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Friday, February 2, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 2, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like the House to take note of today's use of the wooden mace.

[*English*]

This mace is a reminder of the fire that claimed seven lives and destroyed the Parliament buildings the night of February 3, 1916.

[*Translation*]

The original mace was one of the objects destroyed in the fire. The wooden replica you see here today was made after the fire and was used until the United Kingdom gifted us the current mace in 1917.

[*English*]

As the House will not be sitting Saturday, the anniversary of the fire, the wooden mace is being used today to recall what happened 102 years ago.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 1 consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak to another important piece of legislation that the government has brought forward.

I am a bit surprised with the number of amendments and the objections coming forward from the Conservative Party, in particular, with regard to the legislation. I believe Canadians in all regions of our wonderful country would support it because it is about transparency.

Members of the opposition often talk about elections and about looking at ways we can improve them. They often want to talk about ensuring there is more transparency in government. However, when it comes to an opportunity to vote in favour of legislation that would make election financing more transparent, it appears they will vote against it, particularly the Conservative Party. I am somewhat disappointed in that. I thought those members would recognize, as other stakeholders have, the value of passing it.

Nowadays, the Conservatives like to quote the former ethics commissioner excessively. Mary Dawson has been clear that the legislation would ensure more transparency. Even though stakeholders such as Mary Dawson clearly indicate that it is good legislation moving forward, the official opposition objects to it. It does not make sense, unless we get a better understanding as to why the Conservatives might be a bit nervous about it.

We on this side of the House recognize what the legislation proposes to do, and maybe that is a good starting point for me.

What would Bill C-50 do that would offend so many Conservative members across the way? The bill would make fundraising events more transparent. It would apply to all fundraising events involving cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister. I think the Conservatives object to that. The proposed bill also includes transparency by party leaders and leadership candidates when there is a leadership race.

The bill would require events to be advertised on the website of political parties at least five days before they would take place. Political parties would be required to provide a report of attendees at these events to Elections Canada within 30 days after the event.

The bill also proposes some technical changes. It will bring leadership and nomination campaign expenses in line with the current regime for candidates.

In 2017, a Conservative fundraiser was held at which the current Conservative leader was the all-star candidate, not Stephen Harper but his replacement. Many people confuse the two as the same, and I can appreciate why. No one was to know about it. It was a secret fundraiser. When we initially inquired about it, we were told there was no fundraiser.

An hon. members: Where's the transparency?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the initial reaction was that there was no transparency. When the Conservatives were pushed on the issue, they claimed there was a fundraiser—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind members, not all members but one in particular, that when he speaks to his colleagues, he has a wonderful voice that carries throughout the building, but the rest of us have to hear it. If he is to make the comments, maybe he could keep his voice down and he could say it to his own colleagues, but not interrupt the actual speaker.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to help my colleagues across the way in the Conservative Party realize why their speaking notes against the legislation are flawed. They go against what Canadians would want to see the official opposition do with respect to the legislation. If the Conservatives were in touch with their constituents, if they were in touch with Canadians, they would realize the error of their ways and maybe revisit them and consider being more supportive of the legislation and vote in favour of it.

I will go back to my example as to why I believe the Conservative Party opposes the legislation.

The government acknowledged and brought attention to a fundraising event that was hosted with the leader of the Official Opposition attending. Even after the Conservatives' initial denial that the event had not taken place, we persisted and they had no choice but to agree. They admitted to it, after a great deal of pulling. After they admitted they did have it, they said that he was not the same as a prime minister or a minister. It is as if the leader of the official opposition has no authority, power, or influence, that the leader of the opposition does not have to share with Canadians who he or she might receive money from in the future. We are talking about hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars, and the Conservatives still believe they do not have to share that information with Canadians.

As we continue to look at ways to improve our election finances act, the Conservative Party needs to get with the times. It needs to understand and appreciate that there is an obligation to be more transparent with Canadians.

We have seen changes in legislation over the years, modernizing it, with an expectation that we will have a healthier democracy in the long run. The legislation is all about that.

The Conservatives will make accusations of all sorts in regard to the current government and the Ethics Commissioner, and exaggerate things. However, let us be very clear. Our government has consistently worked with the Ethics Commissioner and all independent parliamentary officers of the House in complying, following recommendations, and so forth. The same cannot be said about the Conservative Party, especially when it was in government.

I often make reference to the importance raising of money. It is important that we have the finances in order to campaign in elections. One strong positive is the limits that would be in place so no one could contribute than \$1,500 to a campaign. It speaks volumes to our constituents when they realize that members of Parliament cannot receive more than \$1,500 from an individual. They also cannot receive anything from unions or corporations. It is a way to assure our constituents that we have rules in place to ensure we will not be influenced by big money.

Once, I had a constituent ask me if someone gave me \$1,000 donation, did that influence me. First, if I do find out about it, I appreciate it. I also appreciate the individual who works 20 to 40 hours a week during a campaign period, and often before a campaign period, as a volunteer for me.

• (1010)

When we look at elections, they are about more than just money; they are about people and getting them engaged. We need to recognize that. We need to appreciate the thousands of volunteers who make our democracy work in the first place. However, money is an important component to it. That is one of the reasons why we brought forward this legislation, to ensure there is more transparency, not less, to improve our electoral financing laws.

• (1015)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure listening to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader today. The word that often is used in these circumstances is "hutzpa". The hon. gentleman rises to talk about the glories of Liberal electoral reform a year and a day after the Prime Minister broke the most sacred promise made during on campaign trail, which was the last first past the post, etc. Today, he would like us to believe that somehow making fundraising events more transparent is a substitute for getting rid of cash for access programs. I think he believes we can fool Canadians with these cosmetic changes in Bill C-50 and make them forget that all the Liberals are doing is normalizing cash for access programs.

Does the hon. gentleman even care?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do care. That is why I have suggested, not only to the Conservatives but also to my New Democratic friends, that they support the legislation. It is good legislation.

I know some might be offended with respect to incorporating leaders of political parties. However, today's reality is that leaders of political parties, even Jagmeet Singh, have a responsibility to be transparent when they receive money. As the leader of the New Democratic Party, we goes around Canada no doubt, as other leaders do, soliciting contributions, and individuals donate to the New Democrats. Why? I will leave it up to those individuals to explain that rationale.

However, we know the leader of the New Democrats and the leader of the Conservative Party have hosted these events, just like previous leaders of the Liberal Party when it was in opposition. We are arguing, much like the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers, that all of those individuals, because of the positions they hold, have an obligation today, through this legislation if it were to pass, to be more transparent with Canadians as to who attends these events and the cost when it exceeds \$200.

I do not quite understand why we are seeing this type of resistance, as if something new has happened in the last two years. We see progressive legislation on a very important file. I would have thought the New Democrats would support progressive legislation.

Government Orders

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a couple of days ago I was talking to a constituent about some unrelated matter. We talked about that for a while, and then she said how nice it was for her MP to get back to her on it. She said that in the last election, her and her husband had engaged their children in it. They went through the party platforms and let their children decide who they should vote for. However, she did not tell me who that was. The policy point of the party platform they decided on was electoral reform, making every vote count. She went on to say how disappointed her children were with the Liberal government, how cynical they were, how they felt disconnected from the political workings of the government, and how they might not vote when they were old enough.

Could the member across the way comment on how the breaking of this promise has made so many Canadians cynical about our whole political process.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have held open town halls specifically on electoral reform. Individuals who have attended those are, as a whole, quite pleased with the government and its performance. The member makes reference to one issue within an election platform, but there are many issues in it.

We can talk about the middle-class tax breaks, with hundreds of millions of dollars going back into the pockets of Canadians. We can talk about the increase to the GIS, which is lifting literally tens of thousands of seniors out of poverty. We can talk about the Canada child benefit, which lifts children out of poverty. Millions of dollars are going into my constituency every month because of the progressive approach by this Liberal government. This government is doing many things exceptionally well, and I will be informing the constituents of my colleagues across the way about that.

• (1020)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to talk about Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, specifically on the issue of political financing.

Like the member opposite who just spoke, I have a great sense of pride when it comes to speaking about Canada's political financing and its corresponding election laws, which have kept big business and unions out of government decision-making. Of course, individual donors were the bedrock of Canadian politics.

I had the opportunity a number of years ago, in Panama City, during a Summit of the Americas, with ParlAmericas, to do a presentation having to do with transparency in politics. In that particular discussion, one of the things I spoke of was the lack of dollars from business and the lack of dollars from the unions and that the reality is that anyone can come into the House of Commons without having a lot of money behind them. When we go into Central America and talk about election financing there, we realize that most people are looking at how many dollars are spent on U.S. elections and the constant campaigning that takes place there.

The difference between how Canada conducts itself and how some of the other countries conduct themselves is something they felt was rather intriguing. I was a former teacher, and the amount of money we could spend would probably be about the same amount as my salary for the year. That put it in perspective so that people could

understand exactly how much involvement there is and how the community could stay associated with what is done in a political campaign. For that I felt that as Canadians, we could be extremely proud.

However, here we are today specifically debating the bill before us, because Liberal elites got caught organizing unethical activities, which proved that their promise of openness and accountability to Canadians was just a sham. The Prime Minister, throughout his campaign, said that the Liberals were going to do things differently; that they would govern with openness and transparency; and that, after a juvenile statement that budgets would balance themselves, they would grow our economy from the heart out. They made a campaign promise of small, temporary, \$10-billion deficits and a return to balanced budgets in a few years. We now see what that heart is made of. We are specifically debating Bill C-50 today because the Liberals could not keep their promise of openness and accountability to Canadians.

The member for Papineau was elected in 2008, at the same time I was, and sat way back on the Liberal benches. Very few people heard much of him in those days. Some perhaps thought him a bit aloof, with maybe his head in the clouds as a young guy just trying to find himself. However, the reality was that he was often out on the road, similar to what he is doing in his present position, but on a professional, paid speaking circuit. That in itself is of no concern to me, but the media report from January 16, 2014, in the *Ottawa Citizen* indicated that he was forced to repay money that had been inappropriately charged to his member's operational budget during his off time as an MP. This went way back to 2009 and 2010.

I know that such expenses arise for many of us on reimbursed expenses. I remember a situation of my own where a community advertisement of an event happened to include a commentary later thanking all the sponsors for the event. Well, we know what the word "sponsor" means to everyone. Therefore, when it was looked at, the answer was no, we are not paying for that. There was one person who ended up paying for that, and it was me, because I wrote the cheque. It happens, and it happens to everyone. When they realize that there is a problem, they go back and correct it.

It was also the case for the member for Papineau. He had received \$217,000 in speaking fees as an opposition MP, which is a number curiously familiar to a number we use right now. A mistake was made, and he repaid the expenses that were associated with that type of activity. This is the same type of thing that many of his cabinet ministers have had to do as they have reached into their pockets to make things right.

• (1025)

Now the Prime Minister, after two years, has broken federal ethics laws; has a Minister of Finance embroiled in transparency and ethics scandals; and is touting economic progress, which is solely related to a buoyant U.S. economy and is poised, due to our regulatory burdens and unwise policies, to come crashing back down. This is even before the generational malaise that will affect us all because of the Liberal culture of uncontrolled deficit spending.

Again, we are here today talking about integrity and respect for the Canadian taxpayer and opening up the reality of the Liberals' promise of openness and transparency.

Government Orders

After the election, fresh from their sunny-ways glow, the Prime Minister publicly displayed the mandate letters to his ministers in which he clearly said that his cabinet ministers should hold themselves to a higher standard and that there should be no undue influence and no perception, real or otherwise, of any political interference. Not even halfway through their mandate, the Liberals were caught organizing cash-for-access events for Liberal insiders and deep-pocketed lobbyists. The Prime Minister and his senior ministers were effectively raising millions dollars for the Liberal coffers at private fundraisers where donors had access to government ministers.

This is not what Canadians see as ethical. The Liberals' favourite defence seems to be, "What could be wrong with that? It is what we Liberals have always done."

We need to establish some very clear distinctions. Political fundraising is part of our political process. Everyday Canadians donate to political parties or political candidates because they believe in what those parties or candidates stand for. Donating to the party or candidates of their choice is their way of supporting the activities of those parties or those candidates, and they are doing so out of pure conviction. On the campaign trail, political party leaders and candidates are expected to hold fundraisers, and people buy tickets to come to those fundraisers. That is part of what makes our great democratic system so good here in Canada.

Here is the thing. As the government, the Liberals are going to rewrite legislation with the pretence of openness and transparency. They hope it will deflect from their bad behaviour and put the onus on other politicians that have followed the normal rules, with the hope that they will trip up, so that these types of negative stories about them will be deflected somewhere else. This is very, very sneaky. This, at its very core, is unethical influence. Then again, what else can we expect from a Prime Minister who holds the record of being the first Prime Minister in Canadian history to violate federal ethics laws? Caught red-handed, the Liberals are now trying to save face.

The question many people have with respect to this bill is whether Bill C-50 would change anything. Unfortunately, it would not. This bill would not stop the cash-for-access fundraisers. In fact, it would mandate that the Liberals publicize such events ahead of time, but reporting such events ahead of time would not make them transparent. Bill C-50, despite making the events public knowledge, would not stop cash for access. The Prime Minister and his ministers could still be at events. The staff of cabinet ministers could be at events without it even being disclosed under Bill C-50. There would be no transparency about a senior government official being at an event, only people who were candidates or party leaders or cabinet ministers.

The bill would not stop cash for access. It would not stop the influence of big money in Canadian politics. What this bill would do is formalize and institute a system in which the richest, most connected individuals would have undue influence on the reins of power in Canadian politics.

The Liberals are legitimizing their unethical schemes. This bill would not address the Prime Minister's promise of openness and

accountability, and it would not deter undue influence over government decision-making.

My final thoughts are that Canadians believe that a prime minister should not need a bill to tell him what is right or wrong. The Prime Minister himself can stop this practice of letting the richest and most connected Canadians influence government. If the Prime Minister wanted to end cash for access, all he ever had to do was stop having these fundraisers. It does not take legislation to do what is right.

• (1030)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sat quite close to the member for Papineau when he first came here. I can honestly say that to suggest that he was not involved in this place at the beginning is not exactly correct, considering the fact that he was one of the first ones to pass a motion regarding youth, one that was long overdue, and he did a very good job doing that. He worked very hard on that. That was when he first got here.

I want to go back to what the member said. It is obvious that he does not want to support Bill C-50, which is a long time coming. This proposed legislation is certainly refreshing. It is almost like we have forgotten the facts. He said himself that political fundraising is part of our political process. I was present in the House during the tenure of the former Conservative government. It almost seems like a minister never showed up to a fundraising event in those years. That is entirely not true, if that is what the member believes. The former minister of heritage, the former minister of finance, when they were in the Conservative government, went to these fundraising events.

Instead of talking about Bill C-50, because I know how the member feels about Bill C-50 now, I want him to tell me exactly why it was so wrong for those Conservative ministers to go to those events and what he did to make sure that it did not happen.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, just so people understand, there is a lottery system for private members' bills, and amazingly, the very first name that came up was the member for Papineau. The member is absolutely right, the member for Papineau did make a very good first impact, which had more to do with the lottery than anything else, but that is a different story.

The member made the point about the heritage minister, whom I knew very well, and I also know the facts on that point. When it was found out that members were going to be there, she refused to attend and told the constituency association that it was inappropriate. That did not stop the Liberals from attacking, going into attack mode, and bringing the media in. Those are the kinds of things we see.

We should look at the stories of how the Conservatives and the Liberals are different. The \$16 orange juice always brings back that point. If anyone was at a hotel some place and was not feeling very well and wanted to order an orange juice from room service, we can be pretty sure that it would be \$16. It should not be, but it would be.

Government Orders

These are the kinds of things Conservatives get attacked for, and part of it is because the Conservative base says, “I thought you guys were going to respect taxpayers' dollars”, and we do. We pay it back, and that is what we think Liberals should be doing as well.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the cash-for-access events that resulted in the Ethics Commissioner and the Lobbying Commissioner's launch of an investigation into the Liberals. Is the only reason Bill C-50 is before us today is because the Liberals were caught breaking those rules?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, I certainly believe that is the case. There is a shell game going on. Liberals have tried to come up with a way of deflecting the discussion. They have some members who are very good at doing such a thing. They say they are just trying to make things better, this is what everyone wants, and everything like that, but that is not the reality. They are looking at how they can deflect all the attention to other political parties.

They have made the same point with regard to the NDP, suggesting that they would expect that if a party goes through a leadership campaign or has candidates coming in, it is going to follow these really strong rules. All that is doing is setting up other people for some sort of failure for something that takes place that is going to affect them. Parties are supposed to say who has attended events. All they need is a selfie of someone who said they were there and did not register, then they can attack those political parties because they have done something wrong. These are the kinds of intrusions that occur when a government believes that the bureaucracy should run everything and it simply cannot do the right thing.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House in 2018. This year, I will be as optimistic as ever, and I will keep working tirelessly for the people of greater Drummond. Today we are talking about Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act with respect to political financing, which is at report stage.

If this bill becomes law, all political parties will be required to report to Elections Canada the names and addresses of individuals attending a fundraising event within 30 days of the event taking place. The information will be available to the public. This concerns mainly members of cabinet, including the Prime Minister, party leaders, and leadership candidates.

This amendment was introduced in response to all the scandals involving the current Liberal Prime Minister. The people of greater Drummond have talked to me about all the meetings the Prime Minister has held behind the closed doors of wealthy people's homes at which guests paid \$1,500 for privileged access to him or almost \$1,000 to meet ministers. This creates the appearance of conflict of interest and is known as cash for access.

The current government was thrown into turmoil by the scandal, so it decided to introduce this bill. However, the bill will not make political fundraising by cabinet ministers and party leaders significantly more transparent to the public. Unfortunately, it will not fix the problem of cash for access, so these fundraisers will continue to be held.

This bill comes just one year after the Liberal Prime Minister announced he was breaking his promise to ensure that the 2015 election would be the last one held under the first past the post system. Many voters in Drummond had believed that promise. This reform had been backed by three major political parties, including the NDP, and more than 60% of voters voted for those parties. I myself held consultations in Drummond, and the many residents who attended said they believed this change would be made. Sadly, yesterday was the one-year anniversary of the day this promise was broken, despite 90% of experts and 80% of Canadians unanimously supporting a proportional voting system.

The reform before us today does nothing to fix this problem. On the contrary, the Liberals have swept that reform under the rug, and Canadians have become even more cynical about politics, because this promise had been repeated ad nauseam by politicians. Even the Prime Minister, hand on his heart, had promised this change on multiple occasions. Unbelievably, he backed down from that promise.

What Bill C-50 wants to do is put an end to cash for access, but it does not manage to do that.

• (1040)

Bill C-50 seeks to put an end to cash for access, but unfortunately, it does not. Clearly, there is a lot of money floating around the Liberal government right now. To give just one example, the people interested in projects funded through the Infrastructure Bank are millionaires. They want a private infrastructure bank in order to make a profit on the backs of Canadian taxpayers, including the people of Drummond. Frustrations are growing because people do not want increased user fees, the privatization of our assets, and a loss of control.

Greater Drummond has a number of infrastructure projects, and the Liberal government promised to invest in infrastructure. To date, the riding of Drummond has not received a single investment in that area. As a result, several projects have not been able to get off the ground, specifically because of a lack of federal support.

Drummondville has plans for a multi-sport centre that would include a soccer field, an indoor football field, and a running track. We really need this indoor soccer field. We asked the federal government for help. The project could cost up to \$15 million. We have yet to receive a response from the government regarding funding for the project.

That is unacceptable, given that this government promised to invest in infrastructure. So far, there has been no such investment in the riding of Drummond.

We have another major project, the Promenade des Voltigeurs. This infrastructure project includes plans for a bike path that would also be an ideal walking path winding along the Saint-François River. The price tag for the project is \$6.2 million. We have applied to the federal government for assistance, but have not heard back yet.

When will the federal government invest in infrastructure in Drummond? We are looking to receive investments soon.

Government Orders

Hockey is a big deal in Drummond. Our team, the Voltigeurs, is having a good season. Things are going well for the team this year. We would like to modernize our main arena, the Marcel-Dionne Centre. That project will cost \$26 million. What is the federal government promising for that investment? Once again, nothing, unfortunately.

The Liberal government is not living up to its promise to invest in infrastructure. More than two years after it was elected, it has invested nothing.

I could go on. There is the high-frequency rail project in the riding of Drummond. The train would travel from Quebec City to Windsor, passing through Drummondville and Montreal along the way. This is a major project that would enable the greater Drummond area to grow both socially and economically. My riding is a real transportation hub. It is a wonderful area for transportation because it is so well located. Unfortunately, we are still waiting for answers from the federal government on this project, which has been in the works for a long time. The Liberals took office two years ago and they are still doing studies. It is time for them to announce investments. It is time for them to invest in public transit and this wonderful major project. The Liberals have still not made any announcements in this regard.

All of these examples show that this government was elected because it made certain promises. The Liberals made a big promise, and the people of Drummond and other Canadians believed them. They believed the Liberals when they said that the 2015 election would be the last first past the post election. The Prime Minister broke that promise.

What did the Prime Minister do? He set up a system of cash for access, which has caused numerous scandals. He held meetings at private residences and charged \$1,500 a plate. That is why this government, in the wake of those scandals, introduced a bill, which, when it comes right down to it, will not even solve that basic problem.

I am calling on the Liberal government to go back to the drawing board and redo its homework because this bill does not resolve the problem of cash for access fundraisers.

● (1045)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's great speech, but I do not accept his arguments. I will remind members why we introduced this bill. To this day, we have no idea who donated to former prime minister Stephen Harper's campaign in 2004. That is one reason for introducing this bill. Similarly, we would like to know who donated to Jagmeet Singh's campaign. On the topic of electoral reform, the NDP and Fair Vote Canada were caught red-handed exchanging information. It might be helpful for Canadians to know whether Fair Vote Canada and its members donated to Jagmeet Singh's campaign. That is very important for transparency in our country. As my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière stated, "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander". It is important that Canadians know who donated to the opposition leader's campaign and who donated to Jagmeet Singh's campaign.

Why not be more transparent? Why does he oppose transparency here in Parliament?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, today's discussions are somewhat absurd. The Liberal government has been in office for more than two years. They came to power by making promises they have to keep if they do not want Canadians to become cynical. What did they do when they came to power? They gave people privileged access to the Prime Minister for \$1,500. What do these people expect in return? They figure the favour will be returned. The perceived conflict of interest is greater when the Prime Minister takes meetings like that.

When my colleague raised the spectre of Stephen Harper, he forgot that his own prime minister is the one embroiled in this situation. His own government is the one currently in power. It is up to him to make good decisions and to take the necessary action to fix the problem of cash for access to the Prime Minister. It is unacceptable for people to pay for privileged access.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for reminding the House of the anniversary of the Prime Minister and the Liberals breaking a promise they made to Canadians while they were asking Canadians to help them be the next government.

I want to give my colleague an opportunity to talk about why we are so concerned when people in our communities stand up and ask people to support them. Most of us heard repeatedly that 2015 was going to be the last election under first past the post. Why would people think that the Liberal government was actually going to do real democratic reform, which is what we were all hopeful for?

We want to let Canadians know that we will not let the government simply forget about that promise or bring forward bills in response to it that really have nothing to do with it, bills that are about pseudo-democratic reform to make it look like they are doing something. Canadians do not believe that. We owe our constituents and all Canadians much more respect than that.

I ask my hon. colleague to make comments on that.

● (1050)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, the people I spoke to in Drummond told me that they voted for the political parties that promised electoral reform. Sixty-six percent of Canadians voted for a political party that promised electoral reform. This government and the Prime Minister promised, hand on heart, that the last election would be the last one under the first past the post system.

During the extensive cross-country consultation, I spoke to people in Drummond, and the committee travelled across Canada to consult Canadians. Ninety percent of experts and 80% of citizens preferred a proportional voting system for the promised electoral reform. How did the Prime Minister respond? He said that there was no consensus.

Quite frankly, that makes no sense. This is why people now feel betrayed.

Government Orders

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. I want to point out that he will have time to make his discourse and then the questions will follow question period.

[Translation]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you for making me aware of that, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

It is an honour to rise today and to join the debate on Bill C-50. The Liberals call this the “making political fundraising events more open and transparent” act, but from my read it should really be called the “protecting Liberals from their fundraising practices” bill, because that is what this bill proposes to do.

How did we get here? We know that the Liberal Party, in particular the Prime Minister, was caught and exposed on numerous occasions in what media called “cash for access fundraising”. This is a practice where typically someone of significant wealth hosts a private event where people of similar wealth pay large sums of money to have special access to the Prime Minister or to a minister.

Obviously this is a concern, but let me explain exactly why.

As one example, we know that extremely wealthy Chinese nationals played a role in some of the cash for access fundraising activities with the Prime Minister. Likewise, we also know that the Liberal cabinet has signed off on some very questionable acquisitions of Canadian companies by Chinese interests. That is troubling for many Canadians, much more so when one considers that the lobbying activities under the Liberal government have literally exploded.

I suspect this is the most lobbied government in Canadian history, and why is that? Why are so many lobbyists often found at these private cash for access fundraisers? Even in this proposed Liberal legislation, registered lobbyists are indeed still welcome to attend cash for access fundraisers, because at the end of the day, this legislation in no way seeks to curtail or otherwise discourage cash for access fundraising events. It basically seeks to legitimize them and I would argue, by extension, encourage more of them.

To summarize the bill, basically it says that selling access in exchange for political donations of money is totally okay, so long as the event is advertised less than one week in advance, I might add. If they tell us who is on the guest list, including the address and how much the access fee is, basically, they are good to go.

Can anyone attend? Pretty much, yes. Does what actually happens at the event have to be disclosed? Heck, no. Can lobbyists attend? Absolutely. Can they actively lobby while there? Absolutely, yes, but they are required to report that. Does the legislation require someone to be there to monitor it? Heck, no. What exactly does “lobby the government” mean under this proposed bill? We do not know. It does not specifically say.

Seriously, does anyone see a problem here? I can imagine the discussions that must have went on behind the scenes when the Liberals created the bill: “We need a bill that totally makes cash for access fundraising legal to avoid these nasty media stories, but the

bill cannot in any way stop the fundraising from occurring.” In this regard, the bill is perfect, legitimizing that which should not be legitimized, at least in my view.

The really interesting thing is that the Liberals think we need the bill at all.

Let me explain.

We all know the reason we are debating the bill is due to the fact the Prime Minister was caught multiple times in cash for access fundraisers, and being a Prime Minister who is all about his brand, that uncomfortable fact did not sit well with him. The Liberals could have simply stopped doing these kinds of cash for access fundraisers or at the very least there was nothing stopping the Liberal Party of Canada from adopting these policies they are now imposing in the bill. Of course, because it is all about the brand, instead we are essentially legislating into law what should not be occurring in the first place. This should be the Liberal Party of Canada's policy because hopefully the next leader of the Liberal Party will put an end to this unethical practice.

However, making cash for access fundraisers legal with certain guidelines is more brand friendly, and who does not support the brand? I wonder if the Liberals will next legislate regulations on how they can accept a free luxury vacation to a private island.

I would also like to point out that, from my own political experience at least, I have never observed any of these federal political parties aside from the Liberals using these kinds of tactics. When I brought the previous prime minister to my riding, we held a barbeque where the entry fee was well under \$100 and that was only to cover the cost of the venue, food, and the logistics such as staging. I know that when the former leader of the NDP was in my riding, the event that he hosted was free to attend.

• (1055)

This is why I refer to this bill as the Liberals' “protect us from ourselves” bill, because it is only the Liberals, from my experience, who use these kinds of engagements for cash for access fundraising.

I wonder if this bill is open to an amendment. As an example, we learned recently that incumbent Liberal MPs are now protected from the threat of democracy provided they have a healthy war chest back at home in their electoral district association. Given that, in the past, the current Prime Minister said he would not intervene in candidate nomination processes, only to break his word and intervene, we know that the Prime Minister cannot be trusted.

Statements by Members

Therefore, possibly we could amend the bill to suggest democracy should prevail and that no candidate should be excluded from the opportunity to run for public office because an incumbent could use cash for access fundraisers to buy immunity with the Liberal Party. Because we all know that this Prime Minister plays favourites within his own caucus, some Liberal MPs would get the help and others would not. That is something to think about.

Before I close, I will simply add this thought. Recently it was pointed out that the current Liberal government has the slowest legislative activity record in almost two decades. I am not here to praise the official opposition for that fact or to criticize the Liberals for the lack of it, but when there is less legislation on the table, so to speak, it does speak volumes as to what bills the Liberals see as a priority to advance through the House. The fact that a bill that seeks to legitimize cash for access fundraisers is a Liberal priority speaks volumes about the priorities of the Prime Minister.

We all know this bill would do nothing for the middle class and those seeking to join it, because of course they cannot afford to attend the Prime Minister's cash for access fundraisers. This bill would do nothing for people with disabilities. It would do nothing for citizens looking for affordable housing. It would not help single mothers who have been unfairly cut off from the Canada child benefit support payments, nor would the bill help federal public servants not getting paid by the Phoenix payroll system.

This bill would only help the Prime Minister with his brand when he does cash for access fundraising. That is exactly why I will be voting against the bill.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola will have five minutes of questions coming to him once we resume debate.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ORDER OF CANADA

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today and congratulate Chief Mi'sel Joe of the Miawpukek First Nation in Conne River, Newfoundland and Labrador, on receiving the Order of Canada last week.

Chief Joe has been active in first nations politics since 1974. It is under the leadership of Chief Joe that the Miawpukek Reserve has flourished and set a national example of indigenous self-governance, including policing, education, and full employment for all band members. Chief Joe has worked tirelessly to promote and preserve the culture, language, and traditions of his people. He is recognized both nationally and internationally as a leader in spiritual and alternative healing.

We thank Chief Mi'sel Joe for his hard work, compassion, and leadership, which I greatly admire, and congratulate him on his Order of Canada. It is well deserved.

● (1100)

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a fight between two NDP governments in B.C. and Alberta, supported by NDP members of Parliament, is costing western Canadians millions of dollars every day.

The B.C. government, propped up by the Green Party, has thrown another barrier into the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline. Western Canadian oil sells for almost \$30 less, per barrel, than the world price, and that means one new school each day and one new hospital each week are being built in the United States and not in Canada.

What is the Prime Minister doing about it? Nothing. He says the pipeline will be built. Remember this is the same person that said budgets will balance themselves.

The Prime Minister needs to take a leadership role, declare the pipeline in Canada's national interest, and if not, then Alberta should reduce oil shipments to the B.C. Lower Mainland. Without Alberta's oil, it will be a long cold ride for the NDP and Liberal MPs getting to Ottawa on their bicycles.

* * *

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin by extending a warm welcome to Ottawa to William and Joanna Oliver.

I rise today to recognize an amazing initiative in my riding of Oakville called the Tiny Homes program. This collaboration between the Centre for Skills Development and Training, and the Rotary Club of Oakville Trafalgar is designed to provide valuable skills training, while also addressing the unique challenges of accessible, safe, and affordable housing for Canada's indigenous communities.

This Rotary Club has been a long-time advocate for affordable housing in Oakville, and has now established an innovative way to use the centre's training program. Before this initiative, students would build mock houses that would be sent to the landfill at the end of each course. This program is a win for the environment, a win for workers, and a win for Canada's indigenous communities.

I am so honoured to be a representative for Oakville, people whose creativity, compassion, and collaboration make me proud to be their member of Parliament.

* * *

[Translation]

DRUMMONDVILLE 2018 WINTER CLASSIC

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, forget about the Habs and the NHL. During the weekend of February 9 to 11, Drummondville will be where it's at for top-calibre hockey. Drummondville will be hosting a historic winter classic outdoor hockey event in the middle of downtown, giving hockey fans an opportunity to see hockey's up-and-coming stars play.

Statements by Members

The Drummondville Voltigeurs will take on the Sherbrooke Phoenix on Friday and the Victoriaville Tigres on Saturday. On Sunday, the Saint-Hyacinthe Gaulois will face the Magog Cantonniers in a midget AAA hockey league duel.

I want to take this opportunity to let the members for Sherbrooke and Richmond—Arthabaska know that the Voltigeurs are going to win those two games. I invite everyone to come out and take part in this unique event. I will see you there.

* * *

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF DELSON

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Monday marked the launch of the festivities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Delson, the community where my riding office is located.

Founded in 1918, Delson got its name from the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. On January 3, 1918, by decree of King George V, part of the Saint-Constant parish became the village of Delson.

Delson is a working-class town known for its industrial park, which remains the pride of its residents even today. In this centennial year, I invite the families of Delson and the surrounding areas to participate in the various activities that will be held throughout the municipality under the theme “at the crossroads of time”. This will be a fun way to pay tribute to all those who built the beautiful town of Delson.

* * *

[*English*]

CHILDHOOD CANCER

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a hero as a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, and noble qualities. One might not expect to meet one as young as 10 years old, but Payton Sernick is certainly a hero. For the past four years, Payton has been battling stage 4 acute lymphoblastic leukemia and lymphoma, and battling it she is. It was in remission, but it has now returned.

Throughout this process, she has started #CancerSucks and has raised over \$37,000 for the Children's Hospital Foundation of Saskatchewan. She also speaks at schools and organizations when she can.

She was given the young philanthropist award by the Association of Fundraising Professionals' Regina chapter, was selected as the Saskatchewan ambassador for the champions program by Walmart Canada, and will be the champion child for the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital Foundation of Saskatchewan. Throughout this whole ordeal, Payton is always smiling, and my goodness, what a smile this little girl has.

If Payton is watching this, Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to say to her, Payton, you truly are my hero, and we love you, sweetie.

●(1105)

CLEARPATH ROBOTICS

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Waterloo region is one of the best places in the world to build a technology company. With over 1,000 technology companies, Waterloo region's start-up density is second only to that of Silicon Valley.

I recently visited an innovative and award-winning company in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler. One of Canada's top 100 employers, Clearpath Robotics is a global leader in self-driving technology serving customers in over 40 countries. Established only nine years ago, Clearpath was profitable within only 18 months, and now has sold over 2,000 robots.

Clearpath was founded by graduates of the University of Waterloo mechatronics engineering program, and now employs nearly 200 Canadians full time. We are proud of the entrepreneurship and innovation displayed by partners Matthew Rendall, Ryan Garipey, and Bryan Webb, and their team at Clearpath Robotics.

* * *

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, freedom of religion and freedom of thought are two of the most fundamental rights Canadians enjoy. They are enshrined in black and white in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The government has completely overstepped its jurisdiction in forcing religious organizations to betray their beliefs to get funding through Canada's summer jobs program. This poorly constructed rule means that religious organizations whose charitable work has absolutely nothing to do with issues of conscience cannot obtain funding. Churches in my riding cannot afford to pay staff for their soup kitchens because the government refuses to honour freedom of religion and the freedom of belief. This is wrong, and this attestation represents a massive overreach of power.

I stand with the churches, mosques, synagogues, and the host of other religious organizations in my riding and thank them for the great work they do in our community.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month, a time to celebrate the many contributions African Canadians have made to Canada. Black people have been an integral part of our country since the early days of settlement.

*Statements by Members**[English]*

For over 400 years, black Canadians have been an integral part of building our country. Ottawa West—Nepean has been home to many leaders, change-makers, and heroes. These include Olympic gold medalist Glenroy Gilbert; CBC news anchor Adrian Harewood; girl guide leader Catherine Kizito; journalist Ewart Walters; and community leader Mohamed Sofa. I also applaud June Girvan, who leads Black History Ottawa, and Sarah Onyango, who hosts the radio program *Black on Black*, for all they do to make visible the history and contributions of black Canadians to our city and our country.

During February, there will be activities throughout Ottawa to celebrate Black History Month. It is only by recognizing and sharing one another's stories that we can truly create an inclusive and equal society.

* * *

VOYAGEURS VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize an exceptional sports team from my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River for its outstanding season in 2017. I would like to warmly congratulate Atikokan High School senior boys volleyball team, the Voyageurs, for winning the regional NORWOSSA championship in November. The athletes and their coaching staff performed exceptionally well, placing fifth in their division at OFSAA, and showing the rest of the province the talent we have in northwestern Ontario.

I had the opportunity to visit the grade 10 civics class at Atikokan last November, and I was impressed by the knowledge and eagerness of the students, as well as their school spirit. I happened to be there just after the team had won NORWOSSA and was preparing to head to Toronto to play the best teams in all of Ontario. They had the support of their entire community behind them.

I congratulate the team. They made northwestern Ontario proud.

* * *

NORTHERN LIGHTS CONFERENCE

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to stand today and acknowledge the Northern Lights Conference taking place right here in Ottawa and all those across the north who make it happen.

The Baffin Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Labrador North Chamber of Commerce are jointly hosting this unique event, which is a high-profile showcase of business and culture from Nunavut, Nunatsiavut, Labrador, and Nunavik.

The four-day event attracts over 200 exhibitors and 1,200 delegates. Over the past 20 years, this conference has become the landmark event for anyone interested in Canada's arctic and subarctic regions.

It is an opportunity to network with northerners, industry, business, and government. It is also one of the most unique showcases of Inuit arts, crafts, and culture.

Northern Lights 2018 is also host to the sixth annual Arctic Inspiration Prize awards ceremony. I want to acknowledge the founders and partners of Arctic Inspiration and congratulate those who took home the Arctic Inspiration Prize this year.

I want to acknowledge Arnold Witzig and his wife Sima for their love and commitment to Canada's Arctic and for donating more than \$60 million to the Arctic Inspiration Prize.

As a proud northerner—

● (1110)

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

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night at a town hall meeting in Edmonton, the Prime Minister said his government is fighting some Canadian veterans in court because they are asking for more money than the federal government can afford.

Our veterans put their lives on the line to give Canadians the freedom we enjoy, whether it was World War I, World War II, or any other conflicts our troops are sent into. If any of our veterans are injured resulting in a disability, we must ensure they continue to have the quality of life they so richly deserve.

If the Liberal government can spend \$10 million for Khadr and install a rink on Parliament Hill for \$5.5 million, then why is it treating our veterans so poorly? Remember: they fought for us, so we owe them.

* * *

FIRST BLACK NHL PLAYER

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 18, 1958, Fredericton's own Willie O' Ree stepped onto the ice for the Boston Bruins in a regular season game to become the first black player to play in the National Hockey League.

Despite the overt racism, taunts, and jeers that he would face from fans throughout his professional career, Willie would say, "Things like that didn't bother me. I just wanted to be a hockey player, and if they couldn't accept that fact, that was their problem, not mine."

As we celebrate Black History Month and the 60th anniversary of his breaking of the black colour barrier in professional hockey, we thank Willie for his continued service to the game and to our communities as a long-time ambassador for NHL diversity.

A member of the New Brunswick Hall of Fame and the Order of Canada, there remains but one honour to be bestowed upon this person who left such an indelible mark on the sport. For his dedication as a builder, I am sure Frederictonians, New Brunswickers, Canadians, and hockey fans around the world would share the view that it is past due time that Willie O'Ree be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

HOUSING

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Saskatoon, I hosted a town hall on housing as a human right and heard many concerns from community members who attended.

We heard about a young indigenous man whose home was a garage with a space heater, about women and children who could not find emergency shelter, and young people who became homeless when they graduated from foster care.

Our Prime Minister has said, “Housing rights are human rights and everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home...one person on the streets is one too many.” I agree.

The national housing strategy only aims to reduce chronic homelessness by 50% over 10 years. I believe we can and must do better.

What is clear is we need a national plan to end and prevent homelessness. My Motion No. 147 would allow us to gather successful strategies from all corners of this country to create that plan. I urge all my colleagues to support Motion No. 147, so we can finally make homelessness history.

* * *

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, news reports this morning state that Iranian police have arrested 29 women who have protested the country's oppressive laws against women by removing their hijabs in public places and waving them aloft on long poles. I am asking all of my colleagues here to stand with me to demand the release of these women and to demand that Iran reverse laws that oppress and degrade women.

I also ask all of my colleagues to stand united in understanding that the equality of women has long been diminished by laws, religious or otherwise, and patriarchal social mores that attempt to blame the presentation of a woman's body for various societal ills.

The right of a woman to choose how she clothes herself should be left to a woman alone, not to her family, her spouse, her faith community, or her government. If any of those actors try to remove that agency, we should support her through reclamation of her rights, not impose more restrictions upon her.

Equality will only come when we stand united behind this principle rather than behind laws or mores that oppose it using a warped notion of equality itself for cover.

* * *

•(1115)

WINTER CARNIVALS

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I invite everyone to the winter carnivals taking place in Ottawa and the local area.

Winterlude kicks off today, and next week there are two great carnivals in my riding of Kanata—Carleton.

Fitzroy Harbour Winter Carnival runs from Thursday, February 8 to Sunday, February 11, with activities like a spaghetti supper, a

Oral Questions

snow pitch tournament, trivia night, and much more. With four days of winter fun, there is something for the whole family.

On Saturday, February 10, I invite everyone to the Kanata-Hazeldean Lions Club Winter Festival for horse-drawn sleigh rides, a pancake breakfast, and lots of activities for the children.

None of these great events would take place without the tremendous volunteers who dedicate their precious time to making these carnivals happen. I thank them for everything they do, and for making such a big difference in their communities. Everyone should mark their calendars and next weekend come celebrate that we are midway through winter, both in Fitzroy Harbour and Kanata. I hope to see everyone there.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for five days now, we have been asking the Prime Minister about his illegal vacation on a billionaire's private island. We know that after an investigation requested by our leader, the Prime Minister was found guilty on four counts. This is not a trivial matter. It is the first time this has ever happened in Canadian history. We would like to know why, or rather, Canadians would like to know why.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to pay back the \$215,000 he picked from their pockets?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to help the member better understand. The previous commissioner, both in her report and testimony in committee, answered many questions related to her report. We accept her findings and respect her work. On this side, unlike the opposition, we respect the work of all officers of Parliament. When officers of Parliament make recommendations, we take them seriously. We work with them to ensure that there is follow-up, and we follow up.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the messages I have been getting from members of the public all week: “Anything goes when you are spending other people's money. He is laughing at us.” “He is guilty and he needs to pay us back.” “Do not let up on him, he needs to pay. Being Prime Minister does not put him above the law.” I have received hundreds and hundreds of messages like these; upon request, I would be happy to table them in the House.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to pay them back? That is what Canadians want to know.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleague to read the commissioner's report. As has been the case for past prime ministers, and is the case for this Prime Minister, whenever and wherever the Prime Minister travels there are costs related to security. We always accept the advice of our security agencies as to how best to ensure the safety of the Prime Minister. As the Prime Minister has said, going forward he will engage with the commissioner to discuss personal and family vacations.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the Liberals change their tune for once? In life, when we make mistakes, we face the consequences. If someone commits a crime, they go to jail. If they steal, they have to pay it back. When a Liberal minister or Liberal employee breaks the rules of Parliament, they are expected to pay up.

Why would the Prime Minister be above the law?

He took an illegal trip, he was found guilty, so he should pay Canadians back.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that immediately after the commissioner's report was tabled, the Prime Minister took responsibility, accepted the findings, and committed to working with the Office of the Ethics Commissioner on all future personal and family vacations. On our side, we thank the commissioner, and we accept the findings.

● (1120)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by not paying back the illegal costs that stem from his illegal vacation, the Prime Minister is setting a new low in standards for all of us in this place. He is saying that if a lobbyist or someone who does business with the government offers us a free trip, we should take it. Jewellery, cars, even envelopes full of cash, no problem, people can just take them, pay a small fine, and when they are done, say they are sorry. This is just plain wrong and against what we all know is right. When will the Prime Minister do the moral thing, the right thing, and pay back these illegal expenses?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Conservatives continue to focus on an issue that has been dealt with by the commissioner, this government wants to continue to focus on what is a priority for all Canadians. A good example of that is Canada's middle class. From the very beginning of the reduction of the Canada middle-class tax bracket, putting hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of Canadians in every region of this country, we realized that the policies and the focus of this government on motivating and getting the economy moving forward are creating tangible jobs, 400,000-plus last year—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. opposition House leader.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister took an illegal trip and used taxpayers' dollars to do it. By not paying them back, he is basically saying, "Go ahead, everyone, accept those free tickets to the Elton John concert that you were offered"—I know we were not—"fly yourself and your family across the country, stay at the nicest hotels, claim per diems, and charge all expenses to the taxpayer. Then, when you are caught, you don't have to pay a cent back. You have a free family vacation." It would be so wrong for any one of us to do that.

When will the Prime Minister pay back these illegal expenses and raise the standard in this place?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to remind my colleague across the way that the security agencies make the determination on what is needed in order to protect this Prime Minister, as they have done for previous prime ministers, and we follow their recommendations. The former commissioner has acknowledged that these costs are incurred as part of the role of being the prime minister.

The Prime Minister will continue to work with the commissioner to clear future family vacations.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, strangely enough, selling public infrastructure to private investors did not seem to get mentioned by the Liberals before the last election, but last year's budget revealed the Liberals' plan to take \$15 billion from existing infrastructure promises to fund their new Infrastructure Bank. As Canadian families deal with record levels of household debt, private investors like BlackRock are setting the government's priorities and making Canadian families pay for new tolls and service fees.

Just why do the Liberals think they have the mandate to create their Infrastructure Bank?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Infrastructure Bank will invest in infrastructure that is in the public interest, providing an innovative new infrastructure financing tool and attracting private sector investment to build transformational projects that may not get built otherwise. This is an optional tool that our provincial, territorial, indigenous, and municipal partners can use to increase the long-term affordability and sustainability of infrastructure in their communities.

The bank will not displace traditional infrastructure spending, and our government is continuing to invest historic amounts, \$186 billion, to create inclusive communities where all have access to opportunities that let them reach their full potential.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Infrastructure Bank is really starting to look like the public-private infrastructure partnerships dictated by the Harper government. It will line the pockets of Bay Street investors by making Canadians pay extra tolls and user fees.

Oral Questions

Can the Liberal government reassure the provinces and municipalities that infrastructure projects will not have to go through the bank if what the stakeholders want is genuinely public infrastructure?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bank will not dictate anything. The Canada Infrastructure Bank will invest in infrastructure that is in the public interest, providing an innovative infrastructure financing tool and attracting private sector investment to build innovative projects that, as I mentioned, may not otherwise get built.

As I said, this is an optional tool that our provincial, territorial, indigenous, and municipal partners can use to increase the long-term affordability and sustainability of infrastructure in their communities.

* * *

• (1125)

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board has said that the federal government failed to meet its obligations under the law. Because of the Liberal government's Phoenix fiasco, over 100,000 public service employees are not getting the pay increases that they so deserve. It is completely unacceptable.

Will the Liberals commit to compensating these public servants?
[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we formed government we inherited a situation where the Harper Conservatives refused to negotiate with our public sector unions, resulting in a situation where no public servants had collective agreements. Our government negotiated in good faith, reaching agreements covering 91% of our public servants. We are facing challenges implementing those agreements because of the IBM Phoenix pay system, which was conceived by the Harper Conservatives.

We regret this situation, and we will ensure that our great public servants are treated fairly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind members that there are rules in place that when someone is speaking we should listen, and if we have comments, make them to ourselves. I am sure that comments are made to members themselves, but they carry across. Would members keep their voices down and make those comments to the person next to them and not to the person across the aisle.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how long are the Liberals going to keep blaming Harper?

There are a couple of anniversaries to note. We are approaching the two-year anniversary of when Phoenix first started to fail our public service, and we are already well past the one-year anniversary of when the current government promised to fix it.

We now learn that the government is also violating its legal obligations by failing to meet implementation deadlines for new collective agreements. As PSAC president Robyn Benson said, "Phoenix might be the reason, but it is not an excuse."

Is the government not tired of letting down our public service?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have great respect for our public service. We have a world-class public service in Canada. When the Harper Conservatives eliminated 700 payroll adviser jobs, that created this situation. It gutted the legacy system before the new system was actually operable. In fact, it is bad public practice to eliminate an existing system before the new system is working. This was bad management, but it was all to create an illusory surplus on the eve of an election.

We are investing now to fix the situation, and we will treat our public servants fairly.

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[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the same report by the former commissioner, planning for the Prime Minister's vacation began in the summer of 2016. This fact refutes the Prime Minister's claim that it was a simple mistake, making this the latest in a long line of promises broken by a party that is unfit to govern responsibly.

Will the Prime Minister tell us whether he plans to finally do the right thing and pay back the money deliberately taken from Canadian taxpayers?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the previous commissioner, both in her report and testimony in committee, answered many questions related to her report. We accept her findings and respect her work.

On this side, unlike the opposition, we respect the work of all officers of Parliament. When officers of Parliament make recommendations, we take them seriously and work with the officers of Parliament to ensure that we follow them. On top of this, the Prime Minister is committed to working with the office of the commissioner to clear all future personal and family vacations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians will not be fooled, and the fact that the Prime Minister is treating them like idiots is an insult to their intelligence. The Prime Minister's illegal trip was carefully planned and intentionally paid for out of the pockets of Canadian taxpayers.

Oral Questions

When will the Prime Minister restore even a semblance of integrity by paying back the money he took from Canadian taxpayers so he could have a good time?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my friend across the way that the Prime Minister takes all Canadians very seriously. That is one of the reasons he is on a tour of town halls, whether in Winnipeg or Edmonton. I believe today he is on Vancouver Island.

It is important to recognize that the security agencies are the ones that make the determination on what is needed to protect the Prime Minister, as they have done for previous prime ministers, and we follow their recommendations.

• (1130)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been asked to answer for breaking the law. He says he has taken responsibility, but what is responsibility without accountability? His illegal trips abuse taxpayer funds: \$215,000 for security, \$32,000 for jets, and over \$1,700 for booze and meals. The Prime Minister and his buddies took Canadian taxpayers for a ride, an illegal ride.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and pay the money back?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all I can do is repeat it for my friend across the way. As I have indicated, the previous commissioner, both in her report and testimony in committee, answered many different questions related to her report. We accept her findings and respect her work. As the opposition wants to focus on this particular issue, we will continue to focus on the important issues that Canadians have. In Winnipeg North alone, there are millions of dollars going toward the Canada child benefit, lifting hundreds of children out of poverty. These are important issues to Canadians, and they are important issues to this government.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not always go on vacation, but when I do, I pay for it myself.

The Ethics Commissioner found that the Prime Minister broke the law when he chose to accept a gift worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from a man who has business dealings with the government. How can the Liberals defend this?

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and repay the \$200,000 of taxpayer money?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, but obviously I disagree with it. Let me provide an answer that I provided earlier.

As has been the case for past prime ministers, and as is the case for this Prime Minister, whenever and wherever the Prime Minister travels, there are costs related to security. We always accept the advice of our security agencies as to how best to ensure the safety of the Prime Minister. As the Prime Minister has said, going forward he

will engage the commissioner to discuss both personal and family vacations.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after accepting illegal travel and breaching the Conflict of Interest Act, the Prime Minister has a fiduciary duty to taxpayers to make them whole again. However, all week the Prime Minister and his house leader have recited sophomoric talking points about accepting the commissioner's recommendations. The report did not contain recommendations, only conclusions that the Prime Minister broke the law in four places.

When will the Prime Minister actually take responsibility and repay Canadians?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that immediately after the commissioner's report was tabled, the Prime Minister did take responsibility. He accepted the findings and committed to working with the office of the commissioner on future personal and family vacations.

Again, as the Conservatives want to focus on that issue, this government will continue to persist in its focus on what is important to Canadians, and get a better sense by listening to some of the things that are being talked about at town halls. Canada's middle class is important and this is something that the government will continue—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a year and a half ago, the Minister of Indigenous Services reimbursed Canadians \$3,703.57 for limousine services she used for personal reasons. Interestingly, the Ethics Commissioner had cleared the minister. Nevertheless, to her credit, the minister reimbursed Canadians. She said, "This does not live up to the standard that Canadians expect."

Will the Prime Minister show as much dignity as his Minister of Indigenous Services and reimburse Canadians?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize that there is a cost to security. The security agencies make the determinations on what is needed to protect the Prime Minister, as they have done for all prime ministers prior to the current Prime Minister. We follow their recommendations. The former commissioner has acknowledged that these costs are incurred as part of him being the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister will continue to work with the commissioner to clear all future family vacations.

Oral Questions

●(1135)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the minister was appointed to oversee foreign affairs, I have sent her many letters on Israel and Palestine. I have yet to receive a reply, not a single reply as of yet.

Does the government have a position on the labelling of products from illegal settlements? No reply. Will the government defend the rights of imprisoned Palestinian children, including Ahed Tamimi? No reply. Has the government raised concerns about threats to Palestinian villages like Susiya? No reply.

Why will the minister not answer our—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that Canada is a steadfast ally and friend of Israel, and a friend of the Palestinian people. That is a long-standing policy of the Government of Canada.

If the member opposite is looking for a reply to correspondence she sent to the ministry, I am happy to speak with her on a whole range of issues. She knows she can come and find me at any time at the conclusion of question period today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to respond to my letters. That would be a sign of respect for this institution. Her silence on these matters is unacceptable. Thousands of Canadians are also calling on her to raise questions on human rights in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Canada is refusing to condemn the U.S. decision on Jerusalem and is refusing to act on the issue of settlements.

Does the minister realize that Canadians want their government to defend justice and human rights?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, promoting and protecting human rights are an integral part of our foreign policy in all our relations. As I just said, Canada's long-standing position is that the status of Jerusalem can be resolved only as part of a general settlement of the dispute between the two parties. To answer my colleague's question directly, that has been the Government of Canada's long-standing position. Naturally, we remain at my colleague's disposal to answer any questions she may have.

* * *

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last election, the Prime Minister promised he would never force veterans into court. He also promised a return to lifetime pensions for all our injured veterans.

Once elected, he broke that promise, forcing Equitas veterans back to court. He broke his promise on lifetime pensions. Yesterday, in Edmonton, he blamed veterans for asking for too much money.

When will the Prime Minister admit that he lied to veterans to win their vote in the last election, or will he admit that he did not cost, understand, or care about the promises he made to veteran families?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate all that veterans do to maintain peace and keep Canadians safe. Our government took immediate action to address a number of the issues raised, including increasing pain and suffering compensation and the income replacement benefit.

Veterans asked for a pension for life option, and we delivered. We will make a monthly, non-taxable payment for life, and we will significantly simplify the benefit system.

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now we know why veterans call the new minister “the bad news reader”.

In the last election, the Prime Minister made promises, promises to win the election that he clearly either did not cost or understand. He said that he would not take veterans back to court; he did. He said “life pensions” for all and then said “no.”

There is a question here. Did the Prime Minister of Canada knowingly lie to veterans and Canadians, or did he not care that he was making promises he could not keep?

●(1140)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are few things I have learned in my short time as minister. One of them is the incredible amnesia that seems to exist on the other side of the House. One would think that some foreign body or some alien species had been in government for 10 years. Under the 10 years on the watch of the Conservatives, when veterans came home, what did they come home to? Broken promises, closed offices, and ignored voices.

We have delivered, finally, on a pension for life. We will continue to do the right thing by our veterans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, in Edmonton, the Prime Minister said that the reason the government is still fighting certain veterans groups in court is that they are asking for more than the government is able to give.

In fact, veterans are only asking for what the Prime Minister promised them—the same Prime Minister who has no problem racking up huge billion-dollar deficits year after year.

Why did the Prime Minister deceive veterans?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have delivered on a pension for life. It is monthly; it is tax free.

I have spent the better part of three, four months criss-crossing the country and finally listening to veterans. What do they say? One thing they have resented over the past 10 years—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I want to remind the members that this is a question and answer period. It is not a discussion period where everybody jumps in at the same time. I would like to hear what the minister has to reply.

I will leave it at that and let the minister continue.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, in this place, I know words are used, but words are not enough. On this side, finally, we have taken action for our veterans.

While I have heard others say such things as “shell game” when it comes money, \$10 billion of new money for our veterans is no shell game. That is real money—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Know what is not enough, Mr. Speaker? The act is not enough to our veterans.

Last night in Edmonton, the Prime Minister said “Why are we still fighting certain veterans groups in court? Because they're asking for more than we are able to give right now.” Actually, Mr. Prime Minister, veterans are asking for what you promised them.

He has no problem with billions in deficits, billions to the United Nations, billions more for his pet projects, and handing \$10 million to Omar Khadr. Is it really, Mr. Prime Minister, that veterans are asking for more than you can give, or is it more than you care to give veterans?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members to place their questions through the Chair and not directly to someone else in the chamber.

The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish I could look at the other side and only accuse them of inaction, but I could not do that, not when the Conservatives cut budgets for veterans, not when they closed offices time and again, and not when they ignored the voices of veterans.

We, as a government, in two and half years, have put forward \$10 billion in new money. We have offered and given a pension for life, tax-free, to our veterans. We are keeping the promise that all sides in the House gave in 2006 under our new veterans charter. We are not sitting on our hands; we are taking action, finally.

*[Translation]***CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY**

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2016, between 3% and 5% of seafood imported into Canada was inspected by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. In light of the fact that millions of fish were killed by a toxic spill in Vietnam in April 2016, did the Minister of Health ask the agency to specifically monitor seafood from Vietnam after the disaster?

What tests were carried out and how much of the seafood from this country was tested?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. All food imported into Canada must meet Canadian standards and comply with regulations. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has a robust monitoring and inspection program for imported fish and seafood. When the CFIA determines that a product may represent a risk to Canadians' health, it takes immediate action to protect consumers. The agency increases the monitoring of imported goods based on its own inspections and knowledge of problems in countries, including Vietnam.

* * *

*[English]***CANADA REVENUE AGENCY**

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a recent report has revealed that a profitable Canadian mining company operates in Mongolia but uses a tax haven in Luxembourg. This company avoided paying Canadian taxes of \$690 million and deprived Mongolia of \$230 million. It only paid Luxembourg \$89 million, where it has one part-time employee. However, wait for it. It is completely legal, because this company received written approval from the CRA to avoid paying Canadian taxes.

How can the minister defend this sweetheart deal to the Canadians who are paying their fair share?

● (1145)

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to fighting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance abroad to ensure that we have a system that is fair for all Canadians. This is a global issue, and that is why Canada is working closely with its international partners, including the OECD, to improve the exchange of information. As a result of the investments in the last two budgets, the agency is now in a position to carry out an annual assessment of the risks related to activities of major multinationals. As my colleague knows very well, I cannot comment on specific cases.

Oral Questions

[English]

SCIENCE

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with world-class institutions like Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Sunnybrook Hospital, and Glendon College in my riding, I often engage with scientists and other researchers working on exciting breakthroughs that will improve the lives of Canadians. I am pleased to hear from them that Canada is now being viewed as a leader in science and learning around the world and many of their international counterparts want to work in Canada.

Could the Minister of Science tell the House what our government is doing to recruit top international talent?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Don Valley West for his strong support of research.

Canadians can be proud that the world is looking to Canada as a leader in science. We are an open, diverse, inclusive country that is committed to supporting science, and the world has noticed.

Thousands of top researchers from around the world want to come to Canada. We are investing \$117 million to quickly recruit them to universities across the country. We have already welcomed the first round of researchers, and we look forward to the exciting discoveries they will make to help improve the lives of Canadians.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in November 2016, when the Prime Minister approved Trans Mountain, he said that it was safe, that it was in the national interest, and that it would create 15,000 jobs. That is true. It has been four years since the application started. Now, \$800 million and 175 conditions later, the B.C. NDP is trying to kill it.

Yesterday, the PM said that he did not want to “opine” on provincial disagreements, but it is about the whole country and he should lead.

When will the natural resources minister walk all that talk and show exactly what the Liberals will do to ensure this vital infrastructure gets built?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member has her voice back because what she has to say is always worth hearing. The member knows that the Prime Minister said unequivocally yesterday in Edmonton, as he has said since the approval was made, that this pipeline will be built because it is in the national interest. The national interest means that we safely and securely get our resources to market. The national interest means that we put a premium on world-class protection for our oceans. The national interest means that we—

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

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): However, Mr. Speaker, in November, already a year after approval, Kinder Morgan warned about delays and hurdles. The PM himself said, as the minister said, that Trans Mountain is in the best interest of Canada and Canadians.

It will strengthen our communities and put food on the table. It will create thousands of jobs and add billions of dollars to the economy, but it is all at risk. Yesterday, the PM declared that this pipeline is going to get built. The question is obvious. How?

Exactly what action will the Liberals take? What are they going to do beyond talking to make sure that Trans Mountain is not yet another multi-billion dollar opportunity lost under their watch?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pipeline has been approved by the Government of Canada in the national interest and it will be built. When there are motions in front of the National Energy Board that require interventions from the Government of Canada, the Government of Canada will intervene, as it has done. What could be clearer than the Prime Minister of Canada saying to the entire country that this product is in the national interest because it satisfies the pillars of economic development in the energy sector: jobs, environmental stewardship, and protection of our sacred relationships with indigenous people.

● (1150)

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the B.C. premier shamefully gave his environment minister a mandate letter that ordered him to employ every tool available to prevent the Kinder Morgan pipeline from being built. It should not come as a surprise to the Prime Minister that this is happening. The Liberals have failed on energy east and now they are doing the same on Kinder Morgan.

What exactly is the Prime Minister going to do to get the Kinder Morgan built?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has approved the Trans Mountain expansion. This government has approved the Enbridge Line 3 replacement. This project and also the support for Keystone XL will give us the pipeline capacity we need. Ten years of Conservative government did not have one kilometre of pipe delivered to tidewater.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister only offered Canadians vague platitudes in the face of escalating unconstitutional threats seeking to block a federally approved pipeline. What the Prime Minister has failed to tell anyone is which mechanism his government will invoke to overturn the recent B.C. government's efforts to block the project. This is a serious topic; it requires serious answers. We are talking about respecting the rule of law and our Constitution.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to rectify this situation between British Columbia and Alberta?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that the premiers of Alberta and British Columbia will have reasons to make statements about energy projects. There is only one government in Canada that has the responsibility of approving major infrastructure that goes across provincial lines, and that is the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada has approved the pipeline and we will ensure that the process is as expeditious as possible.

I do not understand all the fuss on the other side. We want the pipeline to be built.

* * *

[Translation]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal issued its fourth non-compliance order for discrimination against indigenous children. This has been going on for two years, and we have seen \$1 million in legal fees, four compliance orders, and one opposition motion in the House.

In the true spirit of reconciliation, will the government finally restore balance and put an end to this discrimination once and for all?

[English]

Mr. Don Rusnak (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to reforming the current broken system, which takes far too many indigenous children in this country away from their families. We will immediately begin to cover the actual costs of all 105 first nation child and family service agencies for prevention and other areas, including retroactively to January 2016. As the CHRT ruling noted, our government is fully committed to implementing all the orders in this ruling to truly develop child-centred, indigenous-led, and prevention-focused solutions.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, VIA Rail's high-frequency train project between Quebec City and Windsor would improve transportation services for Quebeckers and Canadians in a number of regions. This project would promote the socio-economic development of the greater Drummond area. Local and regional players are working hard to make this project happen. The time for reflection is past. Now, the government needs to take action.

When does the Liberal government plan on announcing its support and, most importantly, funding for VIA Rail's high-frequency train project?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Our government is developing the best approach to implementing an effective and reliable rail transportation system for Canadian

passengers. That is why, in budget 2016, we allocated \$45 million to various VIA Rail projects, including \$3.3 million over three years for an in-depth assessment of VIA Rail's high-frequency train proposal—

● (1155)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, communist China's proposed takeover of Aecon has raised serious concerns from security experts, the construction industry, and everyday Canadians. Aecon is a major player in Canada's critical infrastructure including telecommunications networks, nuclear power plants, and the energy sector. This is a bad deal for Canada and a threat to national security.

If a company banned from international contracts due to corruption and fraud, based in a country known for cyber-attacks and espionage on Canada, is not subject to a national security review, then who would be?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, global companies want to invest in Canada because of our skilled workforce and our strong innovation economy. Our government is open to investment. We are trying to encourage investment, but we also have the Investment Canada Act, which puts into place a significant review process such that such investments are an overall economic benefit to Canada. A multi-step security review process is part of that, within which we rely on our experts. We will never compromise national security and each proposed investment is examined on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian company Aecon has been doing maintenance on Bell Canada's networks since the 1950s. Today, Aecon is working on Bell's wireless fibre optic migration to expand its wireless cellphone service in Canada. It is also building Bell's headquarters in Mississauga. The People's Republic of China is now seeking to buy Aecon through a state-owned enterprise. The Liberals do not seem to be concerned about the possible security risk this transaction will have for Canadians.

Could the minister of industry confirm that a national security review will be done on Aecon's purchase, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the act itself provides for a multi-step review process for security issues and we rely upon our experts in the national security structures that we have in order to provide us with guidance. We trust their judgment. We will follow that multi-step review process. In this case, as in all other cases, we will never compromise our national security.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian company Aecon is also helping to build and has built a great deal of Calgary's South Health Campus in my riding.

The People's Republic of China is now seeking to buy Aecon through a state-owned enterprise, leaving many Canadians in fear over what knowledge this foreign government will have of our hospital. We know that the past approval of MDA means that the Liberals do not really care about the national security concerns of Canadians.

Will the minister of industry put Canadian national security ahead of any economic considerations?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I reiterate to the hon. member that we never have and we never will compromise our national security. The fact of the matter is that we have a multi-step process in place under the Investment Canada Act, and we rely on the expertise of our national security experts. It is interesting to note that the opposition does not seem to want to rely on the opinions of our own national security experts. We will and we will get to a good result.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last June the government signed a historic agreement with the provinces and territories on early learning and child care. This agreement showed that, for the first time ever, multiple levels of government were committed to increasing the quality, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity of early learning and child care.

[*Translation*]

Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development update the House on the implementation of that agreement?

[*English*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate and thank our colleague for West Nova for his hard work on behalf of our families and children.

On January 10, I was pleased to announce the signing of an agreement on early learning and child care with the Nova Scotia government that will transfer \$35 million over the next three years to families and children. This is a long-term, 10-year plan to support an increase in the affordability, quality, and accessibility of early learning and child care across our great country. For the next 10 years, more families will have access to those services for children in the long term and the short term.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that party says it is all for supply management, but it is actually undermining the system.

Without the United States, the trans-Pacific partnership agreement covers half the market, but the Liberals gave dairy, egg, and poultry producers from the other 10 countries the same access to the Canadian market. Producers and processors are worried, and although the agreement was signed 10 days ago, there is still no news about a mitigation plan.

Did the Liberals hang producers out to dry so that their Prime Minister could save face? When will they announce their plan?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the trade agreement will create major opportunities for producers across the country.

We know how important supply-managed sectors are, and we are committed to holding consultations about how this will affect the industry and how best to proceed. We started talking to representatives of supply managed sectors right away. I was part of those conversations, and we will continue to consult stakeholders.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, construction workers in my riding and across the country have approached me to explain how late payments affect them and their families. Small businesses count on getting paid in a timely manner in order to feed their families.

[*English*]

This has been an issue for far too long. Can the minister please update the House as to what action our government is taking to ensure that contractors, especially subcontractors, in the construction industry are paid in a timely manner?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Long Range Mountains for her tireless work in advancing this file.

Our government recognizes the good middle-class jobs that contractors and subcontractors provide Canadians from coast to coast. That is why we are proud to announce our intention to introduce federal prompt-payment legislation. With the help of experts Sharon Vogel and Bruce Reynolds, we will be seeking input from the construction industry to develop a robust federal regime. This is another important action our government is taking to help the middle class and those working hard to join it.

*Oral Questions***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the trade minister recently stated that “when you have more than 70 per cent of your exports to one country, I think people realize that it’s in Canada’s best interest to look west and to look east”. That would be great advice when it comes to pipelines. However, thanks to the Liberals, energy east is dead and Kinder Morgan is in serious jeopardy. It is not enough to simply say the pipeline will get built, the Prime Minister needs to back up his words with action. Talk is not enough.

When will the government take action to ensure the pipeline gets built?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the action we took was to consult with virtually tens of thousands of Canadians about the Kinder Morgan pipeline, including many indigenous communities up and down the line. The conclusion, after many months of consultation with tens of thousands of Canadians, was that this pipeline is in the national interest. We have also approved the Enbridge Line 3 replacement. We are also supportive of the Keystone XL pipeline. All three pipelines will significantly help the Canadian government, and really all Canadians, to begin to export our oil and gas beyond—

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

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[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when he was in Saint-Félicien in October 2017 for the by-election in Lac-Saint-Jean, the Prime Minister promised the UPA local that he would not make any concessions on supply management in the new trans-Pacific partnership. This morning we learned that that was rubbish. The government bargained away the same thing as in the previous TPP regarding poultry and eggs, and it gave away 3.25% of the dairy market.

Why did the Minister of International Trade defy the Prime Minister’s mandate ordering him to concede nothing on supply management? Nothing means zero.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this agreement will create opportunities for farmers across the country. We immediately began discussions with supply managed sectors that I have been involved in, and we will continue to consult them. We continue to fully support all of our agricultural interests, including our supply management system. Our government remains committed to growing our agrifood exports to \$75 billion by 2025 to put more money in our farmers’ pockets, while supporting our dairy, poultry, and egg producers.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question was for the Minister of International Trade. I am not interested in the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture’s meaningless talking points.

During the by-election, the Prime Minister promised farmers that he would not make any concessions on supply management in the

new TPP. After the election, our farmers ended up paying the price again. It is like the Félix Leclerc song:

On the eve of the election
He called you son
The very next day
Your name faded away

Why are Quebec farmers always used as bargaining chips in trade agreements? Why?

● (1205)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the aisle make the effort to remember the name of the member across the way. When one of our colleagues takes the floor here in the House to answer a question from across the way, we do so in a serious and reasoned manner.

We met with the agricultural sector a day after announcing that Canada was signing the TPP agreement, an agreement that is good for the agricultural industry. This is an agreement that will enable the Canadian industry to get back into its largest market. We are talking about 500 million individuals and 14% of the global economy. We will continue to work with farmers in Quebec and Canada to ensure that we can work together to promote—

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

* * *

MARIJUANA

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister announced exactly the opposite in Saint-Félicien.

I will tell you what the legalization of cannabis looks like. It is not about health or fighting organized crime. It is the new Liberal gold rush. The government is giving production licences to its Liberal cronies. There is too much money at stake here. Producers are on a “high” after seeing the value of their shares triple in the past three months. What is more, over \$165 million is coming from unknown sources in tax havens. There is no way of knowing who is investing in this. Let us be serious.

Will the government delay the coming into force of its bill until all of this is sorted out, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman asked what the purpose of the legislation is. The purpose of the legislation is two things: first of all, to better keep cannabis out of the hands of our kids, and number two, to stop the flow of illegal cash to organized crime. That includes the present selling system, which has failed Canadians for 90 years. Our new law offers a better prospect of success.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***PETITIONS**

FILIPINO CANADIANS

Kivalliq Hall was a boarding school in my home town of Rankin Inlet. The Nunavut Court of Justice has recently ruled that Kivalliq Hall met the requirements to be considered a residential school. The federal government is now appealing this court decision. I am confused, and so are those affected, because the minister has recently stated, “the best way to address outstanding issues and achieve reconciliation...is through negotiation and dialogue rather than litigation.”

Why is the federal government taking this back to court?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the abuse of children is tragic, and it is unacceptable. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was negotiated by many parties, with the goal of bringing fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian residential schools. We recognize that there are cases that fall outside the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, and although Canada has appealed this decision in the court, we remain committed to pursuing reconciliation and healing. As this matter is currently before the courts, Canada will not comment further at this time.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent on a point of order.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. We, on this side of the House, want to set the record straight for Canadians with regard to the exchange that took place during question period today about veterans.

Accordingly, I ask for the consent of the House to table the document entitled “Real Change: A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class”, which clearly states on page 49: “We will re-establish lifelong pensions...”.

An hon. member: Yes.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sorry, but that is a point of debate. Is there unanimous consent to table this document in the House? I am sorry, but there is no unanimous consent.

[English]

I believe we said no. I just want to make that clear. Hearing is hard in this room sometimes. I will say it slowly. No.

We have another point of order by the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

• (1210)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, if you check the records, there was a yes on that side to table this document. I believe it was the Minister of Health who said it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It was a request for unanimous consent. Usually unanimous consent means everyone has to say yes. I did hear a no. I do not know where it came from, but it came from this room, because I do not think anyone outside the room could scream loud enough so we could hear it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the petition I wish to present deals with the need to recognize June as Filipino heritage month. My colleague and friend from Scarborough Centre is advancing Motion No. 155 through the House of Commons.

The petitioners are calling on members of the House to unanimously get behind the motion recognizing the important and valuable contributions the Filipino community has made and continues to make as an important aspect of everyday living in every region of our country.

CHILDHOOD CANCER

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present electronic petition 1283 from Wayne Reil, in my riding of Bay of Quinte. It is a petition about childhood cancer.

Childhood cancer is the number one killer of our children. It kills more than asthma, diabetes, or cystic fibrosis. Children are dying daily, and nowhere near enough is being done. The current amount of funding put toward research for childhood cancer is 4%, and that is not enough.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition today. The petitioners state that in early August 2017, roughly five tonnes of genetically modified salmon was sold in Canada. This salmon likely ended up on Canadians' plates without their knowing it.

The petitioners want the Liberal government to know that Canadians are concerned about the lack of information about where GMO salmon is sold. They are calling on the government to ban the sale and breeding of genetically modified salmon in Canada until labelling is put in place to warn consumers.

* * *

*[Translation]***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.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CANADA ELECTIONS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, picking up where we left off before question period, as I listened to the member's high moral judging, I was reminded of another great work of fiction.

What we have here is really a tale of two leaders, in which what is the best of times for the leader on this side of the House is perhaps the worst of times for the leader on the opposite side. We have one leader, the Leader of the Opposition, attacking the other, the Prime Minister, for holding fundraisers. At the same time, the Leader of the Opposition first denies having secret fundraisers and then, when presented with proof, in a plot twist worthy of Dickens, says that it is okay for him to do those things. Then we have the other leader, the Prime Minister, proposing a bill to increase transparency in fundraising, and who is indeed already voluntarily following the rules proposed in Bill C-50.

Could the member tell the House why, in the winter of the Conservative despair, the antagonist in this tale, his leader, will not take his party's fundraising activities out of the season of darkness and into the season of light?

• (1215)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member tells quite a tale.

Canadians expect their elected officials to act with integrity. When they see a picture of the Prime Minister on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun* alongside a Chinese nationalist who not only donated but was specifically lobbying the Prime Minister and gave a quote to the press saying that, specifically on a sale that would be to a Chinese company, so it would not have to go through a national security test and whatnot under our Investment Act, something is wrong.

That is why the Prime Minister is putting this forward. It is more to give political cover rather than to ensure we have a system of which we all can be proud.

We should not need to legislate either morality or the integrity of someone's office. This bill could have been about improving the system in other ways, and I gave that suggestion earlier.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite evaded answering that good question.

The issue is that the Conservative Party appears to want to vote against legislation that will ensure more transparency. Surely to goodness, the opposition would recognize that its own leader does have some influence, that it is important for Canadians to know who is paying what kind of money, over \$200, and meeting leaders of our national party. This is in essence what the legislation would do.

I would think it would be natural for all opposition parties, for all members to support the idea that when a leader of a political party meets with some of Canada's more wealthier people and everyday Canadians, quite frankly, where they are paying more than \$200 to be in the presence of that leader. What is wrong with sharing with Elections Manitoba the names of those who are meeting with our leaders? Why would the Conservatives oppose that?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I will give a concrete example that the member should remember.

When former heritage minister Shelly Glover found out that lobbyists, who were registered to lobby her department for funds, were going to attend a fundraiser, she cancelled those tickets and immediately worked with the Ethics Commissioner.

On the flip side, we have a minister of justice from British Columbia going to a law office with people who will eventually be soliciting their names, most likely, towards becoming judges. We should start talking about whether that is appropriate.

What the government is putting forward is legislation that seeks to make what is illegitimate look legitimate. That is not a helpful system. The Chrétien government put forward legislation that banned corporate and union donations. That was a helpful improvement. The previous government built upon that by bringing down the levels of how much could be donated. That was helpful.

This is not helpful legislation. In fact, when we have things like the Phoenix pay system and we have aircraft not being replaced on a timely basis, those are issues we should be spending time talking about today.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have eagerly awaited my turn to speak on Bill C-50 on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

This bill claims it will make political party financing more transparent. The problem is that it completely misses the root of the problem, and sadly, I suspect that was the intention. I wish to remind the members that we are all here to represent the people who chose us, not to represent the political party that we chose. We are here to speak on behalf of the people and defend their interests. We are here to make sure that the people in our ridings are protected against powerful interests.

Interest groups and elites have lobbies to push their causes, but for the Canadian people, we are their lobbies, in a way. However, the public is losing faith in us. Nowadays, it has become commonplace to say that politicians are corrupt, that they are in the pockets of big money, that they are up for sale. Like the weather and the usual gripes, distrust of Canada's political class is now a topic for small talk. The relationship between us and the people who elected us is the backbone of democracy. If we let that relationship crumble, we will have no purpose anymore.

The government claims to want to make the funding of political parties more transparent with Bill C-50. From now on, when governing parties want to organize \$1,500 per person cocktail parties, they will have to advertise them in advance and report the names of those who attend.

Government Orders

However, the fact that these events were not advertised has never been the problem. Even if these \$1,500 per person evenings were to make the front page of the newspaper, my constituents in Joliette would not attend. They cannot afford to spend that kind of money to meet politicians. In fact, most of them would simply like to have that kind of money.

The fact that we did not know who attended these parties has never been the problem. The Chief Electoral Officer releases a yearly report on political contributions. One need only check his website to get all the information.

The problem has nothing to do with the publicity surrounding the great Canadian tango between the two main federal parties, or with the guest list. The problem lies with the events themselves. The problem is that by selling privileged access to the prime minister, cabinet, and aspiring opposition ministers, when polls are good, that sends Canadians the message that access to our decision-makers can be bought. In this case, the fee is \$1,500.

This makes people feel as though there is one democracy for them and another democracy for special interests. There is a democracy for ordinary folks and a democracy for folks who can pay. Everyone knows that this type of fundraising is wrong except for the politicians who benefit from it. Commentators often talk about a cynical public, but that is not at all true. The public has a moral compass. The public can tell between what is good and what is bad. In the people's eyes, we are the cynical ones, driven by our own interests.

The most precious thing a politician has is his or her reputation. This problem had been fixed. The Liberals themselves, under Jean Chrétien, brought forward a solution with the per-vote subsidy. With public financing, the parties' election funds are directly tied to the public's democratic choice. For each vote, the political parties receive a small amount of money, or the equivalent of a medium coffee at a roadside cafe.

Public funding goes hand in hand with lower caps on donations to parties and public office holders. There has to be a reasonable, decent limit. Together, these two measures will send people two messages. First, they will know their vote counts because, even if their party loses the election, they will help fund the political party that best reflects their ideals. This is one way to encourage people to vote for the party that best represents them rather than force them to put an X next to the name of the least bad candidate for the job of prime minister or the person who is most likely to beat the worst candidate. This would also promote diversity in politics by ensuring stable, predictable, recurring funding for all political parties including the small ones, as well as a healthy exchange of ideas in the House of Commons, something there can certainly never be too much of in a democracy.

Second, public funding combined with lower donation caps will send voters the message that all votes are equal because parties will not raise funds by courting the elite during pricey exclusive dinners.

• (1220)

Bill C-50 does nothing to address that problem. It is just hot air.

That is why we are going to vote against this bill, not because it is detrimental, but because it is completely useless. I would also add

that it is dishonest to claim that this bill is going to clean up democracy. Real solutions do exist, and we could be taking strong action, but this bill offers nothing but half measures.

This bill is a snake oil cure. Its primary purpose is to distract us from the current government's ethical problems, which bear a remarkable resemblance to those of the previous government, I must say. Bill C-50 will do nothing to stop the scandals that caused so much embarrassment for the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Justice, and so on from happening again.

In closing, I would ask my colleagues to think about their constituents. We all know our constituents. We live beside them. They are our neighbours, our friends, our relatives, members of our community, people who get involved, our volunteers. We know their values, their needs and their wishes. We also know what they expect of us. I therefore ask my colleagues to take action and do something meaningful to strengthen and perhaps to restore the relationship of trust between us and the public.

There is an easy solution. I just spelled it out. I did not make it up. It is currently on the table. My colleague from Terrebonne proposed it in another bill we are debating in the House these days. His bill restores public financing for political parties and lowers donation limits.

I can assure my colleagues across the way that my colleague from Terrebonne is not petty or selfish. He would not hold it against the government if it were to adopt the solution proposed in his bill and include it in the budget. He would be totally open to that, as would I.

He would even commend the government on having the courage to do the right thing. The current system is simply costing us too much. How much? It is costing the federal Parliament its democratic legitimacy, no more no less.

• (1225)

[English]

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

Mr. Speaker, my question for my friend across the way is in with respect to the independent commissioner's office. Mary Dawson commented that the legislation was positive and a way to ensure more transparency. I think most stakeholders looking at it would see that it would ensure more transparency, not only for the Prime Minister and cabinet, but also recognize the important role political leaders play, whether it is the leader of the Bloc, the New Democrats, or the Conservatives.

Does my friend have any issues with making it mandatory, by law, for those leaders, and the Prime Minister and cabinet to be more transparent? When someone pays, say, \$500 to sit down over a supper, Canadians will then have the right to know with whom the Prime Minister or the leader of a political party has met. Is that not a reasonable to have that within the legislation?

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[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is voting against this bill and not because it is bad, but because it is innocuous and meaningless. The information is published at the end of the year on the Chief Electoral Officer's website. We know who contributed to each political party because that information is public.

The Bloc Québécois takes issue with the fact that the bill gives a fake solution to the current ethics problem. Under the bill, information will be made public on those who meet with the Prime Minister, ministers, or those aspiring to become Prime Minister or a minister. However, the number of meetings will not necessarily go down. In our democracy the problem is not who is meeting these people. We know who is meeting with whom. It is the financing system that has to change. We have to go back to Jean Chrétien's model of public financing.

According to surveys, the party in power and those that hope to get there currently have access to more funding from the business community, which, as we well know, wields a great deal of power. The very foundation of democracy is about trying to level the playing field for each individual, so that each voice can be heard and the middle class and low-income earners are also represented.

The current financing system does not respect that, which is why we oppose it. This bill is merely a distraction. It accomplishes nothing.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks of the cynicism the current government has engendered through its actions on electoral reform and the funding of political activities in all its forms. I hear from my constituents that many people are so disappointed in the government and the promises it has broken, especially on electoral reform, one of the main platforms of the election. These people were encouraged to vote for the government because of that, and now they are cynical and may never vote again. This is very damaging to Canadian democracy. I would to hear his comments.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague.

To me, the current government is the very epitome of political cynicism. My colleague mentioned the Liberal Party's plan for electoral reform, which was in its election platform when it was the second opposition party. As soon as the Liberals came to power, thanks to the current system, they threw the committee members under the bus, claiming that the members could not agree.

The committee agrees? The Liberals disavow it. They are mired in funding scandals? They introduce a meaningless bill to try and divert attention, pure and simple.

This is actually quite similar to the cannabis legislation. Many have noted that permits are being granted to friends of the Liberal Party and that the value of shares has more than tripled over the past few months. There is a lot of cash to be made, mostly by their

friends. This only adds to people's cynicism, and this has to change. I really hope that our voters will make an informed decision in the next election.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take members of the House on a journey through the logic of this bill.

An hon. member: It might start a revolution.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Yes, it might start a revolution, Mr. Speaker.

Let us start with a short title proposition for the bill. I think it is a Liberal Party slogan, but I also think it should become a short title for Bill C-50: in God we trust; all others pay cash. It is also a Yiddish proverb, which is why I want it to be introduced as a short title for this bill. It comes down to the logic of what is in this bill, which is that the Liberal Party of Canada has a deep-seated problem with accepting illegal donations from stakeholder groups.

I am not saying that it is individual backbench members of the government caucus. I am saying that government ministers have struggled with this very mightily, and now they are introducing a piece of legislation that will apply only to them. Seemingly, they could have already done this. They could have already applied moral and ethical standards to not do this. Instead, they chose to pass a piece of legislation to tell them not to do something. On this side of the House, we are being told, "Trust us this time", and perhaps give them some cash, if they accept the short title. "Trust us this time. We will obey this law because we are able to do that."

The leader of the government, the Prime Minister, has proven that he is completely incapable of living up to the standards contained within the ethical requirements, both in the code and in the law itself. The Ethics Commissioner has sanctioned him and has mentioned that there are ethical violations of four sections of the Conflict of Interest Act. She enumerated them and provided the reasoning on both sides of the issue. Actually, she completely eviscerated every single argument put forward by the Prime Minister and his lawyers excusing the behaviour.

On one side, we have this fiasco the House is now trying to deal with and are demanding that taxpayers be returned the \$200,000 he wasted, that he unfairly and unjustly procured for himself. Now we are being told that there will be a new law passed. Cabinet ministers in the government will be expected to live up to the ethical moral standard that will be contained in a law; that is, the disclosure of who attends Liberal Party fundraisers. If that is the goal of this piece of legislation, the logic of it almost demands that the short title become "In God we trust; all others pay cash", because that is the logic. It is a bill about nothing.

Other members have mentioned this. The member for Edmonton West did so in prior debate. He referenced a *Seinfeld* episode called "The Pitch", in season 4, episode 3, in which George comes up with an idea for a show about nothing, absolutely nothing.

Government Orders

There is nothing contained in this bill the government cannot already do. I mentioned to a few members that what I thought could be easily done is to tell a 10-year-old to google “Liberal Party fundraisers”, and that would fulfill the same things contained in this law.

We could google to see where ministers travel. I have my staff do that anyway, because I want to know if Liberal cabinet ministers are travelling to Calgary or other provinces in areas of interest to me so that I know where they are doing fundraisers. There are pictures posted online all the time on Twitter, on Facebook, and on Snapchat.

There is nothing in this law that would bring a modicum of improvement of any sort to the ethical and moral obligations of the government. It cannot live up to them anyway, so why would it force it into a piece of legislation if we know it is incapable of following the Conflict of Interest Act already? Why should the House pass a piece of legislation that will tell the Liberals to do something when we have proof that they are incapable of living up to those established requirements already? It is the Prime Minister himself who cannot live up to the Conflict of Interest Act requirements, and he has been sanctioned for it by the Ethics Commissioner. We know that already, so why do we need laws?

I obviously will not be supporting the bill. I will think about moving an amendment to change the short title. I see the table officer thinking about it. I will think about it and let him know at the end of my speech if that is something I want to do or if I am just kidding.

I notice that the punishment for the strict liability offences is a penalty of \$1,000 for violations of this act. Holding a major fundraiser with cabinet ministers would perhaps raise \$50,000, \$100,000, or \$200,000. We do not know.

• (1235)

There are a lot of private sector companies that could be available for purchase by state-owned enterprises owned by the People's Republic of China they could organize fundraisers around. Who knows how much money they could raise? They would then be liable for a \$1,000 summary conviction fine.

It does not seem to impact the Liberals. The Prime Minister has been fined \$500. This would be double that. A double increase is almost ridiculous. It is a pittance, considering the amount of funds a cabinet minister could potentially raise by travelling to a certain city and holding these with stakeholders. It is not something one is supposed to do.

I speak partially from experience, having been a former exempt staffer here in Ottawa. I was also a staff member in the Edmonton legislature. I knew what the rules were. We were all told what the rules were. It was something that both staff and ministers were responsible for. We had to protect our minister as best we could. It was incumbent on the minister also to know where the line was for an ethical and moral obligation. It did not need to be in legislation for us to know what was right and what was wrong. In this case, the Liberals are saying that they need it in legislation. They need to be told by the House of Commons and the Senate what is wrong and what is right.

In this case, they would continue to take money, potentially money they should not be raising from certain stakeholders, but they

would disclose it. They would provide a report, in a nice format, somewhere online. Perhaps they would tweet it out or put it on Snapchat or Instagram. It would be so much easier for us to find. They should not do it in the first place. It is just that easy.

If they are offered a private helicopter ride to a beautiful island somewhere in the Caribbean, they should just not take it. It is just that simple. There is nothing more complicated about it. They do not need to run everything by the Ethics Commissioner. They do not need to check in with the Ethics Commissioner. Can they take a vacation. It is simple. If someone is offering them something that is too good to be true, such as a free paid vacation to an island somewhere, they should not take it.

If cabinet ministers have an opportunity to fundraise large sums of money, and it is coming from stakeholders in their departments, they could be lobbying them by buying these tickets. They should just not do it. They should not take the funds. If they did, they should return the funds. The House in the past has been pretty generous to ministers who have admitted to fault and have paid it back. Ministers have done it. Members of Parliament have done it. The House has been judicious in how it deals with such situations.

We rely on things like the Ethics Commissioner to outline the facts of a case, and then we deal with those facts in the House, which is also why we are asking the Prime Minister to return the money he illegally, unfairly, and unjustly charged to the taxpayer.

This legislation is just window dressing. It is a bill about nothing. There is no content to it. It really should be amended. We could amend almost the whole thing by saying, “In God we trust; others pay cash”, because that is what it seems to be about. They have fundraising targets they need to reach, and they are desperate to do so. In their bid to make it look as if they are ethical and moral and that every single member of the cabinet has splendid integrity, they are saying that they will have a piece of legislation and disclose everything so everyone will know exactly who is fundraising with them and who is attending their meetings.

It does not matter. If they are lobbyists, is it at a lobbyist's home? If these are stakeholders and there is a perception of a conflict of interest in the future, they should just not do it. They should not take their cash.

Mr. Speaker, you have given me an indication that my time is coming to a close, but that is the contribution I wanted to make to this debate. They should just not do it. They should return the money if they have taken it unfairly. Also, they should not pass a piece of legislation that should be just common sense. If it is common sense, it does not need to be in legislation. That is exactly why we call it common sense. That is not the purpose of legislation. Legislation is to provide rules and guidance formally and to make something have actual consequences. Bill C-50 does not do that. It is a Liberal Party of Canada problem. It is not a Government of Canada problem.

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• (1240)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have known the member for a while now, and I know he is new. I saw him in action at the Procedure and House Affairs Committee, and I have a great deal of respect for him, both as a member and as part of the exempt staff he pointed out.

This is probably more about me speaking about Bill C-50 itself as opposed to going through the list of his arguments or assertions. In this case, transparency is key. In my 14 years' experience here, everyone asks for transparency in light of the fact that we are not trying to eliminate something that exists, as in the case of fundraising. We all know there are certainties in life. There is death, taxes, and of course fundraising, because we all have to do it, which was acknowledged by the other side. I appreciate that.

What Bill C-50 does, just the bill alone, is that it provides an amount of transparency for those who want to attend for the sake of their party or their own electoral district. The rules are in place to allow transparency so that everybody can see this, and it allows them to participate in what is a function of democracy.

With some people, like in the United States, it goes very far in what fundraising is meant to do. I am glad we have the laws that we do. The member pointed out what Jean Chrétien did many years ago, banning the donations from either corporations or unions, and I agree with that as well. That is truly a great step in the right direction. This is part of that step as well in terms of transparency.

If the member does not support Bill C-50, what is the answer?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the member and I spent a lot of time together at the Procedure and House Affairs Committee, afternoons, evenings, and mornings, but thankfully not weekends.

The answer is pretty simple. Raise the ethical bar. Raise the moral bar. He heard me say this at the committee, and I will say it here as well but in a much shorter time frame. We do not need legislation to tell us what to do if we are guided by a moral compass that tells us the right things. When we listen to it, we will always end up taking the right path and the right journey. Legislation in and of itself, more legislation, will never fix the ethical problems that happen to occur on that side of the House on the front bench. I do not mean the government caucus. I mean specifically members of the executive council, members of the cabinet. I want to draw a very firm distinction there.

More legislation is typically the answer that most members of Parliament and Senators will give, and that is not the solution. The solution is to behave better, to act better. It has been said many times on the opposite side of the House in talking points and speeches: do better. "Be the change in the world we want to see" is something I sometimes hear from my kids when they come back from school. Do that: just behave better.

• (1245)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found the exchange very interesting. It was a great speech by my colleague from Calgary Shepard. What is interesting is that our friend on the other side from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame gave a speech in the last Parliament on transparency. In fact, he spoke on Bill C-613, sponsored by the Prime Minister, on accountability with

respect to access to information. The lovely bromides we heard when he spoke in opposition are not being met in government. He said that bill would be "more accountable" than government had ever been. The bill had a subtitle of transparency.

He mentioned Suzanne Legault with respect to access to information and a range of things. Madame Legault criticized the Prime Minister for not meeting the needs of access to information with the bill before us. Now we have a political financing bill that is simply PR to respond to some of the inappropriate actions of the Prime Minister.

Is this really about transparency or is it about message control by the Prime Minister's Office?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, it is message control. This is trying to close the gap on a problem that the Liberal Party has. It is a problem with the cabinet. We see it in the quarterly fundraising numbers that came out very recently. Without these cash for access fundraisers the Liberals have been doing in the past, and the smokescreen they are offering right now, they just cannot keep up.

Canadians know they are not being represented by an ethical government acting in their best interests. It is simply acting in its own best interests.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-50, and to lament what I think is a significant lost opportunity to improve fundraising practices in Canada in a meaningful way. It is very disappointing. Of course we will support the bill. However, it does so little it is hardly worth it.

What the Liberals are trying to do, and I heard this when listening to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader this morning, is what I would call "bait and switch". They would like us to think that by somehow being aware that they are having these cash for access fundraisers, we should all be content: "There is nothing going on here, nothing to watch here, so just move on."

However, that misses the whole point. They pretend this great transparency that they talk about is going to make a critical difference in the understanding of that, forgetting all the while that people can still come and give their money to the party at these private homes in West Vancouver or on Bay Street, and the like, and somehow Canadians should be tickled pink that we now have the ability to know a couple of days in advance, to find out who is there, and so on, missing the point that cash for access is alive and well and just fine. I know a particular individual has paid a lot of money to be there and talk to the finance minister or the Prime Minister. They are on the back porch at that House in West Vancouver.

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At one point, the Liberal Party said it was doing that to have fun and help the party. Then the Prime Minister acknowledged that sometimes they do talk about things at these fundraisers, like who gets the contract, which law firm is going to get the fisheries prosecution contract this year, who is going to get the bridge construction contract, and so on. It exacerbates the cynicism that Canadians have about the current government and our democracy in general. It demonstrates the continuing inequality, because not everybody from rural Canada or impoverished communities are able to go there, spend the money, and buttonhole the Prime Minister about their favourite project. However, if one has lots of money, apparently one can, and we should forget that is a problem. We should just assume that because we know it is happening somehow that makes it all fine.

It is not fine. It undermines our democracy.

This bill is a travesty. It could have been so much more. The Liberals ignored all the recommendations of the conflict of interest commissioner in producing this. They think if they change the channel and pivot away, if they bait and switch, somehow Canadians will forget.

Speaking of bait and switch, I heard the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader use another bait and switch technique. It goes like this, “Mr. Jagmeet Singh, who is the leader of the NDP, has to be transparent too so we will know what the opposition fundraisers are about as well.” There is a tiny problem with that. Members will agree with me I hope that Mr. Jagmeet Singh is not giving out bridge contracts, contracts to law firms, contracts to do whatever people are lobbying the government to do. That is the shame of this bill.

The Liberals think they can persuade Canadians that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, that we are all the same here, forgetting that the government controls billions of dollars in expenditures every year, has patronage positions by the thousands, and somehow we have to make sure that the opposition parties are treated just like the Prime Minister and the cabinet. What a joke. I hope Canadians are not hoodwinked by this rhetoric.

I pointed out earlier in my remarks to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader that yesterday marked a very sad anniversary. The current government got elected in large measure, certainly among young people in my riding I can confirm without a hesitation at all, on the basis that the election laws would be changed. The Liberal Party got 39.5% of the vote, ends up with 100% of the power, and that is supposed to be just fine. People said, “No, no, the Prime Minister came to my riding, and I think dozens of other ridings, and said that those days are over.” Yesterday marks an exact year since the Prime Minister decided that he was just kidding. I can say that the level of cynicism that has engendered saddens me as a Canadian. It saddens me as a person who believes in our parliamentary democracy.

● (1250)

I do not usually quote the Canadian Press, but to give them credit, on December 1 of last year they had something that members may be familiar with. They call it the “baloney meter”. It talked about the first response by the Liberals about why they were not proceeding

with electoral reform. The Liberals said they would only do it with “broad support”. Did they ever say that during the campaign?

However, the Canadian Press, which is hardly a radical NDP organ, said that this merits the full of baloney award. I think it is good that the press, at least, is watching and understands that.

Then just this last Saturday morning, the Prime Minister went on “The House”, the CBC program. He said that proportional representation, which is the choice of most Canadians, every poll would say, would divide Canadians and “exacerbate the small differences in the electorate”. I guess that is why we are not proceeding. Then there was another one where it was his preferred ranked ballot system that was the reason why we could not proceed. People did not like his little options, so he was taking his marbles and going home.

I have to say that I know I am making light of this. I know it is easy to do, and I know it is a standing joke among Canadians what this government has done, breaking promises on fundamental reform, which were repeated like a mantra at every election stop across the land to get young people engaged.

My colleague from the Okanagan talked about constituents of his who said, as I recall, that they were going to do what their children wanted them to do in voting. They got them all engaged in the electoral promise. Essentially, because of the promise the Prime Minister made about electoral reform, we do not know who they voted for but one can guess, now they are not going to vote anymore. Now they are like many people in my riding who say, “What is the point?”, and will be indifferent when the actual election comes.

This also could be the despair for lobbyists act. I know I called it the bait and switch act, but I do not know if I should give it that title. Now I am going to call it the lobbyists despair act, because why get expensive lobbyists in Ottawa when one can pay 1,000 bucks or so, go meet the finance minister, and talk on the back lawn of a West Vancouver billionaire's house or at a Bay Street party somewhere in Rosedale about what one wants?

Who needs a lobbyist anymore? I kind of feel sorry for the lobbyist industry because cash for access is just so much more effective. I know who I am talking to. I am not dealing with some parliamentary secretary. Oh, by the way, they are not covered by this act. I am not dealing with the chief of staff or anything. I am going to go straight to the finance minister and talk about pension reform like Morneau Shepell.

I am going to say as well that the level of cynicism and the level of the inequality that this bill represents is really quite shocking. I would like to read what a journalist, Paul Willcocks, has said about this:

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Cash-for-access fundraisers undermine democracy and put Canada's political inequality on display. The rich and powerful pay to advance their interests behind closed doors, while the rest of us stand outside. They let the party in power sell access—to the prime minister, cabinet ministers, senior officials—in a way that entrenches its political dominance.

This is wrong. Its cosmetic changes are nice and we will support them. However, I end where I began. This is a missed opportunity. This is a bait and switch bill. This does not address the problem, except to put a happy face on a practice that has gone on far too long and undermines our democracy.

• (1255)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my questioning is going to pick up where I last left off with the Conservative member. He mentioned that he is supporting the bill, but that it does not go far enough in his opinion. That is fine and I respect that.

Further, he went on to vilify how we do fundraising. His assertions about cash for access I will put aside. I am not privy to every conversation that happens between a current minister, whether they are federal or provincial, and someone else. If the conversation does delve into the issue of influence, that is wrong. I acknowledge that.

However, let us acknowledge the fact that ministers in this country also belong to a legislature and are involved in elections in which they have to raise money. The member mentioned his leader, Jagmeet Singh. If we look at the numbers from the leadership campaign, he is well accomplished at raising a substantial amount of money, outnumbering his colleagues by a vast margin. I am insinuating nothing about those conversations and what was said.

If this does not go far enough, how far does one go before actually banning people from fundraising in general?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame for his thoughtful acknowledgement that all parties have to raise funds, and I accept that entirely. Whether, however, people should be talking at a fundraiser with a cabinet minister about a contract or a job they would like, the Liberals have changed their tune on this.

A while ago, Liberal Party national director Christina Topp tried an absurd defence. She said, "Fundraising events are partisan functions where we do not discuss government business." Then a couple of weeks later, the Prime Minister confirmed that donors did talk about government business and lobbied him to advance their own interests at these fundraisers.

I am happy to have Jagmeet Singh available and accountable.

The point remains that we can do better than allow people to abuse the system and buy influence, which the Prime Minister acknowledges is part of the fundraising game. It does not matter if it is the Liberals, or the NDP or the Conservatives, Canadians expect better. A lot of my constituents cannot afford \$2,000 or \$1,500 to go and find the guy who will talk to them about how they can get jobs for their brothers-in-law.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I often agree with the member on matters of governance when it comes to how Parliament must conduct itself.

I agree with everything he has said about how the Liberals have completely missed the point in the distinction between those members of cabinet that control crown assets and private members.

Given that, why would the member support the bill at all? To do so, would it not merely give cover to and lend credibility to the government on what is obviously just a poor attempt at this bait and switch that the member has discussed?

• (1300)

Mr. Murray Rankin: That was an excellent question from my hon. colleague, Mr. Speaker, and it puts me in a very difficult spot, because I wonder why I am supporting it too. I think the answer is because it looks good. I do not want to be seen as opposing transparency and apple pie, so of course I want to support it.

Do I think it will do anything positive for Canadian democracy? No. Do I think it misses the fundamental point about cash for access? Yes. Do I think it is a joke that the Liberals bait and switch and talk about how the Leader of the Opposition and Mr. Jagmeet Singh should be treated just the same as cabinet ministers and prime ministers? Of course. However, I do not want to look like I am opposed to transparency and apple pie.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise on Friday in a lively debate here on Bill C-50, which would make changes to Canada's Election Act and is premised on political fundraising.

As my good friend and colleague from Calgary Shepard phrased it, this really is a Seinfeldian bill about nothing. It came as a result of inappropriate conduct by the government with respect to cash for access fundraisers, literally within minutes of forming government. I will speak for a few minutes on why that may seem astonishing to many people, since the Liberals had been out of a power for a decade. However, if we look at the people involved, we will see this is their modus operandi, cash for access. No wonder the Prime Minister and many minister hit the ground running after their election on #realchange.

Essentially, a read of the bill would result in the question of what the changes are. I guess it means that before hosting an event, somewhere in a prominent place on the Internet, the event must be published. Is that truly earth shattering? There are few other elements about what needs to be reported and what is disclosed. However, the main thrust is that now, buried on page 8 of the #realchange website, there is information on the event.

Clearly, the way the Prime Minister structured his affairs was that these fundraisers were happening almost right away. We have seen pictures of them, where the Prime Minister of Canada was helping to host or even preparing a meal for Chinese billionaires. It really caused some questions to be asked very early in this Parliament. Some of the same interests that helped organize or attend those fundraisers were also part of the Trudeau Foundation, named after the late prime minister.

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There was some suggestion, because the Liberal government at first cancelled the monument to the Afghanistan war, that because of that Chinese support for the Trudeau Foundation, a statue Pierre Trudeau would be built before a monument to our Afghanistan veterans. It is shameful. I am glad the government then, after outrage, came forward with some sort of proposal, but it cancelled something I had announced as veterans minister, the location, as well as another monument to our Victoria Cross winners.

That was a series of events the Prime Minister and other ministers had replicating this cash for access for insiders, including some that had links with groups like Canada 2020. I am sure there are wonderful people in that organization. I like to describe it as, "What do the students from Queen's who are on the Queen's Liberal campus club do when they graduate? They join Canada 2020." Now they run events in conjunction with the Prime Minister's office and have exclusive access. There is an inappropriate connection between the Prime Minister and that front group. We also see influence being extended through a number of these intimate cash for access dinners in which the Prime Minister engages.

Why are we not surprised by this conduct, despite language about being open and accountable in the Liberal election platform and in the Prime Minister's note to his ministers on accountability and being clear from even the perception of conflict of interest? The people running the Prime Minister's office, during their years at Queen's Park, in and around Ontario politics, set up the most elaborate cash for access scheme that Canadian politics had ever seen. Throughout the governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, there was a machine providing access for cash.

I will quote a few details contained in a great *Globe and Mail* article that I would suggest some members of the Liberal caucus peruse. I know they already are having concerns about the direction some of the minds in the PMO are forging.

●(1305)

The Globe and Mail reports that there were 159 intimate cash for access fundraisers with Premier Wynne just in a few years, with no disclosure or confirmation of who attended. Three of them were for \$10,000 a ticket. In that period, the Liberals raised \$20 million from the cash for access machine.

As we know from the first few weeks of debate in the House, Canadian taxpayers paid to move that machine from Toronto to Ottawa to run the Prime Minister's Office, and within weeks, he was attending these same-styled intimate cash for access dinners. It really took outrage from the House of Commons and Canadians for him to stop that, put a note on the website or advertise it, and those elements of their public relations campaign led to Bill C-50.

We have to look at what is expected when we talk about transparency and accountability. The government tosses those words around so cavalierly, but let us look at the record.

There is a report from the former ethics commissioner in the name of the Prime Minister. Her report reveals that the Prime Minister accepted a luxury gift from someone he casually knew 30 years prior. He describes him now as a friend. I am 45 and if I had not talked to a friend in 30 years, I might say I went to school with that person, but we were not BFFs. I am not sure if the Prime Minister is

Facebook friends with the Aga Khan, but I do not see that a 30-year casual interaction at a funeral justifies a family friendship.

What was more scary in that report was the fact that the Prime Minister did not feel it was important because he was almost a ceremonial figure for the country. That is ludicrous. At the same time, the good organization run by the owner of that private island was lobbying the government for continued support for its programs. They are good programs, but that is in direct violation of the act, which the Ethics Commissioner said, four times. That is the first report in the Prime Minister's name. Another one is coming on lobbying from the cash for access dinners that I referenced at the beginning of my speech.

With respect to conflict of interest, for Canadians following this debate, there can be a real conflict of interest or the perception of one, which is why the Prime Minister, in his mandate letters, which he made great fanfare about releasing but now ignores routinely, says that ministers are supposed to be beyond even the appearance of conflict.

The finance minister, prior to running, was making advocacy speeches publicly to change pension legislation in Canada, while he had a large interest in a company that advises on making those changes. Then he introduced a bill in Parliament to do that, knowing full well that, at the very least, there would be a perception of a conflict of interest maybe. Am I being unreasonable? No, I am not.

I know the finance minister is an honourable man. He made a big mistake. He should express that and likely stay back. He should probably, as an hon. member of the House, step aside until the report on that bill is complete. That would live up to the lofty goals contained in the mandate letters of the Prime Minister. However, why should he do that when the Prime Minister has more investigations about him and refuses to account for the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on an illegal trip. He is sending quite a signal to his caucus. He is saying that he wrote this in the ministers' mandate letters, but if they are following leadership by example, his example is to not be accountable.

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We can have Bill C-50, we can have a ton of bills in the House, but if Liberals are not making decisions in the nation's interest that are showing they are clear from even the perception of conflict of interest, if they are not showing they are willing to take leadership and own up to mistakes, repay money, and step away from important portfolios while investigations are pending, the language in mandate letters is useless. It is just words.

• (1310)

I want to hear some accountability from these members. We do not want Canadians to see the cash for access scheme that led to 15 years of corruption and incompetence in Ontario.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recall the days when Stephen Harper would fly off to British Columbia and go to a large barbeque with supporters. Off to the side would be a tent in which those who paid \$1,000 would get the privilege of meeting with the prime minister and sharing some time. I suspect there might even have been some lobbying done there. What I see is potential hypocrisy coming from the other benches.

What is the legislation we are debating today? We are talking about ensuring that whether one is the prime minister, a cabinet minister, or the leader of the official opposition, when one meets with stakeholders, one has to declare their names. If someone gives more than \$200, why not declare it? The Conservatives are saying that we do not need a law for it, but we do need a law for it, because the Conservatives disagree.

In a published story, the Conservatives' leader, whose party attacked the Liberal government for months for holding cash for access fundraisers, said that he would not post details of his own private fundraising events. One private fundraising event the article referred to was with real estate executives. The current leader said, "I'll continue to follow every single law that Elections Canada has on these types of issues."

This law would ensure that there is more transparency and accountability on fundraising. Believe it or not, the leader of the official opposition does have some influence in modern-day politics.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the member would stand up and compare the record of the Conservative Harper government to this one. In nine years, how many investigations of Stephen Harper were there by the Ethics Commissioner? There were zero. In less than two years, there have been two investigations by two separate officers of Parliament.

The Harpers would pay for tickets for flights if a family member came out. They would pay back some of the cost of groceries. Who was on that trip to the Aga Khan? There was the veterans minister and his partner, the president of the Liberal Party, and Canada 2020. This was a junket of epic proportions that showed judgment by the Prime Minister that is not fit for leadership. Then his wife asked for another trip. This is Liberal entitlement with a capital E. Then, it is unreasonable for us to ask him to pay the money back.

We hear these people read the same answers over and over. What took the Liberal Party of Chrétien over a decade to creep in, the entitlement and corruption, was in place within weeks with these

guys. That is why we need change, and we need a Conservative government.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the lively debate we are having here, and my colleague's speech. I would like to hear him reflect on another important aspect of accountability and transparency, and that is when a prime minister promises something when he or she is a candidate that does not happen when he or she becomes prime minister.

Yesterday, we celebrated the first anniversary of the Prime Minister's broken promise to Canadians on electoral reform. Most Canadians thought that this was a key pillar of his election strategy. Most Canadians assumed that it was a big one, and that it was probably something he would follow through on should he win and become prime minister. Lo and behold, that is what happened. Then we went through almost a year, nine months, with a parliamentary committee, an expensive online survey, and a ministerial tour, and we were all encouraged to have town halls. Most of us thought we were still going in that direction.

In light of the conversation we just had about accountability and ethics, I wonder if my hon. colleague might reflect on that broken promise to Canadians.

• (1315)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked a day of broken promises on electoral reform, and the Prime Minister blaming veterans for expecting him to keep his promise on lifetime pensions for all our injured veterans. This shows that the Liberals made calculated promises they knew they would break to get left-leaning voters from the NDP on electoral reform, and defence, veteran, and right-of-centre voters on veterans issues.

As I said in the House today, and I choose my words carefully, this shows a leader who is willing to either lie or be so willfully blind to the promises being made that he is prepared to say anything. I would like the Prime Minister to inform the House, and I do not use that word lightly, whether he did not cost these promises or did not think about electoral reform, or whether he chose to lie to Canadians to win the election.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, during question period and right now, the member used a term he knows full well is not parliamentary. We can agree that Conservatives and Liberals at times will get into heated discussions, but I do not believe it is appropriate to start using unparliamentary language.

I would ask the member to rethink the use of the word, without trying to expand or hit a point on which I believe he is outright wrong.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go to the hon. member for Durham, the term "liar" was used, and it is an unparliamentary term. I will let the hon. member reply, and we will see what he has to say.

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Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I have thought a great deal about the use of that term. I have tried to use it within the context of a question, because I am not sure here. When a promise is made, and I am not suggesting the Prime Minister lied in this House or anything like that, but we certainly saw in an election campaign that a promise was made. The determination is either that the promise was made without full knowledge of the cost implications, and that is likely what it is, or it was made for political calculation, which would be a lie. I think it is the former, and I would like the Prime Minister, or perhaps the veterans affairs minister, to clarify that for me.

I do not use that word lightly. However, when I was the veterans affairs minister and I was trying to deal with families struggling with losing faith in the Government of Canada, both Liberal and Conservative, I said that the biggest thing we owe veterans is the truth and to work with them on making progress. I am being very judicious with the decision, and perhaps a ruling on this might be in order.

If I offer this as a question with two alternatives, it really is up to the Prime Minister to determine or confirm which alternative is correct. At that time, if there would be an acknowledgement that they did not cost the full lifetime pension promise, did not look at its implementation or its impact on people, I would certainly withdraw the language I suggested as the alternative. However, this is such a passionate subject for me personally and for veterans, and I know my friend from Barrie feels the same way. I would like a determination on whether posing it in this way, giving the Prime Minister and the veterans affairs minister a choice, allows me to remain within the parliamentary rules. I certainly have respect for this House. I certainly have respect for the deputy House leader. However, this is part of responsibility in public life.

We can get passionate about pipelines and a whole range of issues, but unlike some issues, benefits and payments to injured veterans affects families. This is bigger than a lot of debates we have in this place, and perhaps why, if we do take the sacred obligation we have to our veterans, we should be very precise with our language.

Mr. Speaker, if I am found to be playing too close to the line here by offering it as a choice, if that is your determination, I will apologize to this House. I did give very careful thought about how I have used these terms and how I have presented it for them to respond. Holding a press conference a couple of days before Christmas, after the House rose, and suggesting they did not break their promise is not fair to this House, and it is not fair to veterans or their families across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I will look to your honourable guidance with respect to this question.

•(1320)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will start with the hon. parliamentary secretary and then go to the member for Hull—Aylmer on the same point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if we were to look at Beauchesne's sixth edition and at what is parliamentary and what is not parliamentary, we would find a very clear statement.

A word in itself is not necessarily determined as being parliamentary or unparliamentary because of the word itself. It is

the context in which it is said. The context in which the member said it, whether it was right now or during question period, was that it was meant to try to provoke all sorts of reactions from other members of the chamber. It was to promote unhealthy decorum inside the House of Commons. That is the manner in which he used the word. The member is trying to twist it around to make it look as if the Government of Canada has done something wrong. I give him full merit in terms of his ability to try to communicate a false message. However, by trying to incorporate a word that by nature is unparliamentary, that will be listed as unparliamentary, and then arguing that because of the context, it was to contrast, and now it is up to the Speaker, what the member is really trying to do is re-emphasize a question he asked earlier today.

There was a response from the minister. I would suggest that the minister was right and the member was wrong, and he should accept the answer and recognize that the way he used the word was unparliamentary.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If you do not mind, I am going to go to the member for Hull—Aylmer, and then I will speak to this. This is going a little longer than we anticipated.

The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, please.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for giving me an opportunity to raise this point of order. It is the same point of order my colleague from Winnipeg raised.

I have come to know the member for Durham well since my election in 2015. I consider the member an honourable member. Regardless of the context, I would certainly suggest, out of respect for the House, that the member would want to withdraw that word. I am certain that there are other ways he could make his point without skating so close to the line. The hon. member, as I indicated, has a distinguished history in the House, and I am certain he would not want to impugn another hon. member in the House, in this case the right hon. member for Papineau, by using that word, which I am not even going to employ.

Out of courtesy and out of respect, I would ask the hon. member to make it patently clear that he will withdraw that message and would allow him to make, in his inimitable and usually very erudite way, his point without employing words that even come close to skating to the line.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would refer to Section 491 of Beauchesne's, which says, "No language is, by virtue of any list, acceptable or unacceptable." It is the context.

What I might suggest is a compromise. The member for Hull—Aylmer is probably one of my favourite members on that side. He is a good friend. Perhaps this might change it. I would like clarity here. If this was not an issue that I lived and breathed and bled about, I would not be phrasing it with a choice for the Prime Minister to make. That is how I am phrasing it, and maybe those members do not like it.

Private Members' Business

Perhaps the framework would be that the promise was made when there were no members of the House, because the House of Commons was dissolved. A collection of Liberal candidates in the last general election made a promise with respect to lifetime veteran pensions. That was either one of two things. It was either in the context of a campaign, when the House of Commons was dissolved and there were no hon. members at that time. In the context of that campaign, it was either an un-costed, not properly researched promise, or a political calculation, which now appears to be a lie. I do not like using that word. I hoped I would never have to use it. I am using it, because that is what has happened as a result of that promise.

I look for direction. If I am wrong, I will withdraw and apologize. However, it is not absolutely clear to me if it is presented in that way, or perhaps the compromise would be that the House was not in session, and it was a collection of candidates,

It is important enough that I would like your clarity on it, Mr. Speaker.

• (1325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): What we have done is we have consulted Bosc and Gagnon. There is a paragraph here, and I will take the time to read through it:

In dealing with unparliamentary language, the Speaker takes into account the tone, manner and intention of the Member speaking; the person to whom the words at issue were directed; the degree of provocation; and, most importantly, whether or not the remarks created disorder in the Chamber. Thus, language deemed unparliamentary one day may not necessarily be deemed unparliamentary the following day. The codification of unparliamentary language has proven impractical as it is the context in which words or phrases are used that the Chair must consider when deciding whether or not they should be withdrawn. Although an expression may be found to be acceptable, the Speaker has cautioned that any language which leads to disorder in the House should not be used. Expressions which are considered unparliamentary when applied to an individual Member have not always been considered so when applied "in a generic sense" or to a party

I think in this case, we do find that it was applied to one person, and there was some disruption in the chamber. There is no question there. We have seen it on both sides just while the discussion was taking place. What I want to avoid is a slippery slope. If we start with one word and continue on that way, who knows where we might end up.

I will leave it to the member for Durham to respond to that, and then we will get on with the debate.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you very much for your clarity, Mr. Speaker, and for the time and interventions from other members of this House.

Certainly, when I raised it in question period, there was not disorder caused by it, but clearly in this debate there was disorder caused by it. In light of your reading of the rules, I will withdraw that word. It remains that I would still like a wider answer to the issue, but I will try to use better language, more parliamentary language, when I ask about the issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will take that under consideration and get back, if necessary.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since my speaking time has been cut short, I will try to stay on point.

Our democracy is important and we cherish it. However, it is a living thing, and we must not let it wither. We must support and nurture it. The Liberals had an opportunity to do so. They even promised to advance our democracy by introducing proportional representation. However, they broke their promise and by doing so they discouraged many young people who had decided to vote. They prevented us from having a House of Commons that truly represents the interests of the entire population. Furthermore, they have fuelled cynicism about politicians and our institutions. This is a step backwards for democracy.

In the meantime, they chose to organize cash for access meetings, where people pay for access to the Prime Minister and his cabinet. These are very intimate meetings, where a good meal and a glass of wine are served to people who can afford to pay \$1,500 to speak one-on-one with the Prime Minister and members of cabinet.

In Laurier—Sainte-Marie, most people cannot afford to pay \$1,500 to speak to the Prime Minister or his ministers about their housing problems or how they are outraged about tax evasion and cuts in services. They do not have that kind of money.

Why do the wealthy have this kind of access, while the people I represent, the citizens of Laurier—Sainte-Marie, do not? That is unacceptable. With Bill—

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I am sorry, but that is all the time we have for today. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie will have seven minutes and 30 seconds to finish her speech when we resume debate on this matter.

It being 1:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

NATIONAL IMPAIRED DRIVING PREVENTION WEEK

The House resumed from November 23, 2017, consideration of the motion.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to lend my support to the motion of my friend and colleague the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel to create a national impaired driving prevention week. A similar effort has been under way in Alberta, where December is recognized as Impaired Driving Month. Both intentions are the same, which is to raise awareness of impaired driving and encourage people to drive sober.

Private Members' Business

I salute my colleague and others for sharing their personal stories. As a former police officer, I have seen too many preventable and tragic accidents coming from a decision to drive after drinking or taking drugs. It is encouraging that many of the discussions and stories during the debates have focused on the impacts to families and communities, and support for the victims of these accidents.

Any effort that can reduce the unnecessary loss of life and make our roads safer is worth our attention and effort in the House, and we can show that we can rise above partisanship. By supporting a national impaired driving prevention week, my hope is that we can decrease the number of impaired drivers on the road. These campaigns have been proven to work. Over the last 30 years, impaired driving, both by alcohol or drugs, is down 65%. Today, we are at the lowest rate ever recorded. That is both a cause for celebration and a reminder that the job is not yet done. When it comes to impaired driving, one is too many.

Why did impaired driving drop significantly during this time period? First, in my opinion, it was an attitudinal shift. Punishments changed and how we deal with impaired drivers shifted. Gone are the days when police drove people home instead of arresting them. Zero tolerance was adopted, and those who broke the law faced the consequences of their actions. As a society, we changed our view of drinking and driving. The era of "one for the road" ended. Today, most consider impaired driving as a social taboo. Complacency or acceptance of this practice is at an all-time low.

For our youth today, there is pressure to stop friends from driving while impaired, along with education on how to recognize and avoid driving under the influence. All of this has been accomplished through the community and educational efforts of groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving, MADD Canada. Through their campaigns, MADD and others have reduced the number of fatalities, accidents, and victims. These groups have rallied the industry to help with educational efforts in win-win scenarios that see more people arrive alive.

However, more can and should be done. Nearly 60% of crash deaths today still involve drivers with alcohol or drugs in their system. The most recent statistics show that over 72,000 incidents of impaired driving in Canada were reported in 2015. As we can see, there is still a lot of room for improvement. We need to continue the trend of fewer impaired drivers and fewer families left to pick up the pieces after losing a loved one. I hope that by dedicating a week specific to this issue we are able to rally educational efforts across various groups, and further empower our police services to protect Canadians from drunk driving.

However, as we debate this motion to prevent impaired driving, a surprising number of members in this House continue to support legalized marijuana. Make no mistake. Marijuana legalization will result in more impaired driving deaths, more accidents, and an increased risk to road safety. History has already shown us the results.

Colorado legalized marijuana a little more than five years ago. A summary of the impacts in the U.S. were far gloomier than what the Liberals' proposed plan says, even though the political promises were the same. In the U.S., the politicians promised that legalization would reduce the impacts of organized crime, increase tax revenue,

decrease crime rates, and improve controls over youth access to drugs. Does that sound familiar? However, reports show that organized crime continues to do well, including operating in both the legal and illegal markets for marijuana, where prices are tax-free and significantly lower. Instead of higher revenues, there has been pressure on social services as addiction rates, homelessness, and youth use has increased. For impaired drivers, the first year saw marijuana-related traffic deaths increase by 92%. Youth access spiked, even though the legal age of use is 21 in Colorado. Youth rates were significantly higher in legalized states versus non-legalized states. Drug-related high school suspensions were up 40%. Today in Colorado, business groups, doctors, and health providers are trying to rally the public to reverse that legalization.

● (1335)

Washington state has a similar story, according to the Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area report, which is part of the White House's plan to reduce drugs. They say drivers involved in fatal crashes with drugs in their system increased 122%. Nearly two out of three DUIs for marijuana involved youth, with 20% of youth reporting they were in a car with a driver who was under the influence of or used marijuana. Similarly, half of school expulsions and 42% of drug suspensions were marijuana related. These numbers are consistent and clearly show that Canada should be preparing for a major issue related to drug impaired driving.

Sadly, the government has not been listening. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police warn that it will not be ready to equip and train enough police on drug testing processes and procedures in time for the arbitrary summer deadline. This does not help police services serve their communities, it will not help protect innocent victims from impaired drivers, and it is entirely avoidable.

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This new national impaired driving prevention week would, no doubt, help educate Canadians on the dangers of using marijuana and driving, and lots of education is needed because many Canadians still believe that the impacts of marijuana and alcohol are the same, if not less, for cannabis. However, unlike alcohol, marijuana takes seconds to impact the brain and the user feels and exhibits the effects immediately. While alcohol peak effects are reached quickly and dissipate within two to three hours, marijuana impairment can last up to 24 hours, depending on the strength of the drug and the frequency of use.

The drug impacts critical functions like thinking, reflexes, perception, balance, motor control, and reaction times, all essential elements to driving. Worse for our kids, the impairment is not immediately recognized by the user or others who interact with them. Where the signs of alcohol impairment can warn us not to get in the car with someone who is under the influence, the same warning signs may not be there for a marijuana high. The least we can do is create a week to educate people on the dangers of driving while impaired, since we know there will be significantly more people driving while impaired when marijuana is legalized. Those who ultimately pay the price for impaired driving are the victims. We cannot debate this issue without making the families, friends, and loved ones of victims central to this issue.

As the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel has seen and experienced first-hand from his statements in the House, the innocent victims pay a significant price by those who make the decision to drive under the influence. All penalties, jail, community service, criminal records, pale in comparison to that. I ask all MPs who stand in the House to support the member's motion to also re-examine their support for legalizing marijuana. If our goal, as members of the House, is to improve our society and leave a brighter future for our children, the legalization of marijuana does not align with those ideals.

Canada's record for impaired driving has been getting better each year, but 72,000 incidents of impaired driving remain far too many, and with the government's decision to legalize marijuana, without question, it will create thousands more drug impaired drivers. With this law being rushed, the government puts the safety of its citizens at risk.

There is clearly a need to better inform and prepare Canadians. With this new national impaired driving prevention week, it is our hope that industry, community, and public agencies can rally together to improve road safety and educate Canadians. We can continue to improve awareness, social pressure, and enforcement to reduce impaired driving. We can honour and remember innocent victims who were lost by the senseless act of driving while under the influence. With this week, we can play a small part in the creation of a better and safer future.

● (1340)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to affirm my support for Motion No. 148. I thank the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for bringing this forward.

There was considerable consensus in the House when we had our initial discussion on this motion back in November. It is truly a positive step.

While it is highly commendable to promote awareness, I wish to use some of my time today to encourage the government to go further. We must do all we can to minimize preventable tragedy and keep our roads safe for Canadians.

Driving is not a constitutional right; it is a privilege, a privilege that must be denied those who act recklessly by driving impaired. We need to give serious consideration to concrete, measurable ways so this behaviour can be deterred and ultimately eliminated. I will revisit this a little later.

Committing to additional awareness campaigns about the perils of drug, alcohol, and distracted driving is a good place to start. We have seen that these initiatives work. Data from Statistics Canada shows that in 2015 the rate of alcohol impaired driving was 201 incidents per 100,000 population. That was the lowest rate since data on impaired driving was first collected in 1986, down 65% and 4% lower than in 2014.

After decades of awareness, it is now widely accepted that alcohol impaired driving is wrong and that it causes considerable harm. However, as we move forward toward the legalization of cannabis, we must acknowledge that many individuals do not believe drug-impaired driving is quite so serious. Anything that impairs reactions and judgment will have detrimental effects on the ability to drive. Impairment is impairment.

Recently, I heard Dr. Robert Solomon interviewed by CBC's Michael Enright about impaired driving. Dr. Solomon, a legal expert who has done considerable research on impaired driving, also testified at the justice committee. He pointed that 16 to 24 year olds represented 13% of the population but accounted for one third of the cannabis users.

Canadian youth are already the leading demographic for rates of impaired driving. The high instance of cannabis use paired with the already high rate of impaired driving warrants our attention. Additionally, perhaps most disconcertingly, the perception that drugs will not impair driving is prevalent among young Canadians.

As the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction says:

The challenge is many youth do not consider driving under the influence of marijuana to be risky, unlike driving under the influence of alcohol. Some youth even believe that using marijuana makes them better drivers, but evidence clearly shows that it impairs driving ability....more awareness campaigns that centre on youth are needed to deter them from driving while impaired, especially after using marijuana.

A national study by the Partnership for a Drug Free Canada provides further evidence to that effect, writing, “Nearly one third (32%) of teens did not consider driving under the influence of cannabis to be as bad as alcohol.”

Further to this point, in an article published in the *National Post* in 2016, “About half of pot-smoking Canadians who get behind the wheel while high believe the drug doesn’t impair their ability to drive safely — and 20 per cent say nothing would make them stop driving while stoned.”

People can see that an unfortunate number of factors are converging here. We have Canadian youth with already high rates of impaired driving, high cannabis use, and the belief that drugs will not cause impairment. Clearly, this needs to be addressed. Awareness will help but let us not stop there. Let us also consider measures and practices that will deter impaired driving in all forms.

I supported Bill C-46, which, among other measures, would allow police to administer roadside mandatory alcohol screening, MAS, as a way to apprehend all drivers at the stop who were impaired. Dr. Solomon was quite clear in his testimony on this, that testing every driver at a stop instead of relying on subjective discretion saves lives. It increases the likelihood of an impaired driver being apprehended. The practice deters impaired driving since drivers know they will be tested.

While this practice may give some pause, I reiterate that driving is a privilege not a constitutional right.

● (1345)

MAS is used successfully in many European countries as is illustrated by the submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that Dr. Solomon co-authored. In it he wrote, “When Switzerland enacted MAS in 2005, the percentage of drivers testing positive for alcohol fell from about 25% to 7.6%, and alcohol-related crash deaths dropped by approximately 25%.”

Folks are less likely to engage in a behaviour if they know there is a greater probability of being caught. Dr. Solomon’s submission to the committee goes on to say, “A 2013 study reported that MAS prevented an estimated 5,309 crash deaths in four Australian states over a 27-year period and was particularly effective in reducing crash deaths among 17-30 year olds.”

Lives are being saved by this practice. Mandatory alcohol screening is no doubt effective, but we are still debating a suitable equivalent for drug impaired driving. Such a device needs to be reliable, efficient, and ideally inexpensive for police forces. These are the kinds of measures that I believe are necessary in order to go further than awareness campaigns.

I will conclude by reiterating my support for my honourable colleague’s motion, but I also want to remind members that we have a long way to go. We have a long way to go in terms of addressing persistent misconceptions around the harmfulness of drug impaired driving, and we have a long way to go to implement effective practices that will save Canadian lives.

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great personal pride that I stand today to support the motion of my

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colleague and friend, the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel. I hope I am not betraying his trust today by telling the House how emotional and passionate he is about this particular initiative. It stems from one principle that he raised with us quite recently, which is that he has done everything in his life for his three daughters. For anyone who has studied the background of this motion, it stems precisely from the personal physical and emotional trauma his daughter went through.

This is a bright and important motion, and I am glad it is garnering unanimous support in the House. It comes from a very personal source and it is of great importance to the member. It was something he did way before he got into politics, notably by pioneering an initiative called “cool taxi”, which gave tickets to people who were impaired, without any questions asked, in order for them to get home safely.

I want to talk about a good friend of mine, Peter Cullen. He is a former colleague of mine at the law firm I worked at for a number of years, Stikeman Elliott. This is not a partisan pitch. In fact, his brother is an NDP organizer, and he has reminded me several times that he tends to be Conservative. Members can applaud on that side of the House, but there are about three of those in the Montreal area, so it is not a big number. I did want to emphasize that this is not a partisan pitch by any stretch of the imagination.

When Peter Cullen found out I was getting into politics, he had read a local newspaper article that we have all been the subject of, which goes through our family history in a most embarrassing way. He came up to me in the lawyer’s lounge and asked if my uncle was Graham Gales. Peter is a maritime lawyer. I did not do maritime law at all, so we had not really worked together or gone through our personal histories. I told him Graham was my uncle. He looked at me and under the stress of emotion gave me what I call the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant hug, which is as close as one can get to something a little firmer than a handshake, but it was deep in emotion. He said he did not know that, despite the years we had worked together. He told me that Graham had been his best friend, that he had walked to school with Graham every day, and still misses him. I spoke with Peter this morning to get permission to speak about him in the House. He told me he is still affected every day by the loss.

Graham died at 18, hit by an impaired driver, close to Hawkesbury. I never got to meet my uncle and Peter lost his best friend. This was something I did not know. I knew the loss had affected my mother. It was in 1972. She was pregnant with me, a few months along. It obviously affected her parents, my grandparents. They never recovered from it, nor does any parent, I believe, who loses a child. It also affected a swath of people around him, including my colleague and buddy Peter.

This is something that has touched every single person in the House, whether at this level of capacity or at full capacity. As members of Parliament we hear about trauma, but on a personal level, we have all been touched deeply by it in some measure.

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The reason I am telling the House about Peter is that the repercussions of impaired driving have a devastating effect on society, not only on people who are close but on people we never would have imagined it would have had an impact on, and it marks them every day. When I talked to Peter this morning, as well as a couple of years ago, about this loss, he still is visibly under the emotional trauma of reliving the incident. Part of that was him asking me to help him find the grave where Graham is buried, because he went looking for it and never found it. I have helped him, and hopefully, he has found the grave and has been able to get some peace.

● (1350)

My colleague from Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel has gone through a similar personal trauma. His daughter, thank the Lord, survived and is now in law school. I have not checked her grades, nor should he share them with me, but I am sure she will be at the top of her class. She was highlighted by the Barreau du Québec at some point for her studies. She is a young Quebec leader and has a very bright career. However, she was the subject of an impaired driving crash and it took a significant period of time for her to recover from that.

The reason we support this as a government, why my colleagues across the way support it as members of the Queen's loyal opposition, and why I support it on a personal level is the fact that the motion makes sense. It makes sense for a number of reasons, both personal and professional.

We have talked at length about legalizing cannabis. I had a prepared speech and was prepared to tell the House about the initiatives and the millions of dollars that this government was prepared to invest to raise awareness of impaired driving as it related to cannabis. However, the reason today's motion is garnering so much support is because it makes sense. It only needs to achieve one single purpose to have success, and that is to change but one and to save but one single life. If it does that, my colleague to the left of me can be extremely proud of what he has achieved with this initiative. Moreover, I am going to get rid of this speech. I was waiting for my mother to call me and give me permission to actually talk about this, but I hope she forgives me.

This is deep and personal for everyone. As I mentioned earlier, as members of Parliament, we have all heard terrible stories. We should stay humble because of that. We have all been one step away from taking the wrong turn, being stupid, and jumping into a car in a condition less than respectable. If any kids are listening to this speech, there is one message I would like to convey to them. If they are under extreme peer pressure to get into a car with someone that they know is drunk, then they should take the damn keys away and throw them in the snow, or wherever. A friend may be lost for a week, or maybe two weeks, but that friend will not be lost for life.

● (1355)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment my colleague across the aisle for a very heart-wrenching speech, one that came from his heart and involved a lot of people. He was correct when he said that every time there is an accident when someone is killed by an impaired driver, this is not the only victim. There are also the victims who have to live on. I thank the member. It was a great story.

I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Motion No.148, which would establish a national impaired driving prevention week. As members know, I spent 35 years as an RCMP officer. As an emergency responder, I have personally witnessed the prevalence and impacts of impaired driving. I attended too many fatal MVAs directly related to impaired driving. I even had the occasion once to charge an individual with a Breathalyzer reading six times over the legal limit. It was scary. He was not supposed to be walking.

I am grateful that this motion has been put forward, and I am pleased to see that it appears to have support from all sides of the House, as it should.

Impaired driving is not a new problem in Canada. It has been recognized by the Criminal Code of Canada since 1921. Despite a sizeable drop in the impaired driving rate since the mid-1980s, it still remains a leading cause of criminal death in Canada. In my own province of Alberta, one in five drivers involved in fatal collisions between 2011 and 2015 had been drinking prior to the collision. In that same period, 389 people were killed and 5,969 people were injured in alcohol-related collisions. These numbers are unacceptable.

In a Statistics Canada survey, one out of 20 drivers in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, Yukon, and Nunavut admitted to driving in previous years after consuming two or more drinks in the hour before driving. It is clear that we have a lot of repeat offenders. Out of these individuals, more than three-quarters reported driving impaired on multiple occasions. On one occasion, I remember arresting a person three times in one night for impaired driving. The only way to stop him was to lock him up.

This motion states that the government should recognize the importance of educating Canadians about the consequences of impaired driving, and that is so right. With a good education program, we can get that information out there and lower the statistical data, very much as we did when seat belts came out. A good education program got the message out.

According to the statistics I just shared, 95% of Canadians seem to understand the consequences of drunk driving, but we need to keep educating the public until that number is 100%, because the 5% who keep drinking and driving are doing a lot of damage and permanently changing the lives of thousands of people, as my friend across the way just said.

It is not just alcohol that impairs our driving. Cellphones are a huge distraction on the road. This distraction greatly impacts our ability to drive safely. According to the Canadian Automobile Association, drivers who text are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash or a near miss. I have witnessed ladies applying makeup, men shaving, and some unmentionable distractions while people were driving.

This motion is well timed with Bill C-373, which I will also be speaking to when it is up for debate later this month. It calls for a national framework to deter and prevent distracted driving, with a focus on hand-held devices.

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Distracted driving is a major issue across Canada. The number of deaths caused by distracted drivers is now outpacing the number of deaths caused by drunk drivers in provinces like Ontario and British Columbia. It is imperative that we include distracted driving in our conversations about impaired driving. If this motion passes and we have a national impaired driving prevention week, I would like to see this as part of the conversation each year.

● (1400)

I would also like to see drug-impaired driving as part of this conversation. This is an issue I continue to be very concerned about as the Liberal government pushes to legalize marijuana.

Drug-impaired driving has been increasing every year since 2009. The message about drinking and driving is well known, but people do not fully understand the impact drugs can and will have on their judgment and reaction time when driving.

Studies of vehicle accidents around the world show that the drugs most commonly found in drivers involved in accidents include marijuana, opioids, and cocaine. Each drug affects the brain differently, but almost all impact the user's attention, judgment, motor skills, reaction time, decision-making skills, and coordination.

Public Safety Canada conducted research with Canadians on drug-impaired driving in 2017. It found that 28% of cannabis users have operated a vehicle while under the influence, and one-third of Canadians have ridden in vehicles operated by a driver who was affected by the use of cannabis. Among those who have driven while impaired, almost half downplayed the risks. They either indicated that driving while under the influence of cannabis was less dangerous than driving while under the influence of alcohol, or they believed that driving while under the influence of cannabis posed no real risk to them or anyone else. They are wrong. I have investigated horrific accidents where no liquor was involved but the drivers were high.

These are the attitudes of Canadians, and they need to change, especially as marijuana becomes legal. This is why I support educating Canadians about the dangers of impaired driving. I know there are members here who have personally been impacted by an impaired driver, and we have heard that. Some have lost a friend or family member. The sponsor of this motion almost lost his daughter, a story he shared with the House.

What is even more heartbreaking than his story is the fact that there are thousands more stories like his out there. So many Canadians have been impacted by impaired driving in life-changing ways. This is something that needs to change. From my service as an RCMP officer, some of my worst memories are of motor vehicle accidents: death and mangled bodies. One never forgets.

A national impaired driving prevention week would serve as an annual reminder and education campaign about the very real consequences of driving while impaired, whether by drugs, alcohol, or distractions.

When the sponsor of this motion spoke in November last year, he said that four Canadians die in an impaired driving accident each day. That is too much. If a single life can be saved by this motion, then it is worth supporting. I encourage all members of this House to support Motion No. 148 to help make our roads safer.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a great honour to rise in the House of Commons to offer thoughts on motions and bills in front of us. Particularly today, it is a great honour to rise in support of Motion No. 148, and our move, I hope unanimously, in this House to establish a national impaired driving prevention week.

I will begin by thanking the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for his passion, wisdom, and hard work in bringing forward this motion for our consideration. I believe it is something that can and will change lives once it is enacted.

It is interesting for me that politics is a place where ideas and people come together. This place is a place where our private lives and our public offerings are able to come together. The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel has brought his private experience, his personal story into the public forum, and I think every one of us is richer for that. There will be Canadians whose lives are saved because of his work today. We thank him and commend him.

The speeches I have listened to on this have been interesting. We have had statistics raised regarding the incidents of impaired driving, collisions, and motor vehicle accidents that are a direct result of impaired driving, and lives lost. We have also heard personal stories of lives that have been broken, dreams that have been shattered, and families that have been severed because of this.

What I want to add to this conversation today is the role of civil society. Our job is to get the laws right. It is also our job to ensure that enforcement happens appropriately. If we have laws that are right, and we have enforcement that happens well, lives can be saved. However, attitude, education, personal responsibility, and our own behaviour are critical in ensuring that lives can be saved.

By establishing a national impaired driving prevention week, we have the opportunity to have a national conversation that engages young people and older people, that is involved in schools and communities, that is able to take the conversation forward, get attitudes to change, to make sure that behaviours are appropriate, and that all of us are working together to ensure that lives can be saved.

This sort of a week would build upon weeks that already exist, but would come at a time of year which is critical. At the end of winter and in the early spring, as students begin to think about the summer, it is a most important time to bring those educational offerings into consideration, making sure that everyone is informed and is enabled to live life appropriately.

I want to highlight one civil society group that is working in concert with many others. It is one that I happen to know quite well. The organization is named Arrive Alive Drive Sober. Arrive Alive has been established for several decades. Its national office is in Don Valley West. They run programs aimed both at young people and older people, to ensure that we will have fewer accidents and many fewer casualties from impaired driving.

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Anne Leonard was the executive director for decades, and gave her heart and soul to ensure that their educational programs could find a way to do it. I want to pay tribute to Anne, who retired last year after giving her life to this cause. She worked with so many people to ensure that Canadians have better information and make better decisions. Michael Stewart has taken over from her as executive director and program director. He has brought the wisdom that Anne has offered to the association, and is now living it out.

I work with them every year as they get funding for Canada summer jobs, and employ young people, making sure that information is taken into communities, taken around the province, and making sure that we have activities that promote healthy living, safe driving, and that we have a reduction in impaired driving from any source.

Their public campaigns are centred on two major themes: choose our ride, and shut out impaired driving. They bring together people. They do it in the community at annual conferences, workshops, and other events where people are gathered. They make sure that people hear the right information. They have clever ways of doing that through social media as well as through one-on-one conversations.

• (1405)

I believe that this week, this very important week what will happen in the third week of March, will be an opportunity for Arrive Alive to engage even more strongly in the kinds of activities that the member has envisioned in this motion.

We have rare opportunities in this House to save lives. We bring our personal stories. We commend each other on the activities we are doing. However, this particular motion has the opportunity to change lives and that gives us a great opportunity to engage in that.

I thank the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for doing this work, and for his passion, courage, wisdom, and tenacity in doing that. I encourage all members of the House to support the motion when it comes to a vote.

• (1410)

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer a brief reply. Emotions make us. They are a driving force. They are a guide. I have to tell members that when I addressed this motion, I relived the circumstances that led me to propose it, and at times I am overtaken by emotion. Therefore, if members do not mind I will rely on my notes to ensure that I comply with the time and the constraints that this honourable House imposes on us on occasion.

On November 23, the first reading of Motion No. 148 took place. I would like to take this opportunity today to thank all my colleagues in Parliament, as well as my family, constituents, and friends for their support.

Also, I thank my dear friend the hon. member for Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs for being here today to support me, as he has from the very beginning. In Montreal, we practised law in two office towers across the street. We were competitors. However, here, as in life, we are always friends.

I salute my colleague and friend from Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, and my friend and colleague from Don Valley, for their strong voices and support.

I would also like to thank, in the same manner, my colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay and my colleague from Yellowhead for their support and constant attention to this motion.

Furthermore, as my hon. colleague from St. John's East pointed out earlier, “impaired driving remains the leading criminal cause of death in Canada”. This is why my proposal to establish every third week of March as the national impaired driving prevention week is of paramount importance, as it seeks to raise awareness on the consequences of impaired and distracted driving, in particular for our Canadian youth. In conjunction with my hon. colleague from Victoria, I believe that we must utilize this week to teach our youth that driving impaired can have “dangerous” and “dire consequences”.

In matters of prevention, of which I have been a long-time promoter, the results speak for themselves. Prevention campaigns are addressing concerns, as previously outlined by my colleague from Brandon—Souris, that “Canadians are not getting the message” on the dangers of distracted or impaired driving.

Furthermore, with the rise of mobile phones and social media, distracted driving has grown as a concern. My goal is to instill, especially in our younger citizens, that, as was so eloquently put by my colleague from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, “No text, no tweet, no call, no post is worth a life.”

[*Translation*]

Drug-impaired driving is on the rise. Now that the legalization of cannabis is imminent, it is even more important to strengthen the actions of the many organizations that are already working on this important issue. Motion No. 148 is a call to action in order to direct our energy toward ongoing prevention efforts and the reduction of traffic accidents caused by impaired driving.

Dedicating one week out of every year to increasing awareness will provide a tangible context that will help our fellow Canadians consolidate their efforts to prevent impaired driving. In my work in this regard, I have heard the stories of victims as well as their families and friends. There are organizations, such as MADD Canada, Arrive Alive, and the Canadian Association of Road Safety Professionals, as well as Canadians who are concerned and participate in awareness campaigns.

I would like to acknowledge Justine Rozon, Evelyne Méthot, and my daughter Claudia Di Iorio, whose courage and perseverance have inspired me and made me aware of the terrible problem of impaired driving.

My commitment to reducing and even eliminating the national tragedy of fatalities and serious injuries resulting from impaired driving is the main reason why I came to this venerable institution. Let us unite in this fight, the fight for life.

Private Members' Business

•(1415)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 7, 2018, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[*English*]

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

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

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