will not let up in the fight to reduce obesity and chronic disease. I ask all members for their support on this important issue.

• (1710)

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think all of us want young people and children to eat healthy, and parents have some responsibility in that.

I have been hearing quite a bit about the bill. I am coach of Timbits hockey. Tim Hortons sponsors kids hockey for five and six year olds across Canada. It also supports young people in playing soccer. McDonald's happens to support atom hockey across Canada.

Could the member assure us that the bill in no way would preclude them from continuing to support children's sport, which is important. It is part of a healthy lifestyle for our young people.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, I have heard much of the same concerns from stakeholders. I agree that the promotion of sport and activity is important and essential for the health and well-being of our children.

We have discussed these issues with stakeholders and with the Minister of Health. I can assure the member that the government will be reviewing this to ensure there is no adverse effect on sport sponsorship programs for children.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his work on the health committee.

Everyone is in favour of reducing obesity. However, Quebec has had this implemented for 40 years, and it has had no effect on the obesity rates. The same is true for Chile and the U.K.

What fact and evidence-based science does the member have to show this would actually reduce obesity?

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, as for the effect of the bill in Quebec, many factors are causing obesity in children. I would like to see the data and the study the member is referring to, that this has had no effect on the health of children and rates of obesity.

However, we know advertising and marketing influence behaviour of young people. We know in other initiatives, particularly on restriction of advertising of smoking, that it had very measurable effects on rates of smoking.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure my colleague would agree that many different groups in society, and I think of Winnipeg Harvest for example, and many different educational facilities, in particular for early and middle years, want to see government, in this case private members, take initiatives that will have positive impacts for our children.

This idea is shared by many Canadians. It would have a profound and positive impact. To accept the legislation, at the very least moving it forward, would allow the stakeholders to come to the table, provide some of the information, and address some of the concerns raised today. Could he share his thoughts on that?

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, I agree. There are many aspects to the bill and what can be done. We also know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we need to develop a dialogue and take action at the government level. It is the primary responsibility of a government to look after our most vulnerable citizens.

I look forward to input from all levels of government, from all parties, and from all stakeholders.

The Speaker: Before the hon. member for Brantford—Brant begins, I want to let him know, as he may be aware, that we may be interrupted in a few minutes. We are waiting for an indication of when that will happen, so we are not entirely sure.

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

• (1715)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand before the House to speak to Bill S-228, a bill that calls for changes to the Food and Drugs Act to prohibit the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages directly to Canadian children under the age of 17.

Bill S-228 is meant to address childhood obesity. We can all recognize that childhood obesity is a legitimate public policy concern. As members of Parliament, parents, aunts, uncles, members of the community, we all want to see our children and youth thrive and live healthy lives. However, Bill S-228 is far from the solution. It is a distraction from the urgent need to explore the real causes of childhood obesity, namely, the lack of balance between diet, screen time, and physical activity.

Private Members' Business

Evidence does not support that marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages is the true cause of childhood obesity in Canada. Childhood obesity is a complex and multi-dimensional problem. A holistic approach that takes into account the full set of causes of childhood obesity would better serve Canadians in the interest of truly protecting our children from the negative impacts of obesity on their health and well-being, thus encourage long lives filled with healthy lifestyles.

The main issue I wish to address after reading Bill S-228 is where the evidence and science is that supports the very purpose of the bill. Statistics Canada data suggest that added sugar consumption has been declining over the past two decades. During the same period, obesity rates have continued to rise. This finding was extremely significant, considering the bill states in its preamble that there is widespread marketing of food and beverage to children and restrictions to the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children must be mandated to curb the rapid growth of childhood obesity in Canada.

I strongly encourage my colleagues in the House to read Bill S-228. It should not take them more than five minutes of their time. They will note that the bill as currently drafted is extremely vague and leaves too many doors open to unintended consequences. We do not know yet what constitutes unhealthy food.

ROYAL ASSENT

• (1730)

[*English*]

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, Her Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the honourable Senate.

Accordingly the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned:

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when the House did attend Her Excellency the Governor General in the Senate chamber, Her Excellency was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the royal assent to the following bills:

Bill C-305, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (mischief)—Chapter 23.

Bill S-211, An Act respecting National Sickle Cell Awareness Day—Chapter 24.

Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act in response to the Superior Court of Quebec decision in *Descheneaux c. Canada (Procureur général)*—Chapter 25.

Bill C-60, An Act to correct certain anomalies, inconsistencies and errors and to deal with other matters of a non-controversial and uncomplicated nature in the Statutes of Canada and to repeal certain Acts and provisions that have expired, lapsed or otherwise ceased to have effect—Chapter 26.

Bill C-23, An Act respecting the preclearance of persons and goods in Canada and the United States—Chapter 27.

Bill C-277, An Act providing for the development of a framework on palliative care in Canada—Chapter 28.

Bill C-67, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018—Chapter 29.

Bill S-236, An Act to recognize Charlottetown as the birthplace of Confederation—Chapter 30.

Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Statistics Act—Chapter 31.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CHILD HEALTH PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-228, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (prohibiting food and beverage marketing directed at children), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brantford—Brant has seven minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was at the point of suggesting to my colleagues that they take time to read Bill S-228—about a five-minute investment of their time. They will notice that the bill, as currently drafted, is extremely vague and leaves too many doors open to unintended consequences. We do not know yet what constitutes “unhealthy food”. The definition is not identified. We should disagree with any categorization of any food as unhealthy or bad. If bad or unhealthy, it should not be defined as a food. As well, any food eaten in moderation can form part of a wholesome diet.

Bill S-228 does not provide specifics as to what constitutes marketing for children and types of marketing activities that should be restricted. The bill would likely prohibit an extremely wide range of practices in the form of restrictions on (a) advertising in traditional broadcasting, radio, and print; (b) online and digital content; (c) sponsorships; (d) sales promotions; (e) celebrity and character endorsements; and (f) the use of a brand name, trademark, or logo that is associated with or evokes thoughts of an unhealthy food.

If this is the case, the scope of the marketing revisions under Bill S-228 would likely have negative repercussions on many sectors of business: farming, food manufacturing, advertising, publishing, broadcasting, and retailing, including the small and medium-sized convenience store owners. At no time have we seen a bill before this House with such wide-ranging restrictions on communications and advertising of legal products.

Let me paint a picture of a Canada under this current bill, Bill S-228. A Canada under the bill would mean that youth would be exposed to beer commercials rather than candy bar commercials during the broadcast of *Hockey Night in Canada*. A Canada under Bill S-228 would also mean that youth could drive a car at age 16 or fly a plane at 15 years of age but still be subjected to restrictions on the marketing of food and beverages. What would happen to Timbits hockey and Tim Hortons summer camps? The very sports teams that keep our children active may struggle to exist.

The lack of differentiation of target audiences for advertising purposes exposes Bill S-228 to a potential constitutional challenge under subsection 2(b) of the charter. The majority of the court in *Irwin Toy Ltd. v. Quebec* noted that the advertising ban under Quebec's Consumer Protection Act was the least intrusive means, least intrusive on the constitutional right of freedom of commercial speech, including advertising, and was justifiable under section 1 of the charter because the advertisers were still free to direct their message at parents and other adults.

Bill S-228 would give broad discretionary powers to the cabinet to make regulations "setting out the factors to be considered in determining whether unhealthy food is advertised in a manner that is primarily directed at children, including how, when and where an advertisement is communicated". We must ask ourselves if we as legislators are not abdicating our responsibility when allowing legislation as broadly drafted as is Bill S-228 to enter this House for consideration. The lack of details renders debate and public consultation meaningless, weakening the integrity of our democratic processes and institutions.

With this reversal of roles, with the Senate introducing legislation for consideration by the House, the House must now act as the chamber of sober second thought to reflect the interests of its constituents.

It is also surprising, as my fellow members will notice when they read the bill, to see what is left in the hands of government officials. The definitions in the legislation should be the subject matter of discussion and guidance by this House, not left to the care of others within the bureaucracy, who would be given very wide latitude to address the definition of unhealthy foods.

• (1735)

This would leave Canadian businesses vulnerable to the whims of a few unelected officials who may not appreciate the ramifications of their decisions. I reiterate, who will be impacted by this bill? It will be farmers, small business owners, manufacturers, advertisers, broadcasters, the very heart of job creation, all the way to small convenience store owners.

Our esteemed senators claim that Bill S-228 satisfies the health minister's mandate letter and that similar prohibitions in other jurisdictions, most notably in the province of Quebec, have worked to decrease childhood obesity levels.

It is critical to highlight that Bill S-228 deviates substantially from the Quebec model, despite the Prime Minister's instructions to the health minister in his mandate letter to her to promote public health by introducing new restrictions on commercial marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children, similar to those in

Private Members' Business

Quebec. The bill targets children under the age of 17 rather than under 13, although it has been said that the age will be changed. In fact, I am advised that the original bill introduced in the Senate did provide an initial target age of under 13 years of age, which would be compatible with Quebec.

Bill S-228 will be masked as a means to fight childhood obesity. It will be seen as checking the box in the health minister's mandate letter. I believe the health minister would want to ensure that that piece of her mandate letter is properly addressed with evidence-based solutions. Bill S-228 illustrates the dangers of crafting health policies on the basis of dated and, quite frankly, incomplete data.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada ranks sixth among industrialized countries in respect of its percentage of children who are obese. The number of obese children in Canada is rising dramatically, and it is having a considerable impact on the health of Canadian families and our health care system. It is time that the government took action and remedied this situation.

I am therefore rising to support Bill S-228, which seeks to find solutions to the serious problem of childhood obesity resulting from children's exposure to food marketing. The World Health Organization itself considers the marketing of unhealthy foods as one of the main contributors to obesity.

The NDP have strongly supported this initiative for a long time. In 2012, we introduced Bill C-430, which sought to ban any advertising specifically targeted at children under the age of 13. We therefore applaud the work that was done in relation to the Senate committee's 2016 report on obesity, which led to the drafting of this bill. This report showed that it is essential that we reduce children's exposure to advertising in order to address the issue of childhood obesity. That is an important issue.

Children are being directly targeted by food and beverage marketing. That is why this bill is so important. As the critic for families, children, and social development and the deputy critic for health, I am proud to be speaking on this issue.

I will point out that the committee should discuss the age threshold this bill sets for marketing to children. The only existing legislation on this subject is the Quebec law, which prohibits advertising directed at children under the age of 13, not 17, the age specified in this bill. The bill originally set the age threshold at 13, but after discussion, it was raised to 17. That will require further discussion.

This bill will have to harmonize with Quebec's law. We need to respect the provinces' jurisdiction. The bill should draw on Quebec's law, not contradict it. This bill will make it illegal to market a food or beverage directly to children, which obviously includes the way the labelling and packaging are designed. It also makes it illegal to offer or give gifts or surprises with the purchase of food or beverages.

Private Members' Business

Urgent action is needed to protect our kids. The numbers are frightening. According to this study, the number of obese children has tripled since the 1980s. It is critical that we take swift and early action on childhood obesity. An obese child is 20% more likely to struggle with weight problems in adulthood. Obese teens are an alarming 80% more likely, according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

It is a well-known fact that childhood obesity has terrible effects on children's physical health, and the same is true of their mental health and social lives. Children with poor self-esteem can be in for a lifelong struggle. On top of all that, another harmful effect of childhood obesity is additional health care spending.

Indeed, as obesity rates increase, the associated costs also increase. Once again, the numbers are extremely troubling. The annual economic burden of obesity is estimated to be in the billions of dollars. It is unbelievable. The Senate committee put that figure somewhere between \$4.6 billion and \$7.1 billion annually in health care costs and lost productivity.

That is why the government has to put Bill S-228 to a vote. People should no longer have to wait to protect their children from the harmful influence of food and beverage marketing. Parents have enough to worry about without having to fight the influence of marketing on their children.

Francine Forget Marin, director of health promotion and research at the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, is certain that children are very vulnerable to advertising because they cannot distinguish between good food and bad.

• (1745)

Marketing directed at children influences their food preferences and eating habits. For example, they will have a tendency to want products that are adorned with a familiar logo or character, such as superheroes or princesses. Young people even think that those products taste better than the same product in a different package.

The problem is that most of these advertised products are low in nutritional value. Research by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada showed that children see more than 25 million food and beverage ads on their favourite web sites every year. That is unbelievable. They are completely bombarded and led to believe that the food is good, but it is quite the opposite. More than 90% of the food and drinks advertised online are unhealthy. By limiting access to ads for young audiences, this bill seeks to prevent young people from adopting their parents' unhealthy eating habits by eliminating the problem at the source.

My team presented the bill to Jeunes en santé, an organization in my riding that works to protect and promote the health and well-being of children and adolescents. The organization's coordinator, Véronique Laramée, told us how important it is for messaging directed at young people to focus on healthy eating. For Jeunes en santé, making sure kids know that eating well is good for them and eating foods with lots of sugar and trans fats is bad for them is crucial. Jeunes en santé is to be commended for promoting healthy eating to young people in my riding.

Imagine a world where children are no longer bombarded by ads for products that are bad for their health. The time has come for the

federal government to do something to support parents who are trying to make good choices. Children and parents need an environment free from the influence of food and beverage advertising, one that supports healthy, nutritious choices.

I want to congratulate the province of Quebec for its leadership in protecting children from aggressive advertising tactics. In fact, Quebec is the only province that already has legislation in place. Its Consumer Protection Act was passed in 1980. After an almost 10-year battle, the Supreme Court finally decided in 1989 that the Quebec law was constitutional. Since then, the Quebec law has had a very positive impact on the health of our children. According to a 2011 study, Quebec has the lowest rate of obesity among children aged 6 to 11, and the highest consumption of fruits and vegetables. This shows how important and useful legislation is.

There are very clear differences at the provincial level. I had the opportunity to meet with members of Quebec's Weight Coalition, who confirmed that there is a striking difference in children's exposure to advertising from province to province. It is time that the federal government remedy this situation.

Bill S-228 has been well received in Quebec, since it will complement the existing legislation. In that regard, Quebec's Weight Coalition reminded me that the exceptions in the Quebec law continue to pose a problem. The Quebec law still allows packaging and advertisements in store windows and displays, and of course, that marketing targets children in particular.

The time has come for the federal government to take action. Studies and research have been done and recommendations have been made, yet the epidemic of childhood obesity has still not been stopped. This bill is the first real step in the right direction.

Our children need to be able to make the right choices, and we need to be able to regulate advertising. If we want a healthy population, we need to act now in order to offer our children the greatest gift of all, the gift of health.

This bill makes the health of all of our children a priority and emphasizes the importance of having all the necessary tools to protect them. Quebec addressed this issue nearly 30 years ago. It is high time the federal government did the same.

• (1750)

[English]

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to have the opportunity to rise to speak in support of Bill S-228, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (prohibiting food and beverage marketing directed at children).

Private Members' Business

With the introduction of this bill last fall, the hon. Senator Nancy Green Raine took a significant step forward in protecting Canada's children from the negative influence of commercial marketing of unhealthy food and beverages. The bill before us today represents an effective means to bring about real change in this area. That said, I also believe that the new amendments to be moved by the sponsor at committee are critical to the success of this important endeavour.

Taken together, the decision to change the definition of children to "under age 13" and the inclusion of a mandatory review of the legislation within five years of its introduction will strengthen Bill S-228. Specifically, the amendments will be effective in protecting children under the age of 13 from the negative influence of the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages now, while monitoring the impacts on teenagers aged between 14 and 17.

We cannot underestimate how important this piece of legislation is to the health and well-being of our children. We are all well aware that a nutritious and balanced diet is important to promote good health. In fact, a healthy diet is one of the best ways to prevent obesity and devastating chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

Over the past few decades, the Government of Canada has made great strides in supporting Canadians by promoting good eating habits, through the long-standing Canada's food guide, the introduction of the nutrition facts table, and improvements in the way foods are labelled.

However, a number of factors are challenging public health efforts and making it increasingly difficult for Canadians to eat a healthy and nutritious diet. Because of this, we are seeing alarming rates of obesity and chronic diseases in this country. More than one in five Canadians lives with chronic diseases, and the rates is increasing. The social and economic costs have become unsustainable. Chronic diseases caused by poor diets have been costing the Canadian economy at least \$27 billion every year, and that cost is growing. Perhaps even more disturbing is that our most vulnerable population, our children, are beginning to carry this heavy burden.

Our children are being brought up in an environment where processed, unhealthy and fast food is the norm. Children are not only eating fewer fruits and vegetables than recommended, but they are also exceeding the amount of sugar, salt, and saturated fat they should be consuming. The statistics are alarming. Recent research shows that toddlers are consuming up to 27% of their calories from sugar, and nearly a third of Canadian children are overweight or obese. As a result, this population is now more at risk than previous generations for developing health problems later in life, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

This is a serious health crisis that requires our immediate attention. More needs to be done to improve the health of our children and to reduce their consumption of foods that are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat.

Current public health efforts to curb this growing crisis are being hampered by the powerful and pervasive marketing messages for unhealthy food, particularly those high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat. These marketing strategies often appeal to children's emotions and influence their eating habits.

To be clear, we are not only referring to the commercials that play during children's television programming. Modern food advertising to children takes on many forms going well beyond traditional media. Today's advertising includes sophisticated strategies that make use of online venues, product placement, and brand recognition. For example, according to a recent study, today's children, collectively, are exposed to a shocking 25 million food and beverage ads every single year on their favourite websites alone. Children are also exposed to marketing every day in schools, restaurants, cinemas, and grocery stores. These industry practices include celebrity endorsements, promotions and incentive programs designed to entice children to remember, prefer, and select specific company brands.

Ninety percent of foods advertised online to children are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat. It is not surprising that marketing has been identified by leading experts as a major contributor to childhood obesity.

Bill S-228 puts forward a legislative strategy under the Food and Drugs Act to address marketing to children by imposing prohibitions on the advertising of unhealthy food and beverages directed at children. Most parents are not aware of the extent to which their children are exposed to these advertisements, or the potential negative impacts on them.

We are not alone internationally in battling this problem. The World Health Organization and the United Nations have endorsed government action against harmful, unhealthy food marketing to children. Several countries have already taken action, including the United Kingdom, Mexico, Chile, South Korea, Sweden, and Ireland.

Here at home, voluntary efforts on the part of industry have not proven to be effective, and the time has come for Canada to take stronger action. I would like to remind the House that the Minister of Health has also committed to restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods to children as part of her mandate requirements. These restrictions will complement Health Canada's comprehensive healthy eating strategy, which aims to make the healthier choice the easier choice.

● (1755)

The strategy also includes other initiatives, such as revising Canada's food guide to provide dietary recommendations based on the latest scientific evidence. Health Canada is also improving food packaging labels to make it easier for Canadians to understand what is in the food they are buying. In addition, Health Canada is pursuing sodium reduction targets, and the Minister of Health has already banned industrial trans fat in packaged foods with regulations that will come into force next year.

Private Members' Business

Getting and keeping our children active is key to their living long, healthy, and productive lives. To support this goal, the Minister of Health has made it clear to me that she will advance regulations under Bill S-228 to exempt the sponsorship of community sporting activities from marketing restrictions. Many community organizations have expressed concern about the impact this might have on important sporting activities, and the minister has listened to them and is prepared to respond appropriately.

Community sporting activities provide social and health benefits to our kids. However, since we also know that sponsorship is a powerful marketing tactic, the government will engage with the sports community to better understand the risks and benefits of sponsorship to ensure that our policy approach achieves our goal of the best health outcomes for our children.

I commend the Minister of Health for her leadership in this area. Together, these measures will result in real change for Canadians and, in particular, Canadian youth.

I urge all members of the House to support this legislation so that our children have a chance to grow up healthy without the negative influence of the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages.

It is important that our children and future generations have the tools they need to make healthy food choices. With the right tools and with restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy foods, I am confident that we will be able to bend the curve in the obesity and chronic disease crisis.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill S-228, a bill that would prohibit the marketing of unhealthy foods to children.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank Senator Nancy Green Raine for her continued dedication in this area and for her hard work on this bill. I would also like to thank the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for introducing this bill in the House.

[*English*]

When we talk about the bill, it is important we take a fact and evidence-based approach. I think everyone in the House would agree that we would like to see obesity reduced in Canadians, and that is the goal. However, one of the troubling things is the bill would likely not do that.

First, let us look at the current situation. We have witnessed a decline in childhood and adolescent obesity levels in Canada from 2004 to 2015. This finding is based on the most recent Statistics Canada data from the 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey. Therefore, rates are declining and people are starting to become aware about what they eat and the effect it has on them.

We have heard in the House how other countries have implemented similar legislation to what is proposed here. In fact, the province of Quebec has had this type of legislation in place for the last 40 years. Unfortunately, there has not been a reduction in obesity rates in Quebec. Its rates have been flat for the last 10 years. Therefore, when we look at addressing obesity, it is important to address all of the factors and ensure that what we do will have an impact.

I know the member who has sponsored the bill is a runner and very fit. I am a triathlete and, in full disclosure to the House, I do from time to time eat chips. I do consume McDonald's, Tim Hortons, and a variety of things that might be categorized under the legislation as being unhealthy. However, I do not think members would say I am obese. Certainly, I am quite healthy. It is a balance.

If I look to how I grew up, I remember we ate Lucky Charms, Cap'n Crunch, and a myriad of candied cereals that would make the unhealthy list. In fact, my mother used to give us toast that we dipped in maple syrup. However, there was not a large amount of obesity then, because we ran around all day, played outside, and got our physical activity. Physical activity is probably a stronger factor than what we see here.

One of the problems I have with the bill is the vague definition of “unhealthy” food. Who will decide that? As we pointed out, everything in moderation can contribute to one's diet. That is problematic.

The other thing is the unintended consequences of the bill. I was pleased to hear, with some of the amendments the member has proposed, about the age requirement being held to 13. Although I do not think the bill would have the intended effect of reducing obesity, it is clear that it is problematic with respect to court challenges and also with respect to what we allow people 15 and 16 years old to do. We allow them to fly planes, to get their driver's licence, and all kinds of things. It seems like we need to err on the side of personal choice and individual responsibility.

Also, there will be an impact for many of the folks who have businesses, McDonald's and Tim Hortons I mentioned. Pop is another controversial topic of conversation. However, all of these businesses will receive an unintended consequence. Therefore, I was happy to hear that the health minister recognized there would be an impact on the community support that these organizations provided with respect to sporting events and those kinds of things. It is important that we keep those up, and all the other things they do to support the community, such as the Ronald McDonald houses and the camps that Tim Hortons run. There are numerous beneficial things.

Therefore, I do not think we want to implement legislation that would not actually address the obesity issue but have these other negative consequences, which may not be intended.

● (1800)

One of the concerns that has been brought up as well, which would be addressed by the amendment of reducing the age, is with respect to the kids who work in restaurants or convenience stores and would be exposed to marketing.

Private Members' Business

The advertising part of this also looks to be difficult to implement. I am not sure what we expect to happen with billboards, because young children will see the billboards. Is that marketing directed at children? Who will make those calls? I think it is unreasonable to assume that the people at Health Canada are going to be able to determine whether advertising is directed at children, and to enforce it. How would they enforce that? How many resources are required to enforce something like that? Those are questions that still need to be answered.

The other concerns that have been raised to me have to do with predominantly adult audiences. If the audience is 95% adult, would we allow unhealthy foods to be advertised there or not? Some of these things seem a little hypocritical. If we look at the government allowing 12- to 17-year-olds to possess up to five grams of marijuana, it seems ridiculous and very hypocritical that we do not want them to see ads for unhealthy foods. There are things of that nature that need to be addressed in this legislation.

There are also going to be economic impacts from this. Estimates from a recent industry study indicate that a ban on food and beverage advertising would result in a GDP reduction of over \$10 billion a year, tens of thousands of lost employment person-years, and reductions in income, payroll, and corporate revenues of nearly \$1 billion. These unintended consequences will be very bad for the country. As I said, I do not believe the legislation is actually going to get to the heart of the issue, which is reducing obesity.

The other thing that is problematic from my perspective is this. I grew up enjoying Christmas calendars and Easter bunnies. I really think that there is a time and a place where the marketing of treats does not result in obesity. They happen occasionally and are not a chronic part of an everyday diet. That needs to be looked at as well, and exemptions would have to be put forward for those.

I do not know how one would measure whether or not marketing is primarily directed at children. I am not clear on the definition of that. If we look to other places that have implemented similar programs, I know that the data from Chile suggests that it has not seen a reduction in obesity, even though it put in place some very stringent measures. The boxes of Lucky Charms and Cap'n Crunch that I talked about have to be packaged in a white sack in Chile, yet it is still not seeing a reduction in obesity. Similar results exist in the U.K. as well. Therefore, we need to be fact-based and evidence-based when it comes to how we view this legislation.

One of the things that I would like to see is a focus on the activity level of children. I talked about how there was no obesity around our neighbourhood because we were all very active. We have to educate our children and Canadians on the food that they eat and how to live a healthy lifestyle. That is good education and I have certainly changed some of my eating habits over time. It is better for us to educate and then allow people to make their personal choices. If they are taking their kids out, they should be able to take them to McDonald's. I do not think we want to get into a situation where we have a nanny state and we are influencing the personal choices of people. Individuals have a responsibility. Parents have a responsibility.

Those are my comments. I look forward to being at the health committee to talk about this, to look at the amendments that are put forward, and to further discussion.

• (1805)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today in support of Bill S-228, the child health protection act. I know this legislation will make a difference in the overall health of Canadians, especially our youth. As chair of the all-party diabetes caucus, I know the importance of deterring unhealthy food choices in favour of a healthy, active lifestyle.

I would like to express my thanks to the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for sponsoring the bill. I would also to recognize the efforts of the hon. Senator Greene Raine for leading the bill and for her tireless work in advancing the national dialogue on restricting the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children.

Young children are subject to the influence of advertising in many forms of media. With bright colours and big excitement, advertising can attract young Canadians to food and drink choices that do not contribute to their nutritional needs or that are filled with sugar, which is a leading cause of obesity among our youth today.

The social and economic costs of diet-related chronic diseases in this country are already unsustainable. Chronic diseases impacted by diet cost the Canadian economy at least \$27 billion dollars every year, and that cost is growing. We need to break this trend and move the needle in the right direction, starting with our children. This is just one example of unhealthy marketing to young Canadians that would be prevented through the changes suggested in this legislation, and that would be a great thing.

Bill S-228 seeks to restrict the marketing of unhealthy food to children. It seeks to prevent bright and animated imagery from influencing children to choose foods and beverages that do nothing to meet their daily nutrient needs and that fills them with unhealthy sugars, chemicals, fats, and empty carbohydrates. This is an important move at a time when our nation faces a chronic disease crisis brought on by diets that are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat. The bill would help head off growing obesity rates in Canada and could even help reduce the epidemic of diabetes that is soaring from coast to coast to coast.

As I mentioned previously, my role as chair of the all-party diabetes caucus makes me especially proud to support this bill brought here by my friend and colleague, who brings his extensive medical background to our work on the Standing Committee on Health.

Today Canada ranks among the most overweight OECD countries, based on body mass index. A 2017 obesity update by the OECD showed that in Canada, approximately 27% of the population aged 15 and over is obese. In my riding of Brampton South, we see that obesity is a significant health concern for all residents. In fact, in Peel Region, 51% of adults and 32% of grade 7 to 12 students are overweight or obese.

Adjournment Proceedings

Many factors contribute to these chronic health concerns, including high levels of sodium consumption. Canadian children consume on average more than 80% of the daily recommended salt intake. This can lead to high blood pressure, which comes with many dangerous consequences. Across the country, 25% of Canadians are living with diagnosed high blood pressure, and this rate has been rising by nearly 3% each year since 2000.

While there are many factors that contribute to obesity, a lack of nutritional balance and an overuse of unhealthy foods is a major contributing factor. Interventions like this one are important to protect young Canadians from the appeals of advertising, which can draw them to make unhealthy choices in their daily food and drinks. Certainly, reducing our obesity rate will have a significant impact on reducing the rate of Canadians living with type 2 diabetes. Reduced blood sugar levels, increased physical activity, and loss of about 5% to 10% of total body weight can make a great difference in overall health and quality of life.

Our government is taking great strides to encourage healthy, active living. Canada's healthy eating strategy is a great example of this, with many elements working together to help Canadians make the healthy choice the easy choice.

• (1810)

Too often, with the pressures of our busy lives, Canadians forgo home cooking in favour of processed foods. Too often, we substitute nutritional value for convenience, and with the power of advertising, this can lead to habit-forming patterns for Canadian youth and young adults. In fact, a recent study found that children are exposed to more than 25 million food and beverage ads on their favourite websites. The World Health Organization has also expressed its concern about the power of advertising targeted at children. In 2010, WHO member states, including Canada, made recommendations calling for comprehensive controls on the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children.

We all know how pervasive marketing can be when it comes to making consumer decisions. How many words have entered our common language after first being brand names? How many of us can sing along to the jingles on TV and radio? How many of us can name the big orange tiger on the cereal box?

When healthy eating and active living can make such a great difference in deterring the onset of obesity and chronic disease, a responsible government should do all it can to help Canadians live healthy lives.

This summer, I travelled across Canada to speak with Canadians about healthy eating and heard great support for this bill as it made its way through the other place. Now that it has been raised here, I continue to hear support for this bill and the positive changes it would make to the overall health of Canadian youth. Youth are, after all, the next generation of Canadian adults, and if we can promote improve their health at a younger age, we will see consistent change in the overall health of all Canadians.

It is my hope that in the years to come, the pressures of food and beverage industry marketing will be removed and that children and young Canadians will making healthier choices, contributing to their overall health.

I want thank my colleague for bringing this bill here, and all who have worked to protect young Canadians from targeted marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks. I encourage all of my colleagues on both sides of this House to support this bill and do their part to help us protect the health of Canadian youth. Together, we can make a real difference in the health and well-being of Canadians today and for years to come.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. The the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has approximately two minutes, and then he will be able to continue the next time the item comes up for debate..

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at this time of the year, I want to wish you, all of the pages, staff, and colleagues a very merry Christmas and a very happy and prosperous 2018.

It is a pleasure to speak today to Bill S-228. While the intent of the bill is something we should all support, and I certainly do, more than one member has talked about its unintended consequences. I met today with members of Canada Soccer and Sports Matters, who are very concerned about programs. Everyone is very aware of the Timbits hockey and soccer programs and a number of others. These could be in severe jeopardy of not complying with this bill if the regulations are not done right. That is a concern.

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound will have eight minutes and 45 seconds remaining for his speech when the debate resumes.

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.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this evening's debate is following on the eve of the Union of BC Municipalities convention in Vancouver, in September, where my legislation on the issue of a solution for abandoned vessels was finally, after decades of pushing, especially by coastal communities, on the convention floor. Eighteen-hundred delegates endorsed my legislation, Bill C-352, which I had built in co-operation with coastal communities. It included all the solutions they had asked for over 15 years of advocating both to the B.C. Liberal government and federal governments, both Liberal and Conservative.

Adjournment Proceedings

As we know, two weeks ago, a number of Liberal majority manoeuvres killed the bill, sank it, so to speak. It did not even come to the floor for a debate and a vote, which is quite unusual. My question now to the government is how it will incorporate into its legislation, Bill C-64, the transport minister's bill, all that advice from coastal communities.

As a reminder, fixing vessel registration was a major part of my bill. Piloting a vessel turn-in program, kind of like what we have done successfully in many provinces with old abandoned automobiles by finding incentives and programs to encourage people to turn them in so they can be recycled and dealt with responsibly, would be a good way to deal with the backlog. Second would be creating good green jobs by supporting local marine salvage industries and co-operating with recycling organizations to find new markets for fibreglass and other difficult to recycle material. That links to the previous idea as well. A vessel turn-in program or a boat amnesty would help create the critical mass that might cause some economies of scale to deal with abandoned vessels.

Finally, to end the jurisdictional runaround, would be making one agency the go-to on dealing with abandoned vessels. What we proposed was the Coast Guard. The government's bill continues to have responsibility apportioned out over a number of different ministries, so one would need to have an org chart to figure out who was responsible. That is not tenable for coastal communities.

Since we last talked about this, I have had dozens of endorsements from local governments. I very much want to know how the Liberal government, having sunk my legislation, will still recycle and use the material in it in a way that reflects the multitude of asks from local governments. The Islands Trust Council, the City of Nanaimo, the Town of Ladysmith, the City of Campbell River, and the Regional District of Nanaimo all endorsed my bill. There was the City of Parksville; the City of Victoria; the Village of Queen Charlotte, in Haida Gwaii; the District of Tofino; the District of Oak Bay; the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District; the Powell River Regional District; the Village of Tahsis; the District of Ucluelet; Sooke; Sechelt; Metchosin; the City of Powell River; the Township of Esquimalt; the District of Kitimat; the District of Fort St. James; the town of Burlington, in Newfoundland; the Township of Nipigon, in Ontario; the Town of View Royal; the District of North Saanich; and the list goes on.

The call is clear. Local governments need their solutions inserted into this bill. How will the government respond?

• (1820)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise again to reiterate our government's commitment to address the serious problem of abandoned and wrecked vessels that are negatively affecting our coastal and shoreline communities. We know and understand the issues these problem vessels represent. We have made numerous announcements and launched several initiatives that clearly demonstrate our commitment to addressing these long-standing issues.

I would remind the House that when we launched the oceans protection plan, just over a year ago, we said we would deliver a

national strategy on abandoned and wrecked vessels. We are delivering. Let me explain how.

First, I would like to remind members that in the past year our government has launched two short-term funding programs designed to support the cleanup and removal of legacy abandoned vessels and wrecks. This includes Transport Canada's abandoned boats program, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans abandoned and wrecked vessels removal program, which collectively cover all waters in Canada.

These two programs recognize that local communities, ports, and harbours, particularly those that are small and remote, often do not have the resources to cover the costs of removing and disposing of smaller abandoned and wrecked vessels. These programs will deliver tangible results. They will get smaller problem vessels out of the water, and indeed, this has already started under these programs.

The abandoned boats program also includes two additional sub-components. One is focused on education and outreach to help inform vessel owners of their responsibilities. The other is focused on research into options to improve vessel recycling and design.

Our government also committed to ensuring vessel owners can be held accountable. We are delivering on this commitment as well, with the introduction of the wrecked, abandoned, or hazardous vessels act, or Bill C-64, on October 30. Drawing upon best international practices, this piece of legislation is more robust and comprehensive than anything ever seen previously in Canada.

As the key preventative component of the national strategy, it will strengthen vessel owner responsibility and liability, address irresponsible vessel management, and enhance federal powers to take more proactive action on problem vessels, before they become bigger problems.

Simply put, our government is delivering on the commitments we have made to resolve the long-standing abandoned vessels challenge. We have short-term and long-term preventative and removal measures in place, or being put in place. Everything will not get done overnight, but progress will be made continuously as part of an overall, comprehensive strategy. We look forward to the committee's study of Bill C-64.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, the question still remains. Of the very specific elements I mentioned, how will they be accommodated into the government's legislation? There is nothing in Bill C-64 that contains any of the elements I just mentioned. They are integral to its success. Dealing with the backlog is necessary for dealing with the overall problem, as opposed to the more forward-looking approach of the government's bill. Fixing vessel registration is vital. The government will not be able to send a penalty or a ticket to an irresponsible owner if it cannot find out who that owner is. They have to work together.

I ask again. The government's offer of \$260,000 and \$300,000 this year is a drop in the bucket compared to the thousands of boats that need to be removed. I would like to hear some specifics from the government.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1825)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I wish to reassure members that we are committed to protecting and preserving our marine environment and ecosystems, local economies, and the health and safety of our citizens who are affected by abandoned and wrecked vessels. These issues matter to coastal and shoreline communities, and they matter to us.

We have made significant investments to address this issue, as part of the \$1.5 billion oceans protection plan. Quite simply, we have launched two new funding programs to support the cleanup of small high-priority vessels and wrecks across Canada, support education and outreach, and support research into vessel recycling and design. We have introduced comprehensive new legislation to create the required federal legislative framework to deal with future occurrences of wrecked, abandoned, or hazardous vessels, while also reducing the impact of those that do occur.

Our strategy aligns with the best practices around the world and delivers on our commitment to protect our valuable coasts and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

TAXATION

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House again today to talk about small business tax changes, which is something that we have asked a lot of questions about this fall.

The question on which I expressed an interest in getting more information was one I asked of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and the finance minister are both very wealthy men who have structured their personal affairs in such a way as to protect them from paying the same sort of taxes that they want to impose on our small businesses. Therefore, the question I asked the Prime Minister was quite simple: Would any of the changes being envisioned by the government to increase taxes on small businesses apply to the family fortunes of the Prime Minister or the finance minister?

Today, in question period, the finance minister finally told us that the government would be providing some information tomorrow on some of the changes that are going to be imposed on small businesses. Therefore, I will ask the question again.

As a result of the changes that are coming to small business owners, such as the tax increases and changes in the way taxes are applied to small businesses, will the family fortunes of the finance minister or the Prime Minister be affected in any way?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that our government was elected a little more than two years ago on a promise, a commitment, to Canadians to grow our economy and to strengthen the middle class. It is obvious now, two years down the road, that this plan we put forward, investing in infrastructure and reducing taxes for the middle class, has been and is working.

Over the last two years, the Canadian economy has added close to 600,000 new jobs, most of them full time. Canada's unemployment rate is now the lowest it has been in a decade. Businesses, including small, family-run businesses, are a big part of this success.

Since coming to office, our goal has been to ensure that the middle class and small and medium-sized businesses share the benefits of this economic growth. This is why one of the first things we did as a government was lower personal income taxes for nine million Canadians and raise them on the top one per cent of income earners.

We also brought in the Canada child benefit, which benefits nine out of 10 families, who get more money each month, tax free, to spend on their families. This has also had a very good social and economic impact on our country, as consumer spending has gone up. There is confidence in the Canadian economy now and for the future, as many families now have the means, more so than they did under the previous child tax benefit that the Conservative government had put in place.

[*Translation*]

That is not all. Our government also announced that it would be enhancing the working income tax benefit by \$500 million starting in 2019. That is a 65% increase since we came to office, and it will ensure low-income workers have more money in their pockets at the end of the month. Our government will also keep taking actions that support the middle class, and we will make sure companies that contribute to job creation and economic growth continue to enjoy a tax framework that works in their favour and is designed to help them succeed. We have opened a dialogue with Canadians on how to proceed going forward, and we are following up on what we heard about the tax reform the member was referring to.

Following extensive consultations on tax planning strategies and the use of private corporations that we held with small business owners, farmers, fishers, professionals, and experts, we made changes to ensure that Canada's competitive corporate tax rates are not used by high-income individuals to gain a personal tax advantage through their private corporation. The government is putting forward an approach that takes into account the feedback we received from Canadians on each aspect of the consultation.

Adjournment Proceedings

It is also important to remember that we are going to lower the small business tax rate to 9%. We want to make sure the resulting tax advantage will help those businesses grow, create jobs, and innovate, rather than give wealthy individuals the additional benefit of a tax cut that is not available to other Canadians. Our goal here is to add an element of fairness that is currently lacking in our tax system and to keep supporting small and medium-sized businesses. That is why all of Canada's SMEs will get a tax cut from 10.5% to 10% on January 1, 2018, and then to 9% on January 1, 2019. We recognize the importance of small and medium-sized businesses, and we know how much they contribute to the Canadian economy. Our goal is to promote growth for Canada. We have been doing that remarkably well for the past two years, and our growth rate is the strongest in the G7. We will stay on track by supporting Canadian SMEs.

• (1830)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, that was a great answer to a question I did not ask. I asked if the tax reforms to be imposed on small businesses, starting January 2, the details of which apparently will be released just a few weeks from tomorrow, would impact the family fortunes or the tax shelters of the finance minister or the Prime Minister by a single penny. Those reforms will increase costs for small businesses.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, as the member heard today in question period, the details regarding income sprinkling will be

announced tomorrow. We want to ensure that Canadians who work in family businesses can continue to do so and continue to get paid for that work.

Income sprinkling affects about 3% of businesses in Canada. What I can say, however, is that 100% of SMEs in Canada, from coast to coast to coast, will benefit from a lower tax rate effective January 1, 2018. The small business tax rate will drop from 10.5% to 10% and then to 9% in 2019.

One hundred per cent of the SMEs that currently contribute to the vitality of the Canadian economy have also benefited from the measures that we introduced, particularly our investments in infrastructure and the Canada child benefit, which I mentioned earlier. The confidence that Canadians have in our success and economic prosperity is reflected in all of our businesses. I see that in my region, which is prospering and has a vibrant economy. That is thanks in part to our government's measures.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît not being present in the House 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, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:33 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Parliamentary Budget Officer

The Speaker 16307

Interparliamentary Delegations

Mr. Bagnell 16307

Committees of the House

Official Languages

Mr. Paradis 16307

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Mr. McKay 16307

International Trade

Mr. Eyking 16307

Mr. Dreeshen 16307

Latin American Heritage Month Act

Mr. Kent 16308

Bill S-218. First reading 16308

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time) 16308

Petitions

Algoma Passenger Rail Service

Mrs. Hughes 16308

Religious Freedom

Mr. Van Kesteren 16308

Pensions

Ms. Quach 16308

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lamoureux 16308

Privilege

Statements by Minister of Revenue Regarding the Disability Tax Credit

Mrs. Lebouthillier 16308

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Salaries Act

Ms. Chagger 16309

Bill C-24. Third reading 16309

Ms. Gladu 16311

Mr. Cannings 16311

Mr. Kent 16312

Mr. Finnigan 16312

Ms. Quach 16312

Message from the Senate

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes) 16313

Salaries Act

Bill C-24. Third reading 16313

Mr. Clarke 16313

Ms. Tassi 16315

Mr. Nantel 16315

Mr. Casey (Charlottetown) 16316

Mr. Tilson 16316

Mr. Blaikie 16316

Mr. Lamoureux 16319

Ms. Quach 16319

Mr. Kent 16320

Mr. Lamoureux 16320

Mr. Lamoureux 16320

Mr. Deltell 16323

Mr. Blaikie 16323

Mr. Samson 16324

Mrs. Boucher 16324

Mr. Deltell 16324

Mr. Kent 16326

Mr. Lamoureux 16326

Mr. Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) 16326

Mr. Gerretsen 16328

Mr. Kent 16328

Mr. Bittle 16329

Mr. Kent 16331

Mr. Nantel 16331

Mr. Gerretsen 16331

Mr. Albrecht 16332

Mr. Albrecht 16332

Mr. Baylis 16334

Ms. Quach 16334

Mr. Genuis 16334

Mr. Godin 16334

Mr. Nantel 16335

Mr. Vaughan 16336

Mr. Albrecht 16336

Mr. Gerretsen 16336

Mr. Genuis 16338

Mr. Nantel 16338

Ms. Tassi 16338

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 16338

Mr. McCauley 16339

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Interests of Quebec

Mr. Ste-Marie 16340

Blood Donation

Mr. Longfield 16340

Ray Reckseidler Appreciation Night

Mr. Dreeshen 16341

Yvon Durelle

Mr. Finnigan 16341

Pensions

Mr. Stetski 16341

180th Anniversary of the Battle of Saint-Eustache

Ms. Lapointe 16341

Human Rights	
Mr. Anderson	16341
Hanukkah	
Ms. Dabrusin	16342
H2 Hockey Straps	
Mr. Sorbara	16342
Natural Resources	
Mr. Zimmer	16342
Libya	
Ms. Khara	16342
Davenport	
Ms. Dzerowicz	16343
Eda Rojiet Ezi	
Ms. Rempel	16343
Human Rights	
Mr. Ehsassi	16343
Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	
Mr. Saganash	16343
Battlefords—Lloydminster	
Mrs. Block	16343
By-Elections	
Mr. Aldag	16344

ORAL QUESTIONS

International Trade	
Mr. Scheer	16344
Mr. Trudeau	16344
Mr. Scheer	16344
Mr. Trudeau	16344
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Scheer	16344
Mr. Trudeau	16344
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Scheer	16345
Mr. Trudeau	16345
Mr. Scheer	16345
Mr. Trudeau	16345
Mr. Trudeau	16345
Government Appointments	
Mr. Caron	16345
Mr. Trudeau	16345
Mr. Caron	16345
Mr. Trudeau	16345
Mr. Cullen	16345
Mr. Trudeau	16346
Mr. Cullen	16346
Mr. Trudeau	16346
Taxation	
Ms. Raitt	16346
Mr. Morneau	16346
Ms. Raitt	16346
Mr. Morneau	16346

Mr. Rayes	16346
Mr. Morneau	16346
Mr. Rayes	16346
Mr. Morneau	16347
Mr. Poilievre	16347
Mr. Morneau	16347
Mr. Poilievre	16347
Mr. Morneau	16347
Public Services and Procurement	
Ms. Sansoucy	16347
Ms. Qualtrough	16347
Mr. Weir	16347
Ms. Qualtrough	16347
International Trade	
Mr. O'Toole	16348
Ms. Freeland	16348
Mr. O'Toole	16348
Ms. Freeland	16348
Mr. Clarke	16348
Ms. Freeland	16348
Mr. Allison	16348
Ms. Freeland	16348
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. MacGregor	16348
Ms. Qualtrough	16348
Ms. Benson	16349
Ms. Qualtrough	16349
Innovation, Science and Economic Development	
Mr. Jowhari	16349
Mr. Bains	16349
National Defence	
Mr. Clement	16349
Mr. Sajjan	16349
Mr. Clement	16349
Ms. Qualtrough	16349
Mr. Paul-Hus	16349
Mr. Sajjan	16350
Mr. Paul-Hus	16350
Mr. Sajjan	16350
Public Services and Procurement	
Ms. Boutin-Sweet	16350
Ms. Qualtrough	16350
Mr. Stetski	16350
Mr. Brison	16350
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Scheer	16350
Mr. Trudeau	16350
Mr. Berthold	16350
Mr. Hehr	16351
Mrs. Stubbs	16351
Mr. Hehr	16351
Human Rights	
Mr. Housefather	16351
Ms. Wilson-Raybould	16351

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Ms. Rempel	16351
Mr. Hussen	16351
Public Services and Procurement	
Ms. Ramsey	16351
Ms. Qualtrough	16352
Indigenous Affairs	
Mr. Badawey	16352
Mrs. Philpott	16352
Public Safety	
Mr. Motz	16352
Mr. Goodale	16352
Taxation	
Mr. Barsalou-Duval	16352
Mr. Bains	16352
Canadian Heritage	
Ms. Pauzé	16352
Ms. Joly	16352
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	16353
ROYAL ASSENT	
The Speaker	16353
Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act	
Mr. Goodale	16353
GOVERNMENT ORDERS	
Salaries Act	
Bill C-24. Third reading	16353
Mr. McCauley	16353
Ms. Tassi	16355
Mr. McDonald	16355
Mr. Maguire	16356
Mr. Lamoureux	16356
Mr. Grewal	16356
Mr. Kmiec	16358
Mr. Blaikie	16358
Ms. Tassi	16359
Ms. Malcolmson	16359
Ms. Mathysen	16359
Mr. Vaughan	16359
Message from the Senate	
The Deputy Speaker	16361

Salaries Act	
Bill C-24. Third reading	16362
Mr. Kmiec	16362
Mr. Vaughan	16362
Mr. Blaikie	16362
Ms. Hardcastle	16363
Mr. Kmiec	16363
Mr. Bratina	16365
Mr. Waugh	16365
Mr. Maguire	16366
Mr. Bagnell	16367
Ms. Gladu	16367
Ms. Tassi	16368
Division on motion deferred	16369

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Child Health Protection Act	
Mr. Eyolfson	16370
Bill S-228. Second reading	16370
Mr. Brown	16371
Ms. Gladu	16371
Mr. Lamoureux	16371
Mr. McColeman	16371

ROYAL ASSENT

The Speaker	16372
-------------------	-------

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Child Health Protection Act	
Bill S-228. Second reading	16372
Mr. McColeman	16372
Ms. Sansoucy	16373
Mr. Blair	16374
Ms. Gladu	16376
Ms. Sidhu (Brampton South)	16377
Mr. Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	16378

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

The Environment	
Ms. Malcolmson	16378
Mrs. McCrimmon	16379
Taxation	
Mr. Strahl	16380
Mr. Lightbound	16380

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