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Friday, March 2, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 2, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1005)

[*English*]

IMPACT ASSESSMENT ACT

The House resumed from February 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-69, An Act to enact the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be happily splitting my time with the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

It is an absolutely great honour for me to rise in the House and speak on behalf of the residents of Davenport to Bill C-69. It has quite a long name, an act to enact the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

Davenport residents deeply care about the environment. They care about how we develop projects in this country that impact our environment. They care about how the Canadian government will be adhering to our Paris accord commitments. They have been asking me to show them the plan for how Canada will be achieving its targets, and I will be showing that to them very shortly. In Davenport we are doing our own bit as well in terms of trying to find ways to model a low-carbon, urban, sustainable community.

Back to Bill C-69, I am so pleased to have this opportunity to address the House regarding a legislative initiative that is at the heart of our priorities as a government: to ensure a sustainable future for Canadians. Our guiding principle is that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand. We believe that we can harness our natural resources to create good jobs while fulfilling our duty as stewards of the environment.

Bill C-69 would introduce a review process that for major projects would strike a balance between protecting our environment and ensuring that good projects can be built and can create jobs for the middle class. Essentially, Bill C-69 would create a single agency,

called the impact assessment agency of Canada, that would lead all impact assessments for major projects to ensure a consistent and efficient approach. The impact assessment agency of Canada would ensure that there were better rules in place to protect our environment, our fish, and our waterways; to rebuild public trust and respect indigenous rights; and to strengthen our economy. Let me spend the next few minutes telling members how.

We have to go back a little in time. The fact is that many Canadians no longer have faith in our previous environmental review process following changes introduced by the former government. That is why we made a promise to Canadians that we would review and modernize environmental assessment and regulatory processes. I am proud to say that we are delivering on that promise by bringing in better rules that will restore environmental protections and rebuild public trust in decisions about major projects. Building on what works, we have designed an assessment system that is clearer and more predictable and that allows good projects to go ahead sustainably.

We are a government that consults broadly. The proposed impact assessment act was not arrived at in isolation. It is the result of careful examination and extensive consultations with Canadians.

More than two years ago, our government launched a comprehensive review of federal environmental assessment and regulatory processes. This comprised four separate, but complementary, reviews. We looked at ways to improve federal environmental assessments, to modernize the National Energy Board, and to restore lost protections and introduce modern safeguards under the Fisheries Act and the Navigation Protection Act.

To that end, our government set up a four-person expert panel to solicit the views of Canadians from across the country. We also established a multi-interest advisory committee to support this work. The expert panel went to 21 cities, received more than 800 online and written submissions, and welcomed over 1,000 people at engagement sessions. We had extensive consultations with indigenous peoples and heard from the provinces and territories, industry, environmental groups, and the public.

Government Orders

We also took into account input from three other processes led by another expert panel and two parliamentary standing committees. We then prepared a discussion paper on the government's proposed path forward and solicited feedback. What did we hear? We heard from environmental groups, indigenous leaders, provinces and territories, businesses, and Canadians from communities across our country who told us that effective assessment must not only focus on avoiding negative impacts but must foster sustainability.

●(1010)

Stakeholders told us that there was a need for greater transparency and that assessments must demonstrate how public input informs decision-making. Project reviews must be grounded in scientific evidence as well as in indigenous traditional knowledge. Indigenous people want to participate as partners in the economic development of their territories. We heard that Canadians want to be more involved in our processes. Businesses need clearer and more predictable timelines, and decisions should be more open and evidence-based.

Let there be no doubt that the residents of Davenport also contributed their thoughts to the consultation process. They felt that the previous assessment process was not a good one, that there was not enough consultation with communities and indigenous groups, that there was not enough being done to protect nature, and in general that we needed stronger and fairer environmental assessment laws. I am happy to say that the new legislation incorporates and reflects not only the views of Davenport residents but of all Canadians who participated in the process. What we are proposing is a system that is more transparent, effective, and efficient for all concerned.

I will now highlight some of the principles that form the basis of Bill C-69.

First, we are adopting a broader approach based on the principles of sustainability. Canada has had a law in place since 1992 to ensure that the environment is taken into account as projects are considered for design and implementation. When first introduced, environmental assessment laws and regulatory processes had a specific focus on environmental impacts. Our thinking has greatly evolved since then, and we now understand that an assessment system must consider more than just the environment. It must take into account wider concerns, including the economic, social, and health consequences associated with proposed projects. The new act would do just that, and that is why the name of the act would change from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act to the impact assessment act, reflecting a much wider range of effects we would consider as we reviewed projects for implementation and aimed to foster sustainability.

Second, the new process would be more efficient and more predictable. It would allow people to know where they stood. Projects would now go through an early planning and engagement phase during which potential impacts would be identified and discussed with the public, indigenous people, and the project proponent at the outset of an initiative. Timelines would continue to be legislated. Efficiencies gained through early planning would allow timelines for other phases to be reduced, leading to more timely decisions.

Third, we want to establish a new partnership with indigenous people. They are the most affected by the impacts of the projects, and we will ensure that we respect their rights and jurisdiction in the way decisions are considered.

Fourth, we want evidence to guide and inform all our decisions, so we will consider evidence of science as well as indigenous traditional knowledge as we move forward on these projects. The value of indigenous traditional knowledge cannot be underestimated, and we are determined to include indigenous people in every single project moving forward.

Fifth, we want to increase transparency. By transparency we mean openness that translates into removing barriers to public participation in the review process and making key project information openly available.

Finally, we want to take a truly big-picture view of impacts, one that improves our understanding of the cumulative effects of all projects in a given region. The new impact assessment would take this wider view through the increased use of regional assessments. Regional assessments would examine the effects of past, present, and future activities in a region. For instance, they might examine effects on biodiversity and species at risk and identify impacts on the rights and interests of indigenous people. They would provide decision-makers with a fuller and more complete picture of the context within which a project was proposed, allowing for a better understanding of the overall impact on the environment.

These are not mere operational changes we have introduced but rather are fundamental changes in the way we actually do business. I am very proud to be in this House speaking on behalf of Bill C-69. I believe that we have a wonderful new process in place, and I have a lot of confidence in the projects moving forward. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of Davenport.

●(1015)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, at the northern and aboriginal affairs committee, we had natural resources officials there. We are currently studying Bill C-262, on the implementation of UNDRIP and how all Canadian law is going to have to live within the framework of UNDRIP. We asked the natural resources officials if they had considered whether Bill C-69 lived within that framework, and they had not. That was their answer.

I am just wondering if free, prior, and informed consent is to be held at all levels, particularly legislative, but also if the member thinks that Bill C-69 meets that threshold of free, prior, and informed consent.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, at the base of this bill is the recognition of and respect for indigenous rights. I think that is consistent with what UNDRIP is about.

The bill would require the involvement of indigenous peoples throughout an assessment based on the recognition of and respect for their indigenous rights. As well, it would provide for co-operation with indigenous jurisdictions undertaking their own assessments.

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I have full confidence that there is not only enough consultation with indigenous communities right across this country but that there is very much valuing and respecting their rights.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have here before us a 341-page omnibus bill. It is the biggest bill to come before this Parliament in years, maybe in decades, on environmental protections, and the government has moved closure after two hours of debate.

The NDP has only had two speakers on this bill and may not get another one. I am just wondering what the member can say to that. She is going on about how important this bill is, yet we are not able to fully debate this bill here in this House at all.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the premise that it is an omnibus bill. I think it is a very comprehensive bill, because it is actually changing a number of acts. It is changing the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the National Energy Board Act, the Navigation Protection Act, and a number of other acts that are consequential to it. It is comprehensive. It needs to be comprehensive.

We spent two years consulting on this. Once it moves from this House, there will be opportunities for members of all parties in this House to have input at committee and when it comes back to this House. There will be a number of other opportunities for members to have input.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member just spoke about the consultation process our government has gone through. Maybe she could expand on that consultation process and how extensive it was.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Speaker, we spent a couple of years on this consultation process. It actually comprised four complementary reviews. It was extraordinarily comprehensive. Not only did we go across the country, we also made sure to get comments online.

I know that the residents of Davenport definitely participated. There were a number of letters they sent in and a number of messages sent through me to the minister.

I have a lot of confidence in the consultation process. I have a lot of confidence that we took into account what we heard, and we crafted the very best bill based on those consultations.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people, and thank them for their generosity. *Meegwetich.*

I also want to thank the hon. member for Davenport for splitting time with me. The circumstances are not those that led me to feel particularly relieved or happy, but I am grateful for the civility of giving me 10 minutes. Otherwise, I would not be able to speak at all, because of the egregious use of time allocation on an omnibus bill. I never expected to see omnibus bills with time allocation after the change in government.

This is three bills put together: the National Energy Board Act changed, the Navigation Protection Act changed, and the Environmental Assessment Act overhauled. The fourth piece that had been running along in tandem, through the great judgment of the Minister of Fisheries, is Bill C-68. It stands on its own, and it is an excellent piece of legislation.

However, with the time available to me, I am going to be able to speak only to the impact assessment piece of this omnibus bill, which I am afraid falls below any standard of acceptability and should trouble deeply any Liberal who stood in this place and voted against Bill C-38 in the spring of 2012. We stood together with every single Liberal MP and every single New Democrat against the destruction of decades of environmental law. How that process has been captured by the same mentality, values, and principles that led to Harper destroying these acts, so we now have a repackaged version of those same principles of eroding environmental assessment, is something that the Liberal caucus should try to figure out. I hope it will lead to changes in committee.

With the time available to me, I will quickly review my background in environmental law. I happen to be an environmental lawyer. It is an even weirder fluke that when I was 22 years old and a waitress and cook, I participated in the very first environmental assessment panel hearing in Canadian history, in 1976. It was in Cape Breton. It was about the Wreck Cove hydroelectric plant. I have participated in dozens since.

Ten years after that, I was in the office of the Minister of the Environment. I was actually a senior policy adviser, the person who took the quest from Environment Canada from a wonderful senior civil servant named Ray Robinson, who headed the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency in those days, and we took to the Privy Council Office the request to legislate. Up until then, we had been operating under a guidelines order that required environmental reviews, but it was a bit uncertain in its full rubric. Some people thought it was a guideline and therefore was not binding. We got permission to legislate. Subsequently, I resigned from my job with the Minister of the Environment when the minister violated the environmental assessment review process guidelines in approving dams without permits.

This is just to say that I did not only recently come upon my commitment to proper and thorough environmental assessment in Canada. It is non-partisan and goes back decades.

Now, what happened under Bill C-38 was the repeal of our environmental assessment process and its replacement with a rather bogus process. We can compare Bill C-69 to the bogus process in Bill C-38 in 2012, or we can compare it to what is needed. It is all well and good for the federal Liberals to say to us today that they did a lot of consultation. It is true. There were 21 cities with public hearings, and over 1,000 people showed up to a superb expert panel on environmental assessment. The question before us today is why their recommendations were ignored.

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I am going to read, one at a time, the recommendations that were ignored. There are many. In previous debate in this place, when the bill was first put forward, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment claimed I was wrong in my assertion, which I think is fact, that the environmental assessment expert panel was ignored. It is really important to understand the point of environmental assessment. I will just go back a bit and say that this is one of the pieces of Harper-think that have survived into Liberal-think.

Environmental assessment has never been about a green light or a red light, yes or no, or whether the project goes ahead or not. It is primarily a tool for good planning. In the entire history from 1976 to 2012, when Harper repealed the act, only two projects were ever given a red light. I will say that again. From 1976 to 2012, with the thousands of environmental reviews that were done, only twice did a federal-provincial environmental review panel say that a project was so damaging that it could not be mitigated and the panel had to say no.

• (1020)

It has primarily been about studying a process thoroughly, studying a project thoroughly, and deciding that we can mitigate the damage if only the proponent would agree to better scrubbers or change the location slightly. In the course of the review process, many projects were improved, the damages mitigated and reduced, and in the end a much better project was accepted. This has never been primarily about how to get to yes or no faster. That is what Harper thought, and apparently that thought process has somehow infested some ongoing decision-making process within government. An environmental assessment is about good planning.

Until 2012, the Environmental Assessment Act said that the purpose was to get in and review a project “as early as is practicable in the planning stages of the project and before irrevocable decisions are made”.

Let me quote what we heard from the expert panel on what an environmental assessment should contain. It did agree that it should be called “impact assessment”. That is one piece they could claim.

Page 5 states that the impact assessment authority “should be established as a quasi-judicial tribunal empowered to undertake a full range of facilitation and dispute-resolution processes.” This has been ignored. Members have heard about the expert panel the government sent around the country, with a thousand people participating and with 800 submissions. Their recommendation was not to have ad hoc panels where people are pulled in, with different projects always having different panels, but to develop expertise through a quasi-judicial tribunal. Ironically, this was also the advice from the red book Liberal platform of 1993.

The second point is to have time limits and cost controls that reflect the specific circumstances of each project, not the current one-size-fits-all approach, which was an innovation under Bill C-38. This is a key point. Projects need to be reviewed whether they are big or small. The effect of Bill C-38, which Harper brought in, is this. The previous era had seen approximately 4,000 projects a year reviewed, most of them with paper-screening exercises that did not take much time. After Bill C-38, the number shrank from 4,000 a year to fewer than 100 a year. The Liberals have gone with

perpetuating the fewer than 100 a year. This is how they have done it, by ignoring this advice.

The panel stated that there should be a review when there are federal interests, and that “federal interests include, at a minimum, federal lands, federal funding and federal government as proponent, as well as”, and then there is a list: species at risk, fish, marine plants, migratory birds, indigenous issues, and so on.

This piece of legislation ignores anything except the project list. That was an innovation of Bill C-38. There are no law list reviews requiring that if the navigable waters act or the Fisheries Act requires a permit from the minister there be a review, and no requirement that when federal money is spent there be a review. That is the advice the government got from its expert panel, which it ignored.

The expert panel also said clearly that there should be no role at all for the National Energy Board, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, or the offshore petroleum boards. It pointed out that “the federal system prior to 2012 had decades of experience with delegating final decision-making to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission...and the [NEB]” without those agencies meddling in the environmental assessment.

What is happening under Bill C-69 is like a shell game. We are told it is one independent agency, except that when it is reviewing pipelines the panel must be comprised of people who are sitting members of the NEB, now called the Canadian energy regulator. If they are reviewing offshore petroleum operations in Atlantic Canada, the panel members must come from the offshore petroleum boards, which by legislation are required to expand offshore oil. It is an embedded conflict of interest in the legislation.

The atrocities continue, with respect to indigenous rights. How is it that the Minister of Fisheries can put before us Bill C-68, which has strong language to protect indigenous rights? Bill C-68, in section 2.3, “Rights of Indigenous peoples of Canada”, makes it clear that the act cannot derogate from indigenous rights. Section 2.4 states that it is the duty of the minister when making a decision to “consider any adverse effects” on the rights of indigenous peoples.

This piece of over-discretionary political masquerading of environmental assessment in Bill C-69 merely states that “the impact that the designated project may have on any Indigenous group” is a factor to be considered. As a former litigator, I can tell members that the courts do not regard indigenous rights as a factor to be considered as protecting indigenous rights.

• (1025)

This bill gets an F. At committee, let us please get it to a C+.

Government Orders

•(1030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not question the member's passion on the topic. In fact, she has illustrated well the degree of her involvement on this file.

Having said that, I think there is an expectation that the government have a process in place that incorporates legislation that recognizes there is an indigenous factor, an environmental factor, and an energy to market factor, which have to be taken into consideration in terms of the needs of Canada going forward.

Would the member not, at the very least, look at this? On the one hand, the Conservatives are saying that we have gone too far. On the other hand, the NDP and the leader of the Green Party are saying that we have not gone far enough.

At the very least, let us allow the bill to go to committee. I understand the member's concerns with regard to speeding this through. I can assure her that if it were up to some members of the House this legislation would never pass the House. Unfortunately, at times, time allocation is a tool we require.

Would the member not agree that at least it is a step forward, perhaps not the leap she would like to see, but a step forward?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my commentary is not based on what I would like to see as an environmental activist. It is a public policy question of whether it is good legislation. It is, objectively speaking, not good legislation. It is so wide open to discretion. One might say, "Well, look at our current Minister of Environment. One can't imagine her ignoring indigenous rights and plowing something through." However, legislation is for all time, for different governments. Even if I thought that there was no chance in a million years of any misuse of discretion by the current government, why would I sign off on a piece of legislation that is so deficient, empirically speaking? It is not good legislation.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech of the hon. member. She is definitely very experienced in green energy, and the environment in general. She mentioned the pipelines. She mentioned balance and indigenous communities. How does she envision a pipeline going anywhere, west or east, in Canada with the balance to get the pipeline going through? Where does she see the balance in order to get pipelines through Canada, either to the west coast or to the east coast?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I think it is a question of looking at the evidence and having a full, impartial hearing where witnesses can be cross-examined, assertions can be tested, and the truth can be determined.

In the case of pipelines, I am not against any particular pipeline. The question is always what is in it. If it is a pipeline with bitumen and diluent, it cannot be cleaned up. Should we wish to build a pipeline to bring more B.C. wine to Alberta, I am all for it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not get distracted by the idea of a pipeline filled with great B.C. wine, as much as Canadians would probably like to see that happen.

My question for my friend is both on the process and on the substance. The Liberals promised not to bring in omnibus legislation. The Speaker of the House has determined that to be this. After two hours of debate, the Liberals brought in time allocation, shutting off the conversation, when they promised they would not do this.

I suppose we need to bring this into the real world, and here is my question for my friend on the substance. The Prime Minister, when campaigning for the job, said that the Kinder Morgan pipeline, for example, had been put under a bad review and that he would put it under a proper review. If the Prime Minister had done his job and actually subjected that project to review, the plan for the diluted bitumen to go to Vancouver, would the premier of British Columbia have to do the makeup work after the fact, after the approval process, to find out things such as how one handles a spill of diluted bitumen, either in fresh water or in salt water?

If the Prime Minister had followed through on his commitment to have good legislation go through a decent process, and that projects would be reviewed properly, would we be in the circumstance we are in, with the conflict with first nations people and the people of British Columbia, and now the Government of Canada?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is absolutely right. To me, the question suggests its own answer, which is that had we not been put through a process that is not part of that history of environmental review that I reviewed, the National Energy Board had no expertise in doing reviews.

This allows me to mention another carry-over bad aspect of Bill C-38 into Bill C-69. The time limits that were put into Bill C-38 are how the National Energy Board determined that it would not allow people like me as an intervenor to cross-examine Kinder Morgan's witnesses, which led to an abuse of process and not really getting to the facts of the matter.

That aspect of time limits has not only been continued in Bill C-69, but the time limits have also been shortened.

•(1035)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time.

I rise to speak to Bill C-69, a massive 400-page omnibus bill. Canadians will remember during the last election when the Prime Minister put his hand over his heart and made the solemn declaration to Canadians that he would never ever introduce anything resembling an omnibus bill, but here we are yet again with another omnibus bill from the government.

It gets even worse because the government has seen fit to invoke time allocation after two hours of debate. The government has invoked time allocation after just two hours of debate on a massive, complex bill that is going to rewrite the environmental assessment process, and that is going to have a profound impact on jobs and the economy. I say shame on the government for doing that.

Government Orders

In the short time that I have to speak to the bill, I am going to be focusing on part 2 of Bill C-69, this massive omnibus bill. Part 2 establishes a new approval process for energy projects, including pipelines. It is going to have a profound impact on my province of Alberta and thousands of my constituents who live in St. Albert and northwest Edmonton whose jobs are tied directly or indirectly to the energy sector.

The Minister of Environment, in speaking to Bill C-69 in this House, said that the objectives of the bill include improving public confidence in the approval process, strengthening investor confidence, making the energy sector more competitive, growing the Canadian economy, and creating good, middle-class jobs. That is what the minister said. Who could disagree with those objectives? Those are laudable objectives.

The only problem is that Bill C-69 will achieve none of those objectives. Rather, Bill C-69 is about keeping energy in the ground. That is what Bill C-69 means. I know that for the Prime Minister's principal secretary and chief political strategist, Gerald Butts, keeping Canadian energy in the ground is something he has long fantasized about.

Bill C-69 means gutting an assessment process based on science and evidence that balance environmental and economic issues with an assessment process that is politicized from top to bottom. How is the process politicized from top to bottom?

Let us start with who gets to make submissions to the regulator. Who has standing? Presently, in order to have standing before the National Energy Board, one must be impacted directly by a project, or one must have relevant knowledge or information about a project. Bill C-69 eliminates that criteria and replaces it with any member of the general public.

This means that it is open season. It is an invitation to Gerald Butts' friends and the Minister of Environment's friends, and for the radical anti-oil sands movement to take over the process, to control the process with their ideological and political agenda to shut down Alberta's oil sands, a movement that is funded by U.S. money, filled with activists who are in many cases nothing more than shills for foreign interests.

● (1040)

The Minister of Environment says that is going to restore public confidence in the assessment process. What it is really going to do is completely politicize the process and result in delays in the approval process.

The Minister of Environment says that we should not worry about delays, because Bill C-69 is going to streamline the approval process, that it is going to reduce the time to see major projects approved. When the minister makes that assertion, she is conveniently overlooking the fact that Bill C-69 would impose a planning process before the assessment process begins. The planning process would be a six-month process, 180 days. When that is taken into account, it will not reduce the time; it will add about 100 days to the time in which a project could be approved.

If all we were talking about was an additional 100 days, we probably would not be having this debate, but it gets worse. The

minister, on the basis of a political whim influenced by George Soros funded activists, can extend the timeline. She can extend the delay.

It gets even worse than that. The minister can kill a project at the planning stage before any scientific analysis is done, before any environmental analysis is done, before any economic analysis is done. In other words, the minister can kill a pipeline project purely on the basis of a raw political decision.

The minister says that this is going to increase investor confidence. Is that some kind of a joke? It is not going to increase investor confidence. It is going to do the opposite. It is going to drive billions of dollars of investment south of the border and to other energy-producing jurisdictions that allow their energy sectors to grow and thrive.

Make no mistake about it. If Bill C-69 is passed, not one major energy project will be approved in this country. Before another major pipeline project is killed, it is imperative that this Parliament kill Bill C-69.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the NDP says that the government is not doing enough and the Conservatives say that the government is doing too much. That tells me we have found the right balance in this bill.

It is really rich to hear from members on the other side, the ones who gutted environmental regulation, who gutted staff at Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Has there ever been an environmental regulation that the member actually liked?

● (1045)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the assessment process under the previous Conservative government was among the strongest in the world. That was widely recognized.

In 2012, our previous Conservative government streamlined the process. We did that to increase investor confidence and to increase investment in the energy sector without in any way diminishing environmental standards. That was a very successful process, unlike what we have seen over the last two years, where we have seen billions of dollars of investment driven out of the energy sector. Under the Liberal government's watch, there has been the largest drop in investment in the energy sector over the last two years than Canada has seen in 70 years. That is the record of the Liberal government.

[Translation]

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

In the previous Parliament, when the Conservatives changed the Navigable Waters Protection Act into the Navigation Protection Act, I was a vocal opponent of that approach, as I still am. One of the problems with that approach was that only about 100 waterways and lakes, identified in a schedule to the act, would be protected moving forward. What the Liberals are doing here is simply returning to the old title, "navigable waters protection", but maintaining the Conservative approach.

Would my colleague agree that this is a bit of a publicity stunt? It seems more like false advertising. Flaunting or suggesting measures in the bill that are not really there is a trademark of the Liberal Party.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comment from the hon. member for Trois-Rivières that the Liberals like to say one thing to appeal to their base and then almost always do quite another.

With respect to the Navigation Protection Act and changes that are provided for in Bill C-69, I would say that I do have concerns with those measures. Perhaps they are not necessarily the same concerns that the hon. member for Trois-Rivières has, but the bottom line is that the changes being brought forward in Bill C-69 with respect to navigable waters are going to make it more difficult, and there are going to be more roadblocks and more impediments to getting critical infrastructure built.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals like to put out lofty promises and words. They went to the UN and proudly declared they were going to implement the UN declaration, which really required certain things of them. I would ask my colleague if he sees any evidence of that commitment they made so proudly in this bill particularly around the issues of how they are going to receive consent.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in terms of false advertising that the member for Trois-Rivières referred to, one example of that is the Liberal government's claim that this bill would somehow strengthen indigenous input. The fact is that Canada has had a long-standing legal framework around indigenous consultation. The record of the government from what we have seen is that instead of consulting with indigenous communities, it is blocking major pipeline and other energy projects and preventing indigenous communities from entering into equitable partnerships. That is what the government is doing without consulting indigenous communities.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. I would like to inform the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier that he will have time for his presentation, but questions and comments will come after oral question period.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak after my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton in Alberta. As we will see, Quebec and Alberta can get along well. He is my seatmate and an extraordinary, thoughtful man. He works for his constituents and his province, and I take my hat off to him.

I hope my colleague has convinced the Liberal government to improve Bill C-69, an act to enact the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. That is the title of the bill, and it sure looks like an omnibus bill to me. I will explain why as I try to figure it all out.

Part 1 enacts the Impact Assessment Act and repeals the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012. Among other things, the Impact Assessment Act...

Government Orders

Part 2 enacts the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, which establishes the Canadian Energy Regulator and sets out its composition, mandate and powers. The role of the Regulator is to regulate the exploitation, development and transportation of energy within Parliament's jurisdiction.

Part 3 amends the Navigation Protection Act...

One might say that this 360-page bill is as clear as mud. The provinces are unable to comment on the bill because it is too big and too complex. The Liberals say that they want to improve the process. They have to do better. This government wants to paint us as the big bad Conservatives. The Liberals try every day to label us as wanting to destroy the planet. No one in the official opposition gets up in the morning with the intention of destroying our planet. We want to improve it and be smart about it.

I would like to remind my colleagues from the Liberal Party, the window-dressing party, the social media party, that the previous government introduced a number of measures to combat climate change.

We created the clean air regulatory agenda. We established new standards to reduce car and light truck emissions. We established new standards to reduce emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and their engines. We proposed regulations to align ourselves with the U. S. Working Group III standards for vehicle emissions and sulphur in gasoline. We sought to limit HFCs, black carbon, and methane.

I can see my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable smiling. My Conservative colleagues from Alberta, Quebec, and every other province work well together. That is how we build a country.

I will continue with my list. We established new rules to reduce emissions from carbon-based electricity generation. We implemented measures to support the development of carbon capture technologies and alternative energy sources. We enhanced the government's annual report on the main environmental indicators, including greenhouse gases. Another thing that will likely surprise the members opposite is that we even abolished, yes abolished, tax breaks for the oil sands, so the Liberals really need to stop talking about Alberta's dirty oil.

All of these measures resulted in a good environment report card for Canada and confirmed the reduction in greenhouse gases under the previous government. Do members know that, in 2014, the last full year our government was in power, we reduced greenhouse gas emissions? Canada's share of global emissions decreased by more than 15%.

We were unable to do more after 2014 because we were no longer in office. The Liberals took power. What did they do? Under the Conservatives, our share of global emissions fell from 1.9% to 1.6%. Those results were not obtained under the Liberals. We, the Conservatives, reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

Statements by Members

•(1050)

We must have done something right because the Liberal government adopted our greenhouse gas emissions targets. They say that we do not consult scientists, but they probably consulted the same scientists that we did. They took the findings of our scientists and the findings of theirs to come up with the same target. As a Conservative MP, I established a circular economy committee in my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. Yes, we Conservatives are working to protect our planet in various ways in our own ridings.

When the Liberal government talks about western Canada's dirty oil, I would like to remind the group of members opposite that it was prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau who created the oil sands. Yes, members heard me right. It was Pierre Elliott Trudeau. It was probably to pay for Canada's deficits because it was under Pierre Elliott Trudeau that Canada's deficits were created. Who is the son of that prime minister? It is the current Prime Minister of Canada. It is the son of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Is this son about to do the same thing? Is he legalizing marijuana to try to address his spiralling debt? The father, at least, would not have emboldened the party's friends and organized crime.

I recently said in the House that the government was very naive to think that the Liberals' bill would stop organized crime groups from selling marijuana. I read this weekend in the papers that prices are already dropping. I hear about this every time I go out to talk to constituents in my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. People think this is irresponsible. This is not the right way to go about it.

Let us go back to the subject at hand. This Liberal government was elected on all kinds of promises to environmental groups, and now, 28 months later, it has brought forth a mouse. There is nothing in this bill to improve effectiveness and there is nothing to provide for reasonable time constraints, so that we can proceed with smart sustainable development.

Allow me to take a sip of water. This is a natural resource. We must protect it and develop it intelligently.

Furthermore, this law to protect the process creates a sense of insecurity. Even if the scientific assessment determines that a developer's project complies with environmental standards, the project will still not be guaranteed, since the minister has discretion over whether the project will move forward and can make this decision based on her mood or on the relationship this government has with the developer.

Why not be clear and provide criteria that are properly defined and based on scientific data? Why put the power in the Liberals' hands?

We saw what they were capable of with the Liberal bagmen and the friends of the Liberal government who are investing in pot. The Minister of Finance carried out a few transactions, and once he had made his money, he changed the law on pension plans. Does anyone remember the Gomery commission?

In conclusion, this bill is nothing but window dressing. The Liberals changed the formula for calculating the duration of the process. Honestly, this is just window dressing. It is not for real. It is irresponsible. The government sets deadlines and requests scientific studies, but at the end of the day, the minister has all the decision-

making power. We agree that improvements need to be made to the way things are being done. Yes, we do agree. As I said earlier, we Conservatives want to protect our planet. We need to consider new processes for protecting the environment.

Once again, the government is tabling a document with blatant disregard for the objectives we seek to achieve. Like so many departments and files, this bill is all about appearances.

Can we balance sustainable development with economic development? Why this charade? Why do we not put effective mechanisms in place to protect our resources and develop them intelligently?

•(1055)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier will have five minutes remaining for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on this bill.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

•(1100)

[English]

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, I had the pleasure of attending the 2017 Lake Country Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize all the companies and individuals who were nominated for an award and take a moment to acknowledge the winners: Bernard Dewonck, Anne Leistner, Dairy Queen, UBR Services – Printing & Copies, Interior Savings Credit Union, Nalu Massage Therapy and Wellness, Sip Happens Wine Tours, Sun City Physiotherapy, Neon Consulting, and ArtWalk.

The Young Entrepreneur of the Year award went to Kim Chapman, and the Business Person of the Year was Garth McKay.

I would also like to congratulate the Lake Country Chamber of Commerce for putting on an exceptional event. Small businesses often play a bigger role in smaller districts as they increase both employment opportunities and quality of life for the entire community.

* * *

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer, disadvantaged individuals will not find the help they need. The hungry may not be served meals. Seniors may not receive companionship from trainees. Summer camps may need to reduce their operating weeks or camp spaces. Students will not find summer jobs where they could develop their work skills and advance to better employment. Some would ask, "How can this be? What has changed?"

Statements by Members

The current Liberal government has decided to place its own values test on employers applying for the Canada summer jobs program, a values test that organizations in my riding of North Okanagan—Shuswap cannot in good conscience support. These organizations for years have supported Canada's summer jobs and provided services to children, seniors, and the disadvantaged. I urge the government to abandon its cold-hearted attack on our faith-based organizations and remove the attestation box requirement for the Canada summer jobs program.

* * *

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week marks the sixth anniversary of the House of Commons unanimously passing Shannen's Dream, which called for safe and equitable education for first nations children.

[Translation]

We know that schools on reserves are severely underfunded. That is why we are investing \$2.6 billion over five years to support primary and secondary education on reserve. This funding is in addition to the nearly \$1 billion allocated to support 169 education infrastructure projects, some of which have already been completed.

[English]

I am pleased to highlight that in my riding, funding has been approved for a new K-to-8 school on Elsipogtog First Nation to replace the existing 35-year-old one. Every first nations child deserves the best start in life and this begins with properly funded education.

* * *

[Translation]

ICE CROSS DOWNHILL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, picture yourself on a beautiful winter's day lacing up your skates and donning your helmet and gear before taking the ice to the adoring cries of thousands of spectators. Are you about to play hockey? No, you are at the top of a massive hill about to hurl yourself down a steep slope strewn with bumps, jumps, drops, and turns as you race to the bottom and hopefully arrive in one piece.

This is the extreme sport known as ice cross downhill, and one round of the world championship is being held now through Saturday in La Sarre.

Racers have competed in Austria, Switzerland, Russia, Finland, France, and the United States, and now it is Abitibi-Témiscamingue's turn to host this elite competition as part of a world tour that attracts athletes from many countries like Canada where ice sports are part of the lifestyle.

I would like to congratulate the La Sarre Ice Challenge president, Yannick Provencher, the organizing committee, the City, and the many volunteers who make this kind of event possible and put Abitibi-Témiscamingue in the international spotlight.

[English]

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate International Women's Day and to pay tribute to the incredible women in my riding who are helping to organize the fourth annual International Women's Day event, which is taking place in Napanee tomorrow.

Women across our community will gather together at the Napanee Legion to recognize the incredibly important role that women and girls play in our society. As the organizers have said, they are coming forward, they are standing together with one voice, they are building beside and encouraging one another, and they are gaining strength within their communities.

I will also be celebrating my amazing wife Irene and daughter Hailey, and the incredible women on my constituency office team, Valerie, Jennifer, Stella, Kathy, and Nancy, whose strength, compassion, and dedication are an inspiration to me.

I invite members to join me in saluting these women and to join all Canadians in proudly celebrating International Women's Day.

* * *

●(1105)

HENRY “CHICK” HEWETT

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to a World War II veteran we lost earlier this week. Henry “Chick” Hewett spent nearly all of his life in Oshawa. Like so many of his generation, he valiantly answered the call to defend our freedom during the Second World War.

Chick served as a navigator on a Lancaster bomber. He flew 35 missions with the Royal Air Force's 90th squadron in 1944-45, but his service did not end there. He went on to contribute immensely to the 420 Wing Oshawa and many other groups in my community.

Anyone who knew Chick had great respect and admiration for him. His boundless love for his country and for his family was well known to all. It was my privilege last year to award Chick with a Canada 150 volunteer medal for his service to Oshawa and to Canada.

There is no doubt in my mind that Chick Hewett was a true Canadian hero whose bravery will never be forgotten. May he rest in peace.

* * *

MURIEL MCQUEEN FERGUSSON CENTRE

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in honour of International Women's Day, March 8, I highlight the 25th anniversary of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research.

Statements by Members

Named after women's rights activist and the first woman Speaker of the Senate, the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre has been an active part of the solution to overcoming gender-based violence in New Brunswick and throughout Atlantic Canada.

[*Translation*]

For a quarter of a century, the centre has been playing a huge role in stoking public awareness of gender-based violence. It has worked tirelessly to unite the government, universities, police, and communities around research focusing on concrete measures for helping service providers and survivors of gender-based violence.

[*English*]

I thank and congratulate the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for all the work it has done to prevent gender-based violence and for helping make New Brunswick and all of Atlantic Canada a better and safer place for women and girls.

* * *

PHARMACIST AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March is Pharmacist Awareness Month, and on this occasion, I would like to recognize the important role that pharmacists play in Canada's health care system by promoting safe and effective medication management, health promotion, and disease prevention.

As a registered nurse, I can say that every day pharmacists work closely with other health care professionals to empower patients by providing them with the information they need to get more involved in their care.

Let us also underline the key implication of our local pharmacists in helping to address the opioid crisis in our communities by providing advice to patients on the proper use of prescription drugs. They worked collaboratively with provinces and territories to support access to naloxone in communities from coast to coast.

To all of them across Canada, we thank them for their dedication and commitment to keeping Canadians safe and healthy.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, we celebrate International Women's Day. We celebrate women from all countries, all backgrounds, and all faiths.

Today, we celebrate the fact that all women are valuable and have incredible contributions to make to society. Every woman is full of potential and able to positively impact the world. Every woman deserves an equal opportunity to do so.

This year's theme is "press for progress". Today, we renew our commitment to creating a world where women and men exist as equals, people of equal value, equal worth, and equal dignity.

Today, we celebrate the greatness in each and every woman around the globe. Today, we commit to being her champion. She is strong. She is capable. She is intelligent. She is talented. She is inspiring. She is a grandmother, mother, spouse, daughter, sister, niece, friend, and co-worker.

Today, we commit to empowering women to be who they are. We commit to putting aside our biases and overcoming stereotypes. We commit to being her champion.

* * *

RESEARCH FUNDING

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Montreal is home to the country's brightest minds and top research institutions and when I visited them, I kept hearing the same things. They were concerned that support for fundamental research was lagging, that there were not enough opportunities for those trying to start their research careers, and that they would not have the necessary resources to maintain their facilities.

Whether it is \$925 million in new funding for fundamental research through the granting councils, \$210 million in new support for early career researchers, a \$231 million boost to the research support fund, or \$763 million for the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, budget 2018 delivers for students and researchers.

●(1110)

[*Translation*]

We know that the jobs of the future depend on Canadians' ability to adapt, innovate, and maintain Canada's competitive edge in a fast-changing and increasingly global economy. That is why we will continue to invest in Canadian researchers and their work. This support is critical if we want to give real encouragement to future generations and meet the challenges of the future.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY WEEK

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is an annual public awareness campaign organized by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association in conjunction with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, encouraging Canadians to focus on the importance of agricultural safety. This week runs, in 2018, from March 11 to 17.

[*Translation*]

The AgSafe Ribbon Campaign came from an idea from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. AgSafe ribbons are made in the community, for the community, and are distributed to anyone who cares about the safety of Canadian farmers, their families, and their workers.

Statements by Members

[English]

Agricultural safety is something that hit home for me this fall when my daughter Emma experienced a close call while working during the potato harvest. Luckily she was okay, but it drove home for me the importance of encouraging agricultural safety, and encouraging young Canadians working in the agricultural industry to look after themselves and always be diligent while working around heavy machinery.

This week I had the honour of facilitating the distribution of ag safety ribbons to both sides of the House, and I ask members, this Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, to please wear the ribbon, talk about farm safety, and make a commitment to keep all Canadian farmers, their families, and their workers free from injury.

* * *

OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his autistic son taught Randy Lewis the amazing and underutilized potential of workers with disabilities.

His job as Walgreens vice-president gave him a chance to do something about it, hiring over 1,000 workers with disabilities at Walgreens' mercilessly competitive distribution centres, earning the same wages and doing the same work as everyone else.

His book, *No Greatness Without Goodness*, recounts the touching story of a mother breaking into tears when her adult disabled son came home with his first paycheque, which was bigger than either of his parents had ever earned.

I am pleased to announce today that Randy Lewis has endorsed the opportunity for workers with disabilities act, which will allow workers with disabilities to earn more in wages than they lose in clawbacks and taxes. It will give thousands of people the pride and independence of a job, and what Martin Luther King called the "dignity of labour".

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House today to thank the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

In Budget 2018, our government recognizes the importance and value of seasonal industries and seasonal workers by pledging a historic investment of \$240 million to correct a flaw in the EI system known as the spring gap. Our government allocated \$10 million right away so it can quickly roll out a plan that meets workers' local needs.

[English]

There will be further investments of \$230 million over the next two years, so that key provinces can quickly identify solutions to avoid having this black hole reoccur in the future.

[Translation]

The dedicated workers of Acadie—Bathurst and all seasonal workers will now be able to access to the support they need, when they need it. I want to thank them for their unflagging efforts on this file.

* * *

HIGH-FREQUENCY TRAIN IN TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the disappointing budget presented by the Liberal government, I would like to sincerely thank the people of Trois-Rivières for their involvement in a project that offers hope to our city and our region, the high-frequency train.

Stakeholders' level of engagement remains significant—exceptional, even. Politicians from all levels of government and all parties except one spoke with one voice. The mayor of Trois-Rivières summarized the situation and acknowledged everyone's disappointment by saying that it would be easier to travel to the moon.

I also want to acknowledge the many efforts made by the Trois-Rivières Chamber of Commerce and Industry and by the people of Trois-Rivières, who wrote open letters, sent emails, signed petitions, and responded to my ten percenters. I want to thank each and every one of them. I also want to tell them that, although we do not understand why the government is not taking action, their voices have been heard and that my voice in Ottawa is stronger when we all stand together.

* * *

● (1115)

[English]

REVEREND BILLY GRAHAM

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Reverend Billy Graham walked into the arms of the Saviour he served faithfully for decades. He was 99 years old. Today, thousands will gather to celebrate his life.

Billy Graham, from the age of 15, devoted his life to God, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to millions around the world. He had a simple message that provided hope to the hopeless and light to those in darkness. It can be summed up in three words, "faith in Christ."

That simple message was taken from the Bible, in the Book of John, chapter 3, verse 16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Graham once wrote:

Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.

Reverend Graham fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. I hope he enjoys to the full the reward of his faith in Christ.

*Oral Questions***TRAVEL AND TOURISM**

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, are you like the thousands of Canadians who are planning a vacation over spring break? Have you packed your sunscreen and camera? Have you settled on what type of activities you will be doing during your trip? Do me a favour. Before leaving, you should visit Canada's best source of travelling information at travel.gc.ca. You will find in-depth information about your destination, including travel advisories, security conditions, law and local customs, and climate data. There is even a traveller's checklist that includes Canadian government contact details, just in case of an emergency. You should also download our Travel Smart app. It will place all that info and more in the palm of your hand.

Do not think that just because you are the Speaker you are immune from mishaps on your trip. I just want you to be prepared and make sure that you have an amazing vacation. Do not forget to bring us back lots of pictures.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Thank you for those encouraging words.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, India, with its over 1.2 billion people, provides Canada with the largest potential for export growth. Unfortunately, that potential and opportunity is being damaged because of the Prime Minister's incompetence. Last night India raised the duty on Canadian chickpeas to 60%, a clear signal that India is understandably upset, and Canadian chickpea producers are the first to pay the price.

The Prime Minister has damaged our relationship with India. What is he going to do to fix this mess?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we value our relationship with India. In fact, I was just in India in November leading the largest trade mission in Canada's history, with 150 people from the Canadian side. We met 11 ministers from India. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and the member knows this well, that we raise that issue at every meeting. I will continue to raise that, because what our farmers want is stability and predictability. We are going to be working to provide that for our Canadian farmers.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister makes my very point. It actually does not matter how hard he works, because when the Prime Minister is blaming India for causing problems with his trip, the Prime Minister is damaging all the work everybody in this place is trying to do for Canadians. His conspiracy theory against India is causing a breakdown in our relationship. The Indian government said yesterday that the chickpea tariff increase was due to circumstances that make it necessary to take immediate action. Well, we all know what circumstances that is referring to.

Why did the Prime Minister act so irresponsibly, both while in India and now at home?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said to my hon. colleague, we were there in November. This was to advance our farmers. I was just in Regina last week for their cause with respect to pulses. We are going to continue to work for them. We understand that our farmers need stability and predictability. That is what I brought to the Indian side. What they want is food security. We are going to continue to work together.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just thought I would stop for a second, because I was having a hard time hearing the answer.

The hon. minister, please proceed.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I was just saying that I was in western Canada last week. We are going to continue to work with our farmers. I spoke to Pulse Canada. We are going to continue to work with them, because what we want for our farmers is stability and predictability. You can trust us, Mr. Speaker, that the whole of government is going to make sure that we work for our farmers in a—

• (1120)

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

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, if farmers have friends like the Liberals and this Prime Minister, they do not need any enemies, because look at the results these Liberals are getting: increased tariffs. Maybe just stay home instead of causing all this damage. Instead of maintaining a strong trading relationship and ensuring access for Canadian producers, the Prime Minister has made protecting his own image and covering up his blunders his main priority. He has put that in front of the interests of Canadians.

Again, the Prime Minister has created a huge mess. We are seeing the results with this tariff increase. This could just be the first shot across the bow.

What is the Prime Minister going to do?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this was a trip that was focused on creating and enhancing our business relationship with India. We welcomed \$1 billion in total investments between Canadian and Indian companies, which will lead to the creation of close to 6,000 good, well-paying middle-class jobs in Canada, such as with Tech Mahindra, a leader in tech IT services, which will be investing \$100 million to establish a new centre of excellence for artificial intelligence in Canada; and the Jubilant Bhartia Group, which will be investing \$100 million to expand its facilities in Kirkland.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on his trip to India, our Prime Minister behaved like a bad actor in a low-budget film. That trip was a diplomatic failure, a security failure, and an economic failure.

We have learned that the Indian government just announced an increase in tariffs on Canadian chickpea imports from 40% to 60%.

This feature film started out as a comedy, but quickly turned into a horror movie. Our international relations have suffered since this government took office in 2015.

The Prime Minister is making serious mistakes, but Canadians are the ones who have to pay the price. Why is that?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague that no one is working harder for Canadian farmers than our government. I was part of the last trade mission in November. This trade mission to India was the largest in history and involved 150 entrepreneurs. We met with more than 11 ministers. I can assure my colleague that this issue was raised at every meeting we had.

We are going to continue to work hard for Canadian farmers because we, on this side of the House, understand how important this issue is for them. We are going to raise this issue at every opportunity.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt that my hon. colleague is working very hard. It is his boss that is the problem.

After our Prime Minister's disastrous trip in India, we find out that Canada's security was compromised. Yesterday, we also learned that his diplomatic missteps have been costly to the Canadian economy since the Indian government has just announced a significant tariff increase on chickpeas of 40% to 60%. Our Prime Minister is showing the entire world that he is not fit for the office he holds.

Does he believe that our international relations are inconsequential? What does he plan to do to repair our relations with this major trading partner?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have visited India a number of times. Our discussions are ongoing. India is an important trade partner to Canada and we understand what is at stake.

Let us not forget what the Prime Minister did while he was in India. He announced more than \$1 billion in contracts and several thousand jobs for Canada. We understand the importance of this relationship. I can assure my colleague that on this side of the House, we will always be there to promote trade relations between our two countries.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that Donald Trump wants to go after our industries yet again. First it was softwood lumber, now it is the aluminum industry that could suffer as a result of the American President's unjustified decisions. Yesterday, he announced that he will impose a 10% tariff on Canadian aluminum products. The aluminum industry is a huge employer in Quebec, and many jobs are in jeopardy as a result of these protectionist actions.

Can our industries count on our government to stand up to Trump's protectionist policies?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we are a number one customer of the American steel industry, any restrictions on the steel and aluminum trade in Canada would be completely unacceptable. Our steel and aluminum industry is highly integrated and supports the American manufacturing supply chains. If restrictions are imposed, we reserve the right to defend our trade interests and Canadian workers.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it must be Groundhog Day again already, because once more we see the U.S. administration targeting a vital Canadian industry. This time it is the steel sector.

Here is the pattern with the Liberal government, and it is not a good one. While it sits in round after round of NAFTA talks, Donald Trump targets Canadian industry after industry with illegal tariffs. Here is Trump's Canadian hit list so far: softwood lumber, aerospace, agriculture, and now steel. Exactly how many more tariffs and attacks will Canadian workers have to face before the Liberals reach a durable and fair agreement?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will always defend Canadian interests and values, and as a key NORAD and NATO ally, and a number one customer for American steel, any trade restrictions on Canadian steel and aluminum are not acceptable.

Our steel and aluminum industry is highly integrated and supports American manufacturing supply chains. Our government has raised this point directly with the highest levels of the United States administration, and we will continue to do so. We reserve the right to take responsive measures to defend our trade interests and Canadian workers.

* * *

PRIME MINISTER'S TRIP TO INDIA

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, have you ever been on one of those family vacations where your dad makes you take so many photos that just out of sheer desperation, you have to throw yourself on the ground? That is how Canadians felt watching the Prime Minister's terrible trip to India. Not only that, but he also managed to create a major international security incident in the process. Now, adding insult to injury, we learn that the Indian government is raising the tariff on Canadian chickpeas.

My question is simple. Did the Prime Minister raise the issue of trade, and now that we have a problem, is he going to do something to help Canadian farmers who are being targeted?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that there is no government working harder for our farmers in Canada.

Oral Questions

When I was there last November, we met 11 ministers from the Indian government. We made sure that at every single meeting we had representatives from Pulse Canada with us. We made sure that we talked with our Indian counterparts about stability and predictability. We made sure that the Indian government would understand that we want to be a trusted partner, but we need to ensure a long-term solution based on science. That is exactly what we have done, and that is exactly what the Prime Minister did during his last trip.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members that holding up a poster with someone's picture on it is considered a prop. I will not point out any member in particular, but I want to make sure that it does not happen again.

The hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bad news keeps flooding in regarding the trip to India.

La Presse is reporting this morning that the government may have extrapolated the job creation figures following the announcement it made while the Prime Minister was in India. Apparently, 2,738 jobs were created, not the 5,800 announced. To think that this was the only good news that came out of that trip.

Can the government remind us all once again what exactly that trip was supposed to achieve?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that the purpose of the trip was in fact to promote trade and strengthen our trade relationship with India.

What we achieved was \$1 billion in investments between the two countries, and nearly 6,000 jobs for middle-class Canadians. Let me give some examples. Tech Mahindra, a leader in information technology, is going to invest \$100 million in Canada to create a centre of excellence in artificial intelligence.

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[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Atwal affair gets more sordid by the day.

Yesterday, in his elevator press conference, the public safety minister suggested that it was okay for the national security adviser to share confidential information with the media, but not okay for that same information to be shared with members of Parliament.

Why was the Indian conspiracy theory okay to share with journalists to help get the Prime Minister out of a crisis but not okay to share with the House of Commons, where Canadians send MPs to hold them to account?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. colleague across has been in the House for a long time and he well knows that we cannot discuss specific

intelligence information that is received from national security agencies. He is well aware of that.

The independent, nonpartisan advice that we receive from our public servants is something that we listen to and we act on. Unlike the party opposite, we do not politicize or play games with our public service. We make sure we listen to their advice and act accordingly.

• (1130)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the point made by the parliamentary secretary is absurd.

The government is saying it is okay for the PMO to share confidential information with journalists that Canadians, including members of Parliament, will then read in the paper, but it is not okay to share that same information with parliamentarians or parliamentary committees to hold the Prime Minister and that member to account for this atrocious trip.

When will the Liberals admit that the cover-up of the Atwal affair is worse than the crime?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is what that member is saying but that certainly is not representative of the facts whatsoever.

Again, to be very clear, and the member knows this well. We cannot under any circumstances discuss specific intelligence information we receive from our national security agencies. The member has been in government and he knows that very well. That is a rule that must be adhered to.

We follow the advice of our public servants. We stand behind that advice. We do not play partisan games with it. We act on it when we are given that information.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has accused the Indian government of being involved in inviting his convicted terrorist friend Jaspal Atwal to a state dinner, yet one of his own Liberal MPs has taken the blame and been reprimanded for issuing the invitation. The Prime Minister does not seem to realize he has created a diplomatic disaster as India has responded by raising tariffs on some products by 50%.

Will the Prime Minister issue an apology to the Government of India or will he continue to allow his accusations to cost Canadians?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in this place, the invitation in question should never have been sent and when the information was found out about this individual, that invitation was immediately rescinded. The member of Parliament who advanced that name has apologized and made it clear that an error occurred.

We absolutely and without question stand behind our public servants and the recommendations they make to us. We listen to their advice in this and every instance and act on it accordingly.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal honeymoon is over. Following the shameful diplomatic incident between Canada and India, a Liberal MP was punished for inviting a friend of the Prime Minister, Jaspal Atwal. As a result, India has once again raised the tariff from 40% to 60%. This is the price Canada will have to pay for this diplomatic disaster. It is going to take a lot more than a little dance in the sun to fix this mess.

What does the Prime Minister plan to do to address this diplomatic disaster, for which he is solely responsible?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear. The invitation was a mistake and it was rescinded as soon as information on the individual was available. All input and advice from our public servants are crucial and non-partisan. We have full confidence in them.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's trip to India is best described as the theatre of the absurd.

Mr. Atwal has deep connections with the Liberal Party. The Liberals blamed a backbench MP for inviting him to dinner. Then they brought out this preposterous theory that the Indian government was responsible, trying to embarrass the Prime Minister. The result is a serious diplomatic incident and a punishing tariff on our pulse products, hurting our Canadian farmers.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to fix his mess?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear that the invitation that was made should not have been made and that it was rejected.

Here is my problem. When the party opposite, which was responsible for devastating cuts to our national security infrastructure, \$530 million from the RCMP, \$390 million from CBSA, and the list goes on, stands and gives lectures on national security, when it ignored the advice of Justice O'Connor in 2006 and Justice Iacobucci in 2009, it is a little rich. Therefore, I would ask the Conservatives to rethink their line of attack.

• (1135)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must realize that his antics on the global stage have very real consequences. The casualties for this latest diplomatic nightmare are Canadian farmers. The only souvenir from the Prime Minister's latest family vacation is the successful derailing of Canada's trade relationship with India. Yesterday, India increased the tariffs on our chickpeas from 40% to 60%, further jeopardizing Canada's \$4 billion pulse industry.

Will the Prime Minister please explain why he is so willing to sacrifice Canadian farmers just to maintain this ridiculous conspiracy theory?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is ludicrous to make the assertion the member is making.

Clearly, we have been working for farmers in Canada, and we are always working for farmers. I was in Regina last week, talking with the people in Pulse Canada, making sure that we work with the Indian government. This is the best we can do to ensure that our farmers will have stability and predictability in the Indian market, and we will continue to do so. I have raised that on every single occasion I have had communications with an Indian official.

That is what the Prime Minister did and that is what this whole government is doing, defending our farmers across Canada.

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HEALTH

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week we all saw what could be the fastest-ever Liberal broken promise. The government has clarified it will now just study, not implement, pharmacare, and any future program will not be universal, public, or free. Now the finance minister is facing conflict-of-interest allegations on his fake pharmacare proposal because of his link with Morneau Shepell, Canada's largest benefits consultancy provider.

Will the finance minister recuse himself from any pharmacare discussions because of this serious apparent conflict of interest?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of their publicly funded universal medicare system, one that is based on the individual's needs and not on the ability to pay. However, we recognize there is certainly room for improvement. We have created an advisory council on the implementation of a national pharmacare program with a mandate to study, evaluate, and ultimately make recommendations to government on the path forward to implement pharmacare that puts Canadians first. This initiative builds on the good work that has already been undertaken by our government to improve access to necessary prescription medications for all Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are not the only ones calling for this. Three major organizations, including the Canadian Labour Congress, have asked that the minister recuse himself from discussions on the pharmacare program in order to avoid another conflict of interest, and also to prevent him from working against the public interest. Canadians want and need a pan-Canadian pharmacare program.

Will the Prime Minister remove the Minister of Finance from the discussions and ensure that the consultation is not just a tactic to break another promise?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of our universal medicare system. This system is publicly funded and based on people's needs and not on their ability to pay. However, this system can be improved.

Oral Questions

We have created an advisory council on the implementation of a national pharmacare program, with a mandate to study, evaluate, and recommend options for implementing a national pharmacare program that benefits all Canadians.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had a good laugh today when I heard the minister say how much the Liberals care about agriculture.

Yesterday, when I asked him a question about the budget, the Minister of Agriculture had so little to say that he had to get out his cue card from 2017 to answer the question. There is so little in the budget that he did not even bother to write up a new cue card to answer opposition questions.

Today we learned that the Prime Minister's trip to India has made things worse for chickpea farmers. That is the reality.

Why are the Liberals being so ungenerous to Canadian producers and farmers?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this budget builds on budget 2017. We have recognized agriculture as a key economic sector for Canada.

We are investing over \$150 million in protein industries superclusters, \$100 million in agricultural science and innovation, \$75 million in initiatives to promote Canada's trade with China and other Asian markets, \$350 million in the dairy sector, and \$19.9 million in apprenticeship programs for women in designated trades.

We are going to continue creating growth and opportunities for farmers and their families.

* * *

• (1140)

[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if they are working on improving the Asian market, why do we have a 50% increase on chickpeas?

For two of the past four weeks in Manitoba, the one railroad has only met 6% of the railcar orders placed by shippers. That means tens of thousands of tonnes of contracted grain is not moving, which has virtually stalled cash flow for farmers on the Prairies.

Will the Liberal government stop delaying? We warned the Liberals about Bill C-49 last fall. It is too late. Farmers cannot wait. Action is needed. Reinstate our previous Conservative government's effective measures and get grain moving now.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of efficient and reliable rail service, especially in moving Canadian grain and other commodities to market. However, after enduring 10 years of band-aid actions on behalf of the other government, we introduced Bill C-49. It will

provide a strong, reliable, and efficient freight rail system for the future.

The Minister of Transport and the Minister of Agriculture have been in contact with the railways, urging them to do better. We will closely monitor the situation.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our track record is clear. We have always stood up for Canadian farming families from coast to coast and we will continue to do so.

Here is the deal. Western grain producers have faced a disastrous shipping season due to this government. In order to provide for their families, they rely on getting their grain to market to bring in money in order to put food on their tables. Their ask is very simple. Grain farmers simply want the Liberals to start listening to them and then take action.

When will this government resolve the backlog and get the grain moving?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we have proven time and time again that we are strongly committed to Canadian farmers and our agricultural industry. Unlike the band-aid solutions of the past with an expiry date, our government put forward Bill C-49, which would meet the long-term sustainable needs of users for years to come.

To quote the Western Grain Elevator Association, "this bill [Bill C-49] is a significant improvement over the existing legislation and is a positive step forward for the grain industry."

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing they have proven is that they can increase tariffs.

Liberals think they are good with numbers, so let us try these on for size: 38%, which is the percentage of hopper cars provided by CN and CP combined; 3,965, which is the number of outstanding orders for hopper cars, which is 300 more than last week; millions, which is the amount of dollars in demurrage charges that are being passed on to our farmers. Farmers across Canada have bins full of grain, contracts to fill, and they need the cash flow to start preparing for seeding.

Will the Liberals look at these numbers, do the right thing, and get this grain moving?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both ministers have been in contact with the railway companies.

An hon. member: Who cares?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, we should care. We should care about talking to the railway companies, because we need to find a permanent solution.

The contact with the railway companies has indicated that the temporary situation of early February is improving. That is what we need, an improvement on this performance.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all the stakeholders in my region are disappointed by the lack of vision in the Liberal budget. Everyone was hoping for funding for the high-frequency rail project, but instead the government wants to do another series of studies. It seems as though having a regional minister at the cabinet table is more about giving Ottawa a voice in the regions than giving the regions a voice in Ottawa. The time for action is now, because the people of Trois-Rivières have been waiting too long. The Liberals have announced billions of dollars in infrastructure that they refuse to spend.

When will Trois-Rivières get its share of the infrastructure money that was promised?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is developing the best approach to delivering an efficient and reliable passenger rail system for Canada. That is why we allocated funding in two budgets in order to study VIA Rail's high-frequency rail proposal, which is proof that we are seriously considering this project. We are working actively with VIA Rail and doing our homework on the number of potential passengers.

• (1145)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what my colleague just said. It is very easy to throw numbers around in the House. As the mayor of Trois-Rivières put it, it might be easier to go to the moon than to get a train running on the north shore. He really believed that the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain would be able to make it happen.

Our people are facing some major problems. There are families in pyrrhotite limbo, disaster victims in Yamachiche, and I will not even mention our supply management system. Add to that a labour shortage for our small businesses, and that is just the beginning.

What good is having a Liberal minister from Saint-Maurice—Champlain if he has forgotten all about the Mauricie region?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer my hon. colleague's question.

What good is having a minister in a region? For one thing, it means an investment of over \$100 million in the region. I can tell my colleague from Trois-Rivières that he must have misread the budget. Not only are we investing \$3 million in VIA Rail for studies, but we are also investing in rolling stock because new locomotives and trains are needed.

The whole region should be glad that we are making concrete investments in the high-frequency train from Quebec to Windsor. We will keep working together to make that major project a reality.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 2017 was marked by many disasters and ongoing crises, including violence and famine in Africa, the crisis in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, hurricanes in the Caribbean, and ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. In 2018, humanitarian

needs throughout the world will be unprecedented, with 136 million people in 26 countries expected to need aid.

Could the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie tell the House how the government is helping to meet these challenges?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vimy for her question and her commitment to improving the status of women. Canada will provide an additional \$2 billion over five years for international aid. That is the largest increase in 10 years. This funding will enhance the impact of our feminist policy on the most vulnerable women and girls in the world. These women will not just be beneficiaries of this funding. It will also help them to become agents of change, development, and peace. We will help them to develop their economic, social, and political power.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government inherited a short-term windfall from a housing bubble in Toronto and Vancouver, a booming U.S. economy and world economy, and a doubling of oil prices. What did the Liberals do with it all? They blew it. Now the results are coming in. Today we have disappointing economic growth numbers. Yesterday the former chief economic analyst at Stats Canada revealed that investment in Canada is in a free fall.

Why did the Liberals blow Canada's good fortune instead of setting it aside and preparing for the risks ahead?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can look at the last two years and where Canada was two years ago when we were debating whether we were in a recession or heading into a recession.

After 10 years of anemic growth under the previous government, which had the lowest employment growth since World War II and the lowest growth of GDP since Mackenzie King, all of this while adding \$150 billion to the national debt, Canadians decided to take a different approach, one where we invest in our communities, invest in infrastructure, invest in science, something which the Conservatives should have done a long time ago.

Over the last two years, the Canadian economy has had the fastest growth in the G7. Some 600,000 jobs have been created. I think we can be proud of that record.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Liberals inherited that from the previous government. The previous government took Canada through the great global recession with the best job results, the lowest taxes, and the biggest middle-class income growth of any government since records have been kept—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind hon. members that heckling is bad, whichever side it comes from. I would ask everyone to respect the person who is speaking.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the previous government brought a million new jobs, despite the great global recession.

The Liberals inherited massive global and U.S. growth and have delivered nothing but debt as far as the eye can see. Now the world is taking its money out of Canada, and we are losing jobs along with it. Why?

• (1150)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will use the line that the minister used yesterday, that the member is entitled to his opinion but not to his facts.

The fact is that over the last two years, 600,000 jobs have been created in Canada. It is the fastest growth in the G7. All of that occurred while making Canada a more just and responsible society, giving more to families who need it the most, and reducing taxes for nine million Canadians. That is a record we can be proud of, and those members ought to listen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, let us talk about the facts. In 2015, the hon. member, the parliamentary secretary, and all the Liberal members ran on a platform of running small deficits and returning to a zero deficit by 2019. The reality today is that they are running astronomical deficits and have no idea when we will return to a balanced budget.

It is not just us Conservatives who are fed up with this situation. Those who know how to count think that this makes no sense. Germain Belzile, a lecturer at HEC Montréal, said, “It is quite worrisome for Canada’s economy...this government is being very unwise”.

Can my colleague from Louis-Hébert tell us in what year we can expect to return to a balanced budget?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can talk to him about the growth we have generated and the infrastructure investments we made in the past two years. That is what we promised. By 2022, our debt-to-GDP ratio will be at its lowest since the late 1970s. We are in the best fiscal position of all G7 countries.

If my colleague wants to talk about economists, we could also cite Serge Coulombe, who recently said on Radio-Canada that it was fiscally responsible to invest as we are doing and to keep our deficit under control by ensuring that our debt-to-GDP ratio continues to decline.

I think that is exactly what Canadians expect and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only are economists worried, but so are other finance ministers.

Quebec’s finance minister, a Liberal minister, thinks the current government’s attitude is short on logic. He says that we must take

precautions and when the economy is doing well, balancing the budget is not dogma, it is a necessity. Carlos Leitao, who balanced Quebec’s budget, is the one saying this.

I will again ask my colleague from Louis-Hébert a simple question that I am really fond of: on what date will Canada return to a balanced budget?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we keep doing what we are now doing, Canada’s debt-to-GDP ratio will be at its lowest level since the late 1970s. It is already lower than it was under the previous government.

My colleague recently said that the government was spending a lot of money and did not have much to show for it. I imagine he knows something about that as he is a big fan of Stephen Harper, who added \$150 billion to the country’s debt and was responsible for the worst GDP growth since the Second World War, the worst job growth since Mackenzie King, and the worst growth in exports.

The facts speak for themselves: 600,000 jobs created in two years and the strongest growth in the G7.

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[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised to end the abuse of the temporary foreign worker program, but now they are on the cusp of signing the trans-Pacific partnership, a trade deal that is going to entrench the worst aspects of that program.

Under the TPP, foreign companies are going to be allowed to bring in their own workforce without advertising their jobs to Canadians, without getting a labour market opinion saying there are not enough qualified Canadian tradespeople to do the job. Provincial governments are expressly prohibited from doing any kind of skills testing on these workers.

As a Canadian tradesperson myself, I want to know how it is the Liberals thought it was okay to sell out Canadian tradespeople at the international bargaining table.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for allowing me the occasion to talk about the CPTPP, which we will be signing next week in Chile.

This agreement opens up a market of 495 million people, 14% of the world economy. People in businesses across our nation will benefit from a new market in the Asia-Pacific. I can assure the member that we have been in discussions with labour unions in this country. We are going to continue to engage with them because we want a strong agreement that works for every Canadian from coast to coast to coast.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently, the high Arctic has seen record high temperatures, more than 30° above normal, leading to melting ice in the middle of winter. The Liberals promised to step up and have Canada do its part in the fight against climate change, but they kept Stephen Harper's weak, inadequate targets and they are not even going to meet those. Again, in the budget there was little or nothing for real climate action.

When will the Liberals recognize the urgency and actually do what is necessary to fight climate change?

• (1155)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am extraordinarily proud of our commitment to tackle climate change. After a decade of inaction by the previous government, we have stepped up. We have put a price on pollution across the country. We have phased out coal. We have made historic investments in clean technology, innovation that is going to make a real difference, and we are leading in pushing for ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement on the world stage.

We are all in on climate action. We are serious. We owe it to our kids.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 32 B.C. first nations have LNG pipeline agreements, like the \$40-billion Kitimat project which will run through Haisla Nation traditional territory, but the Liberals' delays and added costs directed by anti-energy activists put it all at risk. Haisla Chief Councillor Crystal Smith sees a “different future with LNG than the Sierra Club”. She says she sees significant employment for her members, access to education, and a way forward to true self-sufficiency.

Why do the Liberals ignore pro-natural resource indigenous communities and deprive them of economic prosperity, social benefits, and thousands of jobs?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before in the House, we have done more for the natural resources sector and the energy sector particularly than the previous government did in 10 years.

We are working on a new plan with indigenous peoples around resource development to have the ability for indigenous peoples to have a greater say and more impact on the process. We believe that this is the right thing to do. Had the previous government done that and engaged more indigenous people, the northern gateway pipeline would not have been struck down by the courts.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the Liberal government loves to spend money and make gestures, but this is a question on priorities. Canada has a very

serious rural crime issue, yet there was absolutely nothing in the current budget to address this serious problem.

Why does the Liberal government continue to fail rural Canada and those who serve and protect?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that the RCMP has the resources and support it needs to keep our communities safe, whether that is in an urban environment or in a rural one. We are still reeling, unfortunately, from the half a billion dollars that the Conservatives cut from the RCMP, which did real damage to rural communities in keeping them safe. However, in the current budget and in others, we have been rebuilding that infrastructure, rebuilding that resiliency and strength, so that we can provide for our rural communities the service, the support, and the security they deserve.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is as much a part of Canada as the other nine provinces and three territories. The Conservative members from Quebec are the best equipped to defend the interests of Quebec in a unified Canada.

How can this government justify investing \$75 million in the maritime provinces, but not in Quebec, to stop the spread of the spruce budworm? This insect does not stop at provincial borders. What scientific study did the Liberal government use to justify this protection for the lumber industry? Why exclude Quebec? Where is the government's logic? How do they explain the unexplainable?

[English]

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has invested millions to support the forestry sector in Quebec. We invested \$87 million to support scientific research, including funding to combat the spruce budworm, and more than \$23 million in funding to Quebec to support innovation and transformation in the forestry sector. Most recently, budget 2018 provides \$191 million to support softwood lumber jobs. That is in addition to the softwood lumber action plan of \$867 million that we are providing to support workers, communities, and companies affected by the unjust American duties.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March is Nutrition Month, and this year's theme is "Unlock the power of food". Our food choices are among the most important decisions we make every day for our health. We are seeing significant discussions among Canadians about the role food choices play in a healthy lifestyle. Can the Minister of Health update the House on our government's important actions with respect to healthy eating?

• (1200)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for his work on the health committee and on Bill S-228.

Over the past year, we have launched our healthy eating strategy to make the healthy choice the easiest choice for all Canadians. As part of the strategy, we are updating Canada's food guide, restricting marketing to kids, and making nutrition labelling easier to use and also to understand. This month I encourage all Canadians to learn more about healthy eating and incorporating healthier choices in their diets.

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TAXATION

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year's assault by the revenue minister on disabled Canadians has jeopardized registered disability savings plans for many Canadian families that saved their money and received matching grants from the government. Disability tax credit rejections mean that some families that received the credit for 10 years or more will lose their savings plans for the future care of their disabled children.

What is the minister doing to ensure that families of disabled children are not losing their savings plans because of this minister's attack on the disabled?

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our party is making sure that all Canadians receive the credits to which they are entitled. The agency is reviewing all disability tax credit applications processed. In the May 2017 clarification letter, the minister reinstated the Disability Advisory Committee, and she participated in the first meeting back on January 24. Experts from around the committee table will have the opportunity to suggest improvements in how the agency and ministers program for Canadians with disabilities, experts the Harper government silenced back in 2006.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the EI working while on claim pilot project has been a success for Canadians receiving parental and caregiving benefits, allowing those EI recipients to return to work without jeopardizing their benefits. Could the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development please tell the House how budget 2018 would expand on this project's success?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and

Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member from Bay of Quinte for highlighting the working while on claim program. I am pleased to say that budget 2018 includes a proposal to make it permanent. In fact, not only will existing EI claimants be grandfathered in, but all EI recipients will be eligible, including those receiving maternity or sickness benefits. This way, people can return to work after an illness or the birth of a child and be able to keep more of their benefits. This budget delivers on providing Canadians with a flexible and compassionate EI system.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister blamed the Indian government for making him look bad. Here is a news flash. The PM is doing an excellent job of embarrassing us on the trade file all by himself: softwood lumber, failed; China trade, failed; U.S. trade, failed; and now the Americans have announced devastating tariffs on our steel and aluminum manufacturers. While our PM feels his job is only ceremonial, Canadians are looking for real leadership. Has the PM confirmed that Canada will be exempt from these new devastating tariffs? Jobs are at risk.

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, Canada is a key NORAD and NATO ally. As the number one purchaser of American steel, any trade restrictions on Canadian steel and aluminum are unacceptable. This industry is fully integrated, and of course, it provides enormous value-added to the North American manufacturing supply chain. Should restrictions be imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum products, we will take, and reserve the right to take, responsive measures to defend our trade interests and Canadian workers.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, farmers were the first to sound the alarm, and now the Government of Quebec is doing the same.

The temporary foreign worker program is not working, and this is undermining Quebec's development. Our high-tech companies cannot find skilled labour, so they are losing out on contracts and all of Quebec suffers.

When will the government recognize that one-size-fits-all federal programs do not work and that Quebec urgently needs some flexibility so that it can thrive?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that the one-size-fits-all model does not work as it was imposed under the past Conservative government. We believe that Canadians deserve the first crack at jobs in this country. We believe that there can be no wage suppression or downward pressure on Canadian wages. We believe that workers who come in have to be protected by the laws of this country. We believe that companies need to have access to a skilled workforce, something that was set out of balance with the past government.

* * *

• (1205)

[Translation]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, not only are Quebecers not well served by one-size-fits-all federal programs, but they are also not well served when it comes to the budworm.

The government listens to Irving lobbyists far more than it does to Quebecers. Irving had 31 meetings with government ministers and managed to secure \$75 million to combat the budworm ravaging its forests in the Maritimes. Irving owns 4.5 million acres in New Brunswick. However, Quebec did not receive one cent to address this same epidemic affecting an area even larger than New Brunswick.

They allocated \$75 million to the Maritimes—

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

[English]

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, our government has invested millions to support the forestry sector in Quebec. We invested \$87 million to support scientific research, including funding to combat spruce budworm, and more than \$23 million in funding to Quebec to support innovation and transformation in the forestry sector. Most recently, in budget 2018, we provided \$191 million to support softwood lumber jobs. That is in addition to our softwood lumber action plan of \$867 million, which we are providing to support workers, families, and communities against the unjust punitive American duties.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear an answer to the question about the budworm. Why is the government giving money to the Maritimes but not to Quebec? That is unacceptable.

Quebeckers, especially Davie workers, are extremely disappointed in the 2018 federal budget tabled this week.

If I were a Quebec MP on the other side of the House, I would be embarrassed. This is yet another budget with nothing at all for Davie, but surprise, surprise, millions more for Irving.

The federal government is clearly not treating everyone equally, and nobody seems willing to speak up on Quebec's behalf, nobody.

When will the government give Davie its fair share of contracts? Is it waiting until condos take over the shipyards?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is definitely taking steps to provide the Canadian Coast Guard with the ships it needs to serve the Canadian people.

The government is pleased to be working with the Davie shipyard, which did very good work on the *Asterix*, to find a solution that will meet our icebreaking needs. Icebreakers stimulate the Canadian economy because they make it possible to transport goods along our waterways and they protect communities by helping prevent floods.

We are committed to making sure the Coast Guard has the equipment it needs and to making Davie part of the solution.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, we have alarming news from the front lines of the climate emergency. The dispatches are deeply worrying. The defences are falling against what protected our Arctic and kept it cold. The polar vortex is eroding, and like an advancing army, the warm air from the south has occupied our Arctic, driving temperatures up 25° Celsius above normal in a sunless winter. No sun has warmed that ground for months, yet the Arctic is in a heat wave. The time for complacency, pat answers, and fossil fuel appeasement is over.

When will the government increase our targets and our ambitions to meet this accelerating threat?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for her tireless advocacy on climate change.

I was in the high Arctic this past summer with Inuit youth, and they talked to me about the very real impacts of climate change. It is extraordinarily worrying what we are seeing right now. I am working extremely hard to bring Canadians together on climate action. We are putting a price on pollution, and we are phasing out coal. We are making historic investments in public transit, on energy efficient social housing, on investments in clean technologies. We need to be working with the world.

We are all in on climate action. I would encourage all the parties opposite to do the same.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

● (1210)

*[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, in relation to Bill C-64, an act respecting wrecks, abandoned, dilapidated or hazardous vessels and salvage operations. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

This bill was built on my Motion No. 40 and will address environmental and economic concerns that have plagued our coastal communities for years. I look forward to the final vote on this bill in the House, and hopefully the full support of all members.

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 22nd report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to the supplementary estimates (C), 2017-18.

[English]

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development: the 12th report, which relates to supplementary estimates (C), 2017-18, and the 13th report, which relates to interim estimates 2018-19.

I am also presenting, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, in relation to Bill C-374, an act to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act (composition of the board). The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates: the 13th report, on the topic of the votes in supplementary estimates (C), 2017-18 that were referred to the committee, and the 14th report, on the topic of the votes in interim estimates 2018-19 that were referred to the committee.

* * *

PETITIONS

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to table two petitions from 114 constituents. The petitioners call to the government's attention that, as it is now

written, the application to the Canada summer jobs program forces employers to choose between their charter-protected freedoms and eligibility for government programming. They are calling on the government to remove the discriminatory attestation requirement from the Canada summer jobs application and respect the charter rights of all Canadians, even though those may be different from the political agenda of the government of the day.

This brings the total number of petitioners signing this petition to 145.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions, one signed by 75 people, and the other signed by 550 people. All the petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to defend the freedom of conscience, thought, and belief, and to withdraw the attestation requirement for applicants to the Canada summer job program.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to table a petition signed by Canadians who oppose the Liberal government's application of a values test to the 2017 Canada summer jobs program. These individuals ask the Prime Minister to uphold the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects our right to freedom of conscience, thought, and belief, and to withdraw the attestation requirement for this government program.

TAXATION

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to present petition e-1311, signed by hundreds of Canadians. They point out that cancer treatment centres and major medical recuperative centres are located in densely populated cities across Canada, and people from rural areas have to travel long distances to those centres for their care. They often incur crippling travel costs. This affects more than half of all Canadians.

The petitioners point out that while medical travel costs are deductible, they are deductible only in the year they are incurred. These people are seriously ill or hurt, and they are not working in that year or are working very little. They point out that the costs cannot be deducted during that year and ask the government, therefore, to allow medical travel costs incurred in Canada to be deductible against all future taxes payable.

● (1215)

RCMP

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on a day when there are some hard-working advocates for the RCMP on the Hill. I am pleased to present a petition signed by thousands of RCMP members, their family members, friends, and concerned Canadians. They want the government to address pay issues within the RCMP and support collective bargaining to address a number of long-standing issues that continue to be extant around understaffing, a lack of good equipment for RCMP members that they need to do their job, and support for their spouses, who often have trouble finding work as their partners move across the country doing their work, as well as a number of other issues.

I am glad to bring those issues to the government's attention on their behalf.

Privilege

GIRLS' EDUCATION

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day, over 130 million girls around the world are not in school. In Canada, we know that education is key to individual and community prosperity and well-being. On behalf of the ONE campaign, which is here in Ottawa right now, I am very pleased to present a petition calling on the government to mobilize support to better fund girls' education internationally.

As our budget 2018 demonstrates, we believe that when women do better, we all do better. That principle applies not just here at home, but globally. The ONE campaign wants Canada to support that principle around the world.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to present yet another petition reflecting the desire of my constituents to see a national pharmacare program. They are calling on the government and the Prime Minister to look at ways we can work with the different levels of government and put into place and incorporate a national pharmacare program into the Canada Health Act.

I was really encouraged the other day with the national budget, which is a good step in that direction.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON PRIME MINISTER'S TRIP TO INDIA

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 48(2) on a question of privilege, notice of which was given this morning in accordance with the Standing Orders.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, after my brief remarks, to make a prima facie finding of a breach of my parliamentary privilege and refer the matter immediately, because of the time-sensitive nature of the breach, to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The breach of my parliamentary privilege relates both to my individual rights as a member of Parliament and to my rights as the shadow minister for foreign affairs. As well, I will highlight why I think there is also a collective breach of the rights of all members of the House of Commons. As I am sure you know, Mr. Speaker, there are individual rights that each member of Parliament has, regardless of side of the House, as well as collective rights that all 338 members and yourself have. These are founded within the Constitution Act of

1867, as well as within the rules of this place and several generations of decisions from the Chair.

I will reference the most recent one that is germane to this request. At the heart of the issue of parliamentary privilege of a member of Parliament is for the member of Parliament to be fully able to deliberate, debate, legislate, and most importantly, especially for members of the opposition, hold the government to account. That is at the heart of our parliamentary democracy, and it has been impeded. Anything that impedes my ability to fulfill my functions is a breach of my privilege.

Specifically, that breach was highlighted yesterday by the Minister of Public Safety, who acknowledged that confidential information related to the Prime Minister's trip to India was shared with members of the press gallery, who do not sit in this place but may be above it or observe it. That same information is not being shared with me, as a member of Parliament.

Furthermore, we do not have the ability to question the national security adviser, Mr. Jean, who shared that information with members of the press gallery. He is not able to appear before a committee of this place or a committee of the upper house, further stymying our ability to fulfill our requirements and obligations as members of Parliament to hold the government to account.

I highlight this specifically. Yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety suggested, to many journalists, including one of the journalists briefed by the national security adviser, that the national security adviser could share information he deemed to be confidential with reporters. However, the Minister of Public Safety was not willing to share that same information with members of the House of Commons. That, in itself, is a prima facie breach of my privilege as a member of Parliament.

As I said, these rights have been adjudicated by various chairs since the founding of our Confederation. This inhibits my ability as an individual to have freedom of speech and information to inform and colour my deliberations and debates in the House.

There is also a critical individual freedom that members of Parliament have, and that is the freedom from obstruction or interference in the fulfillment of their duties. Not only as a member of Parliament who has a background in defence, security, and these affairs, I have additional duties to hold the Minister of Foreign Affairs to account with respect to Canada's role in the world and its diplomatic function.

In the last week, this chamber has been seized with the largest diplomatic incident Canada has witnessed in a generation. Yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety acknowledged information relating to the government, in particular the Prime Minister's specific claims that a partner, the Indian government, is somehow involved in this crisis. It is now named the "Atwal affair", the diplomatic crisis of a convicted attempted assassin, who tried to kill an Indian parliamentarian on Canadian soil, being invited to formal prime ministerial events. That is a foreign affairs crisis.

Privilege

•(1220)

Yesterday, the minister confirmed that information with respect to the Prime Minister's defence in this House of those claims was shared with members of the press gallery, who the government knew would publish it in their newspapers, online, or on television, thereby waiving any confidentiality claims. That is the same information they are withholding from me as a parliamentarian, who is charged with holding the Liberals to account. It is astounding, and far worse than the judgment from former Speaker Milliken, who I am going to refer to shortly. Not only does it breach my individual privileges as a member of Parliament in several ways, it is a breach of our collective rights.

I am sure even members of the Liberal caucus who were not on this Indian junket trip are offended by what happened. They, as government members, have a right collectively to institute inquiries, call witnesses, and demand information to this chamber. Therefore, not only are my individual privileges as a member of Parliament being stymied by the Liberal government, the admission by the Minister of Public Safety, who yesterday said the government is not prepared to share here the same information it shared with journalists, in itself is a *prima facie* indication it is violating privilege.

There is also a collective violation inherent in this withholding of information. I suggested today in question period that often the cover-up can be worse than the crime. I do not think there is a crime here. I am using that as an expression. However, there was a diplomatic incident that has caused Canadians great concern, great international embarrassment, and today members of the Conservative caucus raised how it is already impacting our pulse farmers. We as members of Parliament are not able to have the same degree of information that the Prime Minister's Office offered to journalists, in trying to defend or explain away a crisis with respect to the Atwal affair.

I refer you to the seminal case from the Supreme Court of Canada in *New Brunswick Broadcasting Co. v. Nova Scotia*, where parliamentary privilege must be "absolute" and necessary.

All of our legislatures and our federal Parliament must respect the absolute privilege of its members to be informed, to have debate, deliberations, and to hold the government to account. That is the core of our parliamentary democracy. For the Minister of Public Safety to suggest the national security adviser had the ability to share this information with journalists but not share it with the House, that in itself suggests the information he shared was not confidential.

If the Liberals are going to share information as damage control, clearly it is not information about which CSIS was saying, "Stop. You're jeopardizing our national security." That is why this side of the House feels that the Prime Minister's Office engaged the national security adviser in a media smokescreen attempt to deflect attention from the Atwal affair. I am sure that is the case, because I am being stopped from performing my duties as a member of Parliament. The Minister of Public Safety, the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister's Office, because we all know it is there, are not sharing the same information with me that they have shared with journalists to suggest that they were not to blame for the Atwal affair. However, I have no ability to see that information.

I will quote Speaker Milliken on April 28, 2010, in the Afghan document decision, on a similar type issue, where confidentiality and national security were part of the debate. He states:

It is the view of the Chair that accepting an unconditional authority of the executive to censor the information provided to Parliament would in fact jeopardize the very separation of powers that is purported to lie at the heart of our parliamentary system and the independence of its constituent parts.

•(1225)

This chamber, the men and women who stand in this chamber, sit in this chamber, and participate in the debates of our nation are the most important constituent part of our parliamentary system. Speaker Milliken, probably one of the most profound writing Speakers, said that specifically when the executive, the Prime Minister's Office, suggested confidentiality would prevent parliamentarians from exercising their absolute privileges. All four corners of that Speaker's decision apply to this case. In fact, the Minister of Public Safety, as I raised in question period today, highlighted that breach of privilege yesterday to the media when he confirmed the national security adviser, we believe at the request of the Prime Minister's Office, shared information with journalists that they are now preventing us from having, with claims of confidentiality.

Here is an interesting sidebar. Everyone knows, especially the deputy House leader, that I love to look back into the history of things. When the Milliken decision in 2010 came out, the then-Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, was quite happy with this decision. Speaker Milliken recommended a compromise, because there actually was confidential information. Here, the waiving of confidentiality by allowing the national security adviser to brief the media shows it is a red herring in this case. However, in the Afghan documents case, it was a real concern so the Speaker's decision recommended a compromise so that the parties could get together and make sure the privilege of MPs was not impeded.

Who did Michael Ignatieff charge to work on behalf of the Liberal Party to make sure that privilege was maintained? It was the House leader for the Liberal Party at the time. Who was that? It was the Minister of Public Safety.

Privilege

Sometimes when one is here a long time, one sees everything, and so that minister has seen everything. He has seen this. He knows that not providing us the very same information the Liberals provided journalists, and his work on the Milliken decision and the compromise out of it shows this, the production of documents, the provision of information, and even witnesses to allow a proper deliberation, debate, and holding of government to account, is a breach of privilege. That decision dealt with not just the production of documents and information to allow for that deliberation, that debate, that holding to account. It also dealt with the issue of tampering or impeding witnesses from being part of the parliamentary inquiry. Therefore, I would refer the Chair to the Milliken decision with respect to that.

It is interesting in this case as well, because the national security adviser is a senior civil servant. He was charged to brief the media, thereby suggesting that there was no confidential information that they are now claiming cannot be shared with us and Mr. Jean cannot appear before the public safety committee or a committee of the Senate.

I suggest that any confidentiality or sensitivity of that information was waived, but even if it was not, what did Speaker Milliken suggest in the case with a letter from an associate deputy minister with respect to the Afghan documents? He suggested that letter provided a chilling effect on the civil servant, civil service, and the ability for Parliament to fulfill its obligation. However, this is a far worse chilling effect, because the national security adviser for Canada has never made public statements, particularly quiet, hastily arranged media briefings. This is unprecedented, and with even a more senior person than an associate deputy minister.

Therefore, the chill effect that the Milliken decision was concerned about with respect to impeding, with respect to tampering with the ability for documents and deliberations to take place in this case, also applies here. Unfortunately, unless we get some answers, I feel that the Prime Minister's Office has sullied the reputation of a fine three-decade-long civil servant. He should come before committee and confirm whether he was acting rogue here. Without the information, I am not sure, but my hunch is that this is not the case. Either way, we do not have the information and my privilege is breached.

• (1230)

I will end with this. Perhaps I wanted to speak a little more before we broke for two weeks, but this is very serious. The only limitations on the privileges of a member of Parliament must be self-imposed. We regulate our debates. My very capable House leader, on behalf of our parliamentary caucus, works with the government House leader and other colleagues to make sure the debate functions, to make sure that we hold one another to account, and the Chair helps us in that exercise, capably informed by the table officers.

We determine what information we see, not the Minister of Public Safety. The very fact that he was involved in the Milliken decision compromise tells me he knows that. As well, unelected officials in the Prime Minister's Office, who determine which civil servants go out, who they brief, and what information they share, if they are now trying to impede me from doing my job by not sharing that same

information, they must be held to account. They are not members of this place.

We regulate our own debate, and our own respect for the privileges of this place. Further, and the Milliken decision confirms this once again, that privilege is not affected by statutes that might prohibit distribution of information. If there are real confidentiality or national security concerns, and I have said already in my remarks that I do not think that is the case here, which is what the minister is claiming, disclosure, sunshine, will show all that.

However, even if there is sensitive information or confidential documents, that does not impact my privilege to see it. The Milliken decision confirms that accommodation must be made. The public safety committee could meet in camera. The parliamentary House leaders could get together, like they did with the Milliken decision, like the public safety minister did in 2010, to make sure that Parliament is supreme.

We are not impacted by claims of confidentiality, especially what I am suggesting are false claims.

This is a very serious affair. The national security adviser of Canada is now implicated. One of Canada's most important allies in the Asia-Pacific going forward, one with which all sides of this House have taken strong work to try to improve and enhance relationships and enhance trade, and under the Conservatives two-way trade doubled, that country has now said that the Prime Minister's claims are baseless.

I cannot confirm they are baseless because I am being impeded in my function. Canada's allies are affected. Our reputation is affected. My role as a parliamentarian is affected. For all of my collective colleagues here, their ability to perform their function is affected. This is serious.

Given the nature of this affair, I would ask the Chair, relying heavily on the Milliken decision, which is totally on point, when the House returns, to make a decision so that all of us, on all sides of the chamber, can fulfill our roles as parliamentarians.

• (1235)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first off I would like to thank the member for Durham for his remarks today in the House of Commons. They are very timely.

He has raised some very important issues. We have deep concerns. This whole issue has blown up and moved very quickly. We are very concerned about the breach of privilege and respecting members' rights in the House of Commons, and making sure that we can do our job adequately on behalf of the people that we represent.

I am hoping to reserve some time to reflect deeply and come back to the House as soon as we resume work on Monday.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we always respect our civil service and the fine work it does. The Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety have been very clear on the issue. Much like the New Democratic Party House leader, we will take into consideration everything that my friend across the way has put on the record today and provide a comment once we are back in session after the constituency break week.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to support the comments made by the member for Durham and his request that you intervene. The issue of our privileges is fundamental, and it is unacceptable for a minister or senior government official to give information to the media and not give it to us. Part of your role is to defend our privileges and our rights. I am therefore counting on you, and that is why I support the intervention by my colleague from Durham.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will take this under advisement and return to the House in a timely manner.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

IMPACT ASSESSMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-69, an act to enact the Impact Assessment Act and the Canadian Energy Regulator Act, to amend the Navigation Protection Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of putting legislation in place that would make a positive difference in dealing with Canada's environment and with our energy sector while considering indigenous peoples.

This legislation takes a strong step forward. That is reinforced by the fact that the Conservatives say we have gone too far and the New Democrats say we have not gone far enough. Our government recognizes that we can move forward on energy while taking into consideration the environment and the consultations that are required. That is one of the reasons we were able to do something that the Conservatives failed at doing while they were in government for 10 years, such as getting a pipeline approved.

At the very least, would the member not recognize that Canadians expect us to bring forward legislation of this nature?

• (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my excellent colleague for his question. The

people of Winnipeg North are well represented, given how often he rises to speak in the House.

However, speaking does not necessarily mean working effectively. We in the opposition party have a keen interest in, a strong desire, and the intention to contribute to the environmental movement, in the sense that we want to protect our planet every day. When my colleague states that the Conservatives say the Liberals have gone too far, I have one simple and clear reply. The NDP is accusing the Liberals of not going far enough, and the Liberals are accusing us of saying they are not going far enough. If you ask me, the Liberals are not going anywhere.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue along that line. I would ask the member where he thinks this bill has failed.

The Minister of Natural Resources gets up almost weekly, it used to be daily, and says that he has restored the confidence of Canadians in the energy regulatory system and yet Nanos Research came out with a poll a couple of months ago that showed that only 2% of Canadians had confidence in the regulatory system and that had been steadily dropping since the Harper days. People try to say that they have restored Canadians' confidence, but instead their confidence continues to erode.

I am wondering if my colleague could comment on that and whether he thinks that this bill would do anything to restore that confidence.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay for his question.

I somewhat agree with him that public confidence is not there. Since the current government came into office, the public has been losing confidence in the institution and in the measures being taken to improve our environment.

I would like to read my colleagues an excerpt from a *Le Devoir* article written by Alexandre Shields that backs up what I was saying.

One thing is for sure: the federal government is promising to restore public trust. It will do this by “[m]aking decisions based on robust science, evidence and Indigenous traditional knowledge, [and] respecting Indigenous rights,” federal environment minister Catherine McKenna said on Thursday.

That article was published on February 9. Now look at what it says next.

The government's decisions will ultimately—ultimately being the key word—be based on the “national interest,” she added.

The government is going to consult scientists and indigenous peoples to give them the illusion that they are part of the process. However, it is the minister who will decide whether the project should proceed or not, depending on her mood and how close the ties between the proponents and the Liberal Party of Canada are. That is unacceptable.

Government Orders

As for confidence, I must say that I have a big problem with the current government's attitude. We need to work together to come up with measures for developing the environment in an intelligent way, balancing sustainable development with economic development, and taking a smart approach.

• (1245)

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Repentigny.

I am very pleased to join this important debate. Bill C-69 is a generational opportunity to realize the full promise of Canada through the resources of our land and the resourcefulness of Canadians. It is an opportunity to achieve a lasting balance. This is not easy, and this debate is most timely and most important.

We are at a pivotal moment. Climate change is the great challenge of our generation. The natural environment signals this to us, of course. It also plays a critical role in assisting us to manage climate change, and it will be the measure of the balance we achieve. The natural environment restores us in our daily lives. Our ingenuity and investment in clean technology and innovation are fundamental to the way forward as we continue to build success in the natural resources sector.

As we debate this bill, a new wave of resource development is before us, with more than 650 billion dollars' worth of projects either under construction or planned over the next 10 years. This is not insignificant. This means good, sustainable jobs and new economic opportunities for the middle class. Therefore, it is imperative we have a modern environmental and regulatory system, one that is open, transparent, and effective, a process that views public engagement as an asset, that is critical toward earning public confidence in government decision-making.

This is what Bill C-69 achieves. Bill C-69 is based upon better, clearer rules in order to recognize and achieve greater protection of the environment, fish, and waterways; the centrality and importance of positive relations between Canada and indigenous peoples; collaboration between the federal government and the provinces and territories; more investment in Canada's natural resource sector; and finally, the importance of earning public trust every day.

Bill C-69 strives to integrate Canada's economic and environmental goals to advance indigenous reconciliation and to ensure that worthy projects go ahead in an environmentally sustainable manner. This cannot be accomplished on our own. We can work together better. The provinces and territories are key regulators. Indigenous peoples are central to Canada's economic development. Project proponents make key investments in our innovation economy. Bill C-69 anticipates and accommodates multiple players and multiple imperatives. It is an integrative bill that provides a strong foundation for decision-making.

Beginning with a commitment to the fundamental principle of one project, one assessment for major resource projects, Bill C-69 creates the way in which all parties are part of one process. Industry is asking for environmental processes that are timely and rooted in science, and regulatory reviews that are efficient and offer greater

certainty. The general public and indigenous communities are asking for early and meaningful engagement to identify priorities. All of this would be coordinated by the new impact assessment agency.

Canadians are right to expect that impact assessments consider more than environmental impacts. This has been a long-standing criticism of the previous approach, and we should be proud of sustainability advocates from coast to coast to coast. Bill C-69 proposes that major new resource projects be viewed in the wider context of economic, social, and health impacts of ongoing development, as well as environmental impacts. The bill also expands the opportunities for Canadians to participate in the process, improving public funding for citizens to do so, and communicating our own efforts and decisions in language that is easy to understand and readily available.

Bill C-69 would help to renew and improve Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples, supporting new partnerships by improving the consultation process and ensuring clear accountabilities between indigenous peoples and the crown.

Finally, Bill C-69 would enhance how science and data are weighed, and how this contributes to a decision.

We believe that Bill C-69 responds directly to the reasonable expectation on the part of the general public, that policy-making should incorporate input from thorough public consultation, expert reviews, parliamentary studies, and open deliberation.

Bill C-69 is about environmental assessments and regulatory reviews that make resource development better and more sustainable. Our proposals for modernizing the National Energy Board build on this. Under the Canadian energy regulator act, the NEB would be replaced by a new federal energy regulator that would remain headquartered in Calgary, where it belongs. The new federal regulator would be based on the principles of modern, effective governance, more inclusive public engagement, greater indigenous participation, stronger safety and environmental protections, and more timely decisions.

• (1250)

The modern regulator would reflect Canada's changing energy needs and desires with an expanded mandate to review traditional and renewable sources of energy, including offshore, wind, and tidal. It would have the required independence and proper accountability for our clean-growth energy future in the 21st century.

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Drawing upon the best energy data and the latest trends to inform its decisions, the new regulator would operate with shorter timelines for project reviews. For major new energy projects, the proposed Canadian energy regulator would collaborate with the new impact assessment agency to provide its own recommendations in a single final report. For all other projects, the new federal energy regulator would retain its existing responsibility to review.

Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that sound resource projects are built. We believe that this calls for a modern environmental and regulatory system that promotes common values and ensures shared benefits. Canada can achieve the public good by ensuring that projects are built in a responsible, timely, and transparent way, creating good jobs and a stronger middle class. We are rising to the challenges of our times by driving economic growth, building investment certainty, advancing indigenous reconciliation, and achieving sustainable solutions. We are restoring public confidence and combatting climate change. We are creating inclusive prosperity.

I am very proud to support this legislation, and I hope all members will join our government in approving better rules to build a better Canada.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is good to see a Newfoundlander in the chair. Now you have both places in this building sewn up, it appears.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the member about public confidence in the energy regulation system. One small part of this bill deals with pipelines and the new Canada energy regulator. We had a situation in the Kinder Morgan decision where a ministerial panel travelled along the length of the pipeline, and that panel came up with six questions it said the government should answer before approving or not approving the pipeline. These were the first three: How do they square this with climate action? How do they do this without a comprehensive national energy strategy? How do they square it with UNDRIP?

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary can comment on the fact that most environmental lawyers across this country said that none of these questions were answered before Kinder Morgan was approved, and none of them are answered in this legislation.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, I would like to put today's debate in a broader context. When we formed government, it was very clear that there was a lack of confidence in the National Energy Board, there was a lack of confidence in the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, there was a lack of confidence in the Navigation Protection Act, and there was a lack of confidence in the Fisheries Act. It had been shaken dramatically by the previous government.

Therefore, we put an interim process in place to be consultative, to be more inclusive of indigenous views, and to add conditions to ensure that these projects could go forward, because they were really a long way along in terms of making a final decision. We then took 14 months to consult coast to coast to coast and to bring together and integrate multiple players and multiple imperatives so that our decisions with regard to the natural resources sector were rooted in engagement, environmental protection, and indigenous reconciliation.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has stated that one of the objectives of Bill C-69 is to increase investor confidence. I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to square that statement with the fact that the Minister of Environment, at the planning stage, has the ability to kill a major energy project before any economic analysis is done, before any environmental analysis is done, and before any scientific analysis is done. In other words, the minister can kill a pipeline project on the basis of a purely political decision. Could the parliamentary secretary explain just how that increases investor confidence?

• (1255)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, it does not surprise me that the member opposite does not value the importance of early public engagement and early engagement with indigenous peoples. That is a fundamental commitment of our government, and that is what will allow us to not be surprised, to not be responsible for excluding important voices, and to begin these discussions on a strong foundation.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a primary focus of our government has been achieving the balance between the environment and the economy going together. I wonder if the member could expand on how Bill C-69 would help us accomplish that balance.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, first, the impact assessment act would replace the previous act by bringing together multiple interests and multiple impacts. Any environmental decision, any decision that is good for our economy, and any decision that is good for our society and public health must be one decision. We must share how we get to that end point across multiple interests, including provincial and territorial interests, indigenous interests, and the general public.

We do not see the environment and the economy at all as mutually exclusive. We see the best long-term interests being made with a view to sustainability.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauré (Repentigny, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-69 has some interesting aspects, but it also raises questions and does not do much at all for Quebec.

For example, the government wants to put science back into decisions on the environment. That is great, especially after our experience with the Harper government, which saw science as the enemy. Obviously, this is a vast improvement. It shows there is an intention to protect the environment, but as always with the Liberals, intentions are more talking points than anything else. That does not amount to much unless it is written in black and white in legislation.

I will provide some examples. Do members remember the electoral reform promise that was dropped like a hot potato, or the promise to defend supply management at any cost?

The Liberals did not even want to renegotiate the transpacific partnership to defend our farmers. The government has not even changed its greenhouse gas reduction targets. Instead, it adopted the Conservatives' targets, which are well below those of all other countries.

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I cannot get into every one of these issues in the few minutes that I have, but I will raise a few points that are important for Quebec.

In its current form, this bill is the opposite of what Quebecers want. I firmly believe that instead of imposing these requirements on Quebec, the government should be doing the opposite, that is, it should let Quebecers decide how to manage their province and protect their environment.

That was the reason why on February 1st I introduced Bill C-392, which goes in the opposite direction of Bill C-69. We have a very simple vision: what happens within our borders should be decided by us.

We firmly believe that citizens must have a say on projects that can negatively impact their health and their environment. I am definitely thinking of energy east.

The federal government is being pressured by companies that have interests in these projects. The government must balance the competing interests of provinces. I am thinking of the interests of Quebec as opposed to those of oil producing provinces. I am also thinking of British Columbia, which is in a dispute with Alberta over the Trans Mountain pipeline.

In both cases, one province assumes all the risks without reaping any of the benefits, while the opposite is true for the other province. It is unfair that citizens must suffer the consequences.

I will give another example. In 2016, IMTT-Quebec Inc. moved to the Port of Québec and polluted the entire neighbourhood of Limoilou with red dust. The residents of Limoilou found this dust on their balconies and clotheslines.

The Superior Court ruled that since the company was located in the Port of Québec, which is a federal jurisdiction, Quebec's environmental quality act did not apply. That was ridiculous. The air pollution was a nuisance for everyone in Limoilou and also compromised their health. We are talking about the health of parents and our children, not an administrative technicality. Not at all.

It is really quite simple, it is the provinces that have the expertise. Quebec must manage its health services. It is Quebec that pays the price for pollution and, even worse, it is the people who suffer the consequences. That is why Quebec must have the final say.

The complete opposite would be happening with Bill C-69. The federal government always has the final say. Even if a project is rejected by the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement du Québec, or BAPE, the new impact assessment agency of Canada and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change can always ignore our experts' findings and approve the project anyway, all under the guise of the national interest. I think we can all agree that this term is a little vague. It means nothing and can be invoked at any time, in any way, and for any project.

• (1300)

To us, national interest means the health and safety of our citizens. To others, it may mean corporate profits. The government will be able to make its decisions based on its own interests and the interests of its friends, as we have seen in other cases.

I am not the only one who is concerned about this arbitrary aspect of the bill. Greenpeace contacted me to say it is concerned about the vague assessment criteria that the government will use. The problem is that the government is creating an agency that ultimately serves no purpose, since the minister will reserve the right to override it.

The government claims that Bill C-69 will fix existing problems and help the environment, but with a little lobbying from wealthy corporations, destructive and polluting projects may still be allowed to move forward. The bill really emphasizes consulting the public, scientists, and indigenous peoples, but the minister will be able to approve a project even if the public is against it. Even if the entire province of Quebec opposes a project, the minister will still be able to move forward with it, invoking the national interest.

On another note, the bill missed the opportunity to remove a provision in the current act that makes Hydro-Québec subject to Ottawa. In the current legislation, Hydro-Québec must go through the National Energy Board to build international and interprovincial lines. Hydro-Québec must also have a permit to export electricity, and the Canadian government reserves the right to prevent Quebec from exporting its electricity surpluses.

The future Canadian energy commission will decide whether Quebec can export its surpluses after considering the impact those exports will have on the provinces, verifying whether anyone else has shown an interest in that electricity, and determining whether Hydro-Québec is making an effort to offer its electricity to Canadian buyers. Ottawa also reserves the right to refuse for other reasons. In short, Hydro-Québec is under federal control.

I have to say that the government has never abused that law in the past, but it could well decide to use the legislation to its advantage, thus harming Quebec. The minister could have taken the opportunity presented by this reform to remove all of those provisions. Unfortunately, she did not do so.

In short, this bill takes the wrong approach for Quebecers. By giving herself the right to approve a project regardless of the results of the agency's assessment, the minister is negating any positive effects this bill might have had. The government could impose projects such as energy east on Quebecers and they would have no way of preventing it. That is unacceptable. It is Quebec that has all the expertise and is assuming all the risks. The government needs to listen to Quebec and respect its choices. It is simple. This is simple, and I will repeat: what happens within our borders should be decided by us.

I would point out that the government did not even change its greenhouse gas reduction targets, which are the same as the Harper government's. That is why this bill is just an empty shell in our opinion, and that is why we will be voting against it. I encourage all my colleagues to vote in favour of my Bill C-392, which will give Quebec and the other provinces their say on projects that could have an impact on their environment and their people.

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• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, as we get closer to the windup of this debate, I want to make sure that we are really clear on the fact that as a government we recognize that in dealing with getting energy to the markets, a responsible government ensures that there is an environmental process. This legislation, in good part, deals with that. This is something that Canadians as a whole want to see, a progressive government that takes the environment seriously and therefore brings in legislation of this nature which establishes a process that I believe Canadians would actually welcome.

Does the member have any thoughts in regard to possible, specific amendments to the legislation?

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I do not mind saying that we think federalism is the problem. The federal government always has to override provincial legislation. That is the problem.

Here is a good example. When the Saint-Germain smelter in Drummondville went bankrupt, the land it was on was contaminated. The federal government owned the land, and Quebec companies that applied to clean up the site did not get the contract because, federal laws being looser than Quebec laws, their services cost more. By these loose federal standards, the land is decontaminated, but by our standards, it is still contaminated, which means that we will never be able to use it.

It is always the same old problem. Federal laws override Quebec laws meant to protect the environment and agricultural land.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the member's speech, she alluded to the fact that the minister could, on a whim, essentially approve or veto a pipeline project. That seems to be part of the problem. In as much as Bill C-69 is a framework, what it is lacking are rules that would apply consistently to all major pipeline projects, and this creates uncertainty and a whole host of other issues.

I was wondering if the hon. member could comment on that.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question. He highlighted the minister's veto power. That is what is important about this bill. Regardless of the laws and municipal bylaws, regardless of the public consultation, at the end of the day, the minister will always have the final say. This veto power is unacceptable.

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

I gather that my colleague analyzed Bill C-69 through the lens of her own bill, which I hope I will get a chance to speak on, because it has some interesting aspects and raises questions.

To come back to the essence of Bill C-69, at the beginning of her speech, my colleague welcomed the idea of the Liberal government

putting or wanting to put more emphasis on science. However, what happened under the Conservatives and is now continuing to happen under the Liberals is that every bill gives the ministers additional powers. In this case, although we do want to put more emphasis on science, the minister will have the power to save or kill a project with a snap of her fingers.

Is there not something of a disconnect between intention and execution?

• (1310)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I share his concerns.

This bill does indeed have some positive aspects. For example, there will be an agency with some experience in environment. Furthermore, environmental, social, economic, and health effects will be considered, as will public participation. We have all that in Quebec. We have an environmental review board called the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement that was created in the late 1970s under the René Lévesque government.

However, the minister will have veto power and will get to make the final decision, which is unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-69 is the latest monstrosity to come out of the Liberal government, a bill that will cripple Canada's energy industry and eliminate tens of thousands of good-paying jobs across communities in Canada, particularly in my home province of Alberta. This entire process is yet another concession made by the Liberal government to radical environmental groups that will not stop until Canada's oil and gas industry is eliminated.

I reject the argument that Canada's National Energy Board was not capable of making independent decisions based upon critical public evidence and public interest. Canada's environmental assessment process is among the best in the world, because for generations, Canadians have placed a high emphasis on environmental stewardship and responsible energy development. This symbiotic relationship has allowed Canada to be innovative with environmental regulation and solutions. Our energy industry as regulated under the National Energy Board has resulted in such benefits as hundreds of billions in investments, tax revenue, jobs, and long-term prosperity in our country.

The new Liberal environmental review process threatens that foundation and our long-term prosperity. In fact, we are already seeing that happen today. Our oil prices have doubled over the past year and yet Bloomberg reports that in 2017, foreign direct investment dropped by 27%. This is primarily due to the toxic political environment that has scared away investment from Canada's energy sector.

The always shifting goalposts of the Liberals' social licence requirements are dictated by a United States funded radical environmental lobbies. They are not acting in our country's interests; they are acting in their own self-interest. While Canada appears to have been assigned to the role of a national park for the enjoyment of Americans, the United States has pushed forward with groundbreaking LNG projects and a rapidly expanding export market for shale petroleum. Canada is a hostage to American interests as our lifeblood flows down into America at a dramatic discount, only to be repackaged on American tankers at a premium market price. Canadians are doing the work and we are letting Americans get all the profits.

We live in an age of globalization and our decisions affect our neighbours. However, the Liberals have gone too far and I do not believe that other countries have the right to interfere in our energy regulation. Would the Americans, the Chinese, or the Russians entertain delegations from Canada that opposed their energy development? Never, and yet the Liberal government has eliminated the standing test, which allows only those with a direct connection to the project to have a say. Allowing foreign citizens and foreign interests to influence our energy industry policies and whether or not our regulators will allow infrastructure to be built is an attack on Canadian sovereignty.

In closing, Bill C-69 undermines our nation. It would consign us to the status of a national park for the enjoyment of people around the world, to the detriment of Canadian citizens, people who need jobs and the prosperity and stability that is created by a responsible energy sector.

It is time for the Liberals to go back to the drawing board and create policies and regulations that will actually get shovels in the ground so that our critical LNG and pipeline projects can get the support they deserve.

•(1315)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 1:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 27, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 69.1, the first question is on part 1 regarding the impact assessment act, part 2 regarding the Canadian energy regulator act, the title, the preamble, the schedule, and all clauses in part 4, except clauses 85, 186, 187, and 195.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt these elements of the bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Private Members' Business

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): The recorded division on these elements of the bill stands deferred.

The next question is on part 3, regarding the Navigation Protection Act, and clauses 85, 186, 187, and 195 of part 4. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt these elements of the bill?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour 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): The recorded division on these elements of the bill stands deferred.

Normally at this time, the House would proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at second reading. However, pursuant to Standing Order 45, the recorded divisions stand deferred until Monday, March 19, 2018, at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to canvass the House you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 1:30 p.m., so that we can begin private members' business.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from December 8, 2017, consideration of the motion that Bill C-375, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (presentence report), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a good debate here on a Friday and I appreciate the time given to me by the House earlier with respect to my question of privilege.

I am rising now to speak on behalf of the Conservative Party with respect to Bill C-375 brought forward by the Liberal MP for Richmond Hill with respect to amending the Criminal Code. It is a short bill, because it is really trying to insert one element into the pre-sentence report. I will speak for a few moments about the bill's intention, from what I can find, and then some of the concerns we have with it essentially because it is vague and causes us some concern, which I will get into.

Specifically, the goal of the bill is to amend the pre-sentence report prepared under the auspices of the Criminal Code under subsection 721(3). It wants to insert a new ground for the pre-sentence report, which would be:

(a.1) any mental disorder from which the offender suffers as well as any mental health care programs available to them;

The MP for Richmond Hill with respect to introducing the bill has said that he wants it to include information on families with a history of mental illness to ensure that they are afforded care. We all agree with the afforded care aspect of this.

Mental health conditions and mental health conditions that may be involved in someone's criminal behaviour are serious but there also must be compassion. There is compassion with respect to treatment and making health care programs available and that sort of thing. Generally, our criminal justice system does that.

Various prisoner ombudsmen and people like that have highlighted that we do not have enough mental health resources within our criminal justice system, but the bill is not about that. The bill is about basically just highlighting mental health programming. I agree with that. That is reasonable. It is already being done now but perhaps it is not being done well enough. This legislation would insert that availability into the pre-sentence report. If the person is sentenced, that availability comes later but that is the part of this private member's legislation that we generally feel we are aligned with.

The trouble with the bill is that because it is vague, maybe intentionally so, it seems like mental health might be an aspect of every sentencing decision that a judge looks at in a criminal court context. This being only a one-line bill, it is hard for us to determine. There has not been much public discussion on this, so it is hard for us to determine if that is the case. That concerns me and I will get into why shortly.

Right now what is in the pre-sentence report under subsection 721(3) of the Criminal Code is age, character, maturity, history, including criminal history, and the remorse or willingness to make amends. These sorts of things are the typical aspects that go into the pre-sentence report that a judge will consider before rendering a sentence, after a finding of guilt.

The reference to mental health in a vague sense here, "any mental health disorder from which the offender suffers", does not actually go to intent or *mens rea* or *actus reus*, the fundamentals of criminal law. Was there a guilty mind? Was there a guilty act?

Is the member for Richmond Hill suggesting that even property crimes or things like that should consider all mental health aspects? It is not clear enough. If someone was depressed that would not necessarily mean he or she did not understand, that he or she did not have the *mens rea* to commit a theft. What is worse is when we start getting into crimes against other people. How does this relate to mental health impacting a decision when violence, for example, is committed against another citizen. This is why we have some concerns with it being vague.

Is the bill's intention to make this a requirement for consideration in all aspects of mental health or is it meant to be part of the general discussion on not criminally responsible due to mental disorder? That is already firmly established and I will talk about that in a moment.

● (1320)

I always try to remind people when we talk about criminal justice issues that rehabilitation, treatment, and all of those things are very important, and they have a place in our criminal justice system. However, what often is the difference in the House of Commons is that the Liberals or the NDP put rehabilitation of the offender always first, and in some cases, it is the only consideration with respect to sentencing and incarceration, whereas I find the Conservatives look at all aspects of the principles of sentencing an offender.

Remember, this is after a finding of guilt, regardless of what the underlying Criminal Code provision is. I refer the member and anyone following this debate to section 718 of the Criminal Code, which is our principles of sentencing. This is something we learn in law school, because it is kind of the foundation of our criminal justice system. While some people, advocates and people on the left, talk almost exclusively about rehabilitation, what are the principles of sentencing? What are the foundations of our criminal justice system? I will read them out.

The first is denunciation of unlawful conduct. The second is deterrence. The third is the separation of the offender and protection of society. The fourth is the assistance in the rehabilitation of the offender, which is the rehabilitation aspect. The fifth is reparation for criminal conduct on society or in some cases the victim. Finally, the last principle of sentencing in our Criminal Code is the promotion of a sense of responsibility.

I think that final one is probably the most important, alongside protection of the public in cases where there is violence. Certainly in cases where there is no violence, rehabilitation should probably be a key priority, especially for young people, and our system has that already. However, when we talk about cases that involve violence, that is when we think protection of the public, denunciation of conduct, promotion of a sense of responsibility, deterrence, and all of those other factors should take priority. I think average Canadians agree with that.

Private Members' Business

What is not clear about the bill is how it relates to capacity decisions of an offender. In pre-sentencing, is any mental health condition just part of a “not criminally responsible” discussion, because there is already provision for that, or is it just meant to be a consideration for later treatment? In the bill there is treatment and the consideration of historical conditions, and we see a lot of talk in society today now about trauma being intergenerational. Is intergenerational trauma somehow a consideration at pre-sentencing, meaning somebody should not receive a sentence appropriate because of trauma committed in the past? When there is a very light, vague bill, it is not clear for us to understand.

We already have a not criminally responsible provision for mental disorder where somebody does not have the capacity to understand, the *mens rea* or the mental intention of their act. They committed the act, the *actus reus*, which is one part of a criminal act. The *mens rea* or the mental intention is the other. We already have not criminally responsible.

In the Winko decision in 1999, the Supreme Court said that within that construct, if there is not capacity, then security of the public, if the offender is violent, is still a key priority. We talk about this often, because there are cases like the Schoenborn case in Merritt, B.C., where the public loses faith in the criminal justice system because they see NCR cases not having the protection of the public and other aspects of criminal sentencing principles applied. We know of the Vincent Li case in Manitoba and others. These erode public confidence in our system.

Our concern from the Conservative Party is that the bill is so vague. If this is just about making sure that treatment options are discussed while the person is incarcerated or serving a conditional sentence or something, that is one thing. However, with the consideration of historical mental illness and this sort of vague notion, we do not want to see a situation where there is a violent crime committed and the history of intergenerational trauma or depression would somehow be an excuse for the *mens rea*. Mental health conditions often will mean that people do have the capacity. I talk about veterans and mental health all the time. It is an injury in some cases, but that person still has the capacity.

Therefore, the MP for Richmond Hill has to shed a little more light on this to address these reasonable concerns.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House today to speak to Bill C-375, which would amend the Criminal Code in order to introduce information about mental health issues and disorders in pre-sentence reports.

The NDP is committed to building a criminal justice system that works for everyone. We want compassion and rehabilitation to be central to our policy. That is why my NDP colleagues and I will support this bill, which we believe is necessary to ensure fair and effective justice for all Canadians.

The NDP believes that this bill is a step in the right direction because it ensures that the judge will have all the information needed to hand down a fair and equitable ruling.

At present, nearly 36% of federal offenders need some form of psychiatric or psychological follow-up. I would remind the House, however, that paragraph 721(3)(a) of the Criminal Code requires only certain information to be included in a pre-sentence report, namely “the offender’s age, maturity, character, behaviour, attitude and willingness to make amends”, but nothing on possible mental health issues.

This is despite the fact that people with mental illness are currently overrepresented in our criminal justice system. It would therefore be a good idea to take them into account by including mental health information in pre-sentence reports so that judges can make fairer and more appropriate decisions. Adding information on offenders’ mental health represents a real opportunity to modernize our justice system and adapt it to reflect the current reality.

Bill C-375 is far from perfect, however. My NDP colleagues and I all agree that this bill desperately lacks ambition and does not go far enough. If we really want to bring about change, we need meaningful action on the accessibility of mental health care. Tuesday’s budget could have been an excellent opportunity to invest, but no.

The NDP believes that mental health care should be just as readily available and accessible as any other health care service in our communities. It is only logical and only fair that comparable resources be allocated to mental and physical illnesses.

We must continue to focus on compassionate care in order to help Canadians with mental illness rejoin society after incarceration and avoid over-criminalization wherever possible.

That is why I believe that it is high time for the Liberal government to invest in programs that will truly help people with mental illness before or during their time in the criminal justice system. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, over a million children and youth in Canada have a mental illness, yet less than 20% of them are able to get the treatment they need.

That is why, during the last election campaign, the NDP promised to create an innovation fund for youth mental health services, with a particular focus on first nations and rural and remote communities. This innovation fund would be a real way of proactively preventing crimes committed by people with mental illness.

Private Members' Business

I believe that we need to completely rethink the way we look at things. We need to take care of these people and ensure that they get the treatment they need instead of completely abandoning them as is currently far too often the case.

We must also remember that these people who have serious illnesses often do not have the skills or the ability to adapt to the prison environment. However, with the closure of care facilities for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities, the criminal justice system has become a refuge for people who do not have the resources to cope with life in society.

Solitary confinement and other such measures meant to enhance prison security are never appropriate solutions for people with mental illness. When they leave prison, they end up having untreated or aggravated mental health problems, which may contribute to recidivism.

● (1330)

While the Conservatives want to focus on harsher penalties that will only make matters worse, the NDP prefers to focus on real solutions. This is why the NDP believes in helping convicts who have a mental disorder get access to resources and support so that they can rehabilitate and reintegrate as productive members of society. We believe that we must do everything to reintegrate former inmates into society and to make sure they have the tools to do so.

I want to take a moment to highlight a number of organizations in my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot that are working very hard to help people with mental illnesses and their families. These organizations include The Lighthouse; Les Ateliers de transition; the Auberge du coeur Le Baluchon; the Centre psychosocial Richelieu-Yamaska; the Centre de femmes L'autonomie en soiE; the Collectif de défense des droits de la Montérégie; the Maison alternative de développement humain, or MADH, as it is known; the Trait d'Union Montérégien; and, of course, our volunteer centres and our health and social services institutions.

Every day, these organizations work to help people in need and contribute to improving life for the entire Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale community. Le Phare is one such organization. Its mission is to bring together and help the loved ones of a person with serious mental health problems and provide them with a wide range of support services in order to help them reintegrate into society more easily.

Saint-Hyacinthe and the surrounding region can also count on the work of the Centre psychosocial Richelieu-Yamaska, which has set out to help people with mental health problems in their quest for a better quality of life with a focus on significant and lasting integration into the community.

It is thanks to local organizations like those that we can change things. That is why I believe that we must help them at a federal level in order to allow them to continue their vital mission.

I want to acknowledge another community organization in my riding in particular, the Trait d'Union Montérégien, a not-for-profit community organization that provides a sponsorship service for the social reintegration of adults who have lived with, continue to live with, or are at risk of living with emotional distress.

Since 1991, more than 300 people were able to meet a friend through this organization. When one understands how much support a good friend can provide, one understands how essential an organization like Trait d'Union Montérégien is for people who do not benefit from such relationships in their usual social circle.

The work that these organizations do is invaluable and a source of hope for thousands of people across Canada who are struggling with mental illness. However, I believe that it is vital that the government take action at the national level because the work that these community organizations do locally is not enough to bring about real change. That is why the NDP committed to working with all community workers, mental health professionals, front line workers such as the RCMP, and the provincial and territorial justice systems to seek better support services for people with mental illnesses. I encourage the government to do the same.

I repeat that the NDP will support this bill. However, my colleagues and I believe that the government needs to do more to deal with the overrepresentation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system.

In our eyes, amending our Criminal Code to include information about mental health issues and disorders in pre-sentence reports is a good start. In conclusion, however, this move falls well short of what is needed to make a real difference for the thousands of people suffering from mental health issues who need real support from the federal government. It is time for the government to find the courage to release funds for mental health care. That is the kind of ambitious initiative I was expecting from the 2018 federal budget, but sadly, we will have to keep waiting.

● (1335)

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to speak to private member's Bill C-375, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to pre-sentence reports.

[English]

Let me say at the outset that our government will be supporting Bill C-375, and we commend the hon. member for Richmond Hill for his leadership and collaboration on the important issue of mental health in our criminal justice system.

Private Members' Business

I was listening very carefully to some of the concerns expressed by my Conservative colleague from the riding of Durham. It is important to address the thrust of it, which is that this private member's bill is somehow vague. In fact, in our interpretation of this private member's bill, it serves to clarify and cure a vagueness in the Criminal Code by making an express reference to mental health concerns in the context of the criminal sentencing process. What is important for my hon. colleague to appreciate is that in that context, when we are talking about finding someone not criminally responsible as a result of not having the mental capacity to appreciate the consequences of committing a criminal offence, it is a separate and distinct legal concept from the provisions under sections 718 and 721 of the Criminal Code, where after an accused individual pleads guilty and has accepted responsibility for committing those offences, a judge would take into consideration mental health issues as part of the overall sentencing exercise. I offer those comments in the spirit of constructive dialogue.

Let me say for my hon. colleague from Richmond Hill that in the first hour of second reading debate, the sponsor stated that his bill is intended to ensure that individuals with mental illnesses who find themselves in the criminal justice system are afforded the care, compassion, and appropriate treatment they need during the process of their rehabilitation. Specifically, the bill aims to make the criminal justice system more responsive to individuals with mental health issues by amending subsection 721(3) of the Criminal Code to specify that a pre-sentence report must contain information regarding any mental disorder from which the offender suffers.

• (1340)

[Translation]

A pre-sentence report is a written document prepared by a probation officer to help the court learn more about the person to be sentenced. Its purpose is to assist the court in making the appropriate sentencing decision. These reports are intended to be an accurate, independent, and balanced assessment of an offender and his or her prospects for the future.

[English]

Accordingly, these pre-sentence reports help to provide judges with a firm evidentiary basis on which to exercise their discretion at sentencing. When judges are given the necessary background and context about each unique set of circumstances, the result is a sentence that better protects the community, rehabilitates the offender, and ultimately reduces crime.

[Translation]

The Criminal Code currently outlines that certain information about the offender, including his or her age, maturity, character, behaviour, attitude, and willingness to make amends, should be contained in a pre-sentence report.

[English]

It should also include the criminal history of the offender under the Youth Criminal Justice Act and the history of previous sentences and findings of guilt. The history of alternative measures used to deal with the offender, and the offender's response to those measures, should similarly be contained in the report. Those measures may

include judicial cautions or programs requiring community service or repairing harm done.

However, the Criminal Code does not presently expressly require that information about the mental condition of the offender, as it relates to the offence, be included in the pre-sentence report. In my view, this is highly relevant information for a judge who is attempting to craft an appropriate sentence. Indeed, as we learn more and more about the role of mental health issues in contributing to criminal behaviour, the importance of considering this information at sentencing is beyond question.

The impacts of mental illness are of course not limited to the criminal justice system. They are linked to much broader challenges being faced by our society as a whole. Today mental health issues cost Canadians millions of dollars each year. As the sponsor has previously said, it is estimated that the total cost of mental health challenges exceeds \$50 billion annually in health care expenses and lost productivity. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, in any given year, one in five people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness. These challenges are even more pronounced in the criminal justice system.

While statistics are not as fulsome as we may like, there is evidence to suggest that in our penitentiaries, mental health issues are two to three times more prevalent than in the general population. The rate of mental illness among federal offenders has more than doubled in the last 20 years. In fact, individuals with mental illness are more likely to be arrested, detained, and incarcerated and are consequently more likely to be disciplined rather than treated. This is an ongoing issue, as once they have been released from the criminal justice system, they are also more likely to be rearrested and to reoffend. In other words, an offender whose mental illness is unrecognized and untreated is at far greater risk of being caught in the revolving door of incarceration and repeat offending.

[Translation]

That is why we need to continue to develop measures like the one proposed in Bill C-375, to address mental health in a proactive way. In particular, the bill will help to ensure that our judges are well-equipped to assess the needs of those being sentenced and enable them to direct the offenders to proper rehabilitation. This, ultimately, will help to break the vicious cycle of criminality by addressing this issue at the outset.

Private Members' Business

• (1345)

[English]

The social and economic benefits of this smart and proactive approach to criminal justice can hardly be overstated. Under the prior government, we saw time and time again that a regressive approach to sentencing divides families and consumes financial resources that could be better used to improve the lives of Canadians and to keep all of them safe. Instead, by identifying and meeting the mental health needs of offenders in the short term, we can stop that revolving door of chronic reoffending and create a safer, more prosperous community for all. All of this begins by identifying the underlying problem, which is precisely what Bill C-375 works to ensure.

It appears to me that supporting this bill is consistent with a number of broader initiatives of our government that are aimed at supporting those mental health issues, and they go back to our prior budgets. In budget 2018, we build on the investments made in past years, proposing an additional \$20.4 million over five years, beginning in 2018-19, and \$5.6 million per year ongoing. The funding is aligned with the recently announced investment of \$5 billion over 10 years to improve mental health services across the country.

Bill C-375 is also consistent with the mandate given by the Prime Minister to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. In particular, she was directed to “address gaps in services to...those with mental illness throughout the criminal justice system.” In my view, the measures proposed in Bill C-375 are consistent with that mandate and will serve to advance our government's broader plan to address the challenges related to mental health in Canada.

Before concluding, I wish to draw attention to a few questions I have identified with this bill. I would like to think that these issues could be studied by the committee and possibly addressed through minor amendments.

First, I note that the bill focuses on the need for a diagnosis of an offender, and not on the symptoms or behaviours that manifest as a result of a mental health issue. In my view, it would be more useful to a sentencing judge to have broader information about the offender's mental health more generally, rather than the official diagnosis.

Second, I would note that the bill does not contain a link or a nexus between the mental health information that is sought and the purpose for which it will be used. For me, this raises some concerns that a sentencing court could be provided with mental health information that may not be directly relevant to the offence, and by extension the sentencing process. I trust that these are issues the committee will address through its study.

Finally, it seems to me that the language with respect to “mental health programs” could create some confusion as to what type of information should be provided to the court. In my view, it is unclear what is meant by the term “programs”, as mental health care is, indeed, a specific type of medical care and not specifically delivered through programming.

Once again, I expect that all these issues can be thoroughly addressed at committee.

I would once again like to thank the sponsor of this bill and commend him for his work and his commitment to mental health issues. I know that it comes from a place of great sincerity and authenticity. I look forward to supporting this private member's bill, along with all members of the House.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to discuss my private members' bill, Bill C-375. At the outset, I would like to thank all members who have substantially contributed to the substance of this private members' bill. I would like to thank the members today for once again covering the scope and intent of the bill.

For the next four minutes, I limit my remarks to responding to some of the concerns raised earlier as part of the first hour of debate. I listened intently to those members who spoke previously to the bill. While the debate has been spirited, I have been encouraged by its good faith and co-operative nature. In and of itself, this is an acknowledgment by all parties that there is a need for real change at the intersection between our justice system and mental health. I hope that Bill C-375 can play a role in this change and inform future changes as governments of today and tomorrow navigate that dynamic relationship.

If I could, I would like to take some time to address the contradictions and inaccuracies raised by some of my colleagues across the aisle during the first hour of debate. They raised two concurrent concerns. First is that, in cases where mental health information is relevant, judges already choose to include mental health information in pre-sentence reports. Second is that the process of mandating that this information be provided where relevant would add a new burden to the justice system.

I think the contradiction here is very clear. If judges are already choosing to include this information in the pre-sentence report in all relevant cases, then we are simply codifying an existing practice. There can be no additional burden because this practice is already applied when relevant. As well, if this legislation would add a burden, then we must accept that mental health information is, in fact, not being requested in all relevant cases.

While we are on the topic of additional burdens, it is my understanding that a sentence imposed without reference to relevant, available medical evidence is vulnerable to attack on appeal. Whatever hypothetical burden would be added to the justice system by adding additional information to a pre-sentence report cannot possibly compare to the burden of time and cost that the judiciary is opened to by vulnerable verdicts.

In addition, more than one of my colleagues have suggested that providing mental health information in pre-sentence reports would result in unfairness and inconsistencies in the administration of justice, by which they must mean to say that judges will make considered decisions based on information they would otherwise not have had. This is an intended feature, not a bug. I trust our judiciary. I consider them credible decision-makers and I trust they will not become confused when provided with additional context. However, for our judges to make an informed consideration, they must have all the facts.

Mental health is an ongoing project, a frontier of medical and social science. Even those at the forefront of their field continue to make new discoveries and find new connections and contexts. As such, judges must be provided with all information, whenever possible, so as not to prejudge an offender before they have all the facts. In this constantly changing field, what may or may not be pertinent is in flux, and it is unreasonable to expect every judge to take full account of relevant mental health information in the absence of the facts and context contained in the pre-sentence report.

There have also been colleagues who have suggested this bill would not go far enough. I agree. In drafting legislation, particularly private members' bills, there may be a tendency to err on the side of caution. To narrow the scope, one must consider the end result. I am proud of the bill as it stands, but far be it from me to suggest we cannot broaden its scope or clarify its existing intent. I believe the House stands united in our belief that improvements can and must be made at the intersection of our sentencing process and the lived reality of Canadians who continue to struggle with mental health.

Private Members' Business

● (1350)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 21, 2018, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

The House stands adjourned until Monday, March 19, 2018, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:54 p.m.)

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