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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1000)

[*English*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled "Labour Market Assessment—2018".

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

CANADA-ISRAEL FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

Hon. Bardish Chagger (for the Minister of International Trade Diversification) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-85, An Act to amend the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

PETITIONS

CANADA SUMMER JOBS INITIATIVE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition from my constituents in Oshawa. They are concerned about the Liberals' manipulation of the summer jobs program and its attestation test. In Oshawa, it primarily affects faith-based organizations that hire summer students to provide summer camps, day camps and things along these lines.

It is a huge precedent denying funding for Canadians simply because they have a different belief than the government of the day. There is a concern about what is next. The petitioners are calling on the government to end this discrimination against faith-based organizations.

POSTAL BANKING

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to table this petition. The petitioners are calling on the government to adopt Motion No. 166 on postal banking. They point out the fact that many people are relying on payday lenders and that Canada Post has over 3,800 outlets where it could, in regions that are rural and northern, serve people who generally are unbanked.

● (1005)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition. The petitioners are calling on Parliament to pass Bill C-350 and Bill S-240 dealing with the practice of organ harvesting.

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by several hundred people, most of them from Quebec but also some from other places in Canada. According to the petitioners, there is far too much plastic in our lakes, rivers and oceans. They are asking the government to adopt a national strategy to combat plastic pollution in collaboration with first nations, the provinces and municipalities.

[*English*]

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling this petition supporting two bills before the House, Bill C-350 and Bill S-240, dealing with international trafficking in human organs. The petitioners would appreciate the government passing these quickly.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand and present this petition signed by many from Quebec in support of Bill C-350 in the House and Bill S-240 in the other place. They are calling on the government to speed up the passage of these bills prohibiting the use of organ harvesting.

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from many petitioners throughout Quebec and the country. They are very concerned that the government would purchase Kinder Morgan, making such a poor decision with the investment of tax dollars.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to present a petition, in addition to my colleagues, condemning organ harvesting. The petitioners call for the House to adopt Bill C-350 and Bill S-240.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition today that encourages the House to pass Bill C-350 and also Bill S-240 in the Senate opposing organ harvest transplants.

[*Translation*]

WINE AND ALCOHOL TAX

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition against the wine and alcohol excise tax hike in the previous Liberal budget. The tax hike is hurting small wineries and microbreweries in my riding, and the petitioners strongly oppose it.

[*English*]

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to also table a petition in support of Bill C-350 and Bill S-240. These are important bills that would address the issue of international organ harvesting, making it a criminal offence for a Canadian to go abroad and obtain an organ for which there has not been consent, and that would also deal with inadmissibility to Canada of people who have been involved in international organ trafficking.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also stand today to present a petition regarding Bill C-350 regarding the international harvesting of organs.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by dozens of Canadians right across Canada. They wish to draw the attention of the House to concern about international trafficking in human organs. They call for the speedy passage of Bill C-350 as well as Bill S-240.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am rising with a petition in support of these two bills, one from the Senate and one from the House. The issue of organ harvesting to which attention is drawn by the petitioners is one that has resulted in the deaths of many thousands of involuntary donors of organs, prisoners whose organs are harvested in an abuse of human rights that has had no parallel since the abuses of the Nazis in the Second World War. We need to try to stop this. That is what the petitioners want us to do, and these bills would help accomplish that goal.

● (1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

BILL C-83—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

> That, in relation to Bill C-83, An Act to Amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another Act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the Bill; and
>
> That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on the day allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the said Bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the Bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so that the Chair will have some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in this question period.

The hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is indicative of what the Liberals have been doing overall on this bill, which is very disturbing to see. This is a bill that would have a direct effect on the men and women who put their lives on the line every day dealing with the most dangerous, horrific criminals in Canada.

Corrections officers do not like this bill. The government has not talked with them about this bill. It has not talked or consulted with them on the very dangerous and very real implications for the men and women who serve as corrections officers.

This bill would be taking away the ability of corrections officers to put individuals in solitary confinement for the protection of other inmates, the protection of themselves or the protection of guards.

We are again seeing the Liberals focusing on protecting criminals, focusing on worrying about the comfort of criminals who are serving their time in federal penitentiaries, and shutting down any discussion or debate. It is shameful to see.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will not surprise or shock anyone that I disagree with most, if not all, of those comments. First, what we are seeking to do is to send this legislation to committee. This legislation will have been before the House for three days.

My hon. colleague referred to the importance of hearing from correctional officers. I personally have a large federal correctional institution in my riding. In fact, there are three institutions. I have had a chance to meet with the union representatives for correctional officers on a number of occasions. I think it is always important to listen to those men and women who work in the system. Having the legislation at committee would allow us to do exactly that.

As my hon. colleague noted, this legislation has been before the House for some time. If we fail to enact legislation by December of this year or January of next year, because of court decisions in two jurisdictions, we could very well find ourselves in a situation where the institutions would have no recourse to the proper tools to ensure safety.

● (1015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I am not mistaken, this is the 48th time this government has moved time allocation. With the election only a year away, I imagine the Liberals are trying to step up the pace in order to match the record set by the previous government. In terms of the bill's substance, it basically changes a term; it makes a minor change to administrative segregation. Ultimately, it solves nothing. Ontario and British Columbia courts have ruled that administrative segregation is unconstitutional.

The minister just mentioned the two decisions in question and the fact that measures need to be taken quickly. However, I wonder if the minister can explain to me why his party is rushing a bill that completely fails to address those court decisions. On top of that, we had a bill on the Order Paper, and the government is appealing the B. C. Supreme Court ruling. I do not quite understand where the government is going with that.

Why did it not simply respect the courts' decisions and introduce a bill that really reflects those decisions?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly for his comments. Let me reassure him. I know he must be very worried about the use of time allocation. I can assure him that we are nowhere near the historical record set by the former Conservative government. I think he will agree that it is likely to remain a record for a long time.

However, we agree that this bill needs to be studied by a parliamentary committee, which is precisely where this kind of issue could be examined. I do not agree with my colleague, because not passing a bill in the next few months could in fact take away the appropriate tools available to the management of correctional institutions under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is extremely important to our government. We believe that this bill is consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the court decisions. That is why we are asking members to send it to committee quickly.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister wants us to send the bill to committee quickly. Naturally, we on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security will study it and propose the necessary amendments, but the majority will probably vote down our amendments.

That is why debates in the House are so crucial. Many opposition members have important speeches to give, because they also have concerns about the correctional system. Yes, there are some important judgments, and certain things need to be taken into consideration in that regard. However, the correctional officers' unions have been largely ignored, although it is vital that they be heard.

My colleague said that he met with union representatives from three correctional institutions in his riding. However, I myself met with people from Donnacona Institution two weeks ago, and they made it clear that the government was not listening to them.

This week, even union president Jason Godin said there would be a blood bath in the penitentiaries if Bill C-83 were passed. Those are his words. This government does not want to listen to what we have to say and just wants to rush things through. Many concerns remained unaddressed and the answers we have been given so far are incomprehensible.

I would like the minister to tell us why he does not want to listen to what we have to say.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for his intervention.

I agree with him in part. It is indeed important to listen and consider the experience, judgment and suggestions of correctional services professionals. As I told him, as the member for Beauséjour, I have had many opportunities to meet extraordinary women and men who work for the Correctional Service of Canada. We know that their working conditions are often extremely difficult and we have a lot of respect for them. That is partly why we believe that CSC needs to have the right tools for ensuring safety in the institutions, including the safety of the inmates and the staff who work there.

That is why, in the wake of the court rulings, that apply not just in one jurisdiction, but in many jurisdictions in Canada, including rulings based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we think that it is the right time to renew the tools available to the Correctional Service of Canada to uphold the rights of prisoners and, most importantly, to ensure safety and security in the institutions, including the safety of employees and visitors.

● (1020)

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the government that I am deeply disappointed that it is imposing a time allocation motion on Bill C-83 because this bill was introduced in response to court rulings.

This bill does not call into question administrative segregation by proposing other solutions. All it does is call administrative segregation by a different name and make slight changes to a few measures. I am very concerned because this bill does not seem to respond to the courts' decisions. I would like the House to come up with a solution that truly addresses the courts' decisions so that we do not end up back at square one in a few months when the bill is once again challenged because it did not respond to the court rulings.

Why rush the study of this bill when we know why it was introduced?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her comments.

We are trying to do exactly what my colleague talked about. We are in the process of responding purposefully and appropriately to the courts' decisions. What we are proposing in the bill is very different from the current system. There will be structured intervention units. We are doubling the number of hours inmates spend outside their cells and guaranteeing them a minimum of two hours a day of human interaction, whether it is with staff, volunteers, health care providers, chaplains or visitors with whom the inmates interact well. We are therefore responding specifically to the courts' concerns and have been for some time.

I am from New Brunswick, and I clearly remember the tragic case of Ashley Smith, a young woman from Moncton, near where I live. We are very aware of the need to have appropriate tools that comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and that enable those responsible to keep everyone in these institutions safe, particularly staff and visitors. That is clearly our government's priority.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs makes reference time and time again to responding to the courts and yet whether we look at the Ontario Superior Court decision, the British Columbia Supreme Court decision, the Mandela rules or the 1996 Arbour commission, none of those commissions, neither of the two decisions at hand call upon the government to take away, in all circumstances, administrative and disciplinary segregation. It is the Liberal government moving ahead with that unilaterally to take away a vital tool for correctional officers to use to protect the security of other inmates, the security of correctional officers, the integrity of criminal investigations and the security of inmates themselves. Why would the government do that?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton asks why the government would do that. Actually, the government would not do that and that is not what we are doing. My hon. colleague knows very well that this government takes the safety and security of correctional institutions extremely seriously. We agree that correctional institutions must always have a way of separating inmates who pose a risk to the safety of other inmates, staff and visitors in these facilities and in some cases their own safety as well.

The new secure intervention units will allow for those offenders to be removed from the general population. That way, we are ensuring that even while they are separated, unlike the previous system, they retain access to rehabilitative programs, health programs and mental health treatment as well. Our main priority is to ensure, as I said, the safety of these correctional institutions.

With all the respect I have for my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton, he arrives at a conclusion that is not entirely accurate. The government would never proceed in the way that he described in his comments.

● (1025)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the minister highlight what he sees as the key benefits of getting this to committee, where people involved in the correctional system can testify at committee, tell their stories and let the committee make any amendments deemed necessary from those witnesses giving information?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, in spite of my colleague from Avalon having only been elected to Parliament three years ago, he is a very insightful parliamentarian who understands, deliberately and profoundly, our parliamentary system and the procedures of the House of Commons. It is certainly my hope that he will continue to serve in this place for many decades to come. I cannot imagine the people of Avalon could find a better representative for their constituency than the member who is serving here now.

He highlights exactly the importance of allowing a committee of parliamentarians representing all parties in the House to scrutinize this legislation, to hear from experts and witnesses. Some in the House may choose to only be interested in listening to one particular perspective. I would urge members on that committee to listen to all perspectives and help us craft the best legislation possible to ensure the safety of correctional institutions, the remarkable women and men who work in those institutions, but also comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I cannot imagine any member of Parliament would want otherwise.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that what we are debating today is time allocation.

I want to go back to 2015 when the Liberals made a number of commitments. They promised electoral reform, and what happened? They ditched it. They promised to get back to a balanced budget and the budget would balance itself, and what happened? They blew through $20 billion, so there is no plan to get back to a balanced budget. On ethics, they promised an open and transparent government, and what happened? There has been a rotating door to the Ethics Commissioner, with the Prime Minister, for the first time ever, being found guilty of violating the Conflict of Interest Act. They also promised to respect Parliament.

How is not coming to an agreement with the opposition on the time that is required to debate, which is a simple thing to do if it is broached in good faith, respecting Parliament?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure all members will agree with me, but perhaps some might. It is somewhat ironic for a member of the Conservative Party to be feigning indignation with respect to a parliamentary process that was not allowed to run its course over and over again. My colleague from the NDP I think highlighted the historic record of time allocation and closure used by the Conservative member's party when it was in power some short three years ago. Therefore, I think we can discount that comment.

What we can retain from my hon. colleague's intervention is our government's concern for public safety. When people are incarcerated in federal correctional institutions, it is incumbent on any government to ensure that they receive the mental health and rehabilitative services and what is needed for them, because the vast majority of people who are incarcerated in federal institutions also return to society. All of us want those people to return to society healthier and in a position where they will not reoffend. That is what makes communities safer. We believe that with the significant financial investments that our government is prepared to make and these new measures, we are going to strike exactly that balance and keep those in the institutions safe and also focus on the safety of communities and Canadians. That is our priority.

● (1030)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting because the minister used the justification of the court decisions that have come out as a reason for rushing through this legislation, cutting short debate and using time allocation. The question I have for him is this. The B.C. Supreme Court found that the abusive use of solitary confinement in federal penitentiaries is unconstitutional. Now he is saying that this legislation will respond to the court's decision and make this practice constitutional. The reality is the federal government is appealing that decision. Can the minister tell me why on the one hand it is rushing through legislation that it said addresses the court's concerns and on the other hand it is appealing the court decision, saying it is wrong and that everything is fine and dandy? It does not make sense. Moreover, it looks even sillier when we consider there is a piece of legislation that actually made Correctional Services more accountable and probably came closer, while not being good enough, that was already on the Order Paper from June of 2017, which has not even been debated. This is a new piece of legislation. The government is all over the map on this. Perhaps the minister can enlighten me a bit.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to enlighten my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly. He asked a number of important questions. He is correct that the practice of administrative segregation both in provincial institutions and, what obviously is of concern to us, in federal institutions has been the subject of a number of court cases. He referred to the court case in British Columbia. It has been before superior and appeal courts in other jurisdictions. My hon. colleague will also know that this matter is also subject to a number of potential class action lawsuits. While the court rulings in British Columbia and Ontario, as my colleague properly noted, are under appeal, one is under appeal by our government and one is under appeal by another party, as we sit here today, those rulings declaring segregation as currently practised to be unconstitutional will take effect at the end of this year and we have to be ready for that. Our position is that it would be irresponsible to leave the correctional authorities without the appropriate tools that respect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our position would also allow them to ensure the safety of the institutions in which they serve and of course ensure the public safety of all Canadians.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we are debating time allocation, we have heard the argument, which seems to come up virtually every time, this tired piece of "would it not be better to just get this bill to committee", as if that is an excuse or a substitution for a fulsome debate in this House. Therefore, I would ask the member this. Why is it so important that we rush this to committee amid this seemingly contradictory agenda of the government that was brought up in the previous intervention and not allow all members of Parliament to represent their constituents and speak on this bill if they have something they want to contribute to the debate on it in the House?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would not purport to take the member's comments as disingenuous. The hon. member wants to represent his constituents and serve in this House, but I would urge him to think carefully about the parliamentary process. By allowing this proposed legislation to go to committee, we can hear from colleagues on the public safety committee, and we can hear from Canadians who have real and significant experience in these matters.

The Conservative Party moved a reasoned amendment on the first day of debate. People at home may not understand what this is, and one could argue that it was not very reasoned anyway, but there is a parliamentary tool called a "reasoned amendment", which is designed to ensure that the legislation never passes.

Therefore, on the first day of debate in this House, the Conservative Party moved an amendment designed to jam the legislation. Those members should not now be standing and saying, "Oh my God, we need to hear from every member in the House on this important bill." That is a fundamental contradiction.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister will know that there are no contradictions in this corner. I opposed the anti-democratic use of time allocation time and time again in the 41st Parliament, and I am deeply distressed to see that it is the go-to place for the current government.

It restricts the ability to fully debate an important piece of proposed legislation before the committee stage. Members of Parliament in the same situation I am in have no access to those committees. Therefore, full debate at second reading before going to committee is really an important aspect of parliamentary democracy.

It grieves me that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is carrying the can for the Minister of Public Safety, who is not at this point arguing this offensive use of time allocation yet again before we get to fully debate the bill. I would urge my hon. friend, and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is indeed a friend, to reconsider and let this bill have full debate.

● (1035)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the comment. If we are looking to find contradictory statements and behaviour, I would not start in that corner. The member is right. She has the virtue of being able to be consistent in all these matters, and for that she has my respect and affection.

The member is correct in that members who serve in this House representing their constituents from non-recognized parties, in some cases, are not able to access the committee proceedings as other members might. Therefore, I want to assure the hon. member that we would be happy to welcome her at the public safety committee. My colleagues from the Liberal side on that committee will obviously ensure that she is able to participate and ask questions, because we think it is important to hear her voice on a committee like that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think everyone recognizes that this is a sensitive topic that warrants due consideration and that every parliamentarian who wants to speak should have the opportunity to do so.

My hon. colleague is an influential minister in the current government, an 18-year veteran parliamentarian who was first elected in 2000. Not to mention that through his father, he was quite aware of what was going on here. His father was a credit to our country, having served as governor general and in other roles.

I remind my distinguished colleague that he was elected three years and two days ago on a specific platform. The following is a header from the Liberal Party platform on page 30: "We will not resort to legislative tricks to avoid scrutiny." In fact, the Liberals have done this 44 times in the past three years.

Is this member proud of this record?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his comments. Even though he does not have much experience as a parliamentarian here in the House, we are all familiar with his career in the Quebec National Assembly. He was a top-notch parliamentarian when he served there.

I am very pleased that my colleague took the time to read the Liberal election platform. I suggest he read it again. Some of the ideas will soothe his soul and he will understand why Canadians chose a progressive government that respects the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This is why we think it is important to get this bill to committee to ensure that our institutions have the tools they need to be safe and to keep Canadians safe.

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are two aspects of the legislation that I find particularly interesting. I have some questions about it and would like to see the committee expand further on them. The first is with respect to body scanners. The second is with respect to secure intervention units.

Can the minister explain how these additional costs are expected to be funded? Of course, without the appropriate funding, as we have learned from previous governments, the change is not going to be effective.

How has the government ensured that in this bill there will be appropriate funding for the changes for body scanners and for the secure intervention units?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague for St. John's East focused on two very important aspects of this legislation.

One aspect is the increased use of body scanners to help keep drugs and other contraband out of the institutions. This legislation specifically authorizes the use of these body scanners, which are comparable to the technology currently used at airports. Our government has indicated that all of these important technological investments will be available for institutions, so that the men and women who are responsible for those institutions may access that technology.

Also, the secure intervention units are a model that we think offers the best chance of ensuring the safety of the institution while continuing to ensure the rehabilitation of these offenders and giving them access to increased mental health services. It is something again that our government has announced considerable investments in, because we think that it is part of ensuring public safety and the safety of the men and women who work in these institutions.

My colleague has identified two very important pieces of this legislation. I know all members of this House thank him for that important insight.

● (1040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, the government wants to implement the use of body scanners in penitentiaries, which is a good idea that I hope will be applied to all visitors, inmates and even staff. Can the minister tell us today if his government will immediately stop the implementation of the needle exchange program in penitentiaries?

That program is really a very bad idea. Since body scanners will identify 95% or more of the objects and drugs that enter penitentiaries, the use of needles will no longer be necessary.

Will the government end the program?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I want to again thank our colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

I am pleased that he agrees with us that the appropriate use of body scanners will play a major role in preventing the entry of drugs and other substances that could jeopardize institutional security.

In our view, it is important to listen to the professional men and women working inside correctional institutions. They are extraordinary people who are dedicated to the safety of the public and the institutions and to the treatment of those incarcerated.

As a government, every decision we make concerning the Correctional Service of Canada will be based on science, evidence and the importance of ensuring the safety of all Canadians and of correctional institutions, which are an integral part of our security across the country.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1120)

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

(Division No. 898)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Anandasangaree
Arya
Badawey
Baylis
Bibeau
Blair
Bossio
Brison
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhaliwal
Dubourg
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fergus
Finnigan
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Gerretsen
Gould
Grewal
Hardie
Hébert
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jordan
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Morrissey
Nassif
Ng
Oliver
Ouellette
Philpott
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sarai
Schiefke
Serré
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Tabbara
Tassi
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
Amos
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Bennett
Bittle
Boissonnault
Breton
Caesar-Chavannes
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Dabrusin
DeCourcey
Dhillon
Duguid
Easter
El-Khoury
Eyking
Fillmore
Fisher
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Garneau
Goldsmith-Jones
Graham
Hajdu
Harvey
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Jones
Jowhari
Khera
Lametti
Lapointe
LeBlanc
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
Maloney
McDonald
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Murray
Nault
Oliphant
O'Regan
Peterson
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
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Sangha
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Schulte
Sgro
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
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Stubbs
Thériault
Trost
Van Kesteren
Warawa
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to ask you to rule new clause 344.1 in Bill C-76, reported back from the Procedure and House Affairs Committee yesterday afternoon, out of order for offending the so-called parent act rule.

Before getting into the substance of my argument, I want to acknowledge that this is essentially an appeal of a committee chair's ruling. However, this issue falls within the allowable categories of such points of order. On April 28, 1992, at page 9801 of the Debates, Speaker Fraser said:

> As the House knows, the Speaker does not intervene on matters upon which committees are competent to take decisions. However, in cases where a committee has exceeded its authority, particularly in relation to bills, the Speaker has been called upon to deal with such matters after a report has been presented to the House.

Your immediate predecessor cited this passage as an authority in a ruling he delivered in relation to the parent act rule on May 1, 2014, at page 4787 of the Debates.

Turning to the substance of my point of order, the parent act rule, page 771 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states:

> In the case of a bill referred to a committee after second reading, an amendment is inadmissible if it proposes to amend a statute that is not before the committee or a section of the parent Act, unless the latter is specifically amended by a clause of the bill.

That latter point traces back to citation 698(8)(b) of Beauschene's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, sixth edition, edited by Fraser, Dawson, and Holtby.

In the present case, an amendment, known in the Procedure and House Affairs Committee proceedings as "Liberal amendment 55", purported to add a new clause to Bill C-76 for the purpose of making an amendment to section 498 of the Canada Elections Act. Bill C-76, as introduced, would amend both sections 497.5 and 499 of the Canada Elections Act, the two sections that bookend section 498, but not section 498 itself.

In ruling on my point of order at committee, the chair stated that there is an exception to the parent act rule for consequential amendments, but cited no authority in that regard. An exception such as that could have wide-sweeping consequences, which merits a passing reference somewhere in our various procedural authorities so that members may be guided appropriately.

No such reference, aside, or footnote articulating this exception to such a clear-cut rule appears in a canvassing of Bosc and Gagnon, O'Brien and Bosc, Marleau and Montpetit, Beauschene's or Erskine May. However, I have found the words of Mr. Speaker Fraser, from the ruling I cited earlier:

> When a bill is referred to a standing or legislative committee of the House, that committee is only empowered to adopt, amend or negative the clauses found in that piece of legislation and to report the bill to the House with or without amendments. The committee is restricted in its examination in a number of ways. It cannot infringe on the financial initiative of the Crown, it cannot go beyond the scope of the bill as passed at second reading, and it cannot reach back to the parent act to make further amendments not contemplated in the bill no matter how tempting this may be.

This sentiment was reiterated much more recently by no less an authority than this House's esteemed former law clerk, Rob Walsh. Mr. Walsh, at page 115 of his book *On the House: An Inside Look at the House of Commons*, published just last autumn, offered this perspective from a drafter's point of view:

> An amendment to a bill amending an existing Act of Parliament, if passed, cannot amend a section in the "parent act" that may be implicated in the change but is not being amended in the bill. As a lawyer, I found this rule problematic at times. Occasionally it seemed clear that a section in the parent act, untouched in the amending bill, would need to be amended if the bill's amendments were passed. This is a "consequential" amendment, an amendment that is a consequence of another amendment. The lawyer drafting an amendment for a private member...might see that another section in the parent act would also need to be amended if the member's amendment is to work effectively, but the procedural rules won't allow the consequential amendment to be proposed.

These citations, I submit, are quite clear that consequential amendments, no matter how tempting, cannot be made to a bill if such amendments run afoul of our clear rules and procedures.

● (1125)

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you find new clause 344.1 to be out of order and that it be struck from Bill C-76. Nonetheless, should you find favour with the analysis of the member for Yukon, the chair of the committee, I would ask that the Chair's ruling in consideration of Standing Order 10 "state the...authority applicable to the case" so that all members will understand the applicable limits when contemplating amendments they might like to propose to legislation in the future.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Perth—Wellington for his point of order and in-depth analysis. I will come back to the House in due course with a ruling.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

I wish to inform the House that, because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion, government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

[*English*]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

The House resumed from October 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-83, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton has four minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to continue discussing Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. When I last spoke on Friday, I referred to the fact that the government's justification for rushing the bill forward is that the courts made them do it, that the courts made them ban both segregation for administrative and disciplinary purposes in all circumstances. The problem with that justification is that it is simply not so.

Neither the British Columbia Supreme Court decision nor the Ontario Superior Court decision provide for that. Indeed, in the case of the Ontario Superior Court decision, the primary basis of that decision related to the independence of the review upon the determination made by the institutional head to put an inmate into segregation. The Ontario court determined that the lack of an independent review mechanism contravened fundamental justice under section 7 of the charter. That was the basis of the Ontario decision.

I need not remind the government that aside from these two court decisions, neither the Mandela rules nor the Arbour commission of 1996 called for the elimination of segregation in all circumstances. It is simply the government doing so with this rushed legislation without real, meaningful consultation with the men and women who work in correctional institutions, the most dangerous, difficult and stressful workplace environments. It is really quite unfortunate, but what is worse is that the changes the government is proposing to make will require a lot more resources to handle inmates.

Each time an inmate is removed from their cell to have some time out of it and away from segregation, that requires two guards to accompany them. What the government is proposing is to extend that to four hours. For this to work, it is going to require more resources, and so where are the resources for this from the government? They are nowhere to be found.

Instead of providing our correctional officers with the tools they need to keep our correctional facilities safe, what is the government proposing? It is proposing an 8.8% reduction in Correctional Services Canada's budget. That is what the Liberals are doing. While they are putting a greater burden on correctional officers, taking away vital tools that correctional officers need to keep institutions safe, the government is cutting back at the same time. It speaks to the misplaced priorities of the government and the fact that once again it just cannot get it right.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that this bill is being rushed through. Time allocation was put on it this morning without it being fully debated and without all members having an opportunity to speak for or against the bill, as the case may be, on behalf of their constituents, as the Liberals are in a rush to get it to committee.

Would the member like to comment on the government's confusion, the conflict between this bill and an earlier justice bill that is already before the House? Would he care to comment on the government's confused agenda on this topic?

● (1135)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, yes, this morning the government once again used time allocation, a government that said it would never ever use it or would use it, at best, sparingly. This is the 50th-plus time that the government has moved ahead with time allocation. Its justification is to get it to committee, which can hear from witnesses. If it is all just a matter of getting things to committee, why have this place? Why allow for debate? There is a reason, and it is so that every member in the House can speak on legislation that impacts public safety in a very significant way. However, the government has decided it wants to shut debate down after very little debate on a very problematic bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up on the member's answer to the previous question. The Conservative Party, as the official opposition, is determined to see this bill defeated. It is very clear on it. It opposes it and does not want it to pass. It even brought forward a reasoned amendment to attempt to prevent if from passing. If it were up to the Conservative Party, we would debate this for 100 days, but the House will not be sitting. We might be able to deal with two or three bills if we followed the Conservative agenda. Maybe that is what the Conservative agenda is. The member said this government has used time allocation on 50 times; I do not necessarily buy the 50 times. The Harper Conservative government used time allocation over 100 times in four years.

Was Stephen Harper wrong in using time allocation 100-plus times and what was the rationale that he used when he was prime minister?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, absolutely we on this side are against Bill C-83 and we are going to do everything that we can to defeat it, a bill that the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers said is problematic. It raises the question of whose side the Liberals are on. Are they on the side of criminals or are they on the side of the men and women who work in correctional institutions?

I know which side Conservatives are on. We are on the side of the men and women who work in our correctional institutions. Their union has spoken out against problematic aspects of this bill. We are absolutely against taking a tool away from them to protect other inmates, to protect the integrity of criminal investigations and to protect inmates from themselves.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has insisted that it has to rush this bill because of court imperatives and in response to a court decision. My colleague has clearly articulated how that is not accurate. Could he share with us what the courts actually said Liberals had to do and how this bill does not align with what is supposed to happen as we move forward?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate that both the British Columbia and Ontario decisions made no such determination of banning segregation in all circumstances, as Bill C-83 provides for. In the Ontario court decision, the heart of the decision related to the independent review process. As opposed to fixing the independent review process, the government instead has decided to eliminate a tool that is necessary to keep our institutions safe.

On the issue of whether segregation violated section 12 of the charter or targeted inmates with mental illness disproportionately, so on and so forth, the court ruled against all of those arguments against segregation.

● (1140)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise on behalf of the citizens I represent in Saint Boniface—Saint Vital.

[*Translation*]

I am very pleased to rise in the House to support the government's legislation, Bill C-83, which revolutionizes our correctional services.

As the Minister of Public Safety said, the government is recognizing two things. The first is that institutional security is an absolute imperative that the Correctional Service of Canada must always meet. Second, it recognizes that the safety of Canadian communities depends on the rehabilitative work that happens within secure correctional institutions.

[*English*]

Safety is indeed at the heart of this legislation. We know that some inmates are simply too dangerous or too destructive to be managed within the mainstream inmate population. Our correctional officials must therefore have a way to separate them from fellow inmates.

The current practice is to place those inmates into segregation or, as our American friends call it, solitary confinement. However, two court rulings have found that practice unconstitutional. Those rulings are being appealed, one by the government and one by the other party, but the facts remain that they are scheduled to take effect in the coming months.

As a Parliament, we have a responsibility to ensure that the correctional service has the legal authorities it needs to keep its staff, as well as the people in their custody, safe in a way that adheres to our Constitution. We can do that by adopting this bill, which proposes to eliminate segregation from federal institutions and replace it with a safe but fundamentally different approach.

Under Bill C-83, structured intervention units, SIUs, would be created at institutions across the country. These units would allow offenders to be separated from the mainstream inmate population when and if required, but they would also preserve offenders' access to rehabilitation programming, interventions and mental health care.

Inmates in an SIU would receive structured interventions and programming tailored to address their specific risks, as well as their specific needs. They would be outside their cell for at least four hours a day, which is double the number of hours under the current system. Four hours is an absolute minimum. I need to stress that it is a minimum. It could be more.

The inmates would also get at least two hours of meaningful human interaction with other people each day, including staff, volunteers, elders, chaplains, visitors and other compatible inmates. This is something that hardly exists under the current system. A registered health care professional would visit them at least once a day.

In other words, this bill introduces a new and more effective approach to managing the most challenging cases in our federal correctional system. It would promote not only the safety of correctional institutions, but also the safety of Canadian communities all across our country.

[*Translation*]

I would remind members that nearly all federal inmates will one day finish serving their sentence and be released. Accordingly, providing them with the opportunity to continue their treatment and rehabilitative work will increase their chances of successfully reintegrating the general prison population and, eventually, society.

Reducing the risk of recidivism will better protect Canadians and all communities, from our biggest cities to our smallest towns.

[*English*]

Other important measures in this bill complement the proposed creation of SIUs. For example, the bill would enshrine in law the correctional services obligations to consider systemic and background factors when making decisions related to indigenous offenders. This flows from the Supreme Court's Gladue decision in 1999. It is something that has been part of correctional policy for many years, but we are now giving this principle the full force of law.

● (1145)

This is part of achieving the mandate commitments the Prime Minister gave the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety to address gaps in service to indigenous people throughout the criminal justice system. The two ministers have likewise been mandated to address gaps in services to people with mental illness in the criminal justice system.

As I noted earlier, inmates with an SIU would receive daily visits from a health care professional. More than that, the proposed reforms in Bill C-83 would require the correctional service to support the autonomy and clinical independence of health care professionals working in correctional facilities.

The proposed legislation would also allow for patient advocacy services to help people in federal custody understand their health care rights and to ensure they receive the medical care they need. This was recommended by the coroner's inquest into the death of Ashley Smith.

There is also an important measure in this bill to better support victims of crime. Currently, victims are entitled to receive audio recordings of parole hearings but only if they do not attend. If they show up, they are not allowed to receive a recording. That does not make sense. Victims advocacy groups have said that attending a hearing is sometimes so emotionally difficult that victims simply cannot always remember what was said, which is entirely understandable. Under Bill C-83, victims would have the right to a recording of a hearing, whether they were present or not. They would then be able to listen to it again, later on in a more comfortable setting whenever it is convenient for them.

[*Translation*]

The first priority of any government should be protecting its citizens. When someone breaks the law, there are consequences. In the interest of public safety, we need to have a correctional system capable of addressing the factors that lead to criminal activity, so that offenders become less likely to reoffend and create more victims.

[*English*]

A proper, effective correctional system holds offenders to account for the wrongs they have done, but it also fosters an environment that promotes rehabilitation. Canada's correctional system already does an excellent job of providing rehabilitation and reintegration support for inmates under very challenging circumstances. However, Bill C-83 would strengthen that system, and public safety would be improved with safer institutions for staff and inmates, fewer repeat offenders, and fewer victims in the long run.

For all of these reasons, I fully support this important and transformative piece of proposed legislation, and I invite all honourable members to do the same.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues with the bill is that it is going to require a lot more resources in order to make it work. Yet, under the plan for Correctional Service Canada, there is actually an 8.8% planned reduction. Not only that, nowhere in the 22 priorities of Correctional Service Canada is there any mention about protecting the safety of correctional officers.

How is this going to work in the face of an 8.8% planned reduction and no mention of putting the safety of correctional officers first?

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that when the member's party was in government for 10 years, the Conservatives were not very worried about providing more support for our departments and our public service who do tremendous work, and all of a sudden they are.

This is clearly a priority of this government. I have full confidence in the finance minister, the Prime Minister and the public safety minister that the resources necessary to properly implement this proposed legislation will be there when the time comes.

However, first things first. We have to get this to committee. We have to hear from the unions and other people who are interested in this legislation. We need to get it to committee, we need to have those discussions, and we need to get it back here to actually make it the law of the land.

● (1150)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the bill certainly looks after inmates, those who have committed a crime. However, I have a concern with respect to correctional officers. When individuals who have committed some of the most heinous crimes possible are allowed out of their cell for four hours a day and to wander freely, what resources have been put in place on behalf of the correctional officers to ensure they return to their homes at the end of the day, safe, sound and secure, and can return to their jobs the next day, feeling that their needs are being met and that they are being looked after as correctional officers? They serve our country in an incredible way.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, at the very heart of this bill is public safety. Something the other side fails to recognize over and over again is that the vast majority of inmates end up in our cities, villages and rural municipalities. When they are at the checkout stand at the Safeway next to our aunts, uncles, mothers or fathers, I would like to know we have done the absolute best job we can at rehabilitation so our communities, cities and rural municipalities are safer. Rather than focusing on punishment alone, we need to put a focus on rehabilitation so when they leave the penitentiaries, the communities are safer because of the time they have spent there.

With respect to the officers, part of the legislation involves body scanners, which will make the union members safer as well.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about ensuring that people would come out better on the other end. Would he please comment on the importance of getting this to committee so we can hear from the correctional officers, the unions, the people involved in these institutions and make the necessary amendments to ensure they are safe going forward? I do not think anyone on either side of the House wants our corrections officers to be left in an unsafe position.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly. This has been debated at length already. It is important to get it to committee to hear from correctional officers, other unions, other people and other interest groups that are interested in this policy. I stress that public safety is at the core of this legislation. We need to move it forward to committee to hear from the public.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while Bill C-83 proposes to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act in half a dozen ways, the centrepiece of the legislation is really ending the use of segregation in our penitentiaries and the launching of what would be called “structured intervention units”, or SIUs.

I will get into the details of what SIUs are in a bit, but first I recognize that many stakeholder groups have spent years advocating for a limit to the length of time in administrative segregation.

The correctional investigator has recommended a 30-day cap. The UN Mandela rules call for one at 15 days. We asked ourselves, though, if that did not just leave people without meaningful contact for 15 or 30 days. Did that not just keep people from their needed interventions and training for 15 or 30 days and from the mental health treatment that they might need?

Therefore, what if we were able to create a system where, when people need to be placed in a separate secure facility within the penitentiary, they could continue to have access to all those things? What if we could ensure the safety of inmates, correctional staff and the security of facilities without having to segregate inmates from all those important points of contact and their treatment regimes? What if there were zero days without meaningful human contact in our penitentiaries?

That is what is at the heart of Bill C-83. It is legislation that balances the need for security in our penitentiaries with the need to ensure that we end segregation and create a system that is better able to rehabilitate inmates.

Inside an SIU, inmates will have double the time outside of their cells compared to the current administrative segregation regime. However, it is not unsupervised, as was suggested previously by the member for Lethbridge.

Correctional Service will be provided with funding to staff up on guards to help ensure the safe and secure movement of the inmates inside the SIUs, whether that is to a classroom-type setting, or to attend part of their programming or to interact with another compatible inmate. In short, this is a complete revamping of Correctional Service in a way that will be better for staff, better for inmates and ultimately better for society.

The reason this is so important is that the vast majority of federal inmates will eventually be released into our communities. It is safer for our communities when those offenders with mental health issues have been treated and diagnosed properly. It is safer for our communities when they have successfully undergone Correctional Service rehabilitation programming and had the training they need to help find employment when they finish their sentence, so they can support themselves and are less likely to reoffend.

I have seen some commentary that while this legislation looks promising, there is some skepticism about its implementation. I can assure the House that we intend to ensure the implementation fulfills the promise of the legislation, with all the resources required to make this work. I even asked the minister earlier in the debate about that fact.

Let us be clear that the status quo may not be an option any longer. Courts in both Ontario and British Columbia have struck down large portions of the Correctional and Conditional Release Act that legally allow for an inmate to be placed in administrative segregation. While both of those cases are being appealed, one by the appellant and one by the government, come December and January, administrative segregation may not exist as an option in those provinces. Without a system to replace it, that will be a dangerous situation for Correctional Service staff and it will also be dangerous for offenders. As well, effective rehabilitation cannot happen in a dangerous environment, so it will be dangerous for all of us.

Now let me turn to some of the other parts of Bill C-83. We have heard from victims that Parole Board hearings are often such a highly emotional blur that once they are finished, they are often unable to remember many of the important details of what went on. The proposed legislation will allow victims who have attended a Parole Board hearing to receive an audio copy of the hearing. Currently, registered victims who are unable to attend can request and receive such a copy. However, if the individual was there in person, the legislation does not allow for that. That simply is not right, which is why Bill C-83 would amend the law to ensure that all registered victims, whether they attend a parole hearing or not, would be able to receive that audio copy.

The proposed bill will also allow for Correctional Service to acquire and use body scanners on those entering the prisons. From drugs to cellphones, the phenomenon of contraband inside prison systems is a problem worldwide. New technologies now allow for better and easier searches of those entering correctional facilities, which are less invasive than traditional methods such as strip searches.

I am sure we all remember the tragic death of Ashley Smith who took her own life while under suicide watch in 2007. Her death, and the subsequent coroner's inquest, was a wake-up call that tremendous improvements were needed in our women's correctional facilities. Bill C-83 would deliver on one of the most important recommendations from that inquest.

● (1155)

The legislation would require Correctional Service to provide patient advocacy services to inmates to help them better understand their health care rights and responsibilities. It would also create a statutory obligation for Correctional Service to support health care professionals in maintaining their professional autonomy and clinical independence, a founding principle of the medical profession.

The bill would also enshrine in law the principles of the landmark 1999 Gladue Supreme Court decision that would ensure, from intake, that indigenous offenders' programming and treatment incorporates the systemic and background factors unique to indigenous offenders.

Ultimately, all of this will advance the cause of public safety in all of our communities.

When our corrections system works effectively to rehabilitate offenders within a secure custodial environment, we all benefit.

I am proud of Bill C-83, and I encourage all members to vote in support of it.

Since I have a few more moments left, I will talk a bit about Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundland and Labrador's primary penitentiary is not a federal facility, so it will not be governed under the rules of the proposed legislation. However, we can see from media reports and in the damning history of Her Majesty's Royal Penitentiary in St. John's what can happen in penitentiaries where the right supports and services are not put in place to protect both inmates and the people who work in the prisons.

PTSD is a huge problem for people who work in the correctional system, as well as for people incarcerated in these facilities. We need to find a better way to manage inmates through their periods of trouble while they are incarcerated so they can continue to receive the supports they need.

Once the federal government's new higher standard can be met federally, that will put additional pressure on provinces, where people are serving two years or less, to have similar supports and standards in place, so the system is better able to manage not only the distress being caused to other inmates in the facility by the person who is going into the SIU, but also to provide additional funding and support for additional Correctional Service staff to maintain and manage the supervision of those inmates. That is key.

We have seen throughout our first three years in office that many of the proposed changes that were brought in by the previous government, whether it be Phoenix, or in IT transportation or in Correctional Service, that unless we fund the transition, unless we fund the additional requirements of legislation, we are doomed to fail.

The minister mentioned that $80 million would be available for additional mental health supports within prisons over the next two budgets. That is extremely important. Funding will be available for additional corrections staff and for the very body scanner technology that will help reduce, if not eliminate, the problem of contraband in our prisons, which is so pervasive.

We have heard a lot in the debate by opposition members today about their concern that we are not giving sufficient time to debate this topic. However, it seems to me that many of the points that have been circulating in the room today are starting to retread similar ground. We have not heard a lot of new arguments even in the short amount of debate that we have had.

It will be great to see the legislation go to committee, where any of the legitimate concerns that were raised by the opposition regarding sufficient feedback from stakeholder groups can be addressed and their comments can be incorporated. If there are constructive ways in which the legislation can be amended, committee is the best place to do it.

In light of the fact that December and January present real significant deadlines for ensuring there is a replacement in place to administrative segregation in our prisons, it is important that we get the legislation finalized and passed through the House and the Senate in order to avoid a type of Doomsday scenario that could arise without the ability to properly manage and maintain security in prisons in British Columbia and Ontario in the next year.

For all of these reasons, I encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of sending the legislation to committee.

● (1200)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just made reference to the importance of the bill getting to committee for the purpose of consultation. Where was the government up until now? Should there not have been consultation in drafting the bill in the first place instead of drafting a ramshackle bill that will be criticized at committee and will require amendment at committee?

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers on one key aspect of the bill, which is to eliminate segregation in all circumstances, stated, "the new Bill C-83 must not sacrifice disciplinary segregation as a tool to deter violent behaviour."

Why would the government not have consulted the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers before it introduced Bill C-83? Why is the government waiting for it to get to committee to hear from the union?

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the views of the Union of Safety and Justice Employees, which represents parole officers and program staff, have been consulted on the legislation, and the union is very supportive. As mentioned by my hon. colleague, the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers would have preferred to use administrative segregation, notwithstanding the fact that it has been struck. The union viewed it as an important safety tool, but is nevertheless supportive of the introduction of body scanners. The unions' views are taken into account, at least in part.

The legislation is important. There are different stakeholder groups that agree with some aspects and do not agree with other aspects, but all have been consulted on the legislation. As with all things, it is an iterative process to make sure the legislation is right. The committee is the best place to take the next step in this iterative process.

● (1205)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my fellow colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador is, himself, a lawyer. I know over the past five to 10 years, a lot of jurisdictions in the United States have been gung-ho on a lot of tough-on-crime penalties. They were harsh penalties in many jurisdictions, and in many cases deserving. Public servants and politicians on either side of the ideological scale in the United States, whether Democrat or Republican, would say that the rehabilitative services provided were insufficient in many jurisdictions. Even Republicans would say that.

I was wondering if the member would comment on the fact that, in places where they are tried and true, rehabilitative services work for society as a whole.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame raised an important point. That is the fact that, throughout North America, jurisdictions are moving away from being only tough on crime to being smart on crime.

It is important to realize, in the confines of a penitentiary system, that there are lots of mental stresses, including acute and chronic, long term and short term, that impact not only the inmates themselves in terms of stress that they bring or acquire while incarcerated, but also the staff.

In the context of segregation and enforcing punishment, it is important that everyone has access to all the tools they need to make sure that in the case of inmates, rehabilitation is possible; in the case of inmates who are not segregated, they are kept safe; and in the case of people who are working in the corrections system, they have the supports that are needed.

That is why our government is committed, over the next two budgets, to adding $80 million toward mental health services within prisons. That is one way we are trying to be smart on crime, and not simply tough on it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we rise in the House today to debate Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

This is a very serious matter that requires appropriate analysis and study. Above all, we must not move too quickly on this bill. Unfortunately, just a few moments ago, the government forced a vote that will minimize the time spent debating this bill. Canadians run the risk of being on the losing end.

The bill deals with what happens inside our penitentiaries. To put it bluntly, we want to know what happens in these segregation units that the inmates call "the hole", where people are isolated from other inmates.

Let us co-operate and try to see the positive elements of the bill. We are delighted to see that one measure included in the bill is the body scanning of inmates, which is a very good thing.

Unfortunately, even though, in theory, nothing should enter Canadian detention centres or prisons without authorization, this is not always the case. The Canadians working in our detention centres or correctional institutions must have the necessary tools to keep themselves safe and to make life better within these institutions.

We think that body scanners are a good idea, but that is the only positive in this bill.

With Bill C-83, the government wants to change administrative segregation into structured intervention units.

I remind members that inmates in prison or, for example, at the Donnacona institution in the riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, are sadly not society's finest. These are the most hardened criminals. They are murderers. I could list off all of the people in this prison, the crimes they committed and the reasons they were arrested and found guilty, but that would be infinitely sad. These people are serving their sentence in prison.

Everyone knows those inmates are not exactly nice guys. Severe disciplinary measures are sometimes called for. People with experience in corrections say that the administrative segregation unit serves not only to isolate criminals who may be a danger to other inmates, but also to protect individuals from other inmates. I will come back to that later.

The impression we get is that the government is in a hurry to take action. As the public safety critic, the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, said, there is a disconnect in the government's approach.

A little while ago, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice issued a very clear ruling with respect to administrative segregation. The court questioned the legality of indefinite administrative segregation as a severe detention measure.

The Liberal government decided to appeal the ruling. How interesting, as the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles astutely pointed out, that the government would appeal the ruling then turn around and introduce a bill having to do with none other than the matter raised by the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.

Beyond these philosophical considerations, we are also concerned with the fact that the government has no plan to pay for these measures. We have no idea where the measures proposed in the bill are heading.

Stating the goal and backing it up with dollars to make those changes happen is pretty basic, but the government has done neither.

The proposed changes would allow people in administrative segregation to leave their cells for four hours a day to spend time with their fellow inmates.

● (1210)

I do not want to scare anyone, but the staff and unions of our detention centres are sounding the alarm about this proposal, which they do not think this is a good idea. Sadly, the government has not listened to them. One of them even said that this Liberal approach to administrative segregation could lead to bloodshed.

I will remind members of a certain cruel and persistent statistic: 100 assaults have occurred in our detention centres over the past 12 months. That is 100 too many, of course, because even one assault is one too many. As I was saying earlier, these are some of the most hardened criminals in the Canadian correctional system, and letting them out to spend four hours with their fellow inmates can create highly undesirable situations.

I want to mention that body scanning, which is one element of this bill that we agree with, is not a bad idea. However, we think it might be worth considering the possibility of extending it to include people visiting inmates at a detention centre.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I would like to remind hon. members that when someone is speaking, they should whisper among themselves rather than talking loudly, as it would show more respect for the person who is speaking.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, as we have said, allowing inmate body scanning and assessment is a decent idea, but it would not be a bad idea to also consider the possibility of putting visitors through the same process. If the visitors have nothing to hide, they should have no problem with it. Sometimes passengers at the airport have to go through a body scanner. They are randomly selected to be taken aside and assessed in order to completely rule out any issues. Everyone knows that it is not the most pleasant experience. It has happened to me several times. However, if the passenger has a clean conscience, it does not bother them. If a visitor is going into a detention centre and has a clean conscience, they should have no problem going through a body scanner.

Speaking of visits, my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles visited the Donnacona Institution with the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, since that is the riding in which the institution is located. I am very proud of the work of my colleagues, who get right into the thick of things and go where things are really happening. As my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles mentioned in his speech last week, he met a person who was in administrative segregation. My colleague's testimony reminded me that some people want to be placed in administrative segregation to avoid contact with other inmates. We do not know why, but it is easy to imagine the worst-case scenario. That is often the reality. Although administrative segregation may not seem like the best approach, when we stop and think about it, we see that it is sometimes required in order to protect inmates from each other. The Liberal approach does not take that into account.

In closing, I cannot help but notice that the spirit of this bill reflects the mindset guiding the Prime Minister, the Liberal mindset that we believe puts far too much focus on criminals and inmates, rather than putting victims first.

Is this not the government that dragged its feet for 10 months before appointing an ombudsman for victims of crime?

Should it come as any surprise that this same Prime Minister refused to use his authority in the sorry case of Terri-Lynne McClintic, who committed the heinous crime of murdering a child and is now in a healing lodge, when we believe she should be behind bars?

Was it not this Prime Minister, who, back in the good old days when he was leader of an opposition party, in 2013, told the CBC's Peter Mansbridge in response to the attack in Boston that we should look at the root causes? That is the Liberal mentality of the Prime Minister: think about the attackers, the criminals, the guilty parties instead of thinking of the victims first and foremost.

That is why we are not happy with this bill in its current form and we strongly condemn the time allocation that has been put on this bill.

● (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight a couple of points in the legislation. First, my colleague referenced victims. One aspect of the legislation would allow victims to have audio tapes, whether they attend parole hearings or not. That is a change to support victims.

Second, the member across the way referenced body scans. In this legislation, body scans, which are a good idea, would be applicable to whoever correctional officers warranted had to be scanned. That would include individuals who might be visiting correctional facilities or correctional officers themselves. The Conservatives are providing misinformation on that point.

With regard to segregation, when the vast majority of people going into prisons will someday leave prison, programming is really important. Brian Mulroney even recognized that. Why would the Conservatives oppose any form of programming, whether it is for mental health or whatever it might be, for individuals who might be segregated, as referred to by the member opposite? Why would they oppose that?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, maybe I was not very clear when I spoke, or perhaps the member could not hear me because other members were having some fun.

To be clear, in the case of *la fouille corporelle*, Conservatives agree with the government. That is one of the few elements we support in the bill. What the government wants to do when people enter a jail is correct. It is not fun to have that kind of stuff, but we need that kind of intervention when people go into jails.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

As far as rehabilitation is concerned, there are programs already in place. The hon. member for Winnipeg North mentioned a prime minister from the 1980s, the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney. The rehabilitation programs have been in place for decades to help inmates get back on the right track. We are not against the idea of getting back on track. However, those who committed crimes, who are in prison and who deserve to be in administrative segregation are meant to be there.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague pointed out in his speech, administrative segregation is used for several reasons. Court rulings have found that the current practice violates prisoners' rights.

Does my colleague think the Liberals did a comprehensive analysis of the use of administrative segregation to determine under what circumstances that practice should be replaced?

What I am asking is whether every case and all possibilities were properly studied in order to find a solution tailored to each situation, or whether the Liberals simply modified the term and changed the rules slightly without taking into account the various circumstances in which administrative segregation is used, as this could justify a different approach, depending on the case.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her pertinent question.

As the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles pointed out in his speech last week, this bill reeks of improvisation. A court decision found that we need to be a little more moderate with regard to certain measures pertaining to administrative segregation. The government appealed that decision but, at the same time, introduced a bill that we see as ill-conceived and full of serious errors.

On top of that, the Conservatives think this bill is driven by the Prime Minister's Liberal way of thinking, which puts criminals ahead of victims.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to rise today to speak to Bill C-83. This bill would do a number of things. At its core, what it seeks to do is abolish the use of administrative segregation in Canada and replace it with structured intervention units. However, it would do more than that.

The bill would also make a serious change in the way we deal with the right of victims to obtain audio recordings of parole hearings. It would take certain steps to consider, in particular, the unique circumstances that pertain to indigenous inmates. It would include serious changes to the way we deal with patient care in the inmate population. As well, it would introduce certain changes to the use of body scanners in institutions run by the Correctional Service Canada.

This bill is ultimately about enhancing our justice system to make sure that our system holds guilty parties to account and that it respects the ability of victims to obtain information about offenders who may be released into society.

Importantly, it would also deal with certain measures that would help make our communities safer by ensuring that during a period of incarceration, individuals would have access to services that would actually help them reintegrate more effectively into society on the back end. This is not about being soft on crime. This is about being smart on crime to ensure that in the long term, Canadian communities are safer on the whole.

What have perhaps been the most controversial pieces in this legislation are the changes to administrative segregation in Canada contained within Bill C-83.

Administrative segregation, in common parlance, can be roughly equated to solitary confinement. Today, for a lot of good reasons, the good public servants who work on behalf of Correctional Service Canada want to maintain institutional safety. When they are dealing with particularly difficult inmates who might pose a threat of violence to either the staff who work at CSC or the inmate population, the practice has been to segregate them entirely from the prison population. They essentially confine them as individuals, separate from meaningful human contact and separate from different services.

While this may address the short-term problem of preventing harm to the prison population and to the staff who work at Correctional Service Canada, there is a greater social problem it also contributes to. The inmates who have been subjected to solitary confinement or administrative segregation are subjected to treatment that leaves them worse off and puts them in a position where they are more likely to reoffend upon their release into the community, which is not something we want. We aim to reduce recidivism to ensure that our communities are safer when inmates are inevitably released back into society.

We all know that there are certain incredibly heinous crimes that will result in people potentially being in the custody of Correctional Service Canada for their entire lives, but there are many circumstances, in fact the vast majority of circumstances, in which a person who commits a crime is eventually going to be released back into society. We have to make sure that we are not putting our communities in danger by denying services to those people who are incarcerated that would help them become whole and become functioning members of society upon their release.

Most members of this House would be familiar with the details of the Ashley Smith case. To me, it illustrated, tragically, the problems that exist within our current system. We have young people who may be suffering from certain mental illnesses who, to solve a short-term problem, are completely separated from meaningful human contact. They are separated from the population in which they live while incarcerated. The damage this can cause to a person who is living with mental illness can cause them to harm themselves, and potentially, in the long term, to harm others upon their release.

In light of this case and others, the need to take action is apparent. In fact, the need to take action is frankly not a choice. We have now had two cases, at least, that I am aware of, one in Ontario and one in British Columbia, that have indicated that the practice of administrative segregation, at least going beyond a certain period of time, is unconstitutional. It violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As such, it is a responsibility of Parliament to enact a new regime that is in compliance with our charter. If we cannot respect the values that are enshrined in our charter, then we are not worth much in this House.

● (1225)

I would suggest that the measures implemented in Bill C-83 would strike a balance that would allow Correctional Service Canada to maintain order within an institution and maintain the safety of the prison population. Introducing structured intervention units would help ensure that the person who was causing a problem for the prison population and the staff at CSC could maintain some sort of meaningful human contact and be provided with the services that would help communities be safer in the long term. At the same time, these would maintain order within our institutions.

In particular, I want to point to the fact that inmates in the structured intervention units would have a minimum of four hours out of their cells daily, including at least two hours of meaningful human contact with staff. This is not a lot of time, but it could make a difference to a person who had actually pulled away from society and had been denied meaningful human contact, particularly those in incarceration who were living with mental illness. It would allow them to become better off in the long term and would reduce the threat posed to society, which is what this bill is really all about.

Currently, there is a very limited amount of time a person who is subjected to solitary confinement is allowed out of a cell to have any kind of contact with anyone within the greater population. The harm that impacts the individual also has long-term consequences for our communities and needs to be addressed.

In light of the court cases I have mentioned previously, we have to take some kind of meaningful action to allow us to maintain order in our institutions and do better in protecting our communities.

This bill would not just deal with the issue of administrative segregation. In particular, we would make a change in the way victims were able to access information about parole hearings when they were threatened with the circumstance that an individual who had committed a crime against them was up for parole. Currently, if victims do not attend a parole hearing in person, they are not entitled to the recordings that are part and parcel of those hearings. Members can imagine the trauma victims might go through if they had to see in person the hearing for an individual who had committed a crime against them or a family member. To force them to go through that experience, when they may not be mentally prepared, seems like a step too far, in my opinion. I think the sensible thing to do, which is embedded in Bill C-83, is to allow recordings to be given to the victims of crime, whether or not their personal circumstances allow them to attend in person. I think this would be an important change.

Bill C-83 would also embed the principles from the Gladue decision in the legislation, which require the Crown to take into account the unique circumstances of an indigenous person's background when making decisions of this nature.

When it comes to health care, there is an important change built into Bill C-83 that would ensure that there were new patient advocates. They would have the opportunity to work with CSC to ensure that order could be maintained in institutions while they also, for inmates who had certain health care concerns, ensured that those concerns were met.

Again, this is not about doing favours for people who have committed crimes against other individuals or communities. This is about protecting Canadians in the long term by ensuring that our communities are made more secure. If we deny basic mental health care to people who are separated from society not only because they are in prison but because they are completely segregated and left on their own, the damage they may cause to our communities in the long term, upon release, when their sentences come to an end, is something incredibly important that we need to address.

The final element I would like to turn our attention to today is the use of body scanners. This is similar to the technology we pass through when we go to an airport to come to Ottawa every week to advocate on behalf of our constituents.

The introduction of contraband drugs, weapons and the like into prison communities can be a very serious problem. The use of body scanners, which I understand certain members on different sides of the aisles may actually support, would be an important step, because it would not be invasive but would still protect prison populations.

The suite of changes included in Bill C-83 are important ones. In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the essential point that changes to the administrative segregation regime that exists in Canada today are coming with or without Parliament's action, because a court has deemed them unconstitutional. We need to take steps that not only protect the rights of the individuals who are incarcerated but respect the rights of victims, keep our communities safe, and in the long term, ensure that people who are released from prisons into our society do not cause greater harm to our communities than they already have.

● (1230)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment for his thoughtful speech, but I have to say that I disagree with where he is coming at.

If we listen to his speech and some of the other speeches across the way on the segregation system, we would be led to believe that inmates are left on their own with no access to mental health support and meaningful human contact. However, when I read from directive 709, inmates who are subject to administrative segregation receive a daily visit by a health care professional, a daily visit by the institutional head, a visit by a correctional manager once per shift, visits by legal counsel, access to elected inmate representatives, visits by family, telephone calls to families and friends, and appointments with health care professionals, including mental health care professionals. That hardly sounds like a lack of meaningful human contact.

It seems that the bill is not about that issue but really about taking away a tool that is only used as a last resort, and only when three grounds can be established: first, that an inmate or another person in that facility could be put at risk; second, where it is necessary to protect the integrity of an investigation; or third, when it is necessary to protect the inmate from themself.

Why would the government take away that important tool that can only be used as a last resort?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important question. I expect that over the long term we would realize that the outcome we are seeking to achieve on this side is probably in accordance with what a lot of members of different parties might come to expect should be the case. The difference in position is not necessarily a difference in principle.

We need to empower Correctional Service Canada to maintain order within institutions, and this should only be used as a last resort. Although a person subject to administrative segregation might be eligible to access the elements of society the member listed, in many cases those individuals in solitary confinement are not receiving some of the access to people or the world at large that the member suggests might be the case. Under the new regime, they would be entitled to at least four hours outside of their cell daily, with two hours of meaningful human contact. This is based on evidence from medical professionals who suggest that real harm could befall a person there and cause them to be worse off upon their release.

If I could use a personal anecdote, I have been the victim of a violent crime. I was attacked in the street by a person wielding a piece of lumber who took my knee out. I could not walk for months as a result. What troubled me most greatly was that the individual was not incarcerated, was not given the mental health support he needed, despite the fact I knew he had a severe addiction problem. Within a matter of a few months later, he was incarcerated for harming someone else.

When somebody commits a wrong in our society, I would like to see them given the care they need to be well so that upon their re-integration, they do not repeat the offence and harm other individuals.

● (1235)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned indigenous people when it comes to correctional facilities. We often hear about the rate of incarceration of indigenous people compared with others. Could the member expand on what the bill would do to recognize that issue of indigenous people being incarcerated and the services available to them?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I think most people across Canada understand that indigenous Canadians are incarcerated at a disproportionally high rate compared with the general population. There are a number of reasons this might be the case, but we know from the court's Gladue decision in 1999 that there are certain factors we have to consider to determine whether there are alternatives to incarceration that would leave an indigenous offender better off not only for themselves but also in terms of how they would pose a reduced danger to the community. This decision enshrined into law a principle that has been used subsequently that requires CSC to consider the historical and cultural factors that may be involved with an offender's life circumstances that led them to commit an offence, although there has to be individual responsibility as well, recognizing that their treatment inside the prison system may actually be detrimental to society on the back-end if they are released.

Bill C-83 requires us to consider similar principles that were outlined in the Gladue decision to ensure that we are giving a person the tools they need to be successfully reintegrated into the community on the back-end of their sentence.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act. The key point in this legislation relates to Correctional Service Canada's policies, especially the practice of administrative segregation.

I should point out at the beginning that the bill would do four key things. One, it proposes to eliminate segregation, based on recent court decisions, and it introduces more effective structured intervention units. Two, it would better support victims during Parole Board hearings by, as my previous colleague mentioned, providing audio recordings of those hearings. Three, it would increase staff and inmate safety with new body scanner technology. Four, it would update Correctional Service Canada's approach on critical matters like mental health supports and indigenous offenders' needs. There are fairly extensive policies in this bill on both those latter points: mental health and indigenous offenders' needs.

There has been much criticism of the policy on administrative segregation within the Correctional Service of Canada, and rightly so. I have listened to the debate on the other side, and some have said it is a necessary tool. I do not necessarily agree with that, but something certainly has to be done. In the previous Parliament, I was a critic for public safety and at one time served as solicitor general and was in charge of the Correctional Service of Canada, so I have read a lot of the criticism related to administrative segregation. We have to understand in this place that administrative segregation was there for very legitimate reasons: to protect the inmates themselves from the general population if they were causing trouble; to protect others in the general population from things that those people put in administrative segregation might otherwise have done; and to protect correctional officers from possible harm by moving these inmates to segregation. I understand those key points.

I do not know if many people in this place have seen those segregation units in many of our federal penitentiaries and prisons. I have, and it would not be a great place to spend days on end without mental health services. In fact, as my colleague from Central Nova mentioned earlier, we have to understand that our correctional system in this country is not just about throwing somebody in a cell and throwing away the key. Our system is based on the premise of rehabilitation, and that is the ultimate objective. Yes, there have to be penalties, and severe penalties, for crimes done and, yes, some people stay in the system their whole life after they have committed a crime. However, we must keep in mind that many people, the great majority we hope, will come out and be productive citizens in society. That is what we have to attempt to do.

Therefore, what this particular bill proposes is basically to try to put a new system in place, called a "structured intervention unit", where people who have to be separated from the mainstream inmate population, generally for reasons of safety, will be assigned to a secure intervention unit but not in the same style as in the past.

● (1240)

In addition to being assigned to that secure intervention unit, or cell, Correctional Service Canada would be mandated to provide them with rehabilitative programming, mental health care, and other interventions and services that respond to the inmate's specific needs. That especially relates to those with mental health problems, for whatever reason, and especially applies to the indigenous population, which has different customs and patterns. I have heard a lot of talk in this place about healing centres. The fact of the matter is they work, and we need to keep that in mind too.

Beyond meeting those specific needs of an inmate, keep in mind that we want to protect the individual, the rest of the prison population and the corrections officers working in the system. Under this approach, it would be done in a different way from what is currently in place, as we would address the mental health care needs of inmates and could intervene with other services where appropriate.

Beyond all of that, there are a number of reviews that have to take place. I have talked to a lot of corrections officers, and I can understand that when an inmate challenges them within the prison system, it is really hard not lose one's temper and to want to be vindictive. This is supposed to work at preventing that from happening as well. However, for the inmate, there are several reviews that would take place. There would be a review by the warden within five days, and there a couple of other reviews in place as well.

This bill tries to move away from a system that we know has been challenged in the courts. Yes, we have appealed the decision in question, because we want to keep all options open. It is a system that has been strongly criticized by the correctional investigator, and this bill tries to come up with a better system that would work. In part, that is what this bill is about.

In closing, as my colleague mentioned earlier, there is a real attempt to provide better services to victims in this bill. For example, the recordings of the Parole Board hearings would be provided so they could be reviewed in a quieter place at another time to see what was said. This legislation would add a guiding principle to the law to affirm the need for Correctional Service Canada to consider systematic and background factors unique to indigenous offenders in all the decision-making done within the system.

This bill does not change the world. Keep in mind that we have a system of penalties in this country that, overall, is designed to try to make individuals who have committed a crime, for whatever reason, better citizens when they come out of prison, not better criminals. Our objective is to make them better citizens so they can contribute to their family, their own life's work and to the Canadian economy. This bill does not change the world, but it is a fairly major step forward in how we would handle inmates, how we would work with them within the prison system and how we would try to give victims better services. At the end of the day, this is a bill that members should support.

● (1245)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate hearing from the member for Malpeque, who did remind us that four prime ministers ago he was the solicitor general, I believe. He would have had some occasion to understand administrative segregation, more intimately perhaps, than some of us.

I have been to the Kent maximum-security prison which used to be in my riding. It is now in the neighbouring riding. I can tell my colleagues that, having been through those segregation units, every single offender who is in that segregation unit is not there because a prison guard or the administration is being vindictive, as the member indicated. Rather it is because a person has committed acts inside the prison that make that person unacceptable and too great a risk for the general prison population.

I guess my question is this. We have to legislate for the exceptions. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment talked about rehabilitation. Certainly, for those cases where that is possible, we support that. Where we do not support it is for people like Robert Willy Pickton, who is in a maximum-security facility, segregated for his own safety, I would argue. He is there. He is never getting out. He is never going to set foot as a free man in a community in Canada again. What tools would a prison guard have to deal with someone like that? We have to legislate for those exceptional cases where these people are not going to be cascaded down through the system and released.

Why does someone like Willy Pickton, Canada's worst serial killer, deserve four or two hours of meaningful human contact? What benefit does that have for him, other than to put people in the prison system who have to deal with him at significant risk?

I just do not see how this legislation addresses those exceptional situations.

● (1250)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I guess that is the difference in approach that we take on this side versus the opposite side of the House. We do not make laws based on one or two exceptions. We make laws on the population as a whole. I think that is what we have to do.

There are exceptional cases. There is no question about that. The member made a point on the Pickton case and it is a valid point. However, this particular bill does not give Pickton more rights. He is still in the system and, yes, he may be provided more mental health services.

I do agree with the member opposite that this is for protection. In most cases, it is for protection of the inmate themselves and also for protection of the correctional officers. I did not say that offenders are put in there because of the vindictiveness of correctional officers. Rather, they are put in there because they broke the rules within the system of Correctional Services Canada.

However, we do have to recognize that the old system of solitary confinement, which I think is a better description, is not working. It is challenged in the courts. It does nothing in most cases for better mental heath and better rehabilitation and it has to be changed. What is put forward in this bill does it in a realistic way for all matters intended.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member for Malpeque, my question is this. Why is there no independent oversight of the commissioner's decision-making on putting people into administrative segregation in this bill, as Justice Leask in the B.C. Supreme Court and others have so strongly suggested?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, this is one bill and one step forward. I think it is certainly a step in the right direction that will improve the lot of inmates who are in the prison system.

As I said, in the bill we will also improve victims rights by getting the recordings. It may not go as far as the member opposite wants to go, but I think it is a fairly major step forward.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this important debate today on Bill C-83, that would deal with the abolition of early parole and the issues on conditional release and corrections. I say at the outset that I will speak in opposition to the bill at second reading. I do so for a number of reasons I will try to describe.

I will first talk about the nature of what the bill has tried to respond to, the difficulties, the dilemmas, the torture, as some people have called it, that is involved in solitary confinement. Perhaps one can call it by other words, but that is what it is. Then I will talk about what a couple of our superior courts have said about this practice and the constitutionality of it, the fact that the government has continued with the appeals of those judgments and yet brought in a bill which by all measure is a very modest response to the very strong language of our courts in addressing the issue of solitary confinement.

I would say that this is a modest improvement. I do not want to be misunderstood. There are some things that are in the right direction in this legislation, but it is a pity that, in light of the long and thoughtful decisions in both the Ontario Superior Court and Mr. Justice Peter Leask's decision in the B.C. Supreme Court, this is the result. It is a very modest, to use a neutral word, response to their very strong language.

Let me talk initially about what they said. The B.C. Civil Liberties Association and others brought a constitutional case to the B.C. Supreme Court. In a landmark decision that was handed down in January this year, Mr. Justice Leask in his last judgment before leaving the bench provided what can only be described as a blockbuster decision. Among the things that he talked about, to build on what I asked my friend a moment ago, is the need for an independent review of segregation placements and that is entirely lacking in this decision.

He decided that the practice of solitary confinement, as it was practised at that point in time, breached the security of the person. He said: "I find as a fact that administrative segregation as enacted by [the statute] is a form of solitary confinement that places all Canadian federal inmates subject to it at significant risk of serious psychological harm, including mental pain and suffering, and increased incidence of self-harm and suicide." He wrote a 54,000-word judgment after hearing days and days of testimony, a very carefully reasoned decision and he held that it violated the security of the person that is guaranteed in our charter.

He also said that it discriminated against first nations, disabled and mentally ill individuals. The findings for that again are based on a thorough analysis of the situation at hand. He said thousands of prisoners have been subjected to solitary segregation over the years, isolated for up to 23 hours a day, sometimes for months and sometimes for years. Indeed, we know the sad story of Mr. Edward Snowshoe, an indigenous prisoner who died by suicide after languishing in solitary for 162 days without any meaningful attention from staff.

This is akin to a form of torture. This is not unlike the harm we have heard about in other contexts in this place of post-traumatic stress disorder that leads to the serious risks of suicide and self-harm as has happened so many times. Thousands of prisoners have been subjected to that isolation for so long and for so many hours a day and for so many days in a year.

There are about 14,000 inmates in federal institutions, 679 of them women. One in four of the incarcerated men spend some time in segregation. To my surprise, more than 40% of women do. This is a prevalent problem across our institutions and it is not just limited to some prisoners and some institutions, but is endemic across the country.

● (1255)

Those who believe that prisons are there to provide punishment but also for rehabilitation purposes should listen to what the judge concluded after days and days of testimony. He stated, “I have no hesitation in concluding that rather than prepare inmates for their return to the general population, prolonged placements in segregation have the opposite effect of making them more dangerous both within the institutions’ walls and in the community outside.” This is not serving the community and it is certainly not serving the people who have been in institutions for that long. The kinds of concerns he talked about include anxiety, withdrawal, hypersensitivity, hallucinations, aggression, rage, paranoia, hopelessness, self-mutilation and suicide ideation behaviour.

There is no question that we have dealt with a serious problem. It is not only the judge who said this. The correctional investigator of Canada and the United Nations Committee Against Torture have looked at that and concluded that there were serious issues that had to be addressed. Indeed, Justice Leask said there should be time limits of 15 days in solitary, longer periods are considered torture by the United Nations and the government indicated it could implement that standard. That is what led to the legislation before us today.

As I said at the outset, there are some tweaks in here that are helpful. The administrative segregation or solitary confinement has been rebranded as structured integration units, sort of an Orwellian term I suppose, but maybe the language will change things to some degree. Importantly, instead of spending up to 22 or 23 hours in segregation, the new scheme proposes up to 20 hours a day, but for an indefinite period of time. The Ontario Superior Court found that harmful effects can manifest in as little as 48 hours, so I ask whether that is likely to change anything in a significant fashion. I think not.

One of the things Justice Leask spent pages on in his decision was the need, as so many have said, to have an independent check on the discretion of the prison head or the Correctional Service of Canada's top official. That is lacking entirely in this bill. Senator Pate put a press release out and referred to this legislation, saying it is “only merely a rebranding of the same damaging practice”, now called structured intervention unit. She said that this bill “also virtually eliminates existing, already inadequate limitations on its use”, it “maintains the status quo regarding a lack of effective external oversight of correctional decision making”, it does nothing to deal with what Justice Louise Arbour concluded when she studied the prison for women in Kingston and she acknowledges, as the courts have, that the way segregation or solitary confinement is applied is disproportionately affecting “indigenous and racialized prisoners and those with mental health issues”.

This bill needs improvements on the checking of the discretion that is available to officials by way of appeals. The involvement of counsel on disciplinary hearings is a step forward, but there is so much that needs to be done to address the horrific practices that have been castigated by our courts in thoughtful decisions. This bill does not go far enough to address their disturbing conclusions.

● (1300)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while I do not agree with all that the member for Victoria said, he certainly put forward a compelling case for some of the arguments he put forward.

The member for Victoria alluded to the British Columbia Supreme Court decision. We also have, as he alluded to, the Ontario Superior Court decision. He noted that in the British Columbia Supreme Court decision, there was a fair bit of elaboration on the part of the judge about the lack of an independent review. Going through the Ontario decision, what seems to be one of the key elements of that decision was the lack of an independent review.

Meanwhile, we have a government that says it is introducing this legislation to respond to these court decisions, but if that is true, it seems that one of the key elements of both of those decisions is lacking in Bill C-83. Would the hon. member agree?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, my friend from St. Albert—Edmonton is absolutely right, and I would go further.

Both judgments talked about the lack of external review. There is no independent third party to review the discretion of the CSC administrator, and that is shocking. That was one of the key elements of both decisions, as the member correctly pointed out.

What is also shocking is that despite losing both of these decisions so dramatically, the government sees fit to bring in a halfway measure in Bill C-83, and to continue the appeals to the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. These appeals cost lots of money, and for what purpose? Why can the government not accept what the courts have said so dramatically, improve the bill, and save people having to go all the way to the Supreme Court for the government to be told external oversight is required?

● (1305)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised at the position the NDP has taken on this piece of legislation.

Looking at this legislation, as I know my colleague has, there is absolutely no doubt it improves the current system. It deals with the issue of segregation. It deals with audio recordings for victims. It includes body scans. I would ultimately argue that Bill C-83 is a progressive piece of legislation.

Why would the NDP not support this legislation? Maybe that party could attempt to get some amendments made at committee, or something of that nature. Would those members not at least acknowledge that the bill would improve what we currently have in place, even by NDP standards?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I am not interested in NDP standards. I am interested in constitutional standards.

Two courts have told us that the government needs to go well beyond what it has done in this legislation. I acknowledge that this was not explicit, but none of the key elements that the courts have referred to are dealt with here.

My friend from St. Albert—Edmonton has pointed out that the government has decided not to have any third party review the administrator's discretion, which is a key element of this, the constitutionality or the disproportionate impact on indigenous people, blacks and people with mental disabilities. How is the bill going to address that?

Yes, there would be less time in solitary. Yes, the government has a new name to describe the practice. Yes, there have been some changes, as my friend referred to.

It is not NDP versus Conservative versus Liberal. It is about the Constitution of Canada.

I ask any fair-minded person to read this legislation, read the two judgments at issue, and see whether the government has gone far enough.

Why would the government continue an appeal in the face of this?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the British Columbia Supreme Court decision my colleague alluded to, I get the sense that the judge was, in essence, calling on the government to re-examine the whole concept of administrative segregation. Unfortunately, I do not see the government doing that.

Does the member agree that the government has not re-examined the use of administrative segregation thoroughly and in detail?

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Abitibi—Témiscamingue is absolutely right. The broad review that the judge was calling for is simply not to be found in this legislation. There has been some tinkering, and there have been some modest improvements. The Liberals have referred to them in those terms.

It is unclear whether or not higher courts are going to confirm the unconstitutionality of the past system. It is unclear to me whether Bill C-83 goes the distance in achieving the justice that the courts require for those in solitary confinement.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today and speak to Bill C-83 and the impacts of the corrections facilities and our justice system on real people. In particular, my interest is on indigenous people, and how they are treated by the justice system and in our correctional facilities.

We are looking at a bill that will actually do what it promises and what it needs to do, which is eliminate solitary confinement. That was the major goal, and that is what this bill will do. It is also going to hold guilty parties accountable for breaking the law. Each and every Canadian wants to ensure that we have a justice system and a corrections system that are going to hold offenders to task, that they are receiving the proper penalty, and hopefully that they receive rehabilitation services to make them meaningful and active participants in our society.

Ultimately, we want fewer repeat offenders, fewer victims and safer communities. That is why our government is strengthening the federal corrections system, aligning it to the latest evidence and best practices so that inmates are rehabilitated and better prepared to re-enter our society safely.

This bill will eliminate solitary confinement, following recent court decisions and introducing a more effective system that will be called the structured intervention unit system. It will also provide better supports for victims during Parole Board hearings. It will increase staff and inmate safety with the new body scanner technology. It will also update our approach on critical matters like mental health supports and becoming more sensitive to indigenous offenders' needs.

There is no stronger case to reflect on than the Ashley Smith case, where a young girl was throwing crabapples at a mailman. She ended up in a youth facility, and her experience was then compounded with various acts of aggression and hostility because she felt she was not being treated fairly. Young people who are faced with a situation of hopelessness reach out in any way they can. Ultimately, Ashley hanged herself in a correctional facility operated by the Government of Canada.

It is hard to understand how a young woman would feel so hopeless in a facility that is supposed to be providing rehabilitative services. Ashley Smith's story is one that we should all reflect on. We would reflect on the fact that here was a young girl who was placed in a youth facility for a month in 2003, at the age of 14, after throwing crabapples at the mailman.

I am sorry, but this hardly seems like a reason to end up in confinement, whether it is in a youth facility or not. I have three children. I do not believe any one of them has ever actually thrown a crabapple at a mailman, but I am sure they have done things that might even be worse. The point is that this young girl was thrown into jail, a youth facility, and that experience was compounded. Instead of getting out and rejoining society, she might have had another small infraction, and then it was extended and extended to the point where her life held no hope that she could see, and where she would rather commit suicide than go on living in her condition in solitary confinement. It was a tragic situation and one that this bill is addressing.

● (1310)

We know more can be done, and more needs to be done. We know from the statistics that many of the people in our correctional facilities come from an indigenous heritage. Indigenous people far outnumber those from other communities. We must address the root causes, and that is a much more complicated and longer journey. However, I am proud to say that this is a government that is finally taking steps forward. We have a Prime Minister who has made a commitment to the indigenous people of this country, and to all of us, that this is an issue that we are finally going to address. Progress is being made.

When we go back to look at the bill itself, there is a need to make changes. This is a government that has taken steps forward, and there is no doubt that there are those in our community who will be concerned that some prisoners may be dangerous to the guards, to other inmates and to themselves, and that solitary confinement plays an important role in our correctional facilities. However, they need to understand that this was not the best way to help people. In fact, people in solitary confinement do not receive the supports they need to become stronger and healthier: the mental supports, the health supports and the supports they need to function in a very stressful circumstance.

Therefore, I am very pleased to see that we are eliminating solitary confinement and looking for new alternatives that would keep those offenders from the general population while allowing them to retain access to rehabilitation programs, mental health care and other interventions. Ultimately, effective rehabilitation and safe reintegration are always the best way to protect Canadian communities.

This is an issue that we are looking at federally, but it has also been addressed provincially. I note that in May, Ontario passed Bill 6, the Correctional Services Transformation Act. On May 7, the province implemented a hard cap on days spent in segregation.

The number of inmates who are in segregation has been dropping, and we are glad to see it. In 2011, there were 700 inmates in solitary confinement, and now that has dropped to 340. I am pleased to say I am a member of a government that is finding a way to eliminate solitary confinement.

While the correctional investigator has looked at the situation and acknowledged that the reduction in the use of solitary confinement is an improvement, he has also raised concerns that this decline may be related to increased violence among inmates. There is more to do, as we know, and we must continue to move with society to make appropriate amendments.

The structured intervention units would replace solitary confinement. Individuals would be separated from the mainstream inmate population, generally for safety reasons, and they would be assigned to a secure intervention unit. This would separate inmates when necessary, while continuing to provide them with rehabilitative programming, mental health care, and other interventions and services that respond to their specific needs.

This bill does several other things, including providing supports to victims. The bill would allow audio recordings of parole hearings. At this point, these are only available to victims who do not attend. The recordings would now be available to any victims, even if they attend, and would be an important record for them to review for the future.

● (1315)

The proposed bill also puts in law the guiding principles to affirm the need for CSC to consider systemic and background factors unique to indigenous offenders. This is an important and positive step for all Canadians, in particular our indigenous members of our society.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we listen to the news on the radio, for example, we hear about how the Liberals want to scrap administrative segregation. I heard that three times during the member for Kildonan—St. Paul's speech too. That says to me that nobody will ever again be isolated in a cell for several hours a day or several days in a row.

However, that is not what Bill C-83 says. All it says is that the term "administrative segregation" will be replaced by "structured intervention units", that the number of hours will be reduced from 22 or 23 to a maximum of 20 hours, and that the inmates will have contact with other people. They can still be segregated for 20 hours a day for an indefinite period of time. There is no limit on the number of days an inmate can spend in a structured intervention unit.

How can the government tell people it is doing one thing even as it is doing another? How can it mislead people like that?

To me, that is outrageous.

● (1320)

[*English*]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, there will be a fundamental change in the way people who are in an isolated cell are treated. That includes a minimum of four hours out of their cell daily and at least two hours of meaningful human contact with staff, volunteers, visitors or other compatible inmates. There will also be a daily visit by a medical professional.

By contrast, people currently in solitary confinement are only entitled two hours daily out of their cell, with minimal human contact and access to programming. This does not go as far as what the NDP advocates but goes much further than what the Conservatives advocate. The Liberals have made a positive step in the right direction.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could my hon. colleague please comment on the importance of getting the debate finished in this place and get it to committee where experts can present testimony that may see some amendments come forward before the bill returns to the House?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, we know that when we work well together, our committees can be extremely effective. We will hear from those who have worked in the system, who have studied the system and who can provide expert advice.

Also, committees have the ability to bring forward amendments that can better a bill for all of us. I look forward to seeing whether the committee looks at amending it, but committees have an extremely important role.

I urge all members in the House to conclude the first debates on the bill and move it forward to committee, where there are active representatives from the Conservative and NDP sides and where we often allow those who are independent to participate. Therefore, I look forward to the results of the committee. I urge members to move forward.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last question and comment give me an opportunity to talk about something I was going to talk about anyway. We just had the spectacle of two Liberal members of Parliament bragging about the fact that they were cutting off the debate in the House of Commons. They say that there has just been too much debate and that it has gone on too long.

The bill has not even been printed for a week. It has been before the House for less than three days. After the second day, it was enough. The Liberals had heard enough from members of Parliament and the Canadians we represent. It was just too much and members needed to get it out of the House as quickly as possible. This is from a party and a government which cried every time the previous government allocated the time for debate. It said that it would never do it if it was ever in government.

The hypocrisy of the member for Avalon is a spectacle we can all see today. He campaigned on it, and today he is cheerleading for the fact. He is heckling me during my speech while I try to talk about the concerns of my constituents. Two days in the House before the Liberals cut-off debate. The bill has not even been available to be studied for an entire week and we are under time allocation.

Why should we be surprised that the Liberals do not want to consult with members of Parliament on this? They have not consulted with the representatives of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers who will be directly impacted by the bill. They have not consulted with the guards.

An hon. member: Not true.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I continue to get heckled from the other side. Apparently, the Liberals do not want to hear any debate, let alone cut it off after just three days debate.

The members of UCCO have been very clear that Liberal politicians in Ottawa are not the ones who have to go in and breakup a fight. Inmates of a what the Liberals now call a "structured intervention unit" inevitably have conflicts. These are people who cannot manage themselves in the general population of a prison. They are typically people who are the worst of the worst. In the debate, I mentioned people like Willie Picton. Clifford Olson also spent his life in segregation, where he should have been. That is where Willie Picton should be. Instead of talking about that, the Liberals are saying we should be talking about reintegrating these people into society.

Some people can be reintegrated, and we support that. Some people need to stay in segregation for the rest of their natural lives. Legislation is being proposed which will not allow for that. The Liberals blame it on the courts that this has to come forward, while they the decision is being appealed. They have not even said that this court ruling will stand. They are trying to have it overturned at higher levels, yet here we are with legislation jammed down our throats, legislation about which the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers is very concerned. It is its members who will be put at risk. Its members are the ones who have to deal with the most prolific offenders, offenders who have committed additional crimes inside the prison and who are often placed in segregation for their own protection.

The member for St. Albert—Edmonton laid out very clearly the substantial supports that were available for people in segregation. They receive mental health visits, visits from the institutional head, from the guards and health visits as well. This idea that they are locked in a dark cell and are cut-off from human contact is simply not true.

The bill now calls for meaningful human contact for two hours a day. I would like to know what that looks like for Robert Picton. What does that look like for Terri-Lynne McClintic? What is meaningful human contact when she is already receiving mental health services? She is already receiving phone calls to her family and is allowed to have visitors. Now it will be legislated meaningful human contact. This is very interesting.

● (1325)

The Liberals have not consulted with UCCO or victims of crime, which is par for the course. They did not consult with the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers when they brought forward their ridiculous prison needle exchange program idea. Prisoners in maximum-security facilities, prisoners who often spend much of their day trying to fashion weapons to use against other inmates or against guards when necessary, would be given needles in their cells as a right of an inmate. The Liberals are now forcing that on our prisons and our prisons guards. Also, they would be given spoons so they could heat up their drugs and inject them intravenously, spoons that no doubt are part of a kit that has to stay in the cell but can be used as a weapon.

All of these things are clear to anyone who has been in a prison, who has had a tour of a prison or who has talked to a single prison guard. They know this is a ridiculous proposition, but the Liberals do not care. They do not consult with the actual front-line workers. Instead, they come up with these pie-in-the-sky ideas in their ivory towers in Ottawa and tell the workers on the ground, the people who deal with sharks in the prison, that they will have deal with this now.

Never mind that it is the mandate of a prison guard to ensure there are no illegal drugs in the prison. We will have a situation where there will be illegal drugs in a cell, guards will have to search the cell, but will have to set aside the government-mandated safe injection kit to look for the illegal drugs, which they then will take away. What a ridiculous proposal. That is what the government is defending. The government does not talk to the people who are actually impacted by these decisions.

Again, we have many concerns with the bill.

The member for Malpeque said that we should not legislate based on the exceptional cases. If the legislation does not capture the exceptional cases, what good is it? If we do not allow for prison guards and prison officials to have the ability to have disciplinary segregation when people are endangering guards, other inmates or themselves, what is the point? We simply put people at additional risk.

We support a few parts of the bill. We support giving the audio to victims. We support body scanners and think that should be expanded to ensure there is no contraband in prison. The minister said in his speech on the bill, "Keeping contraband out of correctional facilities would help make institutions as safe and secure as possible." Therefore, we will have body scanners to keep those bad drugs out of those prisons, but we will give needles and spoons to the prisoners to ensure they can inject those life-altering drugs as soon as possible and as safely as possible. How about we just keep the drugs out of the prison? How about we double down on that effort?

I am glad the heckling continues from the Liberals who love debate in this place.

The government once again thinks it knows best. It is not going to take any guidance from the people who work in these prisons.

One of the highest populations of corrections officials and prison guards live in my riding and work in the many institutions around it. In the Pacific region, there is the Pacific Institution, Kent Institution, Matsqui Institution, Mountain Institution, Mission Institution, the Kwìkwèxwelhp Healing Village and the Fraser Valley Institute for Women. I have these people in my office all the time talking about this failed approach from the government. However, this is a government that thinks it knows best. It is a government that is ignoring their concerns and is not dealing with the actual concerns of Canadians.

When we saw that there was a bill on notice to deal with corrections, we hoped it would deal with the ridiculous situation where Tori Stafford's murderer could be transferred down to a minimum-security facility. We hoped it would give the tools, which we believe it has already, and clarify, with this proposed legislation, that someone like Terri-Lynne McClintic would not be in a minimum-security prison. Instead, the government modified it in the bill to allow the minister to allow corrections officials to designate a single cell in a minimum-security facility as a maximum-security cell. Therefore, there would be no fences, locks, segregation, nothing, but room 102 would be declared as a maximum-security cell in a minimum-security prison.

The government has failed to consult with victims, failed to consult with corrections officers and for that reason we should reject the legislation.

● (1330)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I regret that it is unlikely that we will find a compromise on this issue given the fact that Liberals do not believe in the Conservative ideology around prisons and locking offenders up and throwing away the key, as if that somehow were going to resolve the problems we have. The truth of the matter is, whether on this issue or prison farms, the Conservatives have always had that ideology. Where does that lead? It leads toward the system we see in the United States where we end up with super prisons and four times as many people locked up as we did decades ago.

The member specifically asked, how about it if we just kept the drugs out of the hands of inmates? It seems simple enough, but over 10 years the Conservatives were not able to do that. As a matter of fact, if they had been able to do that, we would not be having this conversation right now. Why was the former government not able to keep the drugs out of the hands of the inmates, if it is so simple and he suggests that we should be doing it?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the fearmongering question by the member opposite when he talked about locking them up and throwing away the key. I am surprised he did not say "three strikes, you're out". As to super prisons, we were used to that kind of rhetoric from the Liberals when they were in opposition, when they would say that because of our criminal justice reforms we would have to build new prisons, that there would be double-bunking otherwise, and all the rest of that nonsense.

What we actually found during our time in office is that people were deterred from committing crimes because they did not want to go to prison. Our agenda was to provide deterrence. I do not understand the Liberal mentality of wanting to wish away the types of people who are in prison. Yes, there are some who can be rehabilitated, but the Liberals want to gloss over the fact that there are serial killers, serial rapists, people who will never set foot in public again in the prison system. They want to wish that system away. Yes, our government had no tolerance for drugs in prison policy. We think it is the right policy and the Liberals should stop sending mixed messages by making our guards keep prisons drug-free while handing out drug paraphernalia at the same time.

● (1335)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's excellent speech magnifies this soft on crime approach by the Liberals, but he brought something up that is very concerning to me. I live in a community with a lot of unions and workers and there seems to be a pattern here. The Liberals did it with marijuana, and with this bill they have not consulted the workers to make sure they would have a safe workplace.

Could the member elaborate on the lack of consultation for this bill, because it seems the government wants to throw a blind eye to the fact that people are working in extremely dangerous environments? Could he comment on how important it is to consult with the people on the ground, because it could be somebody's life that is being affected here?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals do not consult on these things because they think they know best. They think they have all the solutions and they have come up with these things in a boardroom and a bull pit session and think they know how they can make this better for someone who might be in segregation. However, what they have not done is talked to the actual union officials.

Many of us met with UCCO last week about the prison needle exchange program. Correctional officers do not even have protective gloves that can stop needle stick injuries. They are not protected from inmates who would weaponize a contaminated needle to use against them or someone else, but this is being forced on correctional facilities. It is being jammed down their throats because the Ottawa Liberals know best. They have come up with these policies in a vacuum. They should talk to the people who are actually going to be impacted and put at risk before they come up with these cockamamie schemes.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time. I will bring some perspective to this debate dating back to October 2004, when I first came to the House. At the time, it was the tail end of a minority government.

We did not deal too much with legislation that addressed crime and other matters as such. I remember when the Conservatives came to power in 2006. They came in on a wave of their getting tough on crime and criminals. Over the years, to say it has been a mixed bag of success is to be somewhat generous. I do not mean that in a harsh or partisan way, but in a way that reflects that it is somewhat disappointing that we never had a decent conversation about crime, and certainly not about rehabilitation. Crime had become a superficial way of trying to gain popularity and votes. I say this not against the Conservatives specifically, but the debate has drifted in that direction. I think the tag line was "Do the crime, do the time."

The problem is that we had seen what happens in jurisdictions around the world, and especially in the United States, where they truly used it, amping it up to the point where it became absolutely deafening, to the point where it was a matter of "Lock them up and throw away the key." I mean nothing specific by that.

I will say, however, that tag line was used quite a bit. Unfortunately, we now find that so many people in the United States who originally used that as a way of gaining popularity and a way of pushing forward a very good public policy are now winding back some, but not all, of that. I am sure some of it worked out in the end. In many cases, there were a lot of people in the system who deserved to be in the system and should continue to be in the system, and that worked.

However, we realized over the years that a lot of people should not be in the system that long and were not given the tools to go back into society. There are people in society who do not belong in society. I get it. I think we all get that. However, there are people in the system administered by CSC who will go back into society. Who will that person be coming back into society, as opposed to who they were when they left society and went to prison for the first time? It is us who make the decisions to be there for the people who help rehabilitate the criminals.

I understand, on this particular legislation, that there are opinions on both sides of it, people who like what we say, and others who say that we need to look at furthering this debate about rehabilitating a person who has been incarcerated and is now going back into society. It takes several steps to get to that point. There are many examples around the world that we could use to get back to that point.

We also have the court system, which has pointed out that the old system has discrepancies that we need to fix, like solitary confinement. Let us look at the concept of solitary confinement for just a moment, the separation of someone from others for the safety of everyone involved. To a great extent, that has to happen within the system.

I have never worked in the prison system. I have never been in prison myself. However, I certainly know enough about the situation. Over the past 14 years, I have certainly heard enough about those who feel that rehabilitation in the prison service is deficient in many ways, federally and provincially in many cases. In my opinion, Bill C-83 is a way to take a step, so that when people go back into society, they will not be the same people who went into the prison. It is incumbent upon us to have that wide debate.

Now, we want to do several things in this particular bill, which I will point out.

● (1340)

This legislation proposes to eliminate segregation, following recent court decisions, as I pointed out. It introduces more effective structured intervention units. It proposes better support for victims during Parole Board hearings and it proposes increasing staff and inmate safety with new body scanner technology. Bill C-83 proposes to update our approach to critical matters like mental health supports and indigenous offenders' needs, as well as the needs of the general population.

What CSC really needs is the authority to separate offenders from the general population for the sake of institutional safety.

While someone is segregated in solitary confinement, there is still a way that we can reach that person to effect a major change. Therefore, there is a minimum. Yes, we do segregate that person from the general population for the safety of the institution, but we also need to provide the structure so that we can tackle the problem in a responsible and mature manner. This is what the SIUs this legislation introduces are about. Four hours of human contact could alleviate the problem.

The problem may have started with a particular person. I am not blaming anyone else. However we must look for the reason why that person needs to be segregated. Why is the individual like that? We need to make sure that it does not happen again. In order to do that, as the courts have pointed out, human contact is needed, which would make the situation it that much better for the institution itself and for the prison population in general.

For many years CSC has been criticized for the practice of administrative segregation, better known as solitary confinement. The case of Ashley Smith is a good example. Ashley died in custody in 2007. Her case highlighted issues related to segregation and mental health care in the Canadian correctional system.

In 2013, a coroner's inquest into the death of Ashley Smith resulted in recommendations, one of which was instituting a cap on the amount of time an inmate can spend in segregation. We realized from that case alone in 2007 that there was a problem and that we needed to go further.

We need to protect institutions and instill institutional safety by taking an inmate from the general population. But then what? What is the right answer?

The right answer involves our listening to the experts who have to deal with these people every day. I know they are on different sides in this particular step that we want to take, but it is our responsibility to have this debate and send the bill to committee so that opposition members who have some concerns can make the proper amendments.

We must remember that key here is the fact that a lot of these people will face society once again. We want to make sure that an individual who goes back into society is not the same person who went into prison.

We know these people through families, through friends, through contacts who have been in prison and had a rough time. We hear about them all the time. That is one of the major things that happened in 2007 with the case of Ashley Smith.

The number of inmates in segregation on any given day in 2011 was over 700. It is now about 340. Why is that the case? We need to explore the reason why.

As we look for answers to this particular situation, I realize that these units, these SIUs, are not the perfect answer for everyone involved in the system, including the guards.

My support for Bill C-83 comes from my understanding of the need to take that step of providing human contact to protect society at large. Of course, there are people here on both sides of the issue. We need to have a debate here and the bill sent to committee so that we can look at any amendments that might be brought forward.

I thank everyone involved in this debate. I also thank the superior courts of both British Columbia and Ontario for helping us guide the way.

● (1345)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many times throughout this debate we have asked the governing party why it did not consult with correctional officers, who have some serious concerns about their own safety while providing the kind of services they do for all Canadians.

My question this time is more related to the member's inference that a committee will study this legislation and that amendments will be presented at committee. The member inferred that the committee would be open to considering amendments. However the track record of the Liberal government is not that great when it comes to being open to accepting good amendments put forward by opposition members.

I want assurance from my colleague that when these amendments are brought forward, amendments that are backed by correctional officers who are concerned about their safety, the committee will in fact give them due consideration.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is very encouraging to hear a straightforward answer, a rare thing in this place, and that the answer is “yes”.

I will be presenting amendments. I certainly want to be listening carefully to the evidence before committee because we have already heard some very strong concerns from people who have given their lives in dedication to this field.

I have mentioned, for instance, Senator Kim Pate, who used to run the Elizabeth Fry Society in Canada before becoming a senator. I will just quote what she said in her statement, "Changing the Name of the Unit Is Not Enough". She suggests that this new structured intervention unit appears to be "rebranding" of what is currently done, but with fewer limitations on how frequently it can be used.

I would like to hope that that is not the government's intent. Therefore, I will ask my friend again if, in openness to amendments, we can be absolutely certain that this ends the kinds of torturous ordeals that particularly discriminate against racialized, marginalized and indigenous women in prison.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for bringing this up, especially with regard to the indigenous dimension of this. I did not bring it up in my speech and I apologize. However, certainly there is a higher proportion of the population who find themselves in that situation.

I hear what she is saying about the amendments she is bringing forward. I know her situation within the context of a committee and her position itself. I am assuming she will be there. I have no doubt it will be debated thoroughly whether I am there or not, not that I have any domain over it but members get the idea.

Nevertheless, the unit that the hon member brought up to me right now, and the flexibility within it, provides that human contact. The certain situations that other people have spoken about, I cannot speak to as I did not see their comments. However, I will say this. The human contact aspect of this to me is very essential. It is a central part of a system that is backed up, of course, by court decisions.

In this particular case where are we looking at an institution that does not provide any human contact whatsoever, which is really incumbent upon solitary confinement, really, we should put ourselves into the 21st century when it comes to dealing with rehabilitation and human contact to benefit society as a whole.

● (1350)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for our hon. colleague.

I just want to know, first, if the changes in Bill C-83 have been fully costed. As well, how is the government going to measure the deliverables outlined in Bill C-83?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the process is the process, as the hon. member knows. I was the former chair of the committee he was involved with.

Certainly, he can bring forward whatever he wishes to do. That is his domain. That is his priority as a member. The debate and acceptance of it, time will tell as we get through it.

However, I will say this. I implore the member to look at it as a positive step that can benefit society because of what has been talked about throughout this particular debate and others about rehabilitation. We have been talking about crime for the past 12 to 14 years in a credible way. It has constituted weeks upon weeks of debate in this House.

Now is the time that we can have a mature conversation about a positive step to getting back to human contact and rehabilitation for those who are in the system. We know these people will be coming back to society. Separate them for the sake of institutional safety? Yes, and provide them supports by which they can contribute to society.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before giving the floor to the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, I must inform her that she will have seven minutes before we move on to question period. She will then have three minutes remaining.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill C-83, I will focus mainly on administrative segregation because it is one of the key measures that should have been greatly improved. Unfortunately, we are not seeing this improvement.

There are two rulings on the use of administrative segregation that, in essence, have profoundly challenged the use of this technique because of the psychological and psychiatric effects it can have on people. For example, a number of studies show that administrative segregation could trigger or aggravate certain psychiatric symptoms such as hallucinations, panic attacks, paranoia, depression, impulsiveness, hypersensitivity to external stimuli, self-harm, insomnia and problems with thinking, concentration and memory. The use of administrative segregation increases the risk of suicidal thoughts and suicide.

In light of all that, the government should have engaged in a profound re-evaluation of the circumstances justifying the use of administrative segregation as well as the guidelines for the duration and supervision of this practice, among other things. Unfortunately, there are no options.

Segregation is also used in the health system. It is one measure used to restrain patients. Clearly, I am not referring to the same clients. Nevertheless, there are many linkages that can be drawn. The health system previously used many restraint measures on a regular basis. For example, a lap belt was used for seniors with dementia and the bed rails were raised so they would not fall out of bed. That was how things were done.

Quebec's health system has seriously questioned the circumstances that justify the use of restraints. There have been questions about how health institutions should determine whether their protocols for the use of restraints are effective.

Several documents were written about this, and I will be referring to a document put out by the Government of Quebec called *Cadre de référence pour l'élaboration des protocoles d'application des mesures de contrôle*, which deals with restraint, isolation and chemical substances. Chapter 4 is extremely interesting and so I hope that members will look into it, especially at committee. It talks about the ethical and clinical principles that health institutions should use to establish their protocols for the use of restraint. The first principle is this:

> Control measures are only used as safety measures when immediate threats are identified

The protocol should state that control measures must be used in a therapeutic context only and must under no circumstances be used to punish, intimidate or correct a person, to modify a behaviour, or to deal with organizational constraints. If a control measure is used, it must be used with the sole object of preventing the person from imminently causing harm to themselves or others.

These ethical principles make many interesting points, especially where they say that restraint measures, such as segregation, must never be used to deal with organizational constraints. In other words, if segregation can be avoided by doubling staff numbers, that would be the ethical thing to do, rather than placing people in segregation just because it is the easiest option and money is tight.

This is also a very important principle from a legal perspective. Administrative segregation should not be used as a substitute for increasing staff numbers due to a lack of means. If segregation can be avoided by increasing staff, whether that means more security guards or other professionals, then increasing staff is the better option.

● (1355)

Another ethical principle is that control measures should be used only as a last resort. That seems logical.

I will continue after question period.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue will have five minutes when we resume debate after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

ENERGY EAST PIPELINE

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative leader confirmed once again this week that their priority is to force Quebec to accept the energy east pipeline. Their priority is not to ensure that the federal government pays its fair share of health care costs, not to improve the services taxpayers pay for, and certainly not to address climate change.

No, their priority is to force us to accept a pipeline no one wants and that will put 800 of our waterways at risk with no economic spinoffs. Their priority is to make us take on all the risk for the benefit of the oil companies.

The greater Montreal area is against this. The Conservative leader should understand that this is three times the population of his entire province. The first nations oppose it, the unions oppose it, environmentalists oppose it and the municipalities oppose it.

If the Conservatives want to steamroll over us, they will find a lot of people in their path, including the Bloc Québécois.

* * *

[*English*]

VERONICA TYRRELL

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our community recently lost a very special person with the passing of my dear friend, Veronica Tyrrell. Veronica made an enormous contribution to the Halton region by promoting, protecting and celebrating diversity.

Veronica was tireless in educating all of us about Oakville's black history and our ties to the Underground Railroad. I will never forget leading a black history bike tour to an emancipation day picnic she organized and arriving to the sounds of a choir singing *Oh, Freedom*. I worked with her to have our Oakville civic holiday renamed emancipation day, and she was thrilled.

As president of the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton, Veronica organized galas, black history events, Christmas concerts and so much more. She founded a cross-generational steel pan band and youth programs with Halton Police.

Veronica dedicated herself to improving the community. Mostly, she was a loving wife, mother, grandmother and friend, one we will miss terribly.

* * *

HALDIMAND—NORFOLK

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight this summer's many great festivals and celebrations in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk.

We started the season with the Dunnville Mudcat Festival and the Delhi Strawberry Festival, followed by all-day Canada Day celebrations in Caledonia and Port Dover. Who has not missed a year since Confederation?

Then we had LavenderFest, Le Tour de Norfolk, CayugaFest, Hagersville Rocks, Lynn River Music and Arts Festival, Selkirk Gas Fest, Turkey Point Summerfest, Dunnville Agricultural Fair, Port Dover Summer Fest, Houghton Fair, South Coast Jazz, Port Rowan Bayfest, Delhi Fall Fest, Langton Agricultural and School Fall Fair, Donnybrook Fair, Routes to Roots Film Festival, Norfolk Studio Tour, Caledonia Fair and the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show. We rounded out the season with Pumpkinfest in Waterford.

I commend all the organizers, volunteers and sponsors for continuing these events and growing and making them better each and every year.

* * *

● (1400)

COMMUNITY LIVING CENTRAL YORK

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we give a smile, we get a smile. “Smile Cookie Week” was recently held at Tim Hortons locations across Canada. In Newmarket—Aurora, one dollar from every cookie purchased went to benefit Community Living Central York, raising a total of $29,239.

Community Living Central York works hard every day to ensure everyone in our community is included, regardless of his or her abilities. It ensures that those with developmental disabilities can reach their fullest potential.

Community Living Central York recently broke ground on its new, fully accessible home in Newmarket where it will operate day programs and offer services to its clients, allowing them to fully participate in our community.

I thank all the volunteers and workers at Community Living for their dedication, commitment and passion to ensure our community is one where everyone truly belongs.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its report, showing that our current emissions trajectory shows we are headed toward catastrophic climate change. It is an unfortunate hallmark of this Parliament that we cannot collectively bring ourselves to see beyond the next election, where short-term political gains incentivize us more than our collective human future on this planet.

The Earth will go on with or without us. It does not care about our petty politics or the bickering about the carbon tax. It does not care that the Conservatives have no plan or that the Liberals' plan is not working. It is our children and our future generations that will most savagely feel the effects of the lack of courage and vision of this place.

We can rise to meet this challenge and create a better world with a new clean-energy economy. We just need a government with the will to make it happen.

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DYSAUTONOMIA AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, October is Dysautonomia Awareness Month.

My constituent, Emily Wilkinson, is a 19-year-old Sault College student. She studies early childhood education, coaches a children's soccer team and hopes to some day go to Africa.

Three years ago, Emily was diagnosed with dysautonomia, a condition causing malfunctions to the autonomic nervous system. Emily could not stand for more than a minute. She was bedridden and had to be home-schooled. This condition has caused all kinds of distressing symptoms for Emily, including dizziness, tremors, heart palpitations, severe fatigue, brain fog, seizure-like activities and many more symptoms.

Emily says, “Living with this condition is comparable to someone living with congestive heart failure and COPD. It takes people affected by this disease three times more energy to stand than a normal person.”

Emily has a dream of spreading awareness so people can get the help they need faster and so more research can be accomplished. I am impressed by Emily's courage and honoured to help share her message with the House and Canada.

FIREARMS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, git yer orange on, it's huntin' season in the Ottawa Valley. For Canadians who share a love of the great outdoors and the pursuit of traditional heritage activities, for Canadians who enjoy the camaraderie of a hunt camp with family and friends, fall is a favourite time of year. Anyone who has experienced a week in the bush, evenings spent by a campfire, stories shared, instinctively knows what I am talking about.

The millions of responsible, law-abiding firearms owners do not understand why the Liberal Party feels it must hate our independence. We do not understand why the Liberal Prime Minister encourages the mean and divisive policies that target law-abiding citizens, like Bill C-71, and how the current ploy is to promote a fake ban on firearms. It does this while pushing laws like Bill C-75, which will decrease criminal penalties.

Farmers, hunters and recreational shooters know they are not safe whenever there is a petty tyrant sitting on the throne. To all the hunters, be careful, be safe and have a good hunt.

* * *

● (1405)

SECRET PATH PROJECT

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, October 23 concludes the second anniversary of the launch of the *Secret Path*, a 2016 multimedia project by Gord Downie and graphic artist Jeff Lemire.

The *Secret Path* was inspired by the true story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12–year–old Anishinaabe boy who died on this day, October 23, in 1966. Chanie froze to death while running away from the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, a building where I once worked as executive director of Grand Council Treaty #3. Chanie, at the time, was trying to return home to his family that he was taken from over 600 kilometres away at Ogoki Post of the Marten Falls First Nation.

Today, all of us in the House and Canadians from coast to coast to coast share the loss with the Wenjack family and we thank the late Gord Downie for using his voice to share Chanie's life with Canadians. By listening to and sharing the stories of residential school children, we will ensure they are never forgotten.

Meegwetch.

[*Translation*]

PAUL-GERMAIN-OSTIGUY HIGH SCHOOL

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the exceptional work of faculty and staff at schools across the riding of Shefford. They work hard developing extracurricular activities that raise young people's awareness of the importance of community engagement while demystifying the democratic parliamentary system.

Students at Paul-Germain-Ostiguy high school in Saint-Césaire are invited to form a real student parliament made up of young elected officials who want to get involved in student life. Some of them are appointed as ministers and a prime minister is elected. These students are charged with representing their peers and proposing changes to the school administration in order to improve the quality of life at the school.

I applaud this wonderful initiative and commend these young people for their great leadership.

* * *

[*English*]

CAPITAL EXPERIENCE

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year, two students from each of the seven high schools in my riding are selected to participate in a program I call the "Capital Experience". During their three-day visit to Ottawa, they will learn about various career opportunities that await them following their graduation from post-secondary education. They will meet an ambassador, members of the media, lawyers from the Supreme Court and executives from Summa Strategies.

I would like to introduce this year's participants: Josie Quigley and Kurtis Adams from Haliburton Highlands; Zach Schummer and Haley Canavan from Brock; Jordan Metrow and Maria Fernanda Haro from Crestwood; Shaun Soutar and Charlotte Neumann from Fenelon Falls; Samantha Collis and Tiana Hanshaw from LCVI; Bethany Johnsen and Jonah Grignon from Weldon; and Dalyah Schiarizza and Ethan Bain from St. Thomas Aquinas.

I would also like to thank the sponsors, the Lions Clubs, the Rotary Clubs, the local legions and the small businesses that contributed.

It is my hope that these students will be inspired as they consider future opportunities. I would like to invite my colleagues to welcome these students to Ottawa.

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HMCS *KOOTENAY*

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, October 23 is HMCS *Kootenay* day. HMCS *Kootenay* was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy in 1959 as a Restigouche-class destroyer, serving until 1995.

Kootenay and her crew demonstrated great courage and ability. Sadly, she also faced moments of tragedy, like on the morning of October 23, 1969.

Forty-nine years ago today, HMCS *Kootenay* was passing through the English Channel when she began to perform a full-power trial. Eleven minutes in, a mechanical failure caused a deadly explosion in the starboard gearbox. The devastation took nine lives, injuring 53 more. This tragedy is still considered the worst peacetime accident in the history of the Royal Canadian Navy.

I would like to invite all members in the House to join me in expressing our utmost respect and gratitude for the crew of HMCS *Kootenay* and their loved ones. May we always be reminded of their sacrifice and valour.

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[*Translation*]

HÔTEL-DIEU DE ROBERVAL

Mr. Richard Hébert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and Export Promotion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 20, the historic village of Val-Jalbert hosted the Festin du centenaire to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Hôtel-Dieu de Roberval, which was founded by the Canonesses of St. Augustine of the Mercy of Jesus.

All residents of Roberval and its surrounding areas were invited to attend this celebration to cap off all of the events that were held in the community in recent months. Throughout the year, there have been various events celebrating the community's history, including an exhibit entitled, "Hôtel-Dieu de Roberval and the Canonesses of St. Augustine of the Mercy of Jesus: 100 years of history and devotion".

The goal of all of these events was to commemorate the arrival of six hospitallers from the Hôtel-Dieu de Chicoutimi in 1918, the nuns who founded what is now the Hôtel-Dieu de Roberval, a very important community institution.

I want to thank Réjean Perron, chair of the organizing committee, and his team for paying tribute to the women and men who sought and continue to seek to ensure the well-being of the community.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberals unveiled their job-killing carbon tax scheme. It is an attempt to buy votes, and Canadians are not buying.

The Liberal tax grab will make everything more expensive, especially for those families that can afford it the least. This is Liberal math at its finest. Tossing Canadians a few coins will not cover the higher costs of heating our homes, feeding our families or filling up our cars.

Opposition to the Liberal carbon tax has been harsh. For example, today the Financial Post said, "the federal plan involves adding even more regulations to the mix — then sticking a carbon tax on top. This looks nothing like what economists have recommended."

The Liberals are also giving a sweetheart deal to the biggest emitters. That means the financial burden of the carbon tax rests solely on the backs of hard-working Canadians, our farmers and our small businesses.

The Conservatives will fight for lower taxes and defend Canadian jobs, everything the Liberal carbon tax threatens. The Conservatives will repeal the carbon tax and it will not cost Canadians a nickel.

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ONTARIO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to stand and recognize all those who ran in the Ontario municipal elections yesterday. I congratulate not just those who won but everyone who put their name forward to make our cities and towns better places to live.

I also thank those who volunteered and helped out. Volunteers are the backbone of our elections and without their dedication, elections would not happen.

As a former mayor and city councillor, I can tell those who were successful last night that there is nothing quite as humbling as representing a community as municipal elected officials do, where the day-to-day lives of constituents are affected with every decision they make.

In my riding, the City of Kingston and Frontenac Islands have bright futures ahead under the renewed leadership of mayors Bryan Paterson and Denis Doyle. I look forward to working with them and their new councils to continue to make our region of Canada thrive.

I congratulate them all.

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[*Translation*]

NICOLET RUN FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for anyone who does not believe in miracles, let me describe what happened in my region last weekend. At the fifth annual run for mental health in Nicolet, Marie-Sol St-Onge, who underwent a quadruple amputation in 2012 after contracting flesh-eating disease, achieved her goal of walking three kilometres using her prostheses. Her loving partner and steadfast ally, Alin Robert, was by her side, providing love and encouragement every step of the way. That is the kind of love that can move mountains. When she crossed the finish line, she summed up her philosophy of life by saying that, after everything she has been through, she just wanted to prove that it is worth persevering and fighting for what you want, because life is far more precious than any of the challenges you might face.

I want to thank Marie-Sol St-Onge and Alin Robert for their inspiring journey of resilience, selflessness and love. They have inspired not only the clients of the Fondation prévention suicide les Deux Rives, the beneficiary of the funds raised, but everyone who saw them.

[*English*]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a Quebec TV show Sunday night, the Prime Minister said this about greenhouse gas emissions: "Even if Canada stopped everything tomorrow, and the other countries didn't have any solutions, it wouldn't make a big difference." The Prime Minister actually said that Canada cannot make a difference without other countries doing the same, and the reality is, those countries are not doing a thing.

This morning, the Prime Minister announced a gimmicky carbon tax plan that will do nothing for the environment and nothing to reduce emissions. However, what it does do is ensure that hard-working Canadian families and seniors who have contributed so much to this country will pay more in tax for just about everything. It will continue to make Canadian businesses less competitive and continue to drive investment away from Canada.

How can anyone in this country believe, after all the promises made and broken by this Prime Minister, as well as all of his failures, that Canadian families will come out ahead with this tax? It is a laughable proposal meant to buy votes, and Canadians will see it for what it is: an election vote-buying gimmick.

* * *

● (1415)

EPILEPSY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is global awareness day for sudden unexpected death in epilepsy.

[*Translation*]

That is what it is called when someone with epilepsy dies suddenly for no apparent reason.

[*English*]

I do not know about you, Mr. Speaker, but many Canadians do not know about this important issue, and that is why a day like today is so important. The goal of today is to raise awareness, increase education about sudden unexpected death in epilepsy and recognize the lives lost because of this issue.

I would like to thank two women in my community who have been so forceful and strong in advocating for this. They co-founded SUDEP Aware. Tamzin Jeffs lost her sister to SUDEP. She also has epilepsy, and she has worked tirelessly as an advocate. Also, Dr. Elizabeth Donner, who is a neurologist who has worked on this issue, has been a tremendous advocate. I would like to thank them and raise awareness.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Prime Minister did what every good Liberal does best: he announced a new tax.

His Liberal carbon tax will make everything more expensive, including groceries, gas and heating. Not only will Canadians pay more, but this will do nothing to help the environment.

How does the Prime Minister plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions with a tax hike?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect their government to have a sound plan to fight climate change.

It is not surprising to see the Conservatives burying their heads in the sand when it comes to this major challenge, since that is exactly what they did for 10 years under Stephen Harper.

Climate change is real, and there is a growing urgency to do something about it. The time has come to protect the future of our children and grandchildren and we have a plan to do just that.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Halloween has come early for this Prime Minister. He was in Toronto earlier this morning trick or treating. For hard-working Canadian families, he is going to raise the cost of gas and home heating. That is the trick. For large industrial polluters, they will get a complete exemption from the new carbon tax plan. That is the treat.

Why is it that under this Prime Minister, every time he comes up with a new scheme, there are treats for large corporate polluters and tricks for hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend knows very well that it is exactly the opposite of what our government is doing. Our government has a plan to fight climate change. The Conservative Party, for over a decade, under Mr. Harper, refused to do anything meaningful about climate change.

We made a commitment to Canadians in 2015 that we would have a robust plan, including putting a price on pollution. That is exactly what the Prime Minister announced today. It is the most effective measure.

I am sorry that the Conservative Party has absolutely nothing to say about its plan, because it does not have one.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that that is simply not the case.

Large industrial polluters are not subject to this carbon tax plan, but hard-working Canadian families, moms who have to drive their kids to soccer practice and small businesses trying to compete in a more competitive global economy, will pay the burden of this new carbon tax, but large corporate polluters will get off scot-free.

How does the Prime Minister think that is fair?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I think my hon. friend is perhaps somewhat confused, with Stephen Harper's lack of a plan for 10 years.

We have been very clear that putting a price on pollution is one of the most effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. My hon. friend thinks that pollution should be free, and he would take back money from hard-working middle-class Canadians that we will be giving them by putting a price on pollution.

This will make our economy more competitive and will create good jobs for middle-class Canadians.

● (1420)

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this Prime Minister's plan that has made pollution free for large industrial polluters who can afford well-paid government relations experts, but do we know who cannot? It is hard-working Canadian families, moms and dads trying to pay their heating bills and bring their kids to hockey practice. It is people living in rural areas who have to drive long distances to get to work. They do not have well-connected Liberal government relations experts.

Why is the government raising the cost of living for hard-working families and giving special breaks to large polluters?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it does not matter how many times my hon. friend repeats the same sentence, it will not make it accurate.

Unlike the Conservatives, who think that pollution should be free, we have a plan to ensure that big polluters pay under our system. We have been clear from the beginning: pricing pollution is important to protecting our economic competitiveness.

Maybe my hon. friend could explain why, in British Columbia, in Quebec, where they have had a price on pollution for a long time, those are among the most competitive and performing economies in Canada.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am taking the Prime Minister at his word. It is his own backgrounder that says that large industrial polluters are exempt from this plan. The Liberals are trying to trick Canadians into thinking that somehow they will be better off with a new tax. If they want Canadians to believe that they will be better off when the music stops after this Liberal shell game, will they finally table the documents that indicate what the true costs of the Liberal carbon tax will be?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend has spent a lot of time pretending that there is some hidden cost to a Liberal plan. What he is not telling Canadians is that he either has no plan himself or his plan is so appalling that he has to hide it until after the election.

Let us be very clear. We committed to Canadians in 2015 that we would put a price on pollution and have a serious plan to attack climate change. Only a Conservative would find it shocking that today we are respecting an engagement we made to Canadians in the last election.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as time goes by and we get to know more about the USMCA, Canadians are quickly coming to the conclusion that the Liberals did not get a good deal. Because of the drug cost increases it will bring, because of yet another breach in the supply management system it will create and because there is no guarantee that steel and aluminum tariffs will be gone, workers in these industries all across the country feel that their government has let them down.

Why did the Liberals roll over instead of standing up for Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just do not understand why the NDP will not acknowledge that our extraordinary team negotiated an agreement that is very good for Canada.

This agreement will provide us with stable access to the biggest global markets on the planet. That is something worth celebrating.

Of course we will fight to get rid of steel and aluminum tariffs.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not the one questioning that; Canadians are.

Just to be clear, Canadians are the ones who will feel the pinch because of steel and aluminum tariffs and changes to supply management. Postal workers will feel the pinch too. Why? Because the new agreement will cut duties for online purchases in the United States only if they are delivered by private couriers, such as FedEx or UPS. What is a clause like that doing in a free trade agreement?

Basically, that clause gives U.S. companies a leg up at the expense of our Canadian public service.

Again I ask: Why did the Liberals roll over instead of standing up for Canadians?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, NDP attacks always lack credibility because New Democrats do not understand the importance of free trade agreements. Liberals do understand it.

It turns out that Canadians are very satisfied with the agreement we spent the last 14 months negotiating. Why? Because it ushers in a period of long-term stability with access to the biggest markets in the world. That is something worth celebrating.

* * *

● (1425)

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the IPCC told us we have 12 years to cut our greenhouse gas emissions by half if we want to avert a global climate catastrophe. This is science. This is serious.

We are not doing enough to fight climate change, and everybody knows that the Liberals will never meet their targets. In fact, Greenpeace considers that the Prime Minister did not tell the truth last Sunday when he said that we will meet our targets in 2030. He is trying to defend the indefensible: his own failure.

Will he admit that Canada is not back but is falling behind?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are happy to tell Canadians is that Canada is taking serious action to fight climate change. We said to Canadians in the last election that we would have a plan that would reduce our emissions and respect international obligations we made as a country.

We also said, and in fact there was a Nobel Prize in economics given recently for this exact premise, that putting a price on pollution is among the most effective measures to reduce pollution. Unlike the Conservatives, who think pollution should be free, we have a plan. It is working, and it will benefit the Canadian economy and middle-class Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yes, we must put a price on pollution, but the Liberal plan does not work. The IPPC is telling us that the clock is ticking, but the Liberal-Conservative pipeline coalition could not care less about science.

This is like a competition: the Conservatives want to bring energy east back to life, whereas the Liberals are buying Trans Mountain with our money and leaving the door open to the return of energy east. If this continues, we are going to end up living in a desert, like in Mad Max. The Prime Minister will be pleased; in the desert, all you have is sunny ways.

Seriously, what do they find so hard to understand?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have clearly understood that Canadians expect their government to diligently fight climate change. Canadians understand very well, unlike the NDP perhaps, that a serious plan to fight climate change is in the interest of the Canadian economy and will create jobs for the middle class.

The province of Quebec, where my colleague was elected, is the perfect example of how well this can work.

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today we found out that the Liberal environment plan is to buy the votes of Canadians. As more and more provinces bail out of the Prime Minister's failed carbon tax plan, he has decided to bribe Canadians with their own money, and today the Prime Minister admitted as much.

How can we trust the government to give us back our own money when it has broken so many other promises? Canadians know they are going to pay more taxes than they will ever get back from this Liberal government.

When will the Liberals stop insulting us and admit that this is simply a massive tax grab?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister said today in Toronto is that our government made a commitment to Canadians in 2015 that we would have a robust plan to tackle climate change. We have said from the beginning that putting a price on pollution is one of the most effective measures to reduce pollution. We have also said that we would reinvest by reimbursing Canadians the money they are paying for the price on pollution. In fact, middle-class Canadians, on average, will receive more money than they are paying for the price on pollution.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's carbon tax is not a tax on the Canadian provinces. It is a tax on the Canadian people who do not have any more to give: Canadians who are single parents, Canadians who are struggling with young families, Canadians who are retired and have paid Liberal tax after Liberal Tax, and they do not have any more to give. Now they will be hit by this new Liberal carbon tax.

Canadians are fed up with the Prime Minister's new taxes and want to know: When will he stop demanding more?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I think it is important to remind members that the Conservative Party voted against a middle-class tax cut that was important to Canadians.

The member talks about vulnerable seniors. The Conservatives voted against increasing the guaranteed income supplement to help the most vulnerable seniors. If they want to talk about seniors, they were going to raise the age of eligibility to 67 for old age security. We brought it back to 65.

They have no plan to fight climate change. We have a plan that is going to make a difference for Canadians and improve the Canadian economy at the same time.

● (1430)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only plan the government has is to continue to put its hands in the pockets of single mothers who are trying to get their kids to school, to soccer, whatever it may be, and vulnerable seniors who really cannot afford to have another $100 a month tacked on to their bills, and they are giving large emitters a pass. Now, magically, the government would like to have them believe that it will leave more money in their pockets. Well, this is simply untrue.

The Liberal carbon tax does not lower emissions. When will the Prime Minister listen to our provinces and scrap the tax?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend wants to talk about putting more money into the pockets of hard-working Canadian families. It is too bad that she voted against the Canada child benefit, which did exactly that.

If the Conservatives have no plan to fight climate change, the good new is that this government does. We have a plan that will make a real difference in the fight against climate change, will create good jobs for middle-class Canadians and will ensure that hard-working Canadians come out ahead in the fight against climate change.

That is what we said we would do. That is what the Prime Minister announced today in Toronto.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Prime Minister promised that Canadians would get refunds of all the taxes they paid, but look at the fine print. Right here, it says in their backgrounder that they will get "most" of the money back they pay in taxes. Then, looking a little further, it says that the taxes will also fund $1.4 billion in new government spending here in Ontario alone.

First it was all, then it is most. Is it not true that after the next election it will be none?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend knows that that is not exactly true. We said from the beginning that asking large emitters to pay a price on pollution would give them an incentive to reduce pollution. That is exactly what our government is doing.

If my hon. friend thinks that it is a mistake to work with the hospital sector, with the education sector and with low-income housing advocates to ensure that they are also able to reduce their emissions and be more efficient, then he should stand up and say so.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, of course, we all support money for hospitals and schools and helping the vulnerable. That is why we already pay taxes. This is not a justification for imposing yet another layer of taxation on top of what Canadians already pay, but the government's own documents, which I have in my hand, clearly lay out that large industrial polluters will pay nothing whatsoever, while middle-class families will pay more.

Is this not just a tax grab to fund more out of control Liberal spending?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon friend knows that that is not the case. He knows that his party does not have a plan to fight climate change. He knows that his party for 10 years under Stephen Harper did absolutely nothing to respect Canada's obligations globally and domestically to fight climate change.

Canadians know this is real. We saw in my province of New Brunswick historic floods this spring. We have seen the same across the country. We have seen wild fires out west.

We need a coherent plan to fight climate change even if the Conservative Party does not have—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso, along with everyone else, will come to order.

The hon member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are planning to raise the cost of gasoline, home heating and basically all the essentials that Canadians require just to survive. In exchange, they say, "Here is $12.25" right before the election. Their own government documents admit that these $12.25 cheques will not compensate people for these higher costs.

Is that not yet more evidence that this is merely a tax grab to flush the coffers of this out-of-control spending big government?

● (1435)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to hear the hon. member for Carleton talk about election gimmicks. Canadians remember very well his showing up at an event with a Conservative Party T-shirt and presenting a government cheque.

That is something we will not do in the fight against climate change. If he thinks that constitutes an effective plan for climate change, he should stand up and say so.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the Liberals, the economy is doing great, but Canadian households have the highest levels of debt of the 35 OECD countries. Why is that? It is because the Liberals chose to help their millionaire friends instead of families in need. Today, Jagmeet Singh is calling on the government to fund the basic income pilot project scrapped by Doug Ford in Ontario. It is an extremely important project.

Will the Prime Minister show he cares about these people and fund the last year of the project?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, I am wondering where he has been for the past three years.

We lowered taxes for the middle class and raised them for the wealthiest 1%. We made the Canada child benefit more progressive than ever before. This summer, the OECD recognized that Canadian families pay the least in taxes of any G7 country and that, on average, they are $2,000 richer than they were under the Conservative government. What is more, child poverty in Canada has been reduced by 40%.

Our government is progressive to the core and is committed to reducing inequality across the country.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the OECD tells us. They tell us that Canadian household debt has skyrocketed out of control and that we are in the midst of the worst family debt crisis ever, the worst family debt crisis in the industrialized world. I do not understand the hesitation. Liberals love studies. They are studying child care and pharmacare to death. At least this study helps people now. There are ways to help these families.

Today, Jagmeet Singh called on the government to fund—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We are not in grade 7 folks. Come on.

Order. I heard it from both sides. Enough.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, they should just call a by-election so Jagmeet Singh can be in the House of Commons. Jagmeet Singh called on the government to fund the basic income pilot project in Ontario that was abandoned by Premier Ford.

Why will the Liberals not step up, and why will they not do the right thing?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we share the disappointment, and in particular the impact it has had on the families who participated in this critical experiment, because we know that it was going to produce results that all of us could benefit from as we put together government policy.

However, let me assure the members on the opposite side that since taking office, we have lifted 650,000 Canadians out of poverty, including 300,000 children. The Canada housing benefit, which kicks in next year as part of the national housing strategy, is also a form of income support. As well, EI reforms have been kicking in, which have also helped Canadians in this situation.

This government has not stepped back from supporting Canadians in need, and we will continue to work to make sure that we get them the help they deserve.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of National Defence said that he would tell us when he contacted journalist James Cudmore to offer him a job as a policy adviser in his department. I am giving him a chance to keep his word today.

When, exactly, did he offer Mr. Cudmore a job in his department?

● (1440)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the independence of our judicial system is absolutely key to our democracy. Therefore, it would inappropriate for me or any other member of the House of Commons to comment on any issue that is currently before the courts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am only repeating what the Minister of National Defence said yesterday, right here in the House of Commons. He said that he would get us an answer about when he contacted the journalist to offer him a job as a policy adviser in his department.

We already know that this individual was working at the CBC on January 8. Four days later, he was hired at the Department of National Defence. He is the one who originally reported on this conflict and the Liberal government's political interference in the Davie shipyard file.

When did the minister contact the journalist?

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals or courts of record. However, that answer was provided to the House Leader of the Official Opposition yesterday.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have full confidence in your ability to make judgements from your seat. Indeed, if there is a problem with the questions that we are asking, I am sure that you would step in and tell us.

In the meantime, I do have questions for the government. The parliamentary secretary indicates that a key of democracy is at stake here, and I would submit there is, the key to a fair and full defence. The Prime Minister is blocking documents that Mr. Norman needs for a full and fair defence.

Who is the Prime Minister protecting?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because the member's question touches on an issue that is currently before the courts, it would indeed be inappropriate to comment. We do believe in the independence of our judicial system, and we will allow it to do its work.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before this latest talking point came out and before he was gagged, the President of the Treasury Board stood up and indicated that he was just doing his job. However, here is the point to that assumption. In order to prove or disprove that, Mr. Norman actually needs to have those documents that the Prime Minister is currently blocking. Seven different departments and agencies are holding back documents that Mr. Norman could utilize in order to determine whether he has a full and fair defence. Who is the Prime Minister protecting?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side, we believe in an independent judiciary, while the opposition members keep trying to indirectly prosecute a court case on the floor of this House. That is not the role of this House, it is the role of the courts.

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every new detail in the Khashoggi case is worse than the last. The whole thing is truly horrendous, but the Saudi regime's treatment of women, dissidents and religious minorities is also horrendous. The war crimes and famine in Yemen are also horrendous.

How much are human rights worth to the Prime Minister? How about the lives of thousands of women and children?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Canada has led our allies in putting out a G7 statement condemning the murder of journalist, Jamal Khashoggi. Yesterday, the Prime Minister convened an incident response group to address this serious situation. The explanations offered by Saudi Arabia are inconsistent and lack credibility. We continue to call for a thorough, accountable, transparent and prompt investigation, in full collaboration with the Turkish authorities, on the circumstances surrounding Mr. Khashoggi's death. Those responsible for the killing must be held to account, and must face justice.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at committee last week, we heard from Finance and CBSA officials, who told us that out of 74 applications, only 36 companies have been approved for duty drawback or relief. The support promised by the current government is not reaching those who desperately need it. Some businesses are giving up altogether, because of the long wait times and red tape. The government is ignoring the reality for steelworkers and they are being laid off as small businesses are struggling to keep their doors open. Will the government finally do the right thing, and strike a national tariff task force?

● (1445)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Canadian steel and aluminum producers are world leaders and important contributors to international supply chains. We are making available up to $2 billion to defend and protect our Canadian workers in the steel and aluminum industries, $1.7 billion of which is through EDC and BDC, $250 million through the strategic innovation fund and $50 million to help companies diversify in order to take advantage of CETA and the CPTPP. We have the backs of the Canadian steel and aluminum workers.

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians should feel they have an equal opportunity to benefit from a growing economy. The system should be fair for everyone. While the wealthy engage in aggressive tax planning to avoid paying taxes, middle-class Canadians depend on programs and services.

[*English*]

Our government has worked hard to tackle aggressive tax avoidance, but we know we need to work with our international partners to crack down on tax avoidance at home and abroad.

Can the parliamentary secretary update us on the government's plan to crack down on tax avoidance?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Hull—Aylmer for his question and for the work he has done on this issue as a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. We have always made it clear that fighting international tax evasion and international tax avoidance is a priority.

[*English*]

We implemented the common reporting standard to allow us to share information with almost 100 other countries to help investigators track money hidden in offshore accounts.

[*Translation*]

We are also working with the provinces and territories to set up a registry of beneficial owners of companies, as requested by the anti-tax haven collective Échec aux paradis fiscaux.

[*English*]

This spring, we introduced Bill C-82. This bill would implement OECD reforms to existing international tax agreements to prevent corporations and individuals from using aggressive tax avoidance schemes.

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ETHICS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are sick and tired of not getting answers from the Liberal government.

We know their friends in the former Ontario Liberal government routinely destroyed evidence whenever they found themselves in hot water, and of course former Liberal staffers, like Gerald Butts and Katie Telford, are running the PMO today.

Canadians have the right to know if the government is following the example set by its Ontario Liberal cousins. Has the government destroyed any evidence in the Vice-Admiral Mark Norman case?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government will not comment or speculate on matters referring to an ongoing justice matter.

We do believe in an independent justice system. I will remind the members opposite that *sub judice* rules may be breached by public statements that risk prejudicing matters or issues that are before the courts.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is starting to smell like a cover-up in here.

The government is alleging that Vice-Admiral Mark Norman leaked cabinet secrets. It is dragging his honourable career and distinguished service in the Canadian Armed Forces through the mud. However, when it is up to the government to provide the evidence that Vice-Admiral Norman needs for his defence, it is just drawing a blank.

Can the Minister of National Defence confirm that his department has not destroyed any evidence related to Vice-Admiral Norman's case?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the *sub judice* rule dictates that members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals, which are courts of record.

The *sub judice* convention is to protect the parties in case of a waiting or undergoing trial, and persons who stand to be affected by the outcome of such an inquiry.

The *sub judice* convention is a restraint imposed upon the House, but to itself.

Therefore, we will not be making further comment.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in late November 2015, the Privy Council Office launched an investigation into supposed leaks from the Liberal cabinet meeting that suspended the Davie Shipbuilding contract.

The PCO engaged the RCMP, largely based on the James Cudmore story. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the President of the Treasury Board were interviewed as part of the investigation.

If a federal investigation was under way based almost entirely on a CBC news story by James Cudmore, what would possibly have possessed the Liberals to make the decision to hire James Cudmore and place him in the centre of the investigation?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we believe in an independent judiciary.

The Conservatives are attempting to prosecute a trial on the floor of the House of Commons, or to gather evidence. We consider that to be inappropriate and will comment no further.

● (1450)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite you to comment on whether these questions can be asked in here, because what we have today is a farce, a tri-service farce.

We have a retired air force colonel covering for a retired army colonel about ruining the career of a navy admiral. CBC reporter James Cudmore wrote stories that led to a PCO and RCMP investigation, but then he was immediately hired by that minister.

On what date, minister, did you or the Prime Minister offer James Cudmore a job?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. First of all, the hon. member for Durham is an experienced member and should know that he should direct his comments to the Chair. I think he will also know that question period is not when points of order are raised.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer remains the same. We do believe in an independent judiciary. We do believe in following the *sub judice* principle. We will not be commenting on any matter that is before the courts.

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[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, extraordinary as it may seem, I am yet again rising to ask questions about the Phoenix fiasco. One thing is for sure: if the Liberals had listened to employees, unions, IBM—in short, everyone—they could have avoided this situation. It is so utterly senseless.

Yesterday, the Auditor General reported that the number of victims of pay errors is actually still going up, for crying out loud.

Will the government adhere to the agreements and procedures it has put in place?

Are the Liberals capable of taking responsibility and fixing the problem?

[*English*]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ongoing problems with the Phoenix pay system remain my number one priority. It is absolutely unacceptable that our public servants are not being paid, but progress is being made.

Since January, pay pod departments have seen a 21% decrease in the number of transactions awaiting processing. We have increased capacity by 1,500 to the pay centre. The backlog has been steadily declining since January, down 100,000 cases, while at the same time we have processed $1.5 billion in retroactive payments for employees.

I recognize that there is much more to do on this file. I can assure the House we are making progress.

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HOUSING

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Northern Saskatchewan needs women's shelters and yet the Liberals refuse to release the funds they promised for a shelter run by the Athabasca Health Authority.

Indigenous and northern women are the most at risk to violence. Many have to travel hundreds of kilometres to get the help they need. This is unacceptable.

What are the Liberals waiting for to act on their promise to northern women and release the funds for the much-needed shelter in Black Lake?

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her dedication to making sure that the services that are needed in northern parts of this country are received by the residents and people who need those services.

The national housing strategy has a specific carve-out for housing for women and in particular, for women escaping violence. There are supports in other ministries as well for the shelters that have been described.

I would like to talk to the member after question period to get the specifics of the case involved so we can follow up.

There is no priority more important to this government than making sure women and girls are safe and housing is a critical component of that. That is why the national housing strategy addresses it.

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[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have seen for several days now, the Liberals are hiding crucial information that would guarantee Vice-Admiral Norman a fair trial. We also now know that James Cudmore, the person who revealed that the Davie shipyard was going to lose a contract because of Liberal backroom deals, was hired, oddly enough, by the Minister of National Defence at the same time.

My question is simple. As the member representing Lévis, I want to know whether the Liberals are trying to sink the Davie shipyard and the Quebec economy.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government will not comment or speculate on any matter that is currently before the courts. On this side of the House, we believe in an independent judiciary. I would remind members that the *sub judice* rule can be breached and violated by public statements that risk prejudicing matters or issues that are before the courts.

● (1455)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame that the parliamentary secretary, herself a former officer in the Canadian Forces, has allowed herself to be used by the Prime Minister to shield the government from giving another officer, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman, the evidence that he needs to provide a fair trial. The government is covering it up.

When will the government stop that cover-up and release the evidence Mark Norman needs to receive a fair trial?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he knows not of what he speaks.

I believe in an independent judiciary. I believe it is key. Therefore I do believe it would be inappropriate to discuss this on the floor of the House of Commons.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I speak of is the Liberal government withholding evidence that Mark Norman needs to get a fair trial.

Answering questions in the House of Commons will not impact the trial of Mark Norman but withholding the critical evidence he needs to mount a defence certainly will. The more the Liberals hide, the more this looks like a cover-up.

Who are they protecting? What are they trying to hide? Why do they not just release the evidence today?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a courtroom. This is the floor of the House of Commons. Attempts to indirectly prosecute a case on the floor of the House of Commons are inappropriate.

The Speaker: I have to remind members that the time to answer someone is not when a member is speaking but it is when he or she has their turn.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Geng Tan (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, improving energy efficiency is one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways to address climate change. It is also good for the pocketbooks of hard-working Canadians.

Today, we celebrate the third annual Energy Star Day here in Canada. Could the Minister of Natural Resources please tell the House what this means for Canadian families?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Don Valley North for his hard work.

Energy efficiency is an important part of a plan to tackle climate change. That is why we are proud to partner with Energy Star to help Canadians save money on their utility bills, create good middle-class jobs and protect our environment. Energy Star Day encourages Canadians to make a simple change to be more energy efficient and save money while reducing their energy bills. This simple change will help make a big difference.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Liberal members from Quebec, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business believes that there is indeed a labour shortage in Quebec.

Ms. Hébert, vice-president of the CFIB, noted that some businesses have had to scale back their operations or even shut down temporarily.

In other words, in Quebec City and around the province, the labour shortage is definitely having an impact on the ground. A wide range of possible solutions are within the purview of the federal government.

Why, then, is the Liberal government not taking immediate concrete action to come up with a concrete solution to this serious problem?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great joy every time the member gets up and talks about how our economy is growing so quickly, how our unemployment rate is so low, how we have record numbers of people in the workforce and that we have a new challenge. I thank the member very much for the opportunity to talk about this.

As we work to make sure everyone has the skills they need and every Canadian has the opportunities to gain employment in whatever sector is experiencing shortages, we also know that having a strong immigration policy is an important part of our growth strategy here in Canada. I would encourage the member to talk to his colleagues about their attitude—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more than four years ago, the Imperial Metals Mount Polley mine disaster sent 25 million cubic metres of water and toxic mine waste rushing through Hazeltine Creek into Quesnel Lake. Mine tailings containing arsenic, cadmium, mercury and selenium still sit at the bottom of the lake. Not only is this a major sockeye salmon rearing lake in the Fraser watershed, but it supplies drinking water to local communities. This was the largest mining environmental disaster in Canadian history.

When will the Liberals do their job, take action and lay charges?

● (1500)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the health of our oceans and lakes is a top priority of this government. We have faith in the enforcement mechanisms we have in place within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to address measures such as this. We will continue to monitor this situation and take the steps that are necessary to keep our oceans and waterways safe, clean and healthy.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to be taking action to grow and strengthen our armed forces, and we know that diversity is an essential factor in mission success. Women have proudly been serving in Canada's military for a century, and today they play a pivotal role in defending Canada's safety and security.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell the House how we are continuing to increase female representation in the forces?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Davenport for her tireless work.

We are increasing the representation of women in the Canadian Armed Forces at home and abroad, and we are making progress. Five per cent more women joined the armed forces last year than the previous year.

During Women's History Month I want to pay tribute to strong Canadian Armed Forces women like Lieutenant-Commander Kelly Williamson, who was named one of Canada's 100 most powerful women last year.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I asked yesterday if UNRWA, an organization that employs anti-Semitic teachers and distributes anti-Semitic material, was subject to a values test before receiving Canadian government funding. There was no answer yesterday, so I will ask again today.

Did the Liberals apply the same values test to UNRWA's application for $50 million as they apply to Canadian charities and summer camps looking to hire Canadian students?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that my team and I are doing everything we can to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is doing its job properly in full transparency, that it is respecting human rights and providing help.

This summer, I visited Palestine and the UNRWA schools and I can assure you that school is the best place for children. This enhances security in the region.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Saudi regime lied repeatedly about what happened to journalist Jamal Khashoggi. It lied repeatedly about how he was killed. It lied repeatedly by claiming not to know the whereabouts of the journalist's remains.

Does the Liberal government believe the Saudi regime when it claims that it does not use Canadian armoured vehicles against Yemeni civilians?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we condemn in the strongest possible terms the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The minister is in close contact with our allies and partners, including the U.K., Germany and Turkey. Our government will continue to have these conversations.

As I said earlier, we support a transparent, thorough, accountable and prompt investigation into the death of Mr. Khashoggi, so that those who are responsible will be held to account. The minister has spoken on the phone with her counterpart, the Saudi Arabia foreign minister, and shared our deep concerns. It is vital that we remain united in the call for justice.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2009, the Conservatives gave Chrysler a blank cheque and set up a loan that the car maker would never have to repay. This week, the Liberals condoned that behaviour by cutting a cheque behind closed doors. It cost taxpayers $2.5 billion. The Conservatives also gave GM a $1-billion loan and we are still waiting for that to be repaid.

The government continues to take Quebeckers' money to fill Ontario's coffers, leaving Quebec high and dry.

Who is going to pay, GM or taxpayers?

[*English*]

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Harper Conservatives chose to bail out Chrysler in 2009, they had no intention of ever recovering the loan to old Chrysler. They even went as far as to approve 100% of the loss at the exact same time they handed out the money.

Our government put every effort into recovering that money, and when we could not do that, we did what the Conservatives intended on doing in first place.

● (1505)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in reference to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report released October 8, it is very clear that we have one chance only; that is, not just one chance in a period of time, but one chance forever, to ensure that our children have a livable world. That is what the scientists told us. That means we must improve our targets globally, not just in Canada.

It is not a political question; it is a human question. It is a question of whether our country can lead the world and show the political will by improving our target at the COP24 negotiations in Poland. We cannot risk deciding our children's future is expendable.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the wake of the IPCC report we all need to work collectively to improve our record on the environment and to preserve our planet for future generations. I was so proud when we achieved the Paris Agreement, and we are going to meet or exceed the targets by putting a price on pollution that protects the interests of middle-class families. We are developing a clean fuel standard. We are putting regulations on methane and HFCs. We are investing in clean energy and taking a number of different steps.

My sincere hope is that we can work collectively, regardless of partisan affiliation for once, to achieve targets and do better by our planet. I wish everyone cared as much as the hon. member does.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

FAIR REPRESENTATION DURING QUESTION PERIOD—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 5, 2018, by the hon. member for Repentigny concerning the number of questions allotted to independent members during oral questions. I would like to thank the hon. member for having raised the matter.

In speaking to her question of privilege, the member for Repentigny argued that, when the number of independent members recently increased from 14 to 15, they were entitled to have an additional question per week during question period. Without it, she claims, there is an unacceptable inequity between independent members and members from recognized parties.

[*English*]

While some may see this issue as simply mathematical, the hon. member for Repentigny raises a question that goes directly to the matter of how our parliamentary institutions are structured. As honourable members are aware, our modern parliamentary system has been developed largely around the existence of recognized political parties. The procedures and practices that guide much of our deliberations revolve around these recognized parties and are, in a lot of ways, the result of negotiations agreed to by them.

Speaker's Ruling

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

For example, recognized political parties have certain benefits in our proceedings that are not necessarily shared, or not to the same extent, with unrecognized parties and independent members. This is the case with respect to such matters as the order of participation in debate, the granting of opposition days, committee membership and, of course, the conduct of question period. Undeniably, these distinctions guide the speaker in exercising his duties.

Furthermore, the Parliament of Canada Act and the bylaws of the Board of Internal Economy make a clear distinction between recognized and unrecognized political parties giving them different funding.

[*English*]

These distinctions have not been static. They have evolved over time through changes in tradition and usage, including the rules and practices adopted by the House itself. Many of these changes are founded on the principle of supporting the fair and active participation of each member in the work of the House.

Speaker Fraser addressed the role of the Speaker in this regard, when he stated, on September 24, 1990, at page 13216 of the Debates:

> I have some discretion in dealing with the rights of every person in this House who is in a minority position. I think we have a great tradition of protecting the rights of minorities, and I can assure the honourable member that the rights of minorities will be protected by the Speaker in a way that is fair and equitable for all other members.

[*Translation*]

Safeguarding the fair and equitable rights of the minority is no less a concern for the Speaker during question period. The Speaker's interpretation of the rules, principles and practices put in place by the House itself must balance the rights and interests of both the majority and minority. This is why successive Speakers have progressively opened up the floor to independent members during question period even though the allotment of the different speaking slots under this rubric in our daily agenda has historically been determined through extensive discussions among the recognized political parties.

For instance, not so long ago, the practice was that, when time permitted, and only when time permitted, the Chair would allow an independent member to ask questions during question period. The member for Repentigny rightfully acknowledged that, in more recent years, Speakers have endeavoured to call on independent members to ask questions that roughly matched their proportion in the House.

[*English*]

In fact, recent successive speakers have made significant efforts to find a delicate balance in the allotment of questions between the recognized political parties and the independent members. This has been brought to a new and unprecedented level in the present Parliament. Never have independent members been recognized as much during question period.

[*Translation*]

The impact of this has been significant; the time now spent on question period has increased so that it rarely ends within the fixed time prescribed by the Standing Orders. As Speaker, I believe that adding another question, as the hon. member for Repentigny suggests, would simply aggravate the pressure on the limited number of hours at the disposal of all members.

[*English*]

In a ruling delivered on April 23, 2013, at page 15800 of the Debates, my predecessor had the opportunity to speak of the notion of equity when referring to the rights of members. He said:

> Hence, while many members in this instance have spoken of the right to speak, the member for Langley acknowledged this inherent limitation and spoke more precisely of the equal right to speak. It is this qualifier of rights—equity—that carries great significance, and to which the Chair must play close attention.

● (1515)

[*Translation*]

The principle of equity applies to the allotment of questions to independent members for question period. Given the 45-minute limit of question period, it is of the utmost importance that it be managed in a way that is fair and equitable to the rights of all members.

I would be remiss if I looked at this matter only through the lens of just one group of members' and their right to speak. Instead, I must manage all proceedings, including question period, effectively for the benefit of all members. It is the view of the Chair that the current allotment of 14 questions per week for independent members maintains an appropriate balance with respect to the management of time, the rights of independent members, and the longstanding practices of this House.

[*English*]

The Chair notes that recently, some of the time slots made available to independent members have not been used. I would therefore encourage independent members to consult table officers, who remain available to assist in any way necessary, with a view to ensuring that these opportunities are optimized for the benefit of all.

[*Translation*]

As the Chair cannot find evidence that the rights of independent members have been breached, or that they have been unduly impeded in fulfilling their parliamentary duties, there is no prima facie question of privilege in this case.

As a final note, the complaint raised through this question of privilege challenges the management and control of House business which is itself protected by privilege. In recent years, the distinction between questions of privilege and points of order have become somewhat blurred. This matter is more properly a point of order.

[*English*]

Nevertheless, the Chair realizes how important this question is for many of us. As the Speaker often looks to the House for guidance and direction, particularly for changes in how business is conducted in this place, I welcome any direction on this matter the House wishes to offer, perhaps through negotiations between the parties and independent members or by way of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*Translation*]

I thank all honourable members for their attention in this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-83, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic to take the floor after that ruling, but I am pleased that we can pursue that other matter through other channels.

I am here now to address Bill C-83. I appreciate that the Liberal Party gave me a time slot, in recognition of the fact that there has been an allocation of time on debate and I otherwise might not have been able to speak to this at all. I wish to go on record, and I am not feeling any sense of cognitive dissonance in doing this, to thank the government party for allowing me to speak for 10 minutes, and I also wish that the government party had not decided to use time allocation on Bill C-83.

In any case, this bill comes to us in a context I want to address first, which is a political context and a political climate that has been created by recent debates in this place, in which, I regret to say, I felt demeaned. I felt displaced, demeaned and diminished by a tactic of the official opposition to turn the House of Commons into sort of a secondary chamber for the review of punishments meted out through the proper system, the courts of law. We have taken days and had people's names and the horrors of gruesome, cruel murders repeated on the floor of this place.

There is clearly some thought in some quarters here that it is a good campaign tactic to talk about punishment a lot and to regret when our correctional system responds in ways that might appear to some as lenient. However, we are a country built on the rule of law. We recognize that our prison system is not merely for punishment. We have to have this discussion, I think, fairly constantly. What is the point of our correctional system? What is the point of our prison system?

As many MPs have said on the floor of this place today in response to Bill C-83, many of the people in our prison system are going to re-enter society. We would like them to re-enter society with the life skills they will need to be contributing members of society, having paid, in that terminology, their debt to society.

It is in that context, where on one end of the political extreme we are told that we have become too lenient towards prisoners, that we turn our attention to an appalling situation, where rights have been infringed and lives have been lost through the failure of the prison system to handle certain kinds of prisoners, those who find themselves in likely incarceration in solitary confinement.

Of course, this bill comes to us in the context of one of the most egregious of those examples, again, as has been mentioned in this place today, the case of Ashley Smith. I think we forget sometimes how horrific her death was, how hard her life was, how hard her mother tried to help her and how the prison system made her survival impossible.

The coroner's inquest into Ashley Smith's death found that although she died from self-inflicted choking, while the guards watched, the context and the circumstances of her death amounted to a homicide. That coroner provided 104 recommendations.

We also know of the cases of Adam Capay, a young indigenous man who spent 1,600 days in solitary confinement; or Richard Wolfe, who did not actually die in solitary but collapsed in a prison exercise yard, at 40 years old, having spent 640 days in solitary confinement; or another indigenous man whose case comes to mind, Eddie Snowshoe, who spent 162 days in solitary confinement before hanging himself.

We can note from those cases that it is quite often those with mental health issues, those who are marginalized, those who are racialized and particularly those who are indigenous who end up in solitary confinement. Therefore, it is certainly welcome that the Minister of Public Safety has brought to this place a bill that promises to end this ongoing stain on the reputation of Canada as a civilized country. Solitary confinement for those lengths of times has been found internationally to constitute torture, and we are a people who are convinced that we do not practise torture.

● (1520)

Therefore, I am sad to share my disappointment with this bill and my concern that we do not have it right yet.

Coralee Cusack-Smith, mother of Ashley Smith, speaking for her family on Bill C-83, said "it's a sham and a travesty that it's done in Ashley's name. It's just a different name for segregation. It's not ending segregation. Not ending segregation for anyone with mental health issues. It's just a new name."

It seems that the fact it is merely a rebranding is reflected in a statement by the hon. Senator Kim Pate who, having spent time before entering the other place to dedicating her life to the fair treatment of women prisoners, in particular through the Elizabeth Fry Society, described Bill C-83 as disappointing and even as weakening the limitations on how often a segregated prisoner can experience solitary confinement. We have this idea that structured intervention units will be entirely different from solitary confinement. I hope they will be. I have to say that it is one place where I would like to emphasize the positive in this place.

I was a member of Parliament, at the same desk, in the same chair, for an opposition party through the 41st Parliament. I could add up on the fingers of one hand the number of times I saw a single amendment made to a government bill. In a four-year term of a majority government under Stephen Harper, bills were rammed through from start to finish without a single amendment. Therefore, I will credit the current government and the administration of the current Prime Minister with being more open to amendments. However, it is a mixed bag. Some bills I would have been so happy to support if they only had been amended enough to make them acceptable. Bill C-69, the environmental assessment omnibus bill, is in that category. It is a tragedy that the Liberals did not get that one right. It will be a tragedy if we collectively in the House do not get it right on this one.

We have an obligation as a civilized society to re-examine what we mean by "incarceration" and "corrections" in the criminal justice system and what the purpose of incarceration is. In the 41st Parliament, the former government got rid of prison chaplains in that system. It got rid of prison farms where some prisoners could have the first experience in their lives of a day outdoors doing an honest day's labour. I suppose it is ironic that an honest day's labour took place in a prison farm context. However, those programs were killed by the previous government.

The prison system in our country cannot just be seen as a place where some parts of the political spectrum can score political points by talking about life being too easy there for people who have committed heinous crimes, as the language always describes them. I am not sympathizing with criminals. I support the rights of victims. However, it is not an effective prison system if it kills people who have committed minor crimes, who become stuck in a Möbius loop where they cannot get help. We have to break that cycle now. We have to find ways to focus our prison system on fairness, respect, reconciliation and rehabilitation. This is not the stuff of bleeding hearts; this is what makes a society whole. This is what allows people who have been in prison to come back out and function in a civilized society and not pass on the patterns of behaviour they have experienced to their family and children.

I have hope for Bill C-83. I will do everything I can at committee, and everything I can by working with members of the groups who have given their lives to this, whether it be the Elizabeth Fry Society, the John Howard Society, the BC Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and those very brave people who have been incarcerated and are willing to come forward to say, "This is what would have helped me. This is how it did not help me."

Yes, a prison system is to ensure that people pay their debt to society and are punished for things that are morally indefensible and a huge assault on our society. However, there are also a lot of people in prison who have committed relatively minor crimes who, if they were wealthier and had better lawyers, might not be there. There, but for the grace of God, go members and I. Therefore, let us fix Bill C-83.

● (1525)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her speech on this bill and her comments, all of which I agree with. She is passionate about this issue, she is well-researched, and I could not agree more that we need to start looking at our prison system in a different way.

It is important to remember that this bill is tied to investments in mental health, which are critical for people who are looking at segregation.

I am very curious to know what kind of amendments the member would be looking at. Does the member have any suggestions at this point? I would also just comment that I would be happy to work with her as this bill goes through committee.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, my colleague and I have worked together to amend other pieces of legislation. I can share with her constituents that they have an MP who keeps her word and is as good as her word. I love working with her.

I would love to see some amendments to this. I am conscious of the fact that the correctional officers who have to deal with potentially dangerous prisoners have unions that are also deeply concerned. I know that the government is trying to achieve some kind of balance here.

I think we need amendments to ensure that we do not weaken the limitations on the use of any form of segregation. Yes, I am very pleased that there will be increases in funding for mental health and assistance. I would like to see more done to ensure that in keeping a prisoner separate from a prison population that may pose a threat to that prisoner, they are not placed in a situation where they lose human contact. Much more could be done to increase family access, as one example.

We will work through this at committee.

● (1530)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is passionate about this subject, knows it well, and provides a great insight into it.

What this really comes down to is making sure that we can eliminate as much as possible that revolving door of people coming in and out of prison. The way that we can do that is by making sure that the system we have is one that promotes rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

To that end, this bill would ensure sure that those responsible for completing that process would have the tools they need to make sure that as we rehabilitate people, it is done in a meaningful way that can transform inmates into productive members of society.

I am wondering if the member would agree with that and with the fact that in order to make this transition back into society, it is key that we give those who are charged with rehabilitating our inmates the tools they require.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I absolutely agree.

Of course, members will recall that it was in the hon. member's riding that one of the great campaigns by local citizens to keep a prison farm open was defeated. I really hope we will see the prison farm system come back. It is a great tool for rehabilitation. If we help one individual within a prison context find that place the hon. member mentioned, so that when they are released into the general population, they find a way to function as a productive member of society, that should always be the goal. I hope this legislation will help us get there.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, although I was not in the chamber, I was listening in the other room.

As other colleagues have mentioned, I really appreciate my hon. colleague's comments. I wonder if she could comment specifically on the need to look at some of the historical issues individuals face and to address them, not just through mental health supports but also through other rehabilitative supports to ensure that we take a more comprehensive and holistic view of the individual when we are looking at reducing recidivism rates and removing that individual from the general population.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, the briefest answer I could give is to say that I think the best thing we can do is to listen to the real experts out there.

With all due respect to all of us here who study the legislation, I think the real experts are the people at the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, and people who have experienced the correctional system. It is going to be a suite of things. For some people, it will be a healing lodge because that will take them back to their indigenous culture. For some people, it will be a pastor who comes in and helps them find Christ. For another person, it will be the experience of working out in the field, or maybe it is studying the Quran.

One way or another, people have to find a way to find self-respect and dignity and a way to function as members of society.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to lend my voice to the debate today in support of Bill C-83, which would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. We all want our communities to be safe, and we all want to be secure in the knowledge that when offenders return to the community, our corrections system will have supported their rehabilitation and prepared them to lead safe, productive, law-abiding lives. Our government believes that for the corrections system to succeed in that regard, safety and security must go hand in hand with rehabilitative programming and treatment. Today, I am proud to know that principle is at the core of the bold new measures the government is taking to transform federal corrections.

Bill C-83 would strengthen the federal corrections system, making it safer and more effective at rehabilitation. The bill would end the practice of segregation. It would establish structured intervention units, or SIUs, to safely manage inmates when they cannot otherwise be managed in the mainstream inmate population, without denying them access to programs, interventions and treatment.

Bill C-83 would also enshrine in law the principle that offender management decisions must involve consideration of systemic and background factors related to indigenous offenders. This change reflects testimony we heard at both the status of women and public safety committees, and I am very pleased to see this included in the proposed legislation. Bill C-83 would strengthen health care governance, allow for the use of new search technologies and enhance support for victims at parole hearings.

Key to this landmark legislation is that with SIUs, the practice of segregation would become a thing of the past. Currently, if an offender is considered dangerous to themselves or others, or is at risk of being harmed, they can be placed in segregation if there is no other reasonable alternative. Segregation has remained a common practice over the years. Recently, policy changes by the Correctional Service of Canada led to a significant decline in segregation placements, from over 700 on any given day a few years ago to just over 300 today.

However, we cannot ignore the fact that stakeholders, including the Office of the Correctional Investigator, advocacy groups, the Ashley Smith inquest and the courts, have raised concern about its effects, particularly on inmates suffering from mental health issues. I have seen a segregation unit in a maximum security prison. I cannot imagine a human being left there hour upon hour, day after day. Imagine a room with a bed, or more like a cot, a toilet and sink, and maybe a small desk attached to the wall, which might or might not have a seat, and being confined there for 22 hours a day with limited to no human contact.

In the courts, recent decisions in both Ontario and British Columbia called for legislative reform to the practice. They have also called for improvements to the provision of mental health services within corrections. At the same time, others have argued that segregation is necessary to ensure that correctional institutions remain safe for their employees and the people in custody. The safety of correctional staff must always be an overarching consideration. Our correctional institutions are full of dedicated staff who work long hours in challenging circumstances to make a positive difference by promoting rehabilitation and protecting communities.

As a member of the public safety committee, I have had the opportunity to tour a number of corrections facilities across the country and to get to know many of the men and women who work in the corrections system, including the commissioner and correctional investigator, regional managers, wardens, corrections officers, parole officers, aboriginal liaison officers, program officers, nurses and more. They work incredibly hard with very little recognition, working day in and day out to rehabilitate those in our corrections system. They develop correctional plans for offenders to ensure that they are receiving programming throughout their sentences. They are passionate about their work and often make a real difference in the lives of offenders so that they can become more productive and healthy members of society upon their release.

Until now, correctional staff had few alternatives to segregation when having to isolate an inmate for safety reasons. We now have an opportunity to address that problem. Bill C-83 would eliminate segregation altogether and establish structured intervention units. These SIUs would provide the necessary resources and expertise to address the safety risks of inmates in difficult circumstances. They would help manage offenders who could not otherwise be safely managed. In an SIU, an inmate would receive structured interventions and programming tailored to their specific needs. Every day, they would have a minimum of four hours outside their cell, including at least two hours of meaningful human interaction.

● (1535)

In the existing segregation system, by contrast, people get only two hours out of the cell and little or no meaningful interaction with other people.

I find some of the rhetoric on the bill coming from my Conservative colleagues to be disturbing. I have heard my colleagues on the opposition benches argue that the bill would make life easier for offenders in corrections facilities. I have said it before in the House and I will say it again. I believe it is essential that our system does all within its power to rehabilitate offenders, if only because we know that it leads to lower recidivism rates and ultimately makes all Canadians safer.

As my friend Stan Stapleton, president of the Union of Safety and Justice Employees, has said with regard to the bill:

> There is evidence that shows that strong rehabilitative programs make communities safer and create a safer environment for both employees and offenders inside institutions...The reality is these offenders—almost all of them—will return to the community. And so if we simply lock them up and throw away the key, we're not providing them with the tools that they require in order to safely reintegrate back into society.

I could not agree more and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the bill. With Bill C-83, offenders will have the ability to work toward the objectives in the correctional plan thanks to a focus on intervention so they are better placed to become productive members of society once they are released. I think we can all agree that this is good for the public safety of Canadians.

With these changes, offenders will have daily visits from health care professionals. Ultimately the idea is to facilitate safe reintegration into the mainstream inmate population as soon as possible.

To that end, placements in SIUs will be subject to a robust system of review. An initial review will happen within five days by the institution's warden. If the person remains in the SIU, subsequent reviews will be done by the warden after 30 days and by the commissioner every 30 days thereafter. Also, at any time a health care professional can recommend a change in conditions or a transfer out of the SIU.

Importantly, the bill also proposes to enshrine in law the principle that health care professionals within the corrections system must have the autonomy to exercise their own medical judgment. As recommended by the Ashley Smith inquest, it creates a system of patient advocates who will help ensure people get the medical treatment they need.

Having spent considerable time studying this issue at the committees on which I serve and having visited several corrections facilities, I can say with confidence that Bill C-83 represents a substantial change in the right direction. We have the opportunity to act now to improve correctional outcomes, reduce violent incidents and ensure a safe environment for inmates, staff, volunteers and the institutions as a whole.

We have the opportunity to contribute to community and public safety by supporting bold new proposals that assist with the rehabilitation of offenders, reducing the risk of reoffending and keeping our communities safe.

I look forward to the opportunity to study the bill further at committee and I urge all members to join me in supporting these important changes.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague opposite.

Does she agree with me that the government is going in the wrong direction by doing away with administrative segregation without providing for adequate resources? As the president of the Canadian correctional officers said, they need tools and measures to control the prison population.

Does she not think that the bill takes tools away from our correctional officers, thereby making our prisons less safe?

That is what we have seen in recent months. Violence has increased as a result of the approach taken in this bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I do not agree with what the hon. member said. Certainly the number of violent incidents in our corrections facilities would not have gone up prior to the introduction of the bill. The fact is that the government has committed to investing additional resources and in hiring more staff to deal with the prison population in these SIUs.

The hon. member may be mistaken in his interpretation of what the government has said around the bill. Certainly it is critical that the safety of our corrections officers be paramount. They have to be safe when they go to work. We have made a commitment to making the investments necessary to ensure that happens.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her speech.

I certainly do not claim to be an expert in this area, though I have very definite ideas about rehabilitation. However, two courts have ruled that certain measures are unconstitutional. I have to admit that I do not see which measures in Bill C-83 will keep us from ending up in court again. I am not an expert, so I would like the member to enlighten me.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I am not a lawyer and I am not a constitutional expert, but I know the government has reviewed carefully the court decisions. In fact, that is why we have a new bill in front of us right now. It has incorporated what the courts have said, along with our previous legislation that had been introduced around administrative segregation. I am confident that the government has looked at it, bearing in mind the importance of the constitutionality of the legislation, but also ensuring we will be rehabilitating offenders when they are in our prison system.

As it stands right now, individuals in administrative segregation do not have access to programming and they do not have access to the kinds of mental health services they need. Therefore, by bringing in this legislation and tying it with programming and mental health services, we should see a significant difference in the outcomes of the prison population.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is more of a comment than a question for my friend from Oakville North—Burlington. Given her speech and the commitment to work on amendments in committee, I am changing my vote and I will vote for Bill C-83 at second reading.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I am so pleased with the hon. member's comments. I am very happy she will be supporting this to get it to committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member from Burlington mentioned that segregated individuals would go from two hours to four hours of human contact during the day. The opposition would like to paint that as our being soft on crime. However, the reality of the situation is that we are going to help people become better people so they can be properly rehabilitated and integrated into society.

Would the member agree that the goal is to accomplish that, to get people back into society to be productive members?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I absolutely agree with my colleague who, I know, is quite passionate about ensuring not only public safety, but ensuring the safety of people who work in the corrections system and ensuring that those who are in the prison system are able to live law-abiding lives when they get out of prison.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act, which was introduced by the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, a position I used to hold.

To start with, I want to say that I will be vigorously opposing this bill. With respect to the point raised a moment ago by my colleague, I would like to remind her that the president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, Jason Godin, has already pointed out the detrimental effects that this bill would have on security in our correctional institutions. He says that the number of assaults on prison guards by inmates has increased as a result of the reduced use of segregation under the new legislation that has been tabled.

I am strongly opposed to this bill, because its very basis is wrong. The first reason I oppose this bill is that it makes our correctional facilities less safe. I am sure members on both sides of the House would join me in acknowledging the remarkable work that our correctional officers do. Much like parents raising children, our correctional officers need respect. Our role, as parliamentarians, is to give them tools to ensure that they get respect, which is essential to keeping our correctional facilities safe. Unfortunately, this bill would weaken the tools available to our correctional officers.

I commend these officers, and I want them to know that I oppose this bill, because it will make our facilities less safe and will put our correctional officers at greater risk.

The second reason I oppose the bill is that any legislation meant to improve our correctional services needs to take into account a fundamental principle that is missing from this bill. The conditions of detention must reflect the seriousness of the crimes committed and must also reflect each individual inmate's risk level. This bill is clearly misguided because it removes tools that help our correctional officers keep our facilities safe.

The third reason I oppose this bill is that it does not contain any significant rehabilitation measures. I remind members that our correctional facilities are meant to ensure that when an inmate is released back into society, he or she is able to contribute to this society again.

With less respect, less safety and, unfortunately, more violence in our correctional facilities, it will be harder for inmates to focus on their rehabilitation.

As members have mentioned, Bill C-83 seeks to eliminate the use of administrative and disciplinary segregation. The Liberals are fixated on that. It seems that those who drafted the bill never had an opportunity, as I did when I was minister of public safety and as our public safety critic did, to simply go and visit correctional facilities to talk to correctional officers and inmates. Our public safety critic and I had the opportunity to meet with inmates who told us to leave this measure in place because it is good for their mental health.

Sometimes inmates need to be alone and to get away from others for awhile. There are some inmates who ask to be sent to administrative segregation, as I witnessed first-hand. We therefore see that the Liberals are taking tools away from correctional officers and inmates that help with inmates' rehabilitation.

What the Liberals are proposing instead is another mechanism for incarcerating inmates who cannot remain in the general inmate population for safety reasons.

● (1550)

This bill will require Correctional Service Canada to give inmates access to patient advocacy services and consider systemic and background factors unique to indigenous offenders in all decision-making.

That brings me to the Liberal approach. It took the Liberals 10 months to appoint a federal ombudsman for victims of crime, but far less time to appoint an ombudsman for criminals. That is definitely not in the interest of society. The government should make victims a priority too, but for the past three years, the government has been silent on that subject. Navigating the justice system is a painful experience for victims, and the government needs to make sure they get the support and respect they deserve.

I just want to point out that our government was the one that brought in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, and thank goodness we did, because the Liberals are not doing anything, on top of which they are taking ages to fill key positions. Clearly, the government does not think victims are all that important.

This bill has other flaws. It seeks not only to get rid of administrative segregation, but also to have body scanners installed. We do not take issue with that idea, but we do have a problem with how this is being handled. We know that a lot of contraband is smuggled into our penal institutions by visitors. It is therefore equally important to include those people in these measures. If the bill gets to committee, I would hope that these measures are given another look.

What is more, instead of giving inmates tools to overcome addiction, the Liberals are doing the opposite and providing them with syringes. We know that having syringes in penitentiaries is dangerous for our correctional officers considering the spread of disease associated with their use and the fact that they might even be used against correctional officers. That is something the bill ignores, but the government is okay with that.

I hope that the government will get back on track and, like our government, have a zero tolerance policy instead of aggravating inmates' health problems. It is important that the government, as legislator, send a clear message about the presence of drugs in our institutions. Everyone remembers the measures our government put in place.

Superior court judges ruled recently on the appropriateness of administrative segregation. I wonder if, much like the members opposite, those judges even bothered to go and speak with officers and corrections officers. Today my colleagues asked the minister, her representatives and other government members if they consulted officers and corrections officers, since this will have a serious impact on their work environment. We have heard nothing but radio silence so far in response.

I have so much more I want to say, but I see that I am running out of time, and I would not want to repeat what I have said in the past, which has been reported by my friends at *Infoman*.

In closing, I want share Jason Godin's view. He said that introducing this legislation could have a detrimental affect on conditions in our prison facilities, increase violence and make the situation worse. The government is going in the wrong direction and I urge it to change course. For now, I oppose this legislative measure.

● (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, while my colleague was minister of public safety he promoted and was very comfortable with the widespread use of double-bunking, which not only led to unsafe conditions for inmates, but was widely opposed by prison guards throughout the correctional system.

I am leery to take his position, particularly when it comes to an issue like this.

Could the member at least acknowledge and accept the fact that we have a revolving door when it comes to people going in and coming out of prison over and over again? We need to properly rehabilitate people so that when they come back into society they can be productive members of society who can contribute to their communities. He would know that from his previous position.

Would the member not agree that we have to give the proper tools to our guards, and this is one of those tools, so they have what they need?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his question.

However, I have to say that his government is doing the exact opposite by getting rid of a tool. According to Jason Godin, president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, it is a mistake to eliminate administrative segregation because it is one of the tools that help keep Correctional Service of Canada institutions safe.

I would like to come back to one thing he said about the so-called revolving doors. The Liberals are turning our prisons into shopping malls with revolving doors where people can come and go. They are eliminating measures and weakening detention conditions by making it easier for inmates to be released before completing their rehabilitation process.

Those are two measures that should be changed. The Liberals should restore administrative segregation and put an end to the revolving door system, which we eliminated but that the Liberals are reinstating. Unfortunately, it makes our communities less safe.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague spoke quite a bit about how removing segregation from the system would create an unsafe work environment. I want Canadians to know that members on all sides of the chamber support the fact that our correctional workers do a tremendous job and should be kept safe.

While this particular piece of legislation proposes removing administrative segregation and the capacity for people to be placed in administrative segregation, people actually would be assigned to secure intervention units. Usually, when they are removed it is for safety reasons.

I am not sure how my colleague would describe this as weakening the system when we would be placing them in a secure unit and giving them the tools necessary to help rehabilitate them while they are in that population. Those interventions could possibly reduce the amount of violence that does happen within the prison system. We would be providing our correctional system with a separate place to house those inmates.

It is not like we are just getting rid of it altogether. We would have secure units. We would also be giving inmates mental health support and rehabilitative support to help them reduce violence and correct themselves, thereby adding to the safety of our correctional officers.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, I did not see much in the bill regarding rehabilitation.

I am sure the member wants safe communities and safe correctional facilities.

Joseph Godin, the national president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, said, “The national prison guards' union is predicting increased violence behind bars as the federal government moves to end solitary confinement...”. He predicted that, “When this goes through, the bloodbath will start.”

I hope that when we eventually review the bill in second reading or at committee, we will be able to work together and reinstate those tools that are needed by our correctional officers to ensure that those facilities are safe. This is the way to make sure that inmates eventually will return to society and not pose a risk to their fellow Canadian citizens.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand and speak in support of Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

It is amazing to me how things connect here in the House of Commons in our parliamentary duties. Bill C-83 today ended up in a discussion with the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention. Bill C-83 also has a direct connection to a town in my riding. It has direct connections to first nations issues as well.

I am going to talk about a few different things. I am going to talk about how this affects my own community and also a little about the health impact of Bill C-83.

In my own community, in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester, I have two correctional facilities. One is the Springhill Institution and the other is the Nova Institution for Women in Truro, Nova Scotia.

I will talk about Springhill first. That institution was built in 1967.

Partly in response to a natural disaster that happened at a coal mine on October 23, 1958, 60 years ago today, in Springhill, 174 miners went to work. At 8:06 in the evening, there was an underground earthquake, which is sometimes called a bump. It was the most severe bump in North American history in one of the deepest coal mines in North America. Of the 174 who went to work that day, 75 lost their lives. There were 99 survivors, and many of them were trapped underground for many days. Six days after the bump, 12 survivors were rescued by creating a tunnel to get them. Later, on November 1, a second group was saved. That was 60 years ago today, and I want everybody to know that Springhill is remembering that bump today as we speak. Many people who work at the Springhill correctional facility are relatives and descendants of the miners who were lost 60 years ago today.

They never forget in Springhill about the people who were lost. They built a beautiful memorial with a number of stones with every name of every miner who lost his or her life in the mines. Every year they have a Davis Day to make sure that people do not forget the lives lost in the Springhill mines. Tonight, at 7 p.m., in the St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church there is a hymn sing led by three daughters of one of the miners, Maurice Ruddick, who was one of the miners trapped underground. He is often credited with helping other survivors underground survive that ordeal. Being trapped 4,000 feet underground, he led them in song and prayer. He was cited as citizen of the year for Canada at the time. Just a month ago, Herb Pepperdine, one of the last men in the mine who was trapped for eight days, died at the age of 95.

Therefore, for me, today is a special day, and 60 years ago, I remember the day. I remember the ambulances, the police cars, the turmoil and the TV. Just two years before that, there was another explosion when 39 Springhillers were lost. In just two years, Springhill lost 114 miners.

However, the Springhill Institution was built and opened in 1967. It has been very successful since and has expanded several times. It provides correctional facilities for medium- and minimum-security prisoners.

I mentioned the connections with the Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention. I talked to them today about suicide prevention and what causes people to attempt suicide. Also, earlier this morning, I was talking to my seatmate for Kildonan—St. Paul and she was telling me about a first nation in her riding in Manitoba, the Berens River First Nation. She gave me a document that reads "Isolation with no road access Kills (feeling of 'entrapment' resulting in high suicides)", which is exactly what we are talking about today: isolation, confinement, solitary confinement and the impact it has on prisoners.

Not all prisoners should be in prison for their whole life, as some opposition members would lead us to believe. I have visited the prison in my riding several times, and often I am struck that the prisoners are just regular people who made a mistake. They want to get back into society. They want to be rehabilitated. They want a second chance and they are certainly entitled it. It is certainly worth the effort to try to help them.

● (1605)

Bill C-83 will take steps to eliminate solitary confinement, which is harmful to people. One of the members just said that prisons needed solitary confinement, and I do not believe that. Bill C-83 proposes to do away with solitary confinement and replace it with structured intervention units, so at least prisoners will always have some human contact with health care workers, guards or other people, as opposed to solitary confinement where there is no contact at all.

In my area, just a short way from my riding, there is Dorchester Penitentiary, the Westmorland Institution and the Shepody Healing Centre. These are three different institutions, with three different levels and approaches to rehabilitation and incarceration. I am hopeful the rehabilitative nature of these facilities will be enhanced and built on. That is the way we should go. I do not believe there is any point in putting people who have just made a mistake away, throwing away the key as some members have suggested here.

A 2017 report from Correctional Service Canada noted that Atlantic Canada had the highest rate of administrative segregation, or solitary confinement, in the country. In addition to that, we seem to segregate them for longer terms than their counterparts in other regions of the country.

Five percent of Atlantic Canada's inmates are in administrative segregation, which is five times higher than in Ontario. The same report also noted that Atlantic Canada accounted for more than one-third of all inmates who were in administrative segregation for more than 100 days. A hundred days in segregation is extremely unhealthy for anybody. It is perhaps cruel and unusual punishment.

I welcome Bill C-83 and the change to a structured intervention unit. This is a giant step forward. It will be better for rehabilitation, better for health and safer for prison guards, the other prisoners and the people who work beside them. I am glad we are moving forward on it.

Our government intends to invest heavily in mental health care within the correctional system, and I am talking exactly about that. I referred to the paper that said that isolation caused a feeling of entrapment, resulting in high suicides. This first nation community I mentioned had a high rate of suicide. After a road was built to it, the feeling of isolation was eliminated and suicides stopped. There were no suicides last year in this community. Prior to that there had been many. The indigenous peoples attributed it to the fact that they no longer have the feeling of isolation or entrapment, which is exactly what solitary confinement does.

Again, in the interest of mental health, we are moving in the right direction. This is a great move to follow through on, but I also support rehabilitative steps so people can re-enter society and play a productive role in it.

The prisoners I meet when I go to the prisons impress me. Most of them have just made a mistake. They are serving their time. They want to get back out. They want to play a role in the community and be productive citizens. The bill is all about that.

We know the administrative segregation rules need updating, and Bill C-83 would do just that. By replacing solitary confinement with structured intervention units, we are going to provide better avenues for our inmates to be productive citizens, finish their terms and come out better trained and be productive citizens.

I thank the House for letting me talk about Springhill. Again, this is the 60th anniversary of that horrible disaster on October 23, 1958. I wish all the people in Springhill, who I know are remembering this right now, well. I wish I were there with them.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his impressive speech.

I sit on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We heard witnesses from the indigenous community. We noted that a large number of indigenous women who are victims of domestic violence are in prison.

Can my colleague explain how Bill C-83 will improve living conditions for women who are victims of domestic violence knowing that a great many of them are in prison?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey: Madam Speaker, again, I come back to my opening statement about how things connect, like Bill C-83 connects with my meeting today with the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention and with my seatmate talking about indigenous efforts and isolation.

Bill C-83 would provide a different approach and eliminate solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is probably worse than anything indigenous women experience. Indigenous peoples in my area are family-oriented, have a strong family culture, work together and are very close. To be in solitary confinement or isolated completely would be extremely difficult for indigenous women. I cannot speak for them, but that is my observation based on my experience.

I have a really interesting indigenous population in my riding. I work very closely with the people. They are extremely good to work with and very helpful. They are interested in bettering themselves. They are perhaps the most industrious people in my riding. Hopefully this will improve the plight of indigenous women in prison.

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

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

Although I do believe he has good intentions, I am still a little confused, so I am hoping he can clarify a few things for me.

The B.C. Supreme Court ruled that the indefinite nature of isolation is unconstitutional. While it has introduced Bill C-83 as a solution to the problem, the government is also appealing the ruling at the same time.

If solutions to this problem, which has been deemed unconstitutional, can be found in Bill C-83, why is the government appealing the ruling?

Are we supposed to believe that the introduction of structured intervention units is really going to address the concerns raised in the court ruling, when really all this does is reduce the number of hours spent in isolation from 22 or 23 to "just" 20 hours a day?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Casey: Madam Speaker, I am the furthest thing there is from a constitutional lawyer. I appreciate the question, but I cannot address the lawsuit.

I talked with some correctional officers before I decided to speak. They said that in their opinion this would be a vast improvement. One of them said that after 24 hours in confinement, the impact on a person was profound. At one week, it would be even more profound. People can be in solitary confinement for a month, sometimes 100 days, or more than three months, and it changes them. It hurts their mental health.

I cannot answer the question about the constitutional lawsuit, but this bill goes in the right direction.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act. I will start by saying that it should come as no surprise that this side of the House feels quite differently than the government side with respect to the legislation.

One of the more profound statements I have recently read on this was in a newspaper article by Jason Godin, national president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers. He was quoted in the Vancouver Sun as saying, "attacks on guards and inmates have been increasing as the use of segregation has decreased ahead of new legislation to change the prison system." His words are profound, likely prophetic, when he says, "When this goes through, the bloodbath will start." That was his prediction with respect to this legislation. We should all heed the advice of somebody like Mr. Godin as we look at enacting legislation that has some serious flaws with respect to the protection of prison guards and what the implications of that could mean for them and their families.

Bill C-83 proposes to make changes to how inmates are treated when incarcerated. It also makes changes to that which will affect the safety of corrections staff, guards, health care providers and others. We must remember as well that it is not just guards in the prison system. There are health care providers and resource people who work there as well. It should be the ultimate goal of any legislation to ensure we protect them.

The bill proposes that new safety procedures be put in place. The government believes it will keep inmates safe and prevent any unwanted items from getting into correctional facilities. The government is also planning to introduce body scanners to federal penitentiaries. As well, it is very keen to discuss the SIUs, the new model for the structured intervention units, a replacement for solitary confinement, formalize exceptions for indigenous offenders, female offenders and offenders with mental health issues. All of these exceptions are important to having correctional services that can obviously help offenders while they are in jail.

Let me take a few minutes to speak specifically about solitary confinement. I have no knowledge or any sort of familiarity with it, but the use of solitary confinement is a serious one. It is used for serious criminals who are convicted of some of the worst crimes that anyone can imagine. The need for the use of solitary confinement must also be balanced with the care that the inmate receives and, more important, the safety of the guards and other staff within the prison system.

Sadly, in some cases, the use of solitary confinement has been abused. In Ontario, for example, two official offices have investigated the use of solitary confinement. First, the provincial advocate for youth published a report in 2017 called, "Missed Opportunities: The Experience of Young Adults Incarcerated in Federal Penitentiaries". The report called for sweeping changes to how youth were treated in federal institutions.

Among some of the key recommendations in the report were that Correctional Service Canada, CSC, add a flag in the offender management system that would allow the CSC to track individuals with a youth sentence transferred to an adult federal penitentiary; that CSC develop a gang disaffiliation strategy that would be responsive to the needs of young indigenous offenders, women offenders as well; and ensure that non-gang affiliated young offenders were not placed where there would be gang members who might attempt to recruit, indoctrinate or intimidate them.

The Ontario chief human rights commissioner also wrote about the use of solitary confinement and added that there was, in that case, a need for a culture shift in how indigenous prisoners, women prisoners and prisoners with mental health issues were treated. Of course, many in the House and those who have followed this closely will recall the tragic incident involving solitary confinement in the case of Adam Capay.

● (1620)

Adam Capay spent four years in solitary confinement while waiting for a trial, and he had not even been convicted while he was in solitary. It is a very sad story. Adam was held in solitary for 23 hours a day with the lights on, and was in solitary for more than four years when we combine his time in the Thunder Bay facility with time in the Kenora jail. We can all agree that what happened to Mr. Capay and what he went through should never happen again.

The Ontario government looked into this following reports by the chief human rights commissioner on the treatment of Adam Capay in Thunder Bay. Solitary confinement is a common and legitimate safety measure that protects guards from dangerous prisoners. Solitary confinement is also a tool for keeping other inmates safe from dangerous offenders, but again, we should all agree that it should never be abused.

What about the guards? What about the health care providers? What about the staff and those who work within the prison system, including mental health professionals, for example?

It has been stated by others on this side of the House that Bill C-83 does not take into consideration the safety of corrections staff. The men and women who work in those institutions deserve to be able to go home every day to their husbands, their wives, and their children. The spouses, parents and children of corrections workers deserve to have their spouses, daughters, sons and parents in a safe workplace.

Bill C-83 would give more flexibility to the lives of inmates while almost maintaining the status quo for staff. The bill would take away solitary confinement as a tool. As I just mentioned, it is also used to protect other staff and other inmates from very dangerous inmates and extremely critical and dangerous situations. Bill C-83 would do nothing to deter the bad behaviour of inmates.

When we look at some of the financial implications of how this bill is being rolled out, I wonder if what is being proposed in Bill C-83 strikes the balance of what we need when it comes to the use of solitary confinement.

There has been no cost assigned or studied in Bill C-83. I wonder if what the government wants to achieve with this bill can be fully met, considering the reduction in funding to federal correctional services. There will be a very large impact, with up to 150 full-time employees lost through reductions in budgets.

On Thursday of last week, my colleague from Calgary Shepard raised important issues about the cost of Bill C-83. He also raised some serious concerns that the government is reducing budgets for Correctional Service Canada.

Let me read what the member for Calgary Shepard said when he asked the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith a question, because he expressed it far better than I can:

> [I]n reading the British Columbia decision rendered by Justice Leask he looked at the cruel and unusual punishment provision and said, in paragraph 534, that it is actually not cruel and unusual. He declines to rule against it as a section 12 violation. He finds that it is not unconstitutional to have solitary confinement, only when it is indefinite and prolonged.

The member for Calgary Shepard continued:

> I want to talk about the budgetary impact of this legislation. In the public safety minister's departmental plan there is a projected reduction of 8.8% in real terms, in actual financial resources, being given to Correctional Services, and a reduction of 150 FTEs over the next few years.

This bill seems rushed; it is thin on concrete actions and needs to be looked at long and hard at committee. I know that when we vote on this later tonight, there is a strong likelihood that it will pass at this reading and end up at committee, but when it gets there, serious work will need to be done, in particular in relation to making sure that correctional facilities staff are better protected.

Members of the opposition and the NDP have all expressed concerns with respect to Bill C-83 that need to be discussed in committee. The Conservatives are very concerned that the government is again giving priority to dangerous offenders; this needs public scrutiny and to be talked about at committee.

As I close, I will quote some words of wisdom from the member for Spadina—Fort York, who said, "No one wants to be in jail." Well, some people deserve to be in jail.

● (1625)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier in my colleague's speech he quoted the vice-president of the union. I will also provide him with a quote from May 2014, when the Conservatives were in government. Global News quoted the national president for the same union, Kevin Grabowsky, who said, "The violence is on the rise and it's a big concern for, certainly, correctional officers."

The auditor general at the time was quoted as saying, "Correctional Services Canada has identified themselves that with overcrowding there can be risks to security in their facilities."

This is a stark underpinning of the difference between the approaches to corrections we see from this side of the House versus the other. All of a sudden, the Conservatives seem to be very concerned with the safety of the correctional officers, yet in 2014, they were encouraging over-bunking and double-bunking, which is exactly what the guards were against.

How can that member actually stand in the House now and try to make it seem as though the Conservatives are the champions of correctional officers, when in 2014 they did the exact opposite, creating extremely unsafe conditions for them?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I thought I was giving a very reasoned argument as to some of the flaws that exist within the bill. We also understand that the current executive of the correctional safety officers' union is quite concerned about this, so much so that I quoted Mr. Godin, who is the president, as saying that this could lead to a bloodbath.

Going into a point-counterpoint and blaming one group or another seems to be the consistent practice of the Liberal government as they look back over our 10 years instead of looking at their failed records or perhaps a failed piece of legislation. All I am asking is, if Mr. Godin is saying this on behalf of his correctional officers, should it not be the ultimate priority of any government and of the House to make sure that these correctional officers are in a safe environment? Should they not be consulted?

Furthermore, should we not expect that they go home to their families at the end of a long day of doing incredibly hard work within that prison system? That is all I am asking. I am not looking at a point-counterpoint. I provided a very reasoned argument as to some of the concerns with this piece of legislation.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague across the aisle.

Bill C-83 does actually contain legislation that is quite progressive. At present, victims have the right to access audio recordings of parole hearings only if they do not attend. However, some people fear that given the emotional nature of those hearings, it might be hard for victims to recall all the details of the proceedings. I would like to hear my hon. colleague's thoughts on that.

I wonder if he could also talk about body scanners. In an effort to combat drugs and contraband, the bill authorizes the use of body scanners, like the ones used at airports, which will be less intrusive for inmates and visitors.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, on the issue of body scanners, there are obviously aspects of the bill that we can agree with. First and foremost is the fact that body scanners should be used. They should be used for everyone entering into the prison system. At the end of the day, it goes back to providing a safe working environment, not only for the prisoners but also for those who work there as guards, mental health professionals and other staff, as well as for those who enter into the prison system, perhaps, to visit those who are incarcerated.

There is no question that body scanners are a reliable tool. Certainly they have been used at airports for a long time. They do a great job of addressing what can be on a person's body and whether that instrument is dangerous and could potentially impact the health and safety of those who are within the prison system.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Vancouver East, Democratic Reform; and the hon. member for Windsor West, Consumer Protection.

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a joy to be here today in support of Bill C-83, which amends the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

I heard some of the debate this afternoon, and I would say we all share the goal of safe communities. We all want to be secure in the knowledge that when offenders return to their communities, our corrections system has done its job, supported their rehabilitation and prepared them to lead safe, productive, law-abiding lives.

For the corrections system to succeed in that regard, safety and security have to go hand in hand with rehabilitative programming and treatment.

I am proud to stand here today and know that principle is at the core of the bold new measures the government is taking to transform federal corrections. Bill C-83 will strengthen the federal corrections system, making it safer and more effective at rehabilitation. The bill will end the practice of segregation. It will establish structured intervention units, or SIUs, to safely manage inmates when they cannot otherwise be managed in the mainstream inmate population, without denying them access to programs, interventions and treatment.

Bill C-83 will also enshrine in law the principle that offender management decisions must involve consideration of systemic and background factors related to indigenous offenders. It will also strengthen health care governance, allow for the use of new search technologies, and enhance support for victims at parole hearings.

Key to this landmark legislation is that with SIUs, the practice of segregation will become a thing of the past. Currently, if an offender is considered dangerous to themselves or others, or is at risk of being harmed, they can be placed in segregation if there is no other reasonable alternative. Segregation has remained a common practice over the years.

Recent policy changes by the Correctional Service of Canada led to a significant decline in segregation placements, from over 700 on any given day a few years ago, to just over 300 today. However, we cannot ignore the fact that the practice remains subject to criticism in and out of the courts. Stakeholders, including the Office of the Correctional Investigator and offender advocacy groups, have raised concern about its effects, particularly on inmates suffering from mental health issues.

In the courts, recent decisions in both Ontario and British Columbia called for legislative reform to the practice, and they have called for improvements to the provision of mental health services within corrections institutions. All of this is on top of class actions and human rights complaints.

At the same time, others have argued that segregation is necessary to ensure that correctional institutions remain safe for employees and for people in custody. The safety of correctional staff must always be an overarching consideration. Our correctional institutions are full of dedicated, hard-working staff who work long hours in sometimes very challenging circumstances to make a positive difference by promoting rehabilitation and protecting communities.

Until now, they have had very few alternatives to segregation when isolating an inmate for security or safety reasons. However, we now have an opportunity to address this problem. Bill C-83 will eliminate segregation altogether and establish structured intervention units. These SIUs will provide the necessary resources and expertise to address the safety risks of inmates in difficult circumstances. They will help to manage offenders who could not otherwise be managed safely.

In an SIU, inmates will receive structured interventions and programming tailored to their specific needs. Every day, they will have a minimum of four hours outside of their cell, and that will include at least two hours of meaningful human interaction.

In the existing segregation system, by contrast, people only get two hours out of their cell and little or no meaningful interaction with other people. With Bill C-83, offenders will have the ability to work towards the objectives in their correctional plans, thanks to a focus on interventions. They will have daily visits from health care professionals. Ultimately, the idea is to facilitate safe reintegration into the mainstream inmate population as soon as possible.

To that end, placements in SIUs will be subject to a robust system of review. An initial review by the institution's warden will happen within five days. If the person remains in the SIU, subsequent reviews will be done by the warden after 30 days and by the commissioner every 30 days thereafter. Also, at any time, a health care professional can recommend a change in conditions or a transfer out of the SIU.

● (1635)

Importantly, the bill would also enshrine in law the principle that health care professionals within the correctional system must have the autonomy to exercise their own medical judgment. As recommended by the Ashley Smith inquest, it would create a system of patient advocates who would help ensure that people got the medical treatment they needed.

For all these reasons, Bill C-83 would represent a substantial change in the right direction. We have an opportunity to act now to improve correctional outcomes, reduce violent incidents and ensure a safe environment for inmates, staff, volunteers and the institutions as a whole. We have the opportunity to contribute to community and public safety by supporting bold new proposals that would assist with the rehabilitation of offenders, reducing the risk of reoffending and keeping our communities safe.

I urge all members to join me in supporting these very important changes.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister spoke quite a bit in her speech about the importance of safety. However, an aspect of segregation and solitary confinement is safety, the safety of not only the inmate who is the target of other inmates but the safety of inmates who may be at risk from the inmate who is to be segregated. It is also a safety issue for the guards and personnel who work in those facilities.

I am curious as to what measures the Liberals have taken. We have certainly heard from the employee unions that are involved, which have great concerns about parts of Bill C-83. I would like to ask the minister what steps the government has taken to ensure the safety of those guards. If steps have been taken to ensure their safety, why are they so concerned about the steps being taken in Bill C-83 to eliminate solitary confinement?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Speaker, I come to this debate with a considerable amount of experience, having worked with very vulnerable populations. I ran the largest homeless shelter in northwestern Ontario for a number of years. In fact, the shelter was where many released inmates landed after their experience in prison. While working in that extremely volatile environment, I learned that one of the best ways to protect the staff who served those people day in and day out, often in very difficult situations and with very little support from the external community, was to ensure that we had the best opportunities for mental health care for those people we supported in that shelter. We made sure that our staff worked with health care professionals to assess their mental health and to encourage better mental health.

Through budget 2017-18, we have dedicated a significant amount of money toward the mental health of inmates. I can tell members that when people feel more positive about their future, they are less violent. They are less aggressive. When they have inclusion and the ability to see another human being and to work on the challenges that led them to incarceration, they have an opportunity to reduce their violent tendencies.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments. It is always interesting to hear different opinions, particularly when they come from a member of cabinet.

I listened carefully to what was said about the respect we all have for those who work in this very difficult field. One of my childhood friends worked in that field for many years. As everyone knows, this type of work puts a lot of pressure on those who do it, as well as on their families and loved ones.

That being said, the minister said that we need to take workers' concerns into account. After all, they are the first to be in close proximity to imprisoned criminals.

Could the minister explain why the government did not take those workers' concerns into account in her bill?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Speaker, I would say that it is precisely because of the concern for the safety of correctional officers that we are taking this step. Certainly it is about rehabilitation, but it is also about lessening experiences of violence, which are often exacerbated by the experience of segregation. When people do not have access to other human beings, when people do not see that they are even considered human, it increases the risk of violence and violent tendencies. We saw that in the shelter I ran, day in and day out.

When people feel that they do not have any hope of any interaction with human beings, when they have no sense of how long they are going to remain in that state, when they are not getting the mental health supports they need, they, in fact, become increasingly unpredictable. We want to ensure that our corrections system is safe for those who work in the system and that when offenders are released, they have had rehabilitation so that they can go back to the community with the capacity to function in a way that is improved and have the supports they need to be rehabilitated back into society.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to sit here during last Friday's debate, where I listened to some of the best lawyers and legal minds who are members of Parliament, including the member for St. Albert—Edmonton. When we start listening to the statistics, when we are talking about all these things that are occurring in our correctional system, there are many different things we have to look at. We have extremely diverse opinions here.

One thing we talked about was the fact that correctional officers have not been talked to, so I am going to start with something I put forward last week. It is a quote from my friend Jason, who is a correctional officer. He said, "No profession has hit the toilet [like] corrections in the last several years. Violence, contraband, assault on staff are skyrocketing. Why? Total lack of consequence for behaviour. Eliminating segregation has handcuffed us. Now, no question segregation exacerbates mental health, but we have no choice. Violent offenders continue assaulting, and easy victims continue being preyed upon. We continually have people making changes based on concepts, not reality."

Today we are discussing Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act. With the members in this House, I recognize that these views are greatly diverse. I am listening to the questions and answers today. What one member may say goes against my entire moral code on this. We have different ideas on the rights of criminals versus what the rights of victims, the use of segregation versus proposed intervention units, and drugs in prison.

Drugs in prison has become a huge issue. It is not just an issue that has come about in the last 10 years. We can find studies done decades ago that show the same trend. While the Liberals put forward policies for needle exchange programs in the jail, I believe we should focus on getting the drugs out of the jails altogether.

We can talk about safe injection sites. This is a huge debate in Ontario. What do safe injection sites do to communities and what should we be doing to help those who have long-term addictions? One of the things they say is that it is about saving people's lives, getting them back on track, and making sure that people do not die in back alleys.

I am going to remind the government that prisons are not those dark alleys. When we talk about safe injection sites, we are talking about getting people off the streets, putting them into an area where they can have safe injections, and truly hoping that wraparound services are available to them. I question why we are starting at step one and providing safe injection sites in prisons in the first place. Yes, it is a very difficult thing, but this is not a back alley. It is a prison, where there are well-educated, trained and skilled staff who deal with these issues. We should actually be going in a trajectory moving forward, not just compensating for the drugs.

There have been so many concerns about convicted criminals and the use of illegal drugs. We have to keep in mind that we are talking about convicted criminals. We are talking about people who are being put in jail for summary or felony offences and what their lives should be like.

We have talked very much about Tori Stafford and her abuser, the person who murdered her. We have talked about maximum-security and minimum-security. We are talking about a horrific murderer going from a place where there may be institutional walls to a healing lodge. I have heard from hundreds of constituents of Elgin—Middlesex—London who are saying that she is living a better life than they are.

When talking to Canadians, a lot of times it is one of the things they are going to say, that people in jail have a better life than they do. They get meals, they get their hydro paid for, all those things that some people living in poverty, and especially in our middle class, have to deal with every day.

I want to continue with the segregation part. Yes, I believe there are extreme situations where we must look at the use of segregation. Sometimes it is used to protect the criminal from the rest of the population, and other times it is used because an offender is a danger to the rest of the population, including the guards.

In a court decision by Justice Marrocco, he found that administrative segregation itself was constitutional. Of course, we are going to have others who believe that this is cruel and unusual punishment. There are parties that will disagree with this whole philosophy and say that we cannot segregate people and that they need to have personal time and the humanity side of it.

● (1645)

I have a problem when talking about this. We are talking about humanity for someone who is alive versus humanity for somebody who may have been murdered or is disabled for the rest of his or her life because of a criminal. I think the mother in me is asking, “Where is the justice here?”

Those are some of my key priorities when we are looking at this.

I have always believed in putting victims first. I think we have lost that side of this debate, because we are always asking what can we do to rehabilitate these criminals. I totally agree that there are some criminals who can be rehabilitated, but there are those people who have done horrific things, and we are sitting here saying that they have to have poetry readings and they have to learn how to cook and their lives will be better. We have to take a really hard look at ourselves and ask if we are really going to manage that. It is a compassionate idea, but it is not reality.

We have to recognize that crimes have a harmful impact on victims and on society. A bill was put forward by the last government on the Victims Bill of Rights. It is something I want to share with the House today.

When I work for the people of Elgin—Middlesex—London, I work for victims' families 100% of the time to make sure that they are taken care of. I am going to read the preamble of the bill to the House:

Government Orders

> Whereas victims of crime and their families deserve to be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect, including respect for their dignity;
>
> Whereas it is important that victims' rights be considered throughout the criminal justice system;
>
> Whereas victims of crime have rights that are guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
>
> Whereas consideration of the rights of victims of crime is in the interest of the proper administration of justice;
>
> Whereas the federal, provincial and territorial governments share responsibility for criminal justice;
>
> Whereas, in 1988, the federal, provincial and territorial governments endorsed the Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and, in 2003, the Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime, 2003;

All this being said, I recognize that some circumstances should be reviewed, including sexual violence and abuse. A lot of times when we are talking about vulnerable communities in these institutions, there may be issues that put people in there in the first place.

Not everyone agrees with the use of Gladue reports, but if we have Gladue reports, with appropriate writers, people who understand how to write a Gladue report, they can put all that imperative information forward at sentencing to decide how the person should be treated.

We talk a lot about truth and reconciliation. We recognize that we have had residential schools and that there has been intergenerational trauma. By no means am I saying that the person should not be looked at a bit differently. I am saying that. That may go against what some of my fellow Conservative colleagues may agree with, but I think these are things we have to go forward with. We have to look at all of these things. Gladu reports are something I support.

I will return to my friend's quote and the concern about drugs and contraband in jails. We need to find a solution. Is the solution making sure that we have needle exchange programs? For me, the concept of scanners is a positive option to find out what is actually entering prisons. We know that we have a problem. What is the reason, and how can we find a solution? The concept of these scanners is really positive. I look at them as a solution.

I want to go back to my daughter, who has graduated from the protection, security and investigation program. She has had the opportunity to work in some different facilities. She is currently working in security with a large company, and she works on a hotline dealing with victims of crime. Her bottom line is, and this is a quote from Marissa, "There is something missing, and drugs continue to get into the jails".

In putting in scanners, should we be expanding that to guests as well? As a graduate and employee in the security field, Marissa's concern about drugs in jails has only been elevated since she graduated, because she sees it more and more each and every day.

We have a big social issue in these places. We always have to remind ourselves that we have to be there for the victims of crime, because they have had their rights taken away. Some people see justice differently. I see justice as the fact that I would want to know that if someone murdered my child, he or she would remain in jail for a long time.

● (1650)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I too am a mom. I am hoping to be able to speak to this piece of legislation from possibly a different perspective, but I do want to talk about the needle exchanges within prisons.

The member talked about safety in prison, including for staff. Right now in federal prisons, the incidence of HIV is 10 times higher than among the general population. If a needle is brought in and shared among many in the population, it is very dangerous for the guards and staff.

That said, needle exchanges in communities are based on international evidence that they decrease infectious disease. There is no correlation with increased violence or increased drug use, but needle exchanges do decrease infectious disease and allow people to move toward treatment.

Does she not believe that until we get to a point where we could totally eliminate drugs, the evidence for needle exchanges allows for a safer context?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, the safe injection sites that we see in our communities are a lot different from what we see in our jails. There are different ways of looking at this. I recognize that when people go to jail, a lot of times there are issues with substance abuse. We should not sitting there and saying, okay, here is a wraparound approach. We have to recognize that what got them there in the first place may have been the use of drugs and alcohol.

We also know there are a lot of gangs within these institutions and that drug trafficking happen to be one of the things they are taking part in for their own wealth. That is also how they are in charge of many of these issues. They are in charge of other people because of the cartel that they have within the jails.

I recognize the compassion that we have for this, but I want to go back to Nancy Reagan's approach and say, "Just say no". There has to be a point in time when we just stop this. That is what I believe when it comes to correctional systems, just say no and stop this.

● (1655)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it has been a while since I studied criminal law and the purposes of the criminal justice system. Certainly, I would agree with the member that retribution is an incredibly important principle that underpins our criminal justice system and why we mete out significant penalties for egregious crimes.

The member spoke about rehabilitation as only about fairness and a matter of humanity. I would ask the member to think about it a little differently, as a matter of public safety. Most criminals do not stay in the system forever, so as a matter of keeping our communities safe, rehabilitation plays an incredibly important role. I wonder if the member could speak to that aspect of the importance of rehabilitation, which is a matter of public safety.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, I recognize that rehabilitation is a big issue that we could be addressing here, but we also have to remember that there are those who may not be rehabilitated. When we talk about this, we talk programming, programming, programming. What is actually occurring in these institutions and why have the correctional officers, who are a big part of this, not been part of this bill and not brought in for consultations on this? They are part of the solution and I do not think the government has used any of the information and evidence that correctional officers find in their day-to-day work that would help with this.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister talked a lot about safety and making sure that criminals feel better about themselves. I do not think solitary confinement is about ensuring that the worst of the worst feel better about themselves. I would like the member's opinion on what we should be focusing on when it comes to incarceration of the most vicious criminals in Canada.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Speaker, the one thing that comes to mind is the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*. Any time we talk about people being in segregation, we are talking about Tim Robbins being put in a hole and having to stay there for months.

Rehabilitation is necessary for those who are not horrific offenders. I think about the crimes people have committed. Do people who have raped young children deserve all of this? Or, what do we do?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to talk about Bill C-83 because it is of personal concern to me and because I was asked to do so by a number of correctional officers who told me that they feel as though they were not sufficiently consulted during the drafting of this bill.

If the government would take the time to listen to our correctional officers, it would find that they think eliminating administrative segregation in correctional facilities is a bogus solution to a bogus problem. Administrative segregation is not used as punishment. It is a risk management tool. The threat of solitary confinement must always be present in order to act as a deterrent, guarantee a certain amount of discipline and enforce compliance in correctional institutions. That discipline is essential to the health and safety of our correctional officers.

Segregation is a tool of last resort. By taking that tool away from correctional officers, the government is saying that it does not care about their reality. It does not care that more assaults on officers have happened since the use of segregation was restricted. The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers has stressed that violence in prison will go up once administrative segregation is scrapped. Union president Jason Godin foresees a bloodbath. Administrative segregation is not used arbitrarily. It is a tool of last resort that protects inmates from others and, sometimes, from themselves.

When a new criminal arrives, conflicts can escalate rapidly. The prison population varies from institution to institution. Sometimes, a new inmate is not welcome, and his new peers will be waiting for him. Administrative segregation is used to ensure that inmate's health and safety until such time as officers find appropriate solutions to de-escalate conflict.

What should be done with an inmate in medium security who becomes more and more violent and has to be transferred to a maximum-security institution? Should such an inmate be allowed to keep living by his own rules for four hours a day while awaiting transfer? That makes no sense to me.

Some inmates altogether refuse to join the general population and also refuse the protective wing. How are we supposed to accommodate these inmates, who want peace and quiet, without abusing public funds? Is it a prison or a five-star hotel? What do I tell my constituents who tell me they would rather go to prison than live in a seniors residence? Correctional officers legitimately wonder what they will do. What tools will be at their disposal when administrative segregation is eliminated? The officers fear that there will be an escalation of violence. They fear for their health and safety, but also for the health and safety of the criminals.

Again, what tools will they have to defuse potential retaliations or thwart revenge plots that they may have caught wind of? Are they to leave the inmates to take justice and discipline into their own hands? Correctional officers cannot turn a blind eye and ignore the warnings they get. How are they supposed to enforce compliance? These are bogus solutions to a bogus problem.

The commissioner's directives, including CD 843, already cover exceptions for indigenous and female offenders, and offenders with mental health problems.

● (1700)

Mental health is taken very seriously in prisons. Offenders have access to care, and correctional officers are quickly informed when an offender is struggling with mental health issues. They find out fast. Correctional officers have faith in the commissioner's directives, and they refer to them regularly in the performance of their duties.

Correctional officers already take mental health issues seriously because they know what kind of impact these issues can have. In fact, they or their colleagues have been through it themselves.

Thirty-five percent of first responders, including paramedics, EMTs and correctional officers, will develop symptoms associated with work-related PTSD.

This is not an easy work environment. Officers must sometimes use a lot of psychological tactics to de-escalate conflicts. They may face moral and ethical dilemmas that they would not face in the world outside the prison. For example, it is not easy to be a mother or father and to be around a pedophile every day. One of the worst things that could happen would be for an officer to get to work and learn that an inmate had taken his or her own life. Prison guards face many risks. This kind of situation makes them very susceptible to PTSD.

Last week, I met with veterans and first responders who spoke to me about Project Trauma Support, a new Canadian program that treats post traumatic stress and operational stress injury in military personnel, veterans and first responders. I was deeply touched by their story and how the centre, located in Perth, Ontario, helped them turn their lives around.

It is often very difficult for anyone affected by work-related post-traumatic stress syndrome to access the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, disability insurance or compensation. They may have to wait a long time before accessing counselling or treatment, which is very unfortunate. We know that the earlier problems are addressed, the better the results and the chances to return to active service. Their families also suffer.

My colleagues and I hope that Bill C-211 will provide a comprehensive solution to this scourge.

However, I wonder why Bill C-83 does not say more about the health and safety of our correctional workers.

The Liberal government's history shows that it favours criminals rather than victims. I should not be surprised to find it more interested in the comfort of criminals than the safety of correctional officers.

The government also did not consult the union and employees when it announced a needle exchange pilot project.

I wonder how providing access to needles to take drugs or create tattoos, thereby providing a potential weapon to criminals, can be perceived as being a good thing.

Canadians need to know about the needle exchange program. When an inmate manages to illegally bring a drug into prison, he can ask the nurse for a needle and he will get one. The nurse and the government know very well that the needle will be used for illicit purposes.

● (1705)

The correctional officer does not know that he will be at greater risk during the next check of the inmate's cell. What message are they sending?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The allotted time has expired. The hon. member can add what he has to say during questions and comments.

The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for questions and comments.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague from the beautiful Chicoutimi and Saguenay region. I find this to be a bit much. We are talking about an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, but that is not really what we heard.

I would like him to talk about victims services. He did not say a word about the audio recordings of parole hearings. They currently do not have access to that. Some fear that because of the emotional nature of the hearings, it is difficult for the victims to recall details. However, the inmates would have access to the recordings during parole hearings. I would like to hear the hon. member's thoughts on this and on the scanners. When the new technology is installed at the detention centres, it could be used for both visitors and inmates.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about that.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, I have talked to correctional officers and what concerns me is that it is going to be extremely difficult for our correctional officers if they no longer have administrative segregation at their disposal.

When something happens, correctional officers are often first on the scene. I would like the government to consider that and understand that correctional officers will have an extremely tough time gaining control if they cannot use administrative segregation. If the prisoner realizes that administrative segregation is not being replaced by anything else, he might end up doing things he otherwise would not have. I think that it is extremely important to keep that in mind for correctional officers' sake.

● (1710)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to my Conservative colleague's speech. Our opinions differ on many subjects, and while I realize we are miles apart on this one too, a number of his arguments did strike a chord.

I would like to know what he thinks of the fact that two legal rulings have found administrative segregation to be unconstitutional. In my opinion, protecting people who work in those environments must be a consideration, but segregation is no way to treat inmates with mental illness.

Can the member reconcile what he just said with those notions of constitutionality and mental health treatment?

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, on the subject of administrative segregation, I believe the duration was reduced. On the other, I think that there needs to be appropriate mental health screening of inmates.

To my mind, if the government takes the crucially important tool that is administrative segregation away from correctional officers, and prisoners know that means they may be transferred elsewhere for their own protection, I have no doubt they will do things they would not do if administrative segregation were here to stay. That is how I see it.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

As my colleague said, administrative segregation has been widely criticized by stakeholders and has been subject to legal challenges.

This bill will eliminate administrative segregation and replace it with structured intervention units, which provide secure environments for inmates who must be separated from the general prison population to receive targeted interventions and real human interaction.

The bill will also make changes in connection to health care, the management of indigenous offenders, victims' access to audio recordings of parole hearings, and search technology to keep contraband out of prisons. These are the objectives of Bill C-83.

I was here on Friday, like many other colleagues, when we were studying this bill at second reading. We talked about it and we are still talking about it today.

Earlier our colleague from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame said that the purpose of detention centres is to rehabilitate inmates so they can reintegrate into society. Yes, they are there because they have committed a crime, but we need to help them reintegrate into society so they can eventually contribute to it once they have made it through the detention part of their sentence.

The unemployment rate is at its lowest in 40 years. We need all the talent we can get in our society. Once inmates have served their sentence, they need to integrate and participate in our society. This means that, during their incarceration, they must be able to take training and, if they have mental health issues, they need to see the appropriate professionals.

Before I was an MP, I was fortunate to be in business, and I had contracts supplying food to some of the detention centres in my region, Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, including the Federal Training Centre in Laval and Leclerc Institution. There were maximum-security and medium-security detention centres, as well as centres for inmates who were nearing the end of their sentence and were getting ready to reintegrate into society. Yes, some inmates do reintegrate into society.

Some of those contacts were with family living units, where people work as a team to learn to cook. When inmates are released from a detention centre, they need to be independent. In short, I had those kinds of interactions, and the ultimate goal was for inmates to be able to reintegrate and participate in society.

As I said earlier, there are maximum-security penitentiaries for inmates who are not yet ready to be transferred to a medium-security centre or a centre where inmates are getting ready to be released.

Mental health services must also be available for people who need them. That is true, and should be one of the first things noted. We need to prepare inmates to return to a normal life in our society and help them get the training they need.

The bill requires inmates in administrative segregation to spend four hours outside their cell so that they have contact with other people in the prison system and health professionals, but also with outside visitors. They need to be able to continue to see people from outside the prison walls if we want them to be able to reintegrate into society. Of course, they also need to continue to have access to training programs.

One of my colleagues said earlier that this bill needs to go further, that we need to continue the debate and that all members need to have an opportunity to express their views.

I would like to continue to talk about the purpose of this bill. Our priority, as a government, is to ensure the safety of Canadians. It seems to me that the Conservatives would be happy to leave people in solitary confinement for years and then send them directly back into our communities. That is what I have been hearing. There are steps to follow, and inmates need to take training.

● (1715)

The best way to protect Canadians, our fellow citizens, is to ensure that offenders serving their sentence in a controlled prison environment, whether it is a minimum, medium or maximum-security facility, get the help and treatment they need to reduce their chances of reoffending.

What is more, what we are proposing is very different from the current system. Structured intervention units will double the number of hours inmates spend outside their cells and guarantee them a minimum of two hours a day of real human interaction, whether it be with staff, volunteers, health care providers, seniors, chaplains, visitors or other compatible offenders. Inmates will have daily visits from a health care professional and access to intervention programs and mental health care. That is very important and we need to always keep that in mind. The whole system will be designed so as to address the factors that make the individual a risk and help that individual reintegrate into the general prison population.

In structured intervention units, the conditions and resources available will be different than those in the current system. This bill will also put in place a robust review system. The assignment to a structured intervention unit will be reviewed by the institutional head in the first five days. If the inmate remains there, the head will again review the case after 30 days. The commissioner will also review the case every 30 days after that.

The bill will also allow a professional to recommend at any time a change in conditions or the transfer of an inmate. The objective will always be the inmate's safe reintegration into the mainstream inmate population as soon as possible.

There is more. The bill will also formalize the possibility of having, for example, maximum-security and minimum-security institutions in the same location. As I mentioned earlier, many years ago I dealt with maximum-security and medium-security prisons. Institutions will always have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate their security level.

I asked some questions a little earlier. At present, victims do not have access to audio recordings of parole hearings. The bill will change that.

There are also the body scanners. When visitors, inmates or employees enter the institution, the search will be less invasive, but we will be able to scan people to ensure no contraband enters the prison.

We will be very pleased to support Bill C-83, and I hope that my colleagues will have second thoughts about not supporting it.

● (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would pose a question in response to the speech from my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

She touched upon the review process. At the heart of the British Columbia Supreme Court decision, as well as the Ontario Superior Court decision, both courts called on an independent review process upon a determination being made as to the status of an inmate from an institutional head.

That independent review mechanism is noticeably lacking in Bill C-83. If the purported objective of Bill C-83 is to respond to court decisions, why the absence?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Madam Speaker, our government's Bill C-83 will strengthen the federal correctional system, aligning its practices with sound evidence. It will also use the latest best practices to rehabilitate inmates and better prepare them for safe reintegration into our communities. Reintegration into society is important. I talked about that earlier. We need everyone's talents. When people reintegrate into society, everyone wins.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I have listened to the Conservatives say that this will endanger Correctional Service Canada staff. However, this bill will make more resources available for reintegration programs, mental health care and other interventions and services for Correctional Service Canada staff.

Would the member comment on how this measure will enhance safety within Correctional Service Canada?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Madam Speaker, I always enjoy working with my colleague. I thank her for her question.

We have to make sure inmates do their time. We also have to help them reintegrate into the mainstream prison population and, later, into society. That happens in stages, and we need to provide them with services.

My colleague is asking whether there will be more staff. As I see it, since the goal is to help inmates reintegrate into society, we have to help them access any mental health services they might need.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, people in administrative segregation suffer from hallucinations. They start seeing things that are not there and they are no longer able to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Do you think that people in administrative segregation could reintegrate into society when they leave prison? These people are deeply affected. Will this benefit our society?

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

The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Madam Speaker, I slip up too sometimes. We can always do better.

It is true that when inmates spend too much time in segregation they can be disconnected from reality. There are steps to follow. Inmates are put in segregation for a reason, but they should not be cut off from the rest of the world. They have to have human interaction.

As I said earlier, the bill provides for inmates to be able to meet with health professionals, volunteers, chaplains, among others. Inmates in segregation have to be able to see other people and socialize. However, there are steps to be followed before returning them to the general population and before they can reintegrate into society. Being isolated all day is not normal and can lead to problems.

● (1725)

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, last week, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness introduced Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act. I rise in the House today to address some serious concerns that the Conservatives have with regard to Bill C-83.

This bill seeks to eliminate the use of administrative segregation in correctional facilities and replace it with structured intervention units; to use prescribed body scanners for inmates; to establish parameters for access to health care; and to formalize exceptions for indigenous offenders, women offenders and offenders with diagnosed mental health conditions. While this bill contains some reasonable measures that are worth considering in order to change and improve the overall prison program, we need to examine it closely to ensure we are making the best decisions and changes possible to the prison program.

In recent Supreme Court decisions, the legality of indefinite stays in solitary confinement has been challenged. However, the government is appealing both of those decisions. This legislation applies to transfers, and would allow the commissioner to assign a security classification to each penitentiary or to any area within a penitentiary. In a maximum-security penitentiary, nothing gets in or out without the strictest controls. Maximum security means maximum security. As I understand it, with this new legislation, a maximum-security classification could be assigned to any area of a medium- or minimum-security penitentiary. If that is not the case, we need some clarification. A maximum-security facility has an entire perimeter and security system that is designed to guarantee maximum security. If they were to change a section of a minimum- or medium-security penitentiary, would the security measures also be put into place?

This bill has one very good idea, and that is to use body scanners. However, it should be expanded to include anyone who enters the facility who is not an inmate or an employee. Body-scan searches would make it possible to control at least 95% of the substances that individuals bring into prisons because they show whether there is anything hidden on a person's body. It is no secret that all kinds of things are brought into prisons.

This legislation also proposes to eliminate administrative segregation in corrections facilities and replace it with a newly created structured intervention unit. Solitary confinement is a common and legitimate safety measure that many western countries take to protect guards from dangerous and volatile prisoners. The introduction of structured intervention units may pose a risk to prison guards, other inmates and the inmates in question for whom solitary confinement is used for their own safety.

Another problem with this bill is reflected in the spirit of the law. These are the worst criminals in Canada. They are murderers, rapists, etc., and they are in maximum-security prisons. The intent of these proposed changes is to create a structured intervention unit for these people. They would spend less time in cells and would be put together to interact. The prison environment is a unique environment. It is a closed environment. The officers who work there are at risk every day because they have to deal with the worst thugs and criminals in Canada. Prisoners want to control their environment as much as possible, like anyone else. This is difficult for our officers who work 24-7 to keep prisoners under control and keep the guards and the rest of the prisoners safe. Taking away disciplinary segregation would make prisons less safe and more dangerous for the guards as they would have to deal with the most volatile prisoners being out and about from their cells for four hours a day.

We cannot support Bill C-83 in its present form. There are some things that would work, such as installing scanning equipment; however, we believe that creating structured intervention units would not.

Additionally, it is concerning that the government has not been able to tell Canadians how much the implementation of these measures would cost. Correctional Service Canada has confirmed that it is not able to estimate how much the measures in this bill would cost Canadians. The government seems to believe it is acceptable to table uncosted legislation that would increase the comfort of the most violent prisoners at the expense of the taxpayer.

● (1730)

Let us look back at the McClintic case again. This murderer's transfer from a maximum-security prison to an indigenous healing lodge has had a lot of people concerned, upset and talking. This is someone who should be serving her sentence in a maximum-security prison. In a maximum-security prison, such an offender has her own cell. Those offenders eat, sleep and take classes if they so choose, and they can go back to their cells. They are protected because they are living in a maximum-security environment. However, for reasons still not understood, it was decided to send that person to a place with virtually no security. From what I understand, Bill C-83 would allow McClintic's room in the healing lodge to be designated a maximum-security room. Again, it appears as though it is the Liberal government's priority to put the rights and comforts of violent murderers and rapists ahead of the rights of victims.

If what I understand is true, then Bill C-83 would be dangerous to Canadians' safety. It does not care about what a maximum-security prison sentence means or what keeping Canadians safe means. Instead, it prioritizes the rights of Canada's most violent and dangerous criminals.

Instead of changing the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to make sure that killers like Terri-Lynne McClintic are kept behind bars, the bill defines and softens the law to make prison time easier for criminals.

I think Canadians know that the government is not serious about being tough on crime and it puts Canadians' safety at risk. If this keeps up, things are bound to get worse. The government should be taking rational measures that are consistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Prisoners have rights, of course, but it is all in the way things are done. The approach outlined in Bill C-83 is not in line with what the Conservatives consider to be an effective way to manage penitentiaries.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am going to repeat the same things that I have said in my other questions.

When we talk about removing administrative segregation and still having the capacity to separate individuals who pose a safety risk, we would separate them from the general population and put them into secure intervention units. Not only that, but we would also give the resources necessary for them to receive mental health services, rehabilitative programming and other interventions so that we can decrease the likelihood that they will continue to pose a safety risk not only to the staff but to other people within the institution.

I would ask my colleague if he does not believe that there should be any mercy in this system, and to look at how we can help individuals who are in the prison system be reintegrated back into the prison or back into our communities.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Madam Speaker, when we talk of mercy, we also need to think of mercy for the victims who have been victimized by these people who are put in prison.

My colleague understands the same as we do that what this means is that we are going to take these people from segregated cells. However, if members had the opportunity to visit Kingston in the old days, there were inmates such as Clifford Olson, Paul Bernardo, Willy Pickton, and some others who were segregated not only for the safety of the guards and other prisoners, but also for their own safety. I am not so sure that we understand exactly what it would have meant to move them all out into the general population. At the same time, they also had all the rights for access to medical personnel, health care, and everything that we talk about here. The bill would not change that. Those provisions are already within the prison system.

● (1735)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to serve with my colleague from Oxford on the justice committee. He brings a wealth of experience as a police officer and former chief of police.

One of the things that we know about Bill C-83's allowing an additional two hours for prisoners to be out of their cells is that it will cost a lot more resources for that to work. While the government is moving ahead with its legislation, the Liberals at the same time are proposing an 8.8% reduction in funding for the Correctional Service of Canada. Out of the 22 priorities for the Correctional Service of Canada, not one of those priorities includes the safety of correctional officers. In the face of the government's mixed up priorities, is it any wonder that the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers has criticized Bill C-83?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised that the correctional officers have found this to be full of shortcomings from their perspective. Those might have been alleviated if there had been more discussion and study with them to hear their concerns on a variety of issues. When we look at it, it is exactly as my colleague said: This is going to cost a lot of money that will not improve either the prisoners' safety or the safety of the guards. It is the lack of consultation with the people on the ground, the front-line officers, that is going to create more problems than we anticipate.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

As we know, Bill C-83 proposes to implement a new correctional intervention model to eliminate segregation, strengthen health care governance, better support victims in the criminal justice system, and consider the specific needs of indigenous offenders.

The purpose of prisons, though, is clear. We have prisons so that we can protect society from those who, as a consequence of various criminally repugnant acts they have committed, have proven to be too great a risk to the broader safety of others. I believe there are cases where criminals can be reformed. We have programs. We provide opportunities for those deemed to pose a reduced security risk to reintegrate into society and become fully functional and productive members of our community.

In general, Canadians believe this and we would not want it any other way. However, there are those in our society who cannot be reformed and have committed acts so heinous that we never want them to be free to walk among our families and friends, in our towns and cities, ever again.

I am not just thinking of murderers and those who commit assault, like Olson, Bernardo, Homolka, Magnotta, and McClintic. I am also thinking of those individuals whose names will not make headlines across the country, the nameless violent criminals who beat, and steal without remorse from, the most vulnerable in our society.

Prisons are their own societal microcosm. We expect that prisoners will follow the rules of the institutions, that they will behave and participate in programs to improve their situation, as I said earlier, in the hope they can reintegrate back into their communities.

This speech is not about the goals of sentencing or to debate the merits of different forms of punishment. It is about protecting society in general, victims in particular, and protecting society from those who are most dangerous.

It is no wonder that there is violence in prisons. It does not take an academic to explain why, when criminals are placed in a community together, there is a high incidence of crime. Some might say, who cares, that they get what they deserve? However, that is not the consensus within our society.

Our correctional facilities are not designed to put prisoners in harm's way. They are designed to protect prisoners from each other, and to protect the men and women in the correctional services.

Bill C-83 proposes to change that by removing an important tool in our correctional services staff tool box to protect prisoners and themselves from violence. Indeed, the argument about prison safety often focuses on the most violent prisoners harming other prisoners, or on protecting the most evil, those who have committed such heinous acts, from retribution.

We often feel and sometimes forget those who are on the front lines in our institutions who deal directly with these acts of violence, who put themselves in danger to protect prisoners from each other. Eliminating the ability of corrections officers to segregate prisoners from each other will not only put prisoners at serious risk, it will also further endanger our correctional officers. That is unacceptable.

Jason Godin, the national president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers has told the Vancouver Sun that attacks on officers and inmates have increased as the use of segregation has decreased. If Bill C-83 passes, he predicts that "The bloodbath will start." While I do not understand the minutia of administering a prison, Godin does as the president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers. He is not speaking haphazardly or without merit.

Bill C-83 calls for more meaningful, human contact. Human contact is important, but not when it is at the end of a fist or a broom handle. Across Canada the number of assaults on staff is projected to rise 32% this fiscal year compared with last year, coinciding with the projected 15% decrease in segregation bed use during that same time.

Solitary confinement is a common and legitimate safety measure that many western countries use to protect correctional staff from dangerous and volatile prisoners. Rather than removing this tool, we should be looking at how to prevent the incidents that cause segregation in the first place. We should ensure that mental health screening is completed, that there is a mental health strategy for prisoners, that psychological counselling is available, and that there are adequate staff on duty to ensure the safety of everyone.

● (1740)

We can reduce the use of segregation by other means without removing the tool of segregation for use when necessary. Rather than prioritizing the rights of Canada's most violent and dangerous criminals, the Liberals should be prioritizing the safety of the general population within our institutions and the officers who run them. Correctional officers are calling for serious consultation and resources to make it work. They are asking the committee not sacrifice this segregation tool as a necessary tool to deter violent behaviour. Correctional Services Canada has already limited the use of segregation. What correctional officers want now are alternatives to segregation to ensure that prisoners understand there are consequences for their bad behaviour.

In the recent ruling, the Ontario Superior Court called into question the legality of indefinite solitary confinement, and the current government has set its sights on appealing that decision. With this I have no issue. However, I wonder why, while appealing this decision, the government is moving forward with Bill C-83. Logically, the introduction of major changes that are at the heart of its appeal make little sense. However, that is not the only thing that does not make much sense.

Under this bill, a maximum-security classification could be assigned to any area of a medium or minimum-security penitentiary. The facility in question, whether minimum, medium or maximum, is built to protect society from prisoners designated as a minimum, medium or maximum-security risks. There are different procedures and expectations in place.

I am getting the signal that there is no more time, which, unfortunately, is a shame because I had a lot more to say.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 5:45 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, 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.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the amendment 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): Call in the members.

● (1815)

And the bells having rung:

The Speaker: The question is the following. Shall I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Chair read text of amendment to House*]

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 899)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Alleslev
Allison	Anderson
Arnold	Barlow
Benzen	Bergen
Bernier	Berthold
Bezan	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Brassard
Calkins	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Deltell	Diotte
Doherty	Dreeshen
Eglinski	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Finley	Gallant
Généreux	Genuis

Gladu
Hoback
Kelly
Kmiec
Lake
Liepert
Lobb
MacKenzie
Martel
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Nater
Nuttall
O'Toole
Poilievre
Reid
Saroya
Shipley
Sorenson
Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Viersen
Warkentin
Webber
Yurdiga
Harder
Jeneroux
Kent
Kusie
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lloyd
Lukiwski
Maguire
McColeman
Motz
Nicholson
Obhrai
Paul-Hus
Rayes
Rempel
Schmale
Sopuck
Stanton
Stubbs
Tilson
Vecchio
Warawa
Waugh
Wong
Zimmer– — 84

NAYS

Members

Aldag
Amos
Angus
Arya
Aubin
Badawey
Bains
Baylis
Bennett
Bibeau
Blaikie
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Brison
Caesar-Chavannes
Caron
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Cullen
Dabrusin
Davies
Dhaliwal
Donnelly
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Garrison
Gill
Gould
Hajdu
Hardie
Hébert
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Jolibois
Jordan
Julian
Khalid
Kwan
Lametti
Lapointe
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Lightbound
Longfield
Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Ashton
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Benson
Bittle
Blair
Bossio
Boulerice
Breton
Brosseau
Cannings
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Christopherson
Cuzner
Damoff
DeCourcey
Dhillon
Dubé
Duguid
Duvall
Easter
El-Khoury
Eyking
Fillmore
Fisher
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones
Grewal
Hardcastle
Harvey
Hogg
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Jones
Jowhari
Kang
Khera
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Levitt
Long
Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Marcil
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
Mathyssen
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McKay
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Moore
Murray
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Pauzé
Philpott
Plamondon
Quach
Ramsey
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sansoucy
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Stetski
Tan
Thériault
Trudel
Vandenbeld
Virani
Whalen
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
MacGregor
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Morrissey
Nantel
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peterson
Picard
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rankin
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Sangha
Sarai
Schiefke
Serré
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Ste-Marie
Tabbara
Tassi
Tootoo
Vandal
Vaughan
Weir
Wilson-Raybould
Yip
Zahid– — 198

PAIRED

Members

Cormier
Fortin– — 2

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[*English*]

The next question is on the main motion. Shall I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Chair read text of motion to House*]

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1835)

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

(Division No. 900)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Amos
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Bibeau
Blair
Bossio
Breton
Caesar-Chavannes
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Dabrusin
DeCourcey
Dhillon
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones
Grewal
Hardie
Hébert
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jordan
Kang
Khera
Lametti
Lapointe
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Lightbound
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Monsef
Murray
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peterson
Picard
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Arya
Badawey
Bains
Baylis
Bennett
Bittle
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Brison
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhaliwal
Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Eyking
Fillmore
Fisher
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Gill
Gould
Hajdu
Harvey
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Jones
Jowhari
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Levitt
Long
Ludwig
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Marcil
McCrimmon
McKay
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Morrissey
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Pauzé
Philpott
Plamondon
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Sajjan
Sarai
Schiefke
Serré
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Ste-Marie
Tan
Thériault
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wrzesnewskyj
Young
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Tabbara
Tassi
Tootoo
Vandenbeld
Virani
Wilson-Raybould
Yip
Zahid– — 164

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Allison
Angus
Ashton
Barlow
Benzen
Bernier
Bezan
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boulerice
Brassard
Calkins
Caron
Chong
Clarke
Cooper
Davies
Diotte
Donnelly
Dubé
Eglinski
Falk (Provencher)
Finley
Garrison
Genuis
Hardcastle
Hoback
Jeneroux
Julian
Kent
Kusie
Lake
Liepert
Lobb
MacGregor
Maguire
Masse (Windsor West)
McColeman
Moore
Nantel
Nicholson
Obhrai
Paul-Hus
Quach
Rankin
Reid
Sansoucy
Schmale
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Vecchio
Warawa
Waugh
Wong
Zimmer– — 117
Albas
Alleslev
Anderson
Arnold
Aubin
Benson
Bergen
Berthold
Blaikie
Block
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Cannings
Carrie
Christopherson
Clement
Cullen
Deltell
Doherty
Dreeshen
Duvall
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Gallant
Généreux
Gladu
Harder
Hughes
Jolibois
Kelly
Kmiec
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lloyd
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Martel
Mathyssen
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Motz
Nater
Nuttall
O'Toole
Poilievre
Ramsey
Rayes
Rempel
Saroya
Shipley
Sorenson
Stetski
Stubbs
Tilson
Trudel
Viersen
Warkentin
Webber
Yurdiga

PAIRED

Members

Cormier Fortin– — 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—TERRORISM

The House resumed from October 22 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made Monday, October 22, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles relating to the business of supply.

● (1845)

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

(Division No. 901)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Albrecht
Aldag
Alghabra
Alleslev
Allison
Amos
Anandasangaree
Anderson
Angus
Arnold
Arseneault
Arya
Ashton
Aubin
Ayoub
Badawey
Bagnell
Bains
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Baylis
Beaulieu
Bennett
Benson
Benzen
Bergen
Bernier
Berthold
Bezan
Bibeau
Bittle
Blaikie
Blair
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block
Boissonnault
Bossio
Boudrias
Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet
Brassard
Breton
Brison
Brosseau
Caesar-Chavannes
Calkins
Cannings
Caron
Carrie
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger
Champagne
Chong
Christopherson
Clarke
Clement
Cooper
Cullen
Cuzner
Dabrusin
Damoff
Davies
DeCourcey
Deltell
Dhaliwal
Dhillon
Diotte
Doherty
Donnelly
Dreeshen
Dubé
Dubourg
Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duvall
Dzerowicz
Easter
Eglinski
Ehsassi
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyking
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)
Fast
Fergus
Fillmore
Finley
Finnigan
Fisher
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Gallant
Garrison
Généreux
Genuis
Gerretsen
Gill
Gladu
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Grewal
Hajdu
Hardcastle
Harder
Hardie
Harvey
Hébert
Hoback
Hogg
Holland
Housefather
Hughes
Hussen
Hutchings
Iacono
Jeneroux
Jolibois
Jones
Jordan
Jowhari
Julian
Kang
Kelly
Kent
Khalid
Khera
Kmiec
Kusie
Kwan
Lake
Lambropoulos
Lametti
Lamoureux
Lapointe
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc
Lebouthillier
Lefebvre
Levitt
Liepert
Lightbound
Lloyd
Lobb
Long
Longfield
Ludwig
Lukiwski
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maguire
Maloney
Marcil
Martel
Masse (Windsor West)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
Mathyssen
May (Cambridge)
McColeman
McCrimmon
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès
Mendicino
Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Moore
Morrissey
Motz
Murray
Nantel
Nassif
Nater
Nault
Ng
Nicholson
Nuttall
Obhrai
O'Connell
Oliphant
Oliver
O'Regan
O'Toole
Ouellette
Paul-Hus
Pauzé
Peterson
Philpott
Picard
Plamondon
Poilievre
Poissant
Quach
Qualtrough
Ramsey
Rankin
Ratansi
Rayes
Reid
Rempel
Rioux
Robillard
Rodriguez
Rogers
Romanado
Rota
Rudd
Ruimy
Rusnak
Sahota
Saini
Sajjan
Sangha
Sansoucy
Sarai
Saroya
Scarpaleggia
Schiefke
Schmale
Schulte
Serré
Sgro
Sheehan
Shipley
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand
Simms
Sohi
Sopuck
Sorbara
Sorenson
Spengemann
Stanton
Ste-Marie
Stetski
Strahl
Stubbs
Sweet

Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Thériault
Tilson	Tootoo
Trost	Trudel
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Vecchio
Viersen	Virani
Warawa	Warkentin
Waugh	Webber
Weir	Whalen
Wilson-Raybould	Wong
Wrzesnewskyj	Yip
Young	Yurdiga
Zahid	Zimmer– — 280

NAYS

Members

May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)– — 1

PAIRED

Members

Cormier	Fortin– — 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It being 6:49 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1850)

[*English*]

OFFICERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, a special committee, chaired by the Speaker of the House, should be established at the beginning of each new Parliament, in order to select all Officers of Parliament.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to present this motion. It is a pretty simple motion, actually. It is a matter of fixing something that is wrong right now, that our officers or agents of Parliament, the words are interchangeable, are hired by the executive in the process that is used.

My motion is deliberately worded so that I am not calling on the government, today, to implement it this Parliament, because, quite frankly, I have been around long enough to know that is not going to happen. I deliberately placed a model in here. I want to say that I am not married to that model either. The principle is what matters to me. The principle is that Parliament should hire Parliament's agents. It is that simple.

I have to say that I am really looking forward to arguments against this motion, simply because I cannot think of any that hold any merit. I am very much looking forward to the debate that will ensue with those who do not think that Parliament should stand up for its own rights.

I am going to make reference during, and also after, my initial remarks to a Public Policy Forum report that was just issued in April this year. What is interesting is that I had already drafted my motion by the time this report came out, which calls for something similar.

First of all, I want to introduce the report very briefly:

In this report, the Public Policy Forum (PPF) analyzes the current and evolving role of agents at the federal and provincial levels to provide recommendations on how oversight and guidance in the administration of policies can be improved while maintaining their autonomy within Canada's Westminster system.

Supported by an advisory group of former agents, senior public servants and other experts, PPF conducted 20 interviews and organized three roundtable discussions between October and December 2017.

I do not want to take the time to mention everyone involved in this report, but just to give colleagues a taste of the calibre of the people who were involved in it. There is going to be at least one name that will twig with everybody, I suspect. I am just going to pick some of them: Margaret Bloodworth; Robert Marleau, former Clerk of the House of Commons; Jodi White; David Zussman; Richard Dicerni; Paul Dubé; Janet Ecker; Christine Elliott; Graham Fraser; the amazing Sheila Fraser, who alone should be enough for the House to follow the recommendations; Edward Greenspon; Bonnie Lysyk; John Milloy; Kevin Page, whom we all remember, and for the work he is still doing at the University of Ottawa; James Rajotte, a well-known member to colleagues; and Wayne Wouters, former Clerk of the Privy Council. That is the calibre of people who were involved in this report.

Their number one recommendation out of nine is the following:

The creation of new agents is the purview of Parliament and legislatures, not the executive.

The third recommendation states:

Legislators must be responsible for the appointment of agents, with the aim of having all-party support for the final selection. The Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office should withdraw entirely from the appointments process. A special parliamentary committee should consider the kinds of selection processes operating in provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan.

May I add that the United Kingdom, the mother ship, is really radical in who takes the lead in hiring the U.K. Parliament's auditor general. Guess who it is? It is the public accounts committee, the home committee to our auditor general. How can that not make sense?

● (1855)

Before we get to the principle of why we should be doing this, members need to look at the incompetence on the part of the current government in making appointments and at all the messes and botch-ups it has made through all of it. I expect that all of those details are going to come out over the next couple of hours of discussion, which will be split over a couple of days.

The report I made reference to had something to say about the process the government followed too:

The shambolic nature of the appointments process has done nothing to elevate the standing of agents in the mind of legislators, public servants and the public.

Further, as one round table participant said, one only has to look at the botched effort to appoint former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Madeleine Meilleur as the Official Languages Commissioner, in 2017, to see how not to handle the appointment of an agent of Parliament.

If we take a look at the current process, it technically meets the law in that this House has to give its final approval with a vote. However, under the current system, the government does the entire hiring process, short of letting the two other leaders know what its intention is.

I just happen to have a sample of that. This is a letter to the leader of the NDP. We will see who knows the rules over there.

It states, "I am writing to seek your views regarding the proposed nominee for the position of Chief Electoral Officer." I am pulling out bits of this. I love this. It goes on, "Following an open and transparent and merit-based selection process, I propose the nomination of", Mr. X, "as the next Chief Electoral Officer." I do not feel it is necessary to mention his name.

That was on April 3. On April 27, the NDP leader got another letter from the Prime Minister, which stated, "I am writing in follow-up to the letter from the government of April 3 regarding the position of Chief Electoral Officer. Your feedback was appreciated. Please be advised that the government will not be proceeding with the nomination, as the principal nominee has been withdrawn."

We can tell it is a form letter, because it says, "Following an open and transparent and merit-based selection process, I propose the nomination of Stéphane Perrault as the next Chief Electoral Officer."

That took months and months and months, and it was still screwed up in the end.

This is basic civics. We all know that there are three branches that govern in Canada. First, there is the legislative branch. That is us. That is Parliament, which is every MP who is elected. Second, there is the executive. That is the Prime Minister and cabinet. Finally, we have the Supreme Court, whose primary function in relation to us is to make sure that the laws that are passed are consistent with the Constitution.

Some will recall that when we elect a Speaker at the beginning of Parliament, the Speaker is ceremoniously dragged, as if reluctant to take the very position he or she just spent days, if not weeks, actively running for. Why is that? We have to go back to the beginning, when Parliament first came into existence. All or any of the powers Parliament had came from the monarch. The monarchs, kind of like some of our former prime ministers, did not like it when people opposed them or took away any power they had. They had to remember their place.

● (1900)

Therefore, the Speaker would be the one to report to the monarch on what Parliament had said, and it was not unusual in the early, early days for Speakers to lose their heads. Therefore, it was not a position a lot of people wanted because they had to go in front of the monarch, who may or may not be in a good mood. My point in raising that is to show the separation of those powers. This is not a complicated constitutional issue, in my view.

The Supreme Court hires its own staff. We would not think of deciding for the court who its nominees should be, give it a phone call the night before and say, "After consultation, do you agree with this name?" That is all that happens here. We would never think of doing that with the Supreme Court and the court, of course, would never think of hiring our agents. I remind all of us that Parliament is supreme, not the government. Parliament decides who the government is. That is the power of Parliament.

The executive is a separate, distinct branch and power base of its own. We currently have this ridiculous, unacceptable overlap. In the case of our agents, whether it is ethics, languages or the Auditor General, the government does the advertising, the interviews, the short listing and picks a name from its own short list, phones the opposition leaders and says, "Consistent with the law, this is consultation. Do you agree?" That is unacceptably absurd. Why would we allow that?

I am looking at all fellow MPs when I say that we are parliamentarians. We are the ones who make up this legislature. Why do we allow the executive to control the hiring process of our officers and agents of Parliament? Why would we do that? Some might say we do that because the executive does it so well. It is going to be fun if anybody tries that defence, because I can say that not just me but there are a whole lot of other people who are ready to go on that one. Is it because the executive has the means? We control the purse. We can give the Speaker all the money we feel necessary to run the selection process. I run out of ideas after that. It always was. It is never much of an answer for anything really, to just say "it always was". This is an attempt to plant a seed, hopefully for the next Parliament, when somebody will grab it, bring it to light, give it life and have the next Parliament do this.

Knowing how tough it is to get a government to change in midstream and how late my number was coming up in the term, I thought that all I really want to achieve, if I can, is a majority vote of parliamentarians who accept and respect that we should control the process of hiring our officers of Parliament. My goal is hopefully to get that majority and if I cannot, I would tell those who do not support this to get ready to defend, because the New Democrats are going to make it an issue.

I do not know what the official opposition is going to do. It will be interesting to see. Part of my thinking is that the Conservatives do not want to give up power because they see themselves going back across the aisle and they would like to have that power for themselves, but, by the same token, they want to oppose the government so here is a chance to stand with the angels. It will be tough. It will be interesting to see how it unfolds.

At the end of the day, this is about respecting ourselves, respecting Parliament and taking back that which is ours.

● (1905)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Hamilton Centre for bringing forward his motion and for his extremely passionate speech. I have not had the opportunity to really talk to him outside of this place. However, my father who spent some time in the Ontario legislature with him spoke fondly of his passion and the speeches he would give. He has certainly lived up to that today.

We have adopted within this government a new approach, a new open and transparent approach to how appointments are handled. As a matter of fact, of the over 900 appointments made, including eight officers of Parliament, after more than 250 open and transparent and merit-based selection processes, we know that over 50% of the candidates self-identified as women, 12% as visible minorities, 9% as indigenous people and 4% as people with disabilities.

Does my colleague think that the process we currently have is producing a wide and diverse pool of candidates from throughout the country?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and friend for his kind remarks. I remember his dad well and enjoyed working with him very much.

The hon. member mentioned 900 appointments. We just want nine. We want 1%. As to the other ones, I am glad that the government is improving the system and that it is resulting in more diversity. That is all to the good, but it has nothing to do with what I have put before the House.

I have put before the House this question: Should we as Parliament have the responsibility and ownership for hiring our agents?

It is good that the government is making those changes. I hope they do better than the appointments we have seen, because the process is pretty bad.

The issue is really not what the government is doing internally for the positions it is entitled to make appointments for. I am talking about the nine that in my opinion the government is not entitled to appoint.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity in the Manitoba legislature to be under a different model. I have experience with what we have here today, and with what the member is somewhat implying, where members of different political identities meet to hire these independent officers.

Being familiar with both processes, I am comfortable with what we are proposing and what the government has advanced. To give the impression that we could have a committee off to the side that has a majority of government members would change that effect. I prefer the opportunity that we have in Ottawa compared with we had in Manitoba, because in our case the appointee appears before a standing committee to go over his or her credentials. The appointment process that my colleague demonstrated has been highly successful and transparent.

Would the member not agree that there are alternatives and that his way is not the only way?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I have experience too. When I was at Queen's Park, we had to hire the sergeant-at-arms. We pulled together one individual from each of the parties and the Speaker chaired the meeting. How is that unfair? How can that not work?

When I look at the system now and the perfunctory form letters with the one name that appears at the end of the process, if that somehow constitutes our hiring our own officers of Parliament, I do not buy it.

I acknowledged at the beginning that I am not wed to this particular model. I am open to any model, and there are all kinds of different models. The principle is either one way or the other. The current principle is that the government is doing the process. My motion says that is not acceptable anymore. They are our officers. We should control the entire process, and I guarantee that we will have candidates as good if not better than anyone the government chooses.

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is the legislative branch able to see the names, qualifications and resumés of the candidates who have applied to be appointed officers of Parliament? Is it possible to prepare the questions to be asked in the interview and to design the scoring grid used to determine who is the best candidate?

Is the legislative branch currently able to do any of this?

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to go over what is a successful model in which we should all take immense pride and move forward with.

I welcome this opportunity to contribute to this debate today in response to a motion by the hon. member for Hamilton Centre and to speak about our government's commitment to the highest standards of openness and transparency.

During the 2015 election campaign, we committed to delivering real change to how government worked. It meant setting a higher bar for openness and transparency in government that would be accountable to Parliament and Canadians.

The results of that last election were clear and unambiguous. Canadians voted for a government to do different things and to do things differently. At times, this has meant challenging the conventional ways of doing things and embracing change to find the solutions we need to make government more fair, open and transparent.

Today we have fulfilled several commitments to changing the status quo to make Parliament more fair and open, which includes applying a more rigorous approach to appointments. Our government, with the invaluable help of public servants, stopped the practice of rewarding party loyalists with Senate and Governor in Council appointments.

Instead we have put in place an open, transparent and merit-based appointment process to help identify highly qualified candidates who are committed to the principles of public service and embrace the public service values. Since implementing a new approach in 2016, more than 25,000 applications have been submitted online for appointment opportunities in close to 200 federal organizations.

To date, over 900 appointments have been made, including appointments to the eight officer of Parliament positions, following more than 250 open, transparent and merit-based selection processes. Of these incumbents, over 50% have self-identified as women, 12% as visible minorities, 9% as indigenous peoples and 4% as persons with a disability. This number includes the appointment of eight officers of Parliament.

There are 11 officers of Parliament: the Auditor General of Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Commissioner of Lobbying, the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the President of the Public Service Commission, the Privacy Commissioner, the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner and the Senate Ethics Officer.

Each of these officers of Parliament has a unique mandate and every one of them plays an important role in our democracy.

The Auditor General was the first such officer of Parliament, established just after Confederation in 1868.

In 1920, the role of the Chief Electoral Officer was created to ensure an independent body was in place to oversee our elections.

The Commissioner of Lobbying was established in 2008.

In the past, appointments were made behind closed doors, at the discretion of the minister or the prime minister, based strictly on politics. The process rewarded partisan loyalists with plum well-paid positions across the federal government.

In February 2016, this government took steps to put a stop to this. We put in place a more rigorous approach to the Governor in Council appointments, an approach that is founded on the principles of openness, transparency and merit. These changes also apply to the process to appoint officers of Parliament.

What does this mean in practice for officers of Parliament?

First, a notice of appointment opportunity is developed and posted on the Governor in Council appointments website. A link to the notice is also posted on the Canada Gazette website and the website of the organization, which is filling the position. Every person who feels he or she meets the qualifications of the position can register online and submit his or her candidacy.

Second, a recruitment strategy is developed for every selection process to identify people who are interested, willing and able to serve. This may include engaging an executive search firm or developing an advertising strategy and may also involve targeted outreach to communities of interest, such as professional associations and stakeholders. This process eventually leads to the identification of a highly qualified candidate.

This process for government appointments to Governor in Council positions, including officers of Parliament, is ensuring that the results are open, transparent and based on merit. In that spirit of openness and transparency, there is also collaboration and goodwill. When a selection process for an officer of Parliament is launched, this government has sent letters to leaders and critics of the opposition parties in one or both Houses of Parliament. For recent processes, the government has also sent letters to the Speakers of both Houses, given the reporting relationship of the position. The purpose of these letters is to promote awareness of the advertised position and to seek input on potential candidates who may be interested in these unique opportunities to serve Canadians.

● (1915)

It is important to emphasize that these letters are not required in statute. They exemplify the openness and the transparency our government stands by, as well as our respect for the input of prospective officials in the appointment process and the role of Parliament. In the case of most officers of Parliament there is also a legislative requirement that, once the government has identified a candidate, it consult with the leader of every recognized party in one or both houses of Parliament.

We have been meeting these obligations. Mr. Speaker, your ruling on this very matter, last year on May 29, confirmed this. Typically, a nominee is invited to appear before the appropriate committee to review his or her qualifications. Legislation also requires approval by resolution of one or both houses of Parliament. A selection process is overseen by a selection committee, which reviews applications to ensure they meet established criteria and then selects a short list of candidates for further assessment through interviews and other assessments that are required.

Candidates whom the selection committee considers to be highly qualified for consideration for appointment also undergo formal reference checks to further assess their personal suitability. The committee presents formal advice to the responsible minister on the most qualified candidates for consideration. The minister then uses the selection committee's advice in finalizing his or her recommendation to the Governor in Council.

It is important to recognize the tenure of officers of Parliament. Furthermore, this motion seeks to have a special committee select all officers of Parliament at the beginning of each new Parliament. However, the length of the tenure in office varies between seven and 10 years, with some positions eligible for reappointment while others are not, since the minimal length of a tenure for all officers of Parliament being seven years means some positions would not be vacated during the five-year constitutional limit of Parliament. Therefore, this motion would overrule the tenure limits outlined in the appropriate acts by having the special committee select all officers of Parliament at the beginning of each new Parliament. Additionally, with some positions eligible for a reappointment, officers with the term ending within the five-year constitutional limit would have to either reapply or give notice of their intention not to be reappointed at the beginning of each new Parliament, possibly years before the expiry of the term.

There are many opportunities for parliamentarians to have their say on the appointments to these important roles. In the case of officers of Parliament, our government has included early engagement with parliamentarians at the outset of the process to seek their input. This is in addition to the legislative requirement for consultation, which a ruling in this House has confirmed that we are meeting. Consultation is followed by nomination, which is followed by a nominee's appearance before one or more committees. There is then a statutory requirement to have the appointment approved by resolution in the House of Commons or the Senate or both.

I genuinely believe that the Prime Minister and this government have fulfilled a commitment that he made to Canadians in the last federal election. Today, unlike with prior prime ministers or governments, we do have a very transparent, very open process that is based on merit. We have seen that in the hundreds of appointments that this government has made. Whether talking about the issues of gender, minorities or disabilities, this government has demonstrated that as a government we are committed to transparency; we are committed to finding the best, most-qualified Canadians in order to fill these very important jobs, not only the independent parliamentary officers but for all the Governor in Council appointments. We believe in our civil service and the fine work that our many civil servants do, day in and day out.

We are asking for opposition members to recognize the significant change that has taken place under this administration since 2016. Any objective person looking in and looking at the results of the appointments that this Prime Minister and cabinet and government have made will find that they have been of great significance in terms of merit and in terms of ensuring that there was a sense of transparency and openness. I am proud of the way in which this government has approached appointments in Canada.

● (1920)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the idea behind Motion No. 170 is an absolutely beautiful one. We would all like to see a more democratic House and more democratic processes. Certainly for me, as the new shadow cabinet minister for democratic institutions, democracy and democratic processes in Canada and around the world are very close to my heart.

Unfortunately, Motion No. 170, like so many other things in life, is something which is beautiful in theory, but becomes an absolute disaster when it is applied. I believe that is what we are seeing here. We would have the romantic notion that there would be nine individuals who are appointed to this committee, which would see all sides working together from across the House to come up with the very best processes for each of the possibly most important officers in the government, certainly something which would have an incredible effect not only on the Government of Canada but also Canadian society.

Unfortunately, there are no guidelines given in the one-sentence motion that is before us. What I have learned in my experience not only in the public and foreign service but across government is that where there is no process, there is a void, and where there is a void, there is the potential for corruption. That is what we have seen time and time again from the current government, partisanship and corruption, when it is given the latitude to make decisions to choose the officers.

Let us evaluate the process at present. Why so many of my colleagues were very enchanted by the possibility of this motion, why they thought it was a great idea is that they are truly democratic. They truly want MPs to have more power to choose these officers, because what happens right now is these top officers of Parliament are appointed by the Prime Minister. As we have heard from other colleagues, usually it is a short list of, say, the name of one person. However, there is certainly the idea that there is input from all sides of the House. Now, we rarely see this happen.

● (1925)

[*Translation*]

I had the opportunity to provide input when I was a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This happened after Madeleine Meilleur was to become the next official languages commissioner, but that is a whole other story I will get to later.

I remember we had the opportunity to ask Mr. Théberge questions. I knew at the time that our questions did not have much influence over the process and the outcome, because Mr. Théberge would become the official languages commissioner.

However, for at least an hour, we were allowed to feel as though we were part of the process, even though the candidate had already been chosen.

[*English*]

At least now this goes through a committee. We have the idea that perhaps we might be a small part of this process by which the officers of Parliament are chosen, but as I have said, unfortunately, there are no details with this motion, not one. In fact, I have a lot of fun thinking about how we might possibly choose our officers of Parliament. Maybe we would do it by playing horseshoes or a game of darts, I do not know, but there is really that much information in this motion in terms of how we would select these officers. As I have said, where there is no process, there is a void, and where there is a void, there is the potential for partisanship and corruption.

We know that the Liberal government will take the opportunity for corruption and partisanship time after time. We have seen this again and again. For example, there was Madeleine Meilleur, the best candidate.

[*Translation*]

In French, we would make a play on words with her name, saying that Madeleine Meilleur was the *meilleure*, or best, candidate.

[*English*]

Sure she was, but guess what else. She was a former Ontario Liberal MPP, someone very involved and intertwined with the party. The Liberals tried to sell it to us as the best choice of an independent candidate, when in fact, this was not the case. It was not someone from input from other parties. It was someone who was pre-selected by the government and fed to us as an independent choice, as the best choice. In fact, this was someone the government specifically chose.

Again, there is no process. There is a void in Motion No. 170, and where there is a void, there is the potential for corruption and partisanship, as we saw with Madam Meilleur.

It does not end there. We saw the same with Senate appointments. The Prime Minister decided that he would like independent Senate appointments. He made all the senators independent, and going forward, would choose senators based on merit. I will say that I was very insulted, as an Albertan, that our own democratic process in Alberta was completely ignored and denied. We had a senator in waiting who was put on the sidelines and ignored. Instead, there were the Prime Minister's favourite choices. Again, this shows that where there is no process, there is a void. Where there is a void, there is the potential for partisanship and corruption, which the government has shown time and time again.

I will also say that, unfortunately, as the new shadow minister for democratic institutions, I am seeing the same with Bill C-76, which is in the House this week going to report stage. I look forward to speaking to this tomorrow, with all of my colleagues, because we are seeing again the opportunity for the government to make the rules for itself. Its objective is very clear. It is not only to pass the bill but to win the next election and every election in perpetuity as a result of changing the rules—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind hon. members that someone is speaking. It is nice to see people talking to each other, but shouting way down the aisle or across the aisle is not exactly polite, and it is coming from both sides, so I do not want to point anyone out. I do not want to point anyone out, but I would expect him to lead by example.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, it is very unfortunate that democracy is not taken more seriously in this chamber in this regard, when we are discussing something as important as the selection process for our senior officers of Parliament. I struggle to think of something more important than this.

In addition to Bill C-76, which I touched on briefly before the Speaker so kindly asked for the respect and attention of others in the House, we are also seeing this blatantly with the office of a debates commissioner. I think this is incredibly unfortunate, because once again, the government is not only deciding that it is going to make up the rules itself to put its potential candidate in the best light, but worse than that, it is silencing Canadians. It is saying to Canadians that they do not have the opportunity to determine how they will select the next leader of their country, which is the most important office in the country. It is saying that the government will decide for them the format in which the questions are asked and how they will be asked. It is saying that Canadians do not have the right to decide how they will determine the process to determine the next leader of their country. It is absolutely shameful that this would possibly exist.

It is for these reasons, the striking void in Motion No. 170, that I cannot support this proposed legislation and that, unfortunately, my colleagues cannot support this piece of proposed legislation. As I said, where there is no process, there is a void. Where there is a void, there is the potential for partisanship and corruption, and we have seen that over and over again from the Liberal government.

I would like to finish with what I started with, which is that the motion before us, like so many things in life, is so beautiful in principle, so beautiful in theory, but in practice, not so much.

● (1930)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion, which is very important. Officers of Parliament play an essential role.

I would like to speak briefly about my experience as an MP. Back in the day, Jack Layton appointed me military procurement critic. I can assure the House that without the tireless work of Kevin Page, my role would have been much more difficult. He was able to give me a great deal of information on the cost of the infamous F-35s. His role was really crucial. I have a true appreciation for the work done by officers of Parliament.

When we talk about officers of Parliament, we are talking about nine individuals who play an essential role for all parliamentarians, not just government members. We all interact with them. Francophone MPs might have frequent dealings with the Commissioner of Official Languages, for example. That position is extremely important to them.

The Liberals have shown us exactly what not to do when appointing someone to those positions.

Members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages were told that an independent appointment process had taken place and that the best candidate for the job of official languages commissioner just happened to be a former Liberal minister. The opposition leaders received a letter indicating that she was the best candidate. That letter was the extent of the consultation process.

I understand that, for logistical reasons, every member of the House cannot see all of the resumés and interview questions, but at least one NDP representative could have been asked to consider the appointment. That person could have seen the list of candidates, participated in the selection process, and known which candidates were rejected and which were called in for an interview.

Right now, we know nothing about what is happening. We were informed of the name of the person who was supposedly the most qualified for the job. We know that about 70 other people applied, but we have no idea why their resumés were rejected or accepted. We have no idea who was invited to an interview. We have no idea what questions were asked during those interviews. We have no idea what criteria were used to assess the applications and determine who was the best candidate. We have no idea about any of that.

The government imposed a name, and we just had to believe in its ability to determine who was the best candidate. We did not even know what evaluation grid was used, for example. We had no information on that, nil.

On top of that, it took the government 24 months to appoint an official languages commissioner. It also took 24 months to find a replacement for the chief electoral officer, even though he had announced his departure in advance. It even took the chief electoral officer saying that the next election might be compromised if someone were not appointed. The former chief electoral officer said the government had to stop wasting time, as the situation had become totally absurd.

This proposal is about creating a committee to take care of this. The committee would be non-partisan. It would therefore be composed of members from all parties. It could deal with several aspects that are completely missing from the legislation. It would handle the application process and determine what skills are required. All parties would have to agree on the required skills, on what is needed, on the candidate's profile, and on the person being sought. The committee would then handle the application process. That could even be done ahead of time. If the committee knew what direction to take, it could start working in advance. If the committee knew which individuals will be leaving their post in six or 12 months, it could begin the work and everyone could agree on the information that would be needed in the application process. That could be done in advance. Then everyone could agree right away on the evaluation grid to be used and on the questions to be asked in the interview. Some of the work could be done before officers of Parliament even leave their position.

It is also important that the committee agree on which candidates should be rejected and which ones should be selected.

● (1935)

With regard to the appointment of the Commissioner of Official Languages, some candidates stated, on condition of anonymity, that they had no idea why they were not selected and that the questions they were asked were ridiculous. They even said they had doubts about the seriousness of the process, so naturally, we have serious concerns. Discussions were held in secret and we have no idea what was said. We only know which candidate was selected.

We were able to ask questions of the person appointed when she appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, but we were not able to ask questions of the other 69 people who applied. We were not able to voice our opinion about the suitability of each candidate, and we absolutely were not involved in any step of the process. That raises serious doubts. These people are appointed to serve Parliament and not the Liberal government. We must ensure that they do the best possible work in a non-partisan fashion.

When we hear the Liberals claim that partisan appointments are a thing of the past given what we know about what happened with Madeleine Meilleur, what can we do but laugh? It just so happened that a former Liberal minister was the most qualified person for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages. We were not told who the other candidates were, what questions were asked in the interview or what process was followed, but we were asked to believe that she was the best person for the job. Quite frankly, who would believe that? Even someone who does not follow politics would realize that it is nonsense. It is time to put a stop to that.

The government was supposed to institute democratic reform to ensure that every vote counts, but when people did not give it the answer it wanted to hear, the whole thing was dropped.

Now we have an opportunity to make changes and to do something about partisan appointments. Though they may be minor, these changes are very important for democracy, our institutions, and Parliament. The nine officers of Parliament are there to help Parliament and, unfortunately, sometimes to conduct investigations. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner investigated the Prime Minister and this government's Minister of Finance. When we know that ministers and prime ministers can be investigated, then we have to select people who will have the courage to make appropriate decisions, who will be able to do the work and not be afraid to do it, people who got their appointment because they were truly the most qualified of all the candidates.

If the process is totally flawed from the start people will not be able to trust the decisions made by officers of Parliament. Today, we can do something about that. The motion does not clearly explain the process in detail, but if adopted, the government could implement this process and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs could study it and work out the details.

The purpose of the motion is not to establish the whole committee membership process and all of the other details. The purpose of the motion is simply to propose the idea. If the government and our Conservative colleagues had the courage to at least support this motion and admit that it is time for an intelligent, democratic process to appoint officers of Parliament, we could all work together on the details. We could then develop this new process and start the next Parliament off on the right foot. My colleague will unfortunately not be here to lend us his experience.

● (1940)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate in response to the motion by the member for Hamilton Centre and to speak about our government's commitment of the highest standards of openness and transparency.

In February 2016, this government took steps to put in place a more rigorous approach to Governor in Council appointments, an approach that is founded on the principles of openness, transparency and merit. These changes also apply to the process to appoint officers of Parliament.

Anyone who is interested in a position and feels he or she has the necessary qualifications can apply. In the two years since we launched the new process, more than 23,000 applications have been submitted for Governor in Council opportunities in upwards of 200 federal organizations.

The process is also transparent. Governor in Council appointment opportunities and information about the process are available online to the public. It is also merit-based, grounded in a rigorous selection process, with established selection criteria for each Governor in Council appointed position. Candidates are assessed against the publicly available selection criteria.

Underpinning these principles is the government's commitment to diversity and employment equity. When it comes time for a minister to consider whom to recommend for a Governor in Council appointment, the process ensures that the candidates presented to the minister for consideration reflect the linguistic, regional and diversity considerations that inform this government's choices.

Since 2016, the government has made over 750 appointments following an open, transparent and merit-based selection process. Of these appointees, over 50% self-identified as women, about 13% as visible minorities, about 10% as indigenous peoples and around 4% as persons with disabilities. This number includes the appointment of six officers in Parliament and there are currently selection processes under way to fill two more of these positions. There are 11 officers of Parliament. With all of these, parliamentarians have played, and do play, a significant role. I will speak more on this later.

We are delivering on our commitment to Canadians to ensure that our democratic institutions reflect the diversity of our country. About 1,500 Governor in Council appointed positions, including officers of Parliament positions, are subject to this new approach and have been put in place by a system that ensures these opportunities are open to all Canadians. I will take a few moments to explain how this new system works.

First, a notice of appointment opportunity is developed and posted on the Governor in Council appointments website. A link to the notice is also posted on the Canada Gazette website and the website of the organization that is filling the position. A recruitment strategy is developed for every selection process to identify people who are interested, willing and able to serve. This may include engaging an executive search firm or developing an advertising strategy and may also involve targeted outreach to communities of interest, such as professional associations and stakeholders.

Candidates must register and submit their applications online through the Governor in Council appointments website. Only those candidates who apply online will be considered. In this way, an even playing field is created for all individuals who are interested in a Governor in Council appointments and who want to put their names forward for candidacy.

This government also encourages members of the House, as well as the Senate, to reach out to their constituents to apply for positions that are of interest to them.

This open, transparent and merit-based approach for selection processes is no different for an officer of Parliament position. For these key leadership positions, if an individual meets the selection criteria, which in some cases may be entrenched in legislation such as for the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner position, then there is nothing stopping that individual from applying online and submitting his or her candidacy.

What is also new is that the processes to fill these positions also include an invitation to parliamentarians of all stripes to have their say at the outset of the selection process. Following the launch of this process for an officer of Parliament position, our government has taken the unique step of sending letters of engagement to the leaders and critics of both opposition parties in Parliament. We have also sent letters to the Speakers of both Houses in respect of the reporting relationship of some of these positions. The purpose of these letters is to provide information about the position and invite input, including the names of qualified candidates who may be interested in applying.

● (1945)

I think it is important to emphasize that these are letters that are not required in the statute. They exemplify the openness and transparency of our government, as well as respect for the input and perspectives of elected officials.

Parliament has a key role in this new approach to Governor in Council positions, in particular with respect to officers of Parliament. Enabling legislation for most officers of Parliament positions requires the government to consult with the leaders of the recognized parties in the House of Commons or the Senate or both. We have been meeting these obligations. Mr. Speaker, your ruling on this very matter last year, on May 29, 2017, confirmed this. To be clear, this is a first step in an already very robust parliamentary process for these positions.

As we know, a nominee for an officer of Parliament position is usually invited to appear before the appropriate committee of this House, the Senate or both houses. During the committee appearance, the parliamentarians ask the nominee questions about his or her qualifications for the position. Legislation also requires approval by resolution of one or both houses of Parliament. There are opportunities throughout, beginning as soon as a process is launched, for parliamentarians to weigh in on candidates who could apply and ultimately on the appointment of a candidate.

As I have already stated, the government has made significant progress in filling important positions in our democratic institutions, including agencies, boards, commissions, administrative tribunals, Crown corporations, and we are including officers of Parliament positions. We are committed to timely selection processes that ensure democratic institutions have high-calibre appointees to provide excellent services to Canadians.

I think the Speaker wants to interrupt me as we are coming to the end. I would be happy to pick it up at the second hour of debate on this.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The time provided for consideration of private members' business is now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 24, 2018, I asked the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development in the House when he and his Prime Minister would keep their word and increase the 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits.

The Liberals once again demonstrated their lack of interest in our most vulnerable citizens by ignoring a motion that I moved before the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to review the EI sickness benefits program, which currently provides for 15 weeks of benefits.

Had the committee conducted a study and heard from experts, sick workers, and unemployed workers, the government would have seen that this outdated legislation needs to be updated. This study would have led to a comprehensive report being tabled in the House with practical recommendations regarding the usefulness of the statutory 15 weeks of sickness benefits.

I am astonished that the Liberals rejected this request for consultation out of hand, considering how much they like to consult. I am especially disappointed because hundreds of thousands of people need those benefits. What are the Liberals so afraid of?

They repeatedly promised to review the Employment Insurance Act, which was last changed nearly 50 years ago. The act is way out of step with what today's society needs. The sickness benefits program still lasts only 15 weeks, and thousands of families and sick people find it hard to make ends meet as a result. How can a low-income patient get by financially under such conditions? As I have repeatedly told the House, a seriously ill person cannot get better by the time their 15-week benefit period ends. That is deplorable.

This law has remained unchanged since 1971 and is causing financial insecurity for thousands. Over one-third of current beneficiaries need much more than the 15 weeks provided for under the program. People recovering from cancer need 52 weeks on average to get better.

The government should make this issue a top priority and update the law to ensure that it reflects what Canadians need at this point in time, now that one in two of us will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in our lives, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. The time to act is now.

Inspired by her own experience, Marie-Hélène Dubé has been taking on the federal government over its inaction on this file for nearly 10 years. Ms. Dubé created an online petition called "15 weeks to heal is not enough!", which has been signed by 600,000 Canadians who are calling on the government to extend sickness benefits to offer the best possible conditions for recovery.

I will be holding a town hall meeting on the theme of "15 weeks to heal is not enough". I invite the people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton to come meet their neighbour, Mélanie Pelletier, who, like hundreds of thousands of people, exhausted her EI sickness benefits. I was deeply moved by Mélanie's story, and I invite all of my constituents to come support our neighbour Mélanie and the thousands of people like her who need more than 15 weeks to heal. I hope to see many of my constituents there.

Once again, the government has failed to keep its promises. The 15-week sickness benefit system has been around for 47 years now and is completely outdated.

This should not be a partisan issue.

● (1950)

[*English*]

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for raising the issue of employment insurance. I am proud to stand before the House and remind my hon. colleague about the good work our government is doing on this front.

Our EI program delivers approximately $18 billion in benefits to nearly two million Canadians annually. It is one of the most important programs that make up the core of our social support system. Canadians benefit from an employment insurance program that is dynamic and designed to respond automatically to changes in an EI economic region's unemployment rate. This helps to ensure that people residing in similar labour markets are treated similarly, with the amount of assistance provided adjusted according to the changing regional economic conditions.

In regions and in communities across Canada, our EI program is providing income security for our families and workers during periods of unemployment. Since taking office, we have made it our duty to improve the employment insurance program so that it remains relevant to Canadian workers, including seasonal workers, and better corresponds to the realities of today's labour market.

For example, we have eliminated some restrictive EI eligibility requirements for new entrants and re-entrants to the labour force and simplified job search responsibilities for claimants. We reduced the EI waiting period from two weeks to one. Shortening this waiting period eases the financial strains on EI claimants at the beginning of a claim, and we expect this to put an additional $650 million in the pockets of Canadians annually.

We are also saving Canadians money through reduced EI premiums paid by workers and employers. In fact, the 2017-18 rates are the lowest since 1982. In the fall of 2018, eligible Canadians who lose their jobs after several years in the workforce will have more opportunities to upgrade their skills without losing their EI benefits.

Most recently, we implemented new EI measures that support Canadian families through more flexible maternity and parental benefits and more inclusive care giving benefits. These improvements came into effect on December 3, 2017, and provide enhanced support for Canadian families.

Furthermore, as part of budget 2018, we are proposing legislation to make the default rules of the current working while on claim pilot project permanent and expand it to sickness and maternity claimants, who currently have their benefits reduced dollar for dollar if they earn income while on claim. The working while on claim rules help claimants stay connected with the labour market by encouraging them to accept available work and earn some additional income while still receiving EI benefits. By working while on claim, seasonal claimants can also accumulate hours toward establishing their next EI claim.

These are just some of the ways we have taken action to improve employment insurance so that more Canadians, including seasonal workers, get the help they need when they need it.

As was announced in budget 2018, we have reallocated $10 million from existing departmental resources to provide immediate income support and training to affected workers. The government has signed agreements with the governments of the most affected provinces to deliver this funding. Provinces will have the flexibility to deliver a wide range of supports, including career counselling, workplace essential skills training and associated income supports while on training.

Budget 2018 also proposes to invest $80 million in 2018-19 and $150 million in 2019-20 through labour market development agreements with key provinces to co-develop local solutions that can be tested to support workforce development. These measures will help ensure that unemployed workers in Canada's seasonal industries have access to the supports they need when they need them the most.

Our government understands that seasonal industries are a key part of Canada's economy. Important sectors of our economy, such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, and construction, rely on seasonal workers. We are working hard to support those workers and industries, to the benefit of our economy and all Canadians, and we will continue to do so.

● (1955)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary just explained what EI provides, but the problem is what it does not provide. Fifteen weeks is not enough. If my colleague wants to talk about employment insurance in general, I can tell her about the six in 10 workers who do not have access to employment insurance.

She talked about seasonal workers. I would like her to listen to fishery workers from New Brunswick, workers from eastern Quebec, seasonal workers from the north shore and those from Charlevoix who end up in increasingly longer spring gaps.

However, I wanted to talk about employment insurance sickness benefits. I now have doctors in my riding contacting me to say that it makes no sense that their patients are being forced to go back to work. This should be an issue that brings us all together in the interest of claimants and their families.

When does the government plan to take real action and improve employment insurance sickness benefits so that people do not end up—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*English*]

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Mr. Speaker, we understand how important Canada's employment insurance program is in providing income security for families and for workers during periods of unemployment.

The improvements our government has made to our EI program have strengthened Canada's social safety network for all workers right across the country, including the seasonal workers that my hon. colleague referred to.

Important sectors of our economy rely on seasonal labour and those workers deserve our full support and our continued commitment to ensure their well-being. That is why we will continue to be there for seasonal workers and our seasonal industries. It is the right thing to do. It is the smart thing to do. It creates a stronger economy for all Canadians.

I am proud of our government's work on this front. We will continue to help Canadians when they need it most through a robust and dynamic employment insurance program.

● (2000)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rose in the House on May 25, in regard to the government shutting down debate on Bill C-76. This week, Bill C-76 returns to the House for debate at report stage.

We are three years into the Liberal majority mandate. Canadians trusted the Liberals to follow through on their big democratic reform promises. We all remember the big promise from the now Prime Minister that the 2015 election would be the last under the first-past-the-post system.

In Vancouver East, like many MPs, I held a town hall and consulted with my constituents. Overwhelmingly, the people of Vancouver East wanted to see a new voting system. They wanted every vote to count. They wanted to see proportional representation. This was echoed through the extensive consultation the committee undertook.

Sadly, after the election, the Prime Minister suggested that Canadians, "have a government they are most satisfied with" and "the motivation to want to change the electoral system is less urgent". ln a truly disappointing show of brazen partisan bias, the Prime Minister then abruptly abandoned the promise to Canadians.

That is not what democracy is, and I hope that this broken promise, an insult to Canadians, is not forgotten in 2019.

As I said, after three years, we are only now reaching the report stage of a democratic reform bill. One may wonder what took so long.

Stéphane Perrault, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, made it clear that any major electoral reforms needed to be passed by the end of April 2018. The 230-page Bill C-76 was not even tabled until April 30.

The Liberal government is treating democratic reform like stereotypical procrastinating high school students that no one likes working with on an important group project. They show up at the last minute. They do not do what they told everyone that they were going to do. Then they have the audacity to impose things on the rest of the group so that the work will fit into their schedule.

That is exactly what the Liberals did when they broke another democratic reform promise to Canadians by shutting down debate on an election bill.

Now that the bill is back in the House to be debated at report stage, my colleague the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has informed me that the government continues to be the group partner nobody wants.

Bill amendments are like editing our legislative work. Unfortunately, the Liberal government, after showing up at the last minute and not completing the work it said it would do, refused to accept edits to fix the holes and missing pieces in its work.

My colleague, a tireless champion for improving Canada's democracy, tried to ensure that Bill C-76 protected voter information. He tried to strengthen privacy protections to prevent election meddling in the digital age. Those were rejected.

He tried to push the gender equality initiative of Kennedy Stewart, my former colleague and now mayor of Vancouver. The government would not even talk about it.

Why has the government broken so many promises to Canadians on this issue? Why has it put partisan interests ahead of improving our institutions? Why has it failed to move on legislation on electoral reform for so long?

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House tonight to respond to the question from the hon. member for Vancouver East.

I am pleased to speak to Bill C-76, the elections modernization act, which the government introduced on April 30. This legislation represents a generational overhaul to the Canada Elections Act, which will improve transparency, fairness, integrity and participation in Canada's electoral system.

The proposed legislation will reduce barriers for Canadian Armed Forces members and persons with disabilities. It will establish a pre-election period with transparency requirements and spending limits for political parties and third parties. It will modernize the administration of elections to make it easier for Canadians to vote and more difficult for elections law-breakers to evade punishments.

The preamble to the question posed by the hon. member for Vancouver East referenced indigenous Canadians, which I would like to address.

Bill C-76 is aimed at reducing barriers to participation in federal elections and increasing accessibility for all Canadians, including indigenous peoples.

The former chief electoral officer's recommendations following the 2015 general federal election indicated that the proof of address requirement was difficult to meet for many and, in some cases, presented a significant barrier to voting for Canadians. Moreover, the same report stated that this was particularly true for youth, homeless electors, seniors living in long-term care facilities, as well as indigenous peoples hoping to cast their ballots.

It was for this reason that the Chief Electoral Officer authorized the use of the voter information card, commonly known as the "VIC", in several pilot projects. When the VIC is used as proof of address, together with another document proving identity, it will help electors who otherwise may have difficulty meeting the identification requirements.

Consequently, the Chief Electoral Officer recommended that the prohibition on authorizing the VIC as a piece of identification to establish address be removed from the Canada Elections Act.

I am pleased to remind members of the House that Bill C-76 would reverse elements of the Harper Conservatives' so-called Fair Elections Act, which increased barriers to participation in our electoral process. Notably, and for the purposes of debate in the House, Bill C-76 would reinstate both the ability for electors to vouch, as well the use of the voter information card, as proof of address.

The legislation also contains many other measures aimed to ensure that barriers to electoral participation that Canadians currently face are reduced or eliminated and that our federal elections are made more accessible to voters.

I will also remind the House that the current Chief Electoral Officer, as well numerous other witnesses who testified at the Standing Committee for Procedure and House Affairs, agreed that restoring both vouching and the use of the voter information card would return the franchise to Canadians across the country. In fact, I have heard from citizens in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets that this will indeed assist and encourage them to get out to vote during the next federal election.

Bill C-76 would also restore the communications mandate of the Chief Electoral Officer and would allow Elections Canada to conduct increased outreach initiatives, including with members of first nations communities. It would also be possible to have advance polls in different locations on each day to better serve remote and isolated communities.

I encourage all hon. members to support this legislation, which would reinforce confidence in the integrity, fairness and transparency of Canada's electoral system.

● (2005)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, it is as if the parliamentary secretary did not hear a thing I said.

The timeline speaks for itself. The Liberals have abandoned key democratic reform promises. They failed to move significant electoral legislation until the deadline on which it needed to have been passed. Then they broke another promise by shutting down debate on an election bill. Now they have rejected important amendments to safeguard our elections from digital meddling campaigns.

It is clear the pre-November 2015 Liberals and the current Liberal government have very different views on democracy and democratic reform. Why? Because it is not in the best political interest of the Liberals.

The Prime Minister took the electorate for fools. Let us send a message in 2019.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say a few additional words about the time allotted for debate on Bill C-76.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs studied Bill C-76 for a lot of hours, heard from 57 witnesses, including multiple appearances from both the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada and the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

Prior to the introduction of Bill C-76, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs spent hours studying the recommendations from the previous chief electoral officer's report from 2015. As a result of the committee's hard work and study on those recommendations, 84% of the findings that were studied are in this legislation.

The procedure and House affairs committee worked hard on the legislation and as a result of the great collaboration and amendments brought forward from all parties, I look forward to debating this further strengthened bill at report stage very soon.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to follow up a question I asked with regard to digital privacy. It related to the fact there have been data breaches from Canada's major banks that have left 90,000 Canadian customers exposed. That is consistent with the type of problem we have had with the exposure of private information and other problems in the cyberworld.

One of the reasons for my Motion No. 175, a digital bill of rights, is that when I asked the minister a question on this, it was clear that the government's digital strategy is similar to trying to fix potholes. We have a problem with privacy issues and how much consumer protection there will be. There are several problems together, and the government is going through the CRTC, PIPEDA and other types of legislative means with an almost a spotty, fix-it approach to dealing with the new modern digital age. That is setting us back.

In fact, in terms of privacy alone, a number of different situations and breaches have taken place. I mentioned that the banks had exposed the private information of 90,000 Canadians in different ways. However, there are others: Uber, Equifax, Bell, Yahoo, eBay, Home Depot, Sony Pictures, Facebook and Twitter, just to name a few.

What I have been calling for in Motion No. 175, a digital bill of rights, is a way to bring about a set of rules and guiding principles for a new digital age. Any single piece of legislation will not do the job. Again, the government is approaching this in a very piecemeal way at this time, when we need a much more sophisticated and robust discussion with regard to a new digital age. Therefore, with regard to a digital bill of rights, Motion No. 175, which we tabled, there have been consultations with consumer society, with academic society and with the business sector to ensure that the bill of rights would deal with a number of issues.

One of the things we start with is universal affordable access to digital services. This is very important. As we have seen most recently, the CRTC even backs away from allowing the idea and concept of equal services being provided.

Transparency in billing is another issue that is very important so that people know what they are purchasing.

The private sector needs to make sure that information is protected, as we are talking about with regard to cybersecurity as well.

We are also talking about enshrining net neutrality and making sure that our privacy rights in the digital world must be equivalent to those in the physical world. Our individual and family data must also be protected.

We deal with all of those issues in Motion No. 175. I hope the government takes this opportunity to be more robust in its approach to the new digital age, because it is an opportunity that should not escape us.

● (2010)

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the comments made earlier by the hon. member for Windsor West concerning consumer protection and privacy.

I very much appreciate the work that the member for Windsor West does on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. We are all delighted by his oratorical skills. I admire his passion for the subject.

Our government is perfectly aware of how important it is to establish strong and effective rules to protect personal information. That is becoming more and more obvious in this digital age where every aspect of the economy and global society are becoming interconnected.

I am proud to say that Canada has a robust, internationally recognized privacy regime. The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, or PIPEDA, was implemented to enhance Canadians' confidence in the digital economy.

This law helps us to achieve that goal by establishing robust yet flexible rules to protect personal information that apply both online and off. They strike a balance between individual privacy rights and businesses' need for information in support of their legitimate practices.

The Privacy Commissioner of Canada, who is an independent officer of Parliament, monitors compliance with PIPEDA. The commissioner's office is currently investigating a number of high-profile incidents.

The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development is responsible for the administration of PIPEDA, including amendments to the act and its regulation.

Our government recently made changes to strengthen PIPEDA. Effective November 1, businesses must inform Canadians of the loss or theft of personal information and their exposure to a risk of harm.

Businesses will also be required to report any data breach and to keep a register of breaches of personal information for two years. These new requirements will allow individuals to take the necessary steps to protect themselves. They will also be an incentive for organizations to implement better information security practices.

In 2017, our Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics colleagues conducted an in-depth study of PIPEDA and released a report on their findings in February 2018. The report included 19 recommendations, including legislative amendments in four main areas. The recommendations had to do with issues around consent, online reputation, the Privacy Commissioner's enforcement powers, and Canada's status in the eyes of the European Union as a government that provides adequate protection for personal information.

In its response, the government recognized that changes are required to ensure that rules around data are clear and enforceable and to support the level of privacy protection Canadians expect. The response also emphasized the importance of enlisting Canadians to help strike a balance, and as the government, that is what we are going to do.

● (2015)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the government has moved on some items that have been important and the Privacy Commissioner's office is very important. I appreciate the work that is getting done there and the expansion of their support.

However, the reality is that in the new digital age we require a more robust analysis in development. That is why Motion No. 175, as I have tabled, deals with universal access, fees that are transparent, security issues, cybersecurity, net neutrality, enshrinement, privacy rights, personal data rights, contracts we understand, cyber-bullying as well as open data and all of those things that are important.

I will conclude with a quote from Jim Balsillie, the chair of the Council of Canadian Innovators, that summarizes where we are at. He states:

> Canadians need to be formally empowered in this new type of [digital] economy, because it affects our entire lives. For our democracy, security, and economy, Canadian citizens, not unaccountable multinational tech giants, need to control the data that we and our institutions generate.

I would hope we do that.

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct to say that there are many issues on the table, and he has highlighted a large number of them. For the part of the government, there are a number of studies and collaborations ongoing, the largest one being our current consultation on data across the country. This will form another part of the information and evidence we have in front of us to try to manage a great number of these issues. We look forward to working with the hon. member in the future toward the resolution of this balance.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:18 p.m.)

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