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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 19, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 19, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*English*]

VACANCY

KINGS—HANTS

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Mr. Scott Brison, member for the electoral district of Kings—Hants, by resignation effective Sunday, February 10, 2019.

Pursuant to subsection 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 79.2 of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled “Economic and Fiscal Monitor—February 2019”.

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[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled “Protocol Relating to an Amendment to Article 50(a) of the Convention on International Civil Aviation” and “Protocol Relating to an Amendment to Article 56 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation”, done at Montreal on October 6, 2016, as well as “Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of Japan Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Between the Canadian Armed Forces and the Self-Defense Forces of Japan”, done at Toronto on April 21, 2018.

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)(b), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to three petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that recently the public accounts committee was saying how hard it is working to present the 59th report of the committee.

[*Translation*]

I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 83rd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee advises that, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the subcommittee on private members' business met to consider the order for the second reading of private members' public bills originating in the Senate, and recommended that the items listed in the report, which it has determined should not be designated non-votable, be considered by the House.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), the report is deemed adopted.

* * *

[*English*]

BAN ON SHARK FIN IMPORTATION AND EXPORTATION ACT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-238, An Act to amend the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (importation and exportation of shark fins).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to sponsor Bill S-238, which proposes to ban the importation and exportation of shark fins. This legislation was passed in the Senate late last year and now must be reviewed in the House of Commons.

This legislation, introduced by Senator Michael McDonald, would prohibit the importation and exportation of shark fins.

Routine Proceedings

With a federal election expected on October 21, it is imperative that all members work together to ensure that Bill S-238 receives royal assent before the fall election.

Over 70 million sharks are killed each year for their fins. Since 2011, five private members' bills have been introduced that would have banned the trade in shark fins. In that time, over half a billion sharks have been butchered and killed for their fins.

We cannot wait for another election. We must pass this legislation and end the destructive practice of shark finning.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition in support of Bill S-240 on organ harvesting, which is currently before the foreign affairs committee.

[*Translation*]

IMPACT OF OVERPASS CONSTRUCTION

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by several hundred residents of my riding, Hochelaga. They are concerned about the social and environmental effects of the construction of an overpass near a residential neighbourhood. They are asking the Minister of Transport and port authorities to design and develop other options for the location and layout of the future overpass and to make those options available for public review.

•(1010)

[*English*]

NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians who are calling on the government to end the needle exchange program. They are calling on the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety to end the prison needle exchange program and implement measures that would increase the safety of correctional officers in the surrounding community.

BANKING SERVICES

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to table a petition regarding concerns surrounding bank closures. These petitioners are from Dubreuilville, White River, Echo Bay, Richards Landing, Bruce Mines, Elliot Lake, Hearst and Kapuskasing, all from the beautiful riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

The petitioners are concerned about bank closures in rural communities across Canada. They indicate the negative impact these closures have on economic stability and remind the government that people in rural areas experience a lack of reliable broadband and cellular services to be able to do online banking. They are forced to drive long distances to access banking services. That is the case for Dubreuilville residents, as it takes a one-hour drive to access banking services.

They ask the federal government to work with financial institutions to address access to physical institutions in rural communities, introduce a three-month penalty-free period to move their finances elsewhere in order to encourage other facilities to come in, and also to consider postal banking.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present this morning.

The first petition urges the Parliament of Canada to move quickly to amend the Criminal Code to prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs removed without consent or as a result of a financial transaction, and to render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who have participated in this abhorrent trade in human organs.

ROUND LAKE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is with respect to a lake in my riding. It is beautiful, but it is not functioning well right now. The water level is deplorably low and the lake is not serving its purpose because of a disagreement between the Government of Canada and the first nations of Ochapowace and Piapot.

The petitioners call on the minister to use his authority to re-establish communication with those first nations and work on a resolution to this matter that is impacting businesses and use of the area for enjoyment in the summer.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning to present a petition from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands calling attention of this House to the ongoing deep concern of the tragedy of violence against women.

The petitioners point out that it remains a critical problem in Canada, particularly in relation to vulnerable populations, particularly indigenous women, and they call for equal participation of women in all parts of our society.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on the issue of pharmacare.

I have had literally hundreds of constituents petition the House asking for the Prime Minister, the government and all members of this House to recognize the important value of having a national pharmacare program. They are calling upon the Government of Canada to work with the different stakeholders, in particular our provinces and territories, in ensuring that we can have a pharmacare program for prescribed medicines.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED RACIAL PROFILING—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Mr. Speaker, I am now ready to rule on the issue raised on February 6, 2019, by the member for Hull—Aylmer regarding an incident of racial profiling that recently occurred within the parliamentary precinct.

The Chair is grateful to the honourable member for bringing this incident to the attention of the House. I also appreciate the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism.

[*Translation*]

While the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer raised this matter as a question of privilege and it deals with a serious event, it is not properly a question of privilege. It did not involve a member of Parliament or engage a proceeding of either this House or any committee. Nonetheless, the member has given me an opportunity to make a statement to the House and to report on the investigation that has taken place with respect to the incident.

•(1015)

[*English*]

The member for Hull—Aylmer explained that he and the parliamentary secretary had been made aware that a group of Canadians, mostly young, had come to Parliament Hill on February 4, 2019, to engage with members of Parliament on, and sensitize them to, issues that black communities in Canada are facing today. Reporting that an incident of racial profiling had occurred during this initiative, known as “Black Voices on the Hill”, he asked me to investigate the matter immediately and suggest measures to ensure that Parliament is an open and welcome place for all Canadians.

As Speaker, I have responsibility, shared with the Speaker of the Senate, for the oversight of matters of security and policing for the parliamentary precinct, and the Parliamentary Protective Service has the operational responsibility for the security in the parliamentary buildings. These important responsibilities embody far more than just the physical aspects of keeping people safe when here on Parliament Hill. The racial profiling incident cannot be condoned and must be dealt with swiftly and purposefully.

[*Translation*]

A complaint was quickly raised in the House, and the Parliamentary Protective Service replied with a full and unreserved apology, stating:

We offer our apologies to the participants for the situation that they experienced. Our security personnel must always conduct themselves with professionalism and respect towards parliamentarians, employees and visitors. We need to do a better job in ensuring that this standard is maintained across our workforce. The Parliamentary

Business of Supply

Protective Service has zero tolerance for any type of discrimination. We took immediate action upon learning of this incident and launched an internal investigation into the matter. Once the investigation is completed, we will be advising the Speakers accordingly.

[*English*]

The apology is a welcomed first step. However, it should not be construed as either a final step or a way to erase the harsh and unacceptable reality of what happened. Instead, we are resolved to learn from it and to do better going forward.

While one transgression does not represent the actions of all, one is too many and none can be overlooked, dismissed or excused.

[*Translation*]

All who come here must know unequivocally that they will be welcomed with equality, dignity and respect. To experience anything less here on Parliament Hill, the centre of our democracy, is a failure on our part and for that I offer my sincere apologies. We can and must do better, and we will.

[*English*]

As Speaker, I would like to conclude by making it clear that while there is not a finding of a prima facie question of privilege, for the reasons I have mentioned, this in no way diminishes the importance or gravity of the matter raised.

I thank all hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP) moved:

That the House: (a) call on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege for the former Attorney General with respect to allegations of interference in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin; and (b) urge the government to launch a public inquiry, under the Inquiries Act, in order to provide Canadians with the transparency and accountability promised by the Liberals in the 2015 election campaign.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to rise in the House to represent the people of Timmins—James Bay and as the ethics spokesman for the New Democratic Party.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

We are now two weeks into the explosive allegations that the Prime Minister's Office attempted to end a legal investigation, a legal case into corruption against SNC-Lavalin.

Yesterday, Gerry Butts, who was the architect of the sunny-ways' revolution that propelled the present Prime Minister into the office he holds, was forced to resign in disgrace. This shows us that the crisis and corrosive nature of this scandal is eating its way right into the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister must come clean with Canadians today.

Business of Supply

• (1020)

[Translation]

The Prime Minister needs to explain himself. The allegation that the PMO tried to shut down the legal case of corruption against SNC-Lavalin is extremely serious. What is even more serious is the open bar for lobbyists and the privatization of public goods and services to benefit companies like SNC-Lavalin. Canadians deserve credible answers. The Prime Minister needs to assure them that the government did not cover up this scandal.

[English]

I am going to start off with four really concerning issues we need to consider when are looking at the SNC-Lavalin case.

The first is a very serious allegation that the Prime Minister's Office attempted to shut down the legal case of corruption against SNC-Lavalin. If that allegation is true, then the Prime Minister has lost all moral standing with the Canadian people.

The second, which is just as explosive and very important, is the possibility that because the former justice minister, the very first indigenous woman justice minister in the country, did not go along with the pressure from the Prime Minister's Office, she was demoted, punished. Then we saw this horrific whisper campaign against her credibility by key Liberal staffers to assassinate her credibility. These allegations must be answered.

The third issue is the powerful backroom lobby system in Canada, that when SNC-Lavalin called everyone in the Prime Minister's Office and all key departments, they jumped and responded and whether, because of those lobbying efforts, the government rewrote the laws of Canada and slipped that into an omnibus bill to specifically protect SNC from its legal consequences.

The fourth is the culture of insider access that has taken place under the Prime Minister, the open bar for lobbyists and the privatization of public services to benefit companies like SNC-Lavalin at the expense of the Canadian taxpayer.

We can put these issues under the three toxic Cs of political life: the allegations of corruption, which have to be answered for the Canadian people; cronyism, which has been the underpinning of the Liberal Party for much too long with its insider pals; and third, the corrosive effect this has on public confidence.

We are here today to restore public confidence and to ask the Prime Minister to come clean with the Canadian people, to stop hiding between the solicitor-client privilege that is keeping the former justice minister from speaking and to agree to an independent inquiry, similar to what we had under Gomery, so the answers can be looked at and presented to the Canadian people in a credible light, so they will know whether the government has undermined its legal obligations or whether it can come clean. That is what we are asking the Prime Minister to do.

Just three months ago, SNC was the sponsor of the biggest schmoozefest in Ottawa. It was the ultimate insider access event to get to meet all the top Liberal ministers. They were all at the beck and call of SNC. The person the Liberals had advertising this SNC event was the indigenous affairs minister. They were using this minister's photo for an SNC event. What were they all coming

together for? It certainly was not reconciliation, because that is not the most important relationship for the Prime Minister. They were all coming together to talk about how they could benefit from the privatization of public services.

Let us think about this for a moment. How is it possible that a company that was under criminal investigation for illegal bribes to both the Liberals and the Conservatives was able to host an event where all the key Liberal ministers and staffers were there? How is it possible that a company with a long and ugly history of allegations of corruption and bribery in Algeria, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Libya was able to host this event, knowing it could promote every key Liberal to be there, and the Liberals saw nothing wrong with this? It is not that their moral compass is bent in the wrong direction, there is no moral compass. It never was about the middle class and those wanting to join it. It was always about the Fortune 500 and those who were on the inside track to get there. The most important relationship never was about reconciliation with first nation people; it was about protecting their friends.

We get told now that SNC is too big to jail, too big to fail. However, I would point to Arthur Porter, who was the centre of one of the biggest fraud investigations in Canadian history. Under the former government, which is as in with SNC-Lavalin as the present one, Stephen Harper appointed Arthur Porter to oversee Canada's spy agency. This shows how much Canada is up for sale to these insiders. They always say "Too big to fail, too big to jail", but Arthur Porter ended up in a Panamanian jail, and Canadians were no worse off for him finally getting punished.

We need to talk about clearing the air, because the government is now talking about the jobs. I am very concerned about the jobs for all the honest working people at SNC-Lavalin. However, I am also worried about the jobs of many Canadians. Their jobs have been taken away, like the workers at the heating plant right here in the National Capital Region. They worked there for years, but their jobs are being undermined because the government wants to privatize to SNC. The government says that it is worried about jobs, but it never worried about jobs when those working for Stelco and Sears lost their pensions. Why not? Because it was the family business of the finance minister that had the contract to windup their pensions. The Liberals were looking after the 1%. They would not stand up for the pension rights of Sears or Stelco workers, but they would stand up for the rights of Morneau Shepell. The finance minister is the minister of the 1%.

Business of Supply

Let us talk about KPMG, a company that established an offshore fraud account so that multi-millionaires could evade paying their taxes. What did the government do? It not only cut a deal with KPMG and said it was okay, but it actually hired a KPMG representative to be the treasurer of the Liberal Party. It never was about the middle class and those wanting to join it. It never was about reconciliation. It was about the government and the Prime Minister's insider relationships for whom they would bend the laws of the country. They will look after their friends. They will do things behind closed doors. They will turn the public services of Canada into a cash cow for their lobbyists and their friends.

Now the Liberals are saying not to be negative but talk about positive things. However, there is nothing more negative for Canadian public life than corruption and cronyism. Until we clear that up, until we can say to the Canadian people that they can trust that everyone will have a fair chance, then Canadians have no reason to believe. Therefore, I ask the Prime Minister to do the right thing, to stop hiding, to explain why Gerry Butts had to take the fall, and for the Prime Minister to vote for our motion to have an independent investigation and stop hiding behind that fig leaf of solicitor-client privilege.

• (1025)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, given the nature of the comments of the member for Timmins—James Bay and the partisan rhetoric that was employed, would the member opposite not think it would be a more appropriate forum to have these matters thoroughly flushed out in a non-partisan, apolitical manner, in a manner that has more robust mechanisms, to have this addressed through the Ethics Commissioner investigation, which is already under way by virtue of a request that was made by the very same party?

Would the Ethics Commissioner's investigation be a more appropriate venue because it has stronger authority, more robust mechanisms and also can operate in a non-partisan and apolitical manner?

• (1030)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Hallelujah, Madam Speaker.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): One moment, please. I would remind the member he has to wait until I recognize him and his light comes on his microphone so everybody can hear him.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, the light has come on the Liberal Party. The light has come on, hallelujah. Yes, would it not be amazing if we did this through an independent investigation, not like the little monkey-wrenching the Liberals did at the justice committee where the Liberals would only have people who could not say anything? Yes, that is why we are here. Let us have an independent investigation like Gomery.

I believe the member was the assistant to the justice minister, so I am sure he knows the laws of the land, that the Ethics Commissioner can only look at a very small aspect of this, but not the aspect that actually matters, which is the legal interference by Gerry Butts or the Prime Minister or anybody over on that side.

Come to Jesus. Come with us. Walk over to the side of the light and agree to have this independent investigation. Come on over. Stop hiding with the corrupt ones.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, for all members of the opposition and many members on the backbenches of the Liberal Party, my hon. colleague's speech contained some fairly profound truths.

With regard to the first question from the government side today about the investigation by the Ethics Commissioner, I wonder if my friend could recall the Ethics Commissioner's eventual report on the Prime Minister's illegal Caribbean vacation, when the Prime Minister delayed for months a request to meet with the commissioner to discuss the allegations against him. I wonder if the Liberals are hoping the commissioner's investigation will be delayed until they can run for the hills in the summer recess.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is laying out a very important point, which is that the government is trying to walk the clock down on one of the worst corruption scandals in memory.

I would say this for my Liberal backbencher friends, who do not get called by lobbyists, who came here to do the right thing, who have to hide behind this terrible scandal. The easiest thing would be for the Liberals to be given the opportunity to go back to their voters and say that they are not a party of corruption, that as individual backbench members, they have come here to do good things. When someone is alleged to have been involved in trying to undermine a legal investigation, that is why it needs to be investigated. It should not be hidden or put under the carpet.

Now that Gerry Butts is gone, I am sure he would be more than willing to be subpoenaed. I am sure sunny ways may not be completely dead, but the sun is certainly disappearing from the horizon. I am asking the Liberal backbenchers not to go along with that front bench, not to get led by the nose, to stand up, do the right thing and vote with us. This is about accountability to the Canadian people.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member started off his speech today, saying that it was a demotion for a minister to be moved from one portfolio to another one. Could he please explain to veterans and the House how veterans are any less than any other department in our county?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I would ask my hon. colleague this. Who in the Prime Minister's Office was phoning the media and making comments about the justice minister? They said that she thought that because she was indigenous and a woman, she would be treated differently in the Liberal government. Obviously not.

Business of Supply

I would ask my hon. colleague this. Who in the Prime Minister's Office did the character assassination against her? That is a nice, simple question.

• (1035)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member for Avalon that he had an opportunity to ask a question. If he has other questions he should wait until we go back to questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise after my colleague from Timmins—James Bay to speak to the important revelations that have emerged, some of which came to light last week.

We already had concerns about potential political interference by the PMO and the Prime Minister himself in the case against SNC-Lavalin when we left to go back to our ridings over a week and a half ago. This is a very important criminal case, given that the company has engaged in many rather shady dealings involving corruption in other countries. Many questions were raised at that time which have yet to be answered. No clarification has been given since the first time this allegation was raised a week and a half ago.

On the contrary, many other questions have been raised since we left the House on February 8. At that time, the veterans affairs minister was still in cabinet, but she resigned last week. What is more, the Prime Minister's principal secretary also resigned last week.

Today, the Liberals would have us believe that they have absolutely nothing to hide, that the government is being transparent and that we have to get our answers somewhere else. However, all these events happened within a week, not to mention that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has launched an investigation into the matter, which only happens when there are questions on the issue brought to his attention. Today, I am sure that the government will keep trying to have us believe that this is a non-issue, but that is absolutely not true.

A lot of questions need to be answered. That is why the NDP is calling for an independent public inquiry. What is more, the Liberals used their majority on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to simply refuse to shed light on whether the Prime Minister's Office interfered with the former attorney general of Canada regarding the SNC-Lavalin trial. This is a fundamental question that deserves answers. Given that the standing committee refused to look into this, we are calling for a public inquiry. Clearly, the Liberal majority has no intention of shedding light on this issue.

In reality, the Liberals are trying to distract us by calling people who are not involved in this issue to testify. They are trying to create distractions to divert our attention. They obviously have something to hide. I find it hard to believe that a minister and the Prime Minister's principal secretary would resign when a scandal broke if they had nothing to hide. That is why we need to shed light on this whole business.

We need to launch a public inquiry to clear up the issue of political interference, because our justice system is founded on the independence of the courts and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. That independence is enshrined in law. The Attorney General cannot give these kinds of directions willy-nilly, or with a simple phone call. The Attorney General is required to follow clear procedures when giving directions to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada to influence the conduct of penal and criminal prosecutions.

These protections exist for a reason. Our laws are designed to guard against political interference in the judicial process, in order to avoid the slightest suspicion that the justice system might be politicized. That independence is the cornerstone of our system. Today, the independence of the court system is being called into question because of potential, attempted or actual political interference by the Prime Minister, his office and his principal secretary. The public inquiry will determine which one of those it was. For now, we do not know why the Prime Minister's principal secretary resigned, but I believe that launching an independent public inquiry is warranted.

The NDP also feels that we need to consider the employees of SNC-Lavalin. In the wake of this political interference scandal, they are worried about their future, and I can understand why.

• (1040)

That is why the focus today is not SNC-Lavalin, but the Prime Minister's government. His very office has brought the independence of our country's judiciary into question. That is the issue, not SNC-Lavalin, which is currently dealing with legal problems and irregularities with the awarding of foreign contracts. Naturally, this raises questions, but the employees work in good faith to support their families and they do their best every day.

The SNC-Lavalin executives are the real focus. That is why it is important to ensure that the most senior executives of the company, who were involved in the corruption at the time, are brought to justice. It is unfortunate that today we are seeing these executives get off scot-free, even though they have committed serious crimes, because of the administrative delays in the justice system.

I can understand that Canadians are worried about a company getting off so easily in such a terrible case of foreign government corruption. That is why we must absolutely look into this issue and into the political interference in our judicial system. It is extremely important to ensure public confidence. Canadians are increasingly under the impression that the government only looks after the interests of Canada's biggest players, the corporations and their executives. The government seems to listen to them very carefully when they want something. Whether it is SNC-Lavalin or KPMG, for example, the Liberal government seems to lend them a very receptive ear when some of their business practices are called into question.

Business of Supply

SNC-Lavalin is a good example. KPMG is another. When push comes to shove, the Liberals always give priority to corporate interests over the interests of workers, as we saw with Sears and GM. They could care less about the workers, which is why we need to be thinking about them today. We must make sure that workers and the public interest are foremost in our discussions and in our minds, in every decision the government makes. It is quite clear that, in many areas, the government cares only about its buddies who give them hundreds of thousands of dollars. In the past, some companies that seem to have this government's ear have sometimes made illegal donations.

The other part of the problem I want to talk about is the political influence that SNC-Lavalin had in the debate on Bill C-74. I was on the Standing Committee on Finance when the bill was studied. I asked the official what motivated the idea of a deferred prosecution agreement, and she seemed to be rather alone and a little unprepared for the many questions from the opposition and the government. The member for Hull—Aylmer asked a number of questions, including some on division 20 of Bill C-74. Although I asked which cases and files could have motivated such a bill, this official was not able to provide a single specific case. She was obviously trying to evade the question, but there was clearly something fishy going on.

This part of Bill C-74 seems to have been drafted for a specific case, namely, SNC-Lavalin. This company had been asking for such a measure for many years, and it kept asking until it was successful. Once this happened, the company continued to lobby to get this bill passed and to make sure that the Attorney General would grant this deferred agreement.

This deferred agreement has not yet been granted, which may be why the former justice minister stepped down. We must adopt this motion today so that we can get to the bottom of this affair and make sure that there was no political interference and that there will not be any under the next government.

• (1045)

I move:

That the motion be amended by adding the following after the word “Act”:
“and to report back to the House no later than May 31, 2019.”

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

[*English*]

Therefore, I ask the hon member for Timmins—James Bay if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, yes, of course.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Sherbrooke for his comments.

There is one thing I would like to point out, and I have two questions.

[*English*]

We already have remediation agreements in many countries around the world, so painting this as an anomaly is not correct. In the United States, they have existed since the 1990s. They have also existed in Britain since 2014.

As the member is from Quebec, I want to ask him about his perspective on SNC-Lavalin and its economic importance, not only to that province but to the entire country vis-à-vis an aspect of the remediation agreement that is in place. That aspect calls for responsibility to be taken by a corporate offender through an admission of responsibility, a forfeit of any benefit, participation in further investigations, and paying of a penalty.

Is that the type of regime that allows corporate entities to take responsibility, demonstrate that to Canadians, and at the same time continue to provide the economic benefits that they do in his province of Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that very good question.

As I said earlier, the company directors should personally be brought to justice for their wrongdoing. Unfortunately, that is not what is happening right now. They have managed to get off the hook because of the delays in the legal proceedings. Frankly, the company has to pay for its behaviour in some way.

We cannot give corporations a free pass when they conduct shady business abroad.

It is certainly important that there be consequences for the people involved. I think that in some cases, the company has to take some responsibility for the corporate culture that is at issue. It is not just the individuals who are responsible on the basis of their roles within the company. There is also a corporate culture that is sometimes to blame and that should be overhauled.

The public prosecution service must be given the latitude to determine the best course of action. There is no room for political interference by the government due to pressure from its friends.

• (1050)

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is very interesting that the parliamentary secretary wants to talk about remediation agreements now, as he did not want to talk about them previously. One was narrowly slipped into a budget bill, and it did not have the scrutiny that we would normally expect when making this kind of expansive change to the Criminal Code.

In fact, the former minister of justice, the former attorney general, did not even come to committee to testify about this. A parliamentary secretary went instead. This is very revealing regarding the concerns that the former minister likely had at the time.

Business of Supply

The government wants to make this about the type of investigation that could happen and where. As the NDP also understands, there cannot be an effective investigation unless and until the government waives solicitor-client privilege and allows the former attorney general to speak about this. If the government wants a meaningful investigation, regardless of who is doing it, solicitor-client privilege must be waived.

Could the member share more about why solicitor-client privilege is so important for allowing Canadians to get to the bottom of this issue, regardless of who does the investigation?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, the short answer is that I completely agree. That is why our motion calls for waiving solicitor-client privilege. That is extremely important. A public inquiry cannot move forward with this veil of secrecy shrouding the former justice minister. Openness and transparency are needed, and that is what is behind our motion.

If the government truly has nothing to hide, as it keeps saying, then when will it lift this veil of secrecy over the former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the principles of solicitor-client privilege in a government context.

[English]

According to the authors, Manes and Silver, the origin of the law of solicitor-client privilege goes back to Tudor times in England and originated as respect for the oath and honour of a lawyer who is duty bound to guard communications with clients. At first, that duty was restricted to an exemption only from testimonial compulsion, that it was the right of the lawyer or client to refuse to testify in court regarding confidential communications. Later, as the law of privilege evolved over time, confidentiality expanded from communications in the context of litigation to any communication for legal advice.

Confidentiality in the communication between the solicitor and the client became a benchmark. It was supposed that if the consultation between the client and the solicitor could not be kept confidential, then clients might be less inclined to be forthcoming with their lawyers, thus reducing the quality of advice that a lawyer could give.

In Canada, over the last few decades, solicitor-client privilege has evolved from not simply a mere rule of evidence to a substantive rule of law, as well as a principle of fundamental justice that is captured within the meaning of section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Supreme Court of Canada has described it as “a principle of fundamental justice and a civil right of supreme importance in Canadian law”.

[Translation]

Today, the Supreme Court of Canada recognizes the great importance of solicitor-client privilege and the unique role that it plays in our legal system. Solicitor-client privilege is nothing short of a cornerstone of our legal system, regardless of the nature or context of the legal opinion sought.

[English]

What is the *raison d'être* of solicitor-client privilege? Our legal system is very complex. The complexity of rules and procedures is such that in the Supreme Court's view, realistically speaking, it cannot be navigated without a lawyer's expert advice. It is in the public interest that this free flow of legal advice be encouraged. Let me repeat that because it is so tellingly important: It is in the public interest that this free flow of legal advice be encouraged between lawyers and their clients.

The integrity of the administration of justice depends on the unique role of the solicitor who provides legal advice to these clients. Because of that importance, the Supreme Court has often stated that solicitor-client privilege, this cornerstone of our legal system, should not be interfered with unless absolutely necessary. It must remain as close to absolute as possible, with very few exceptions. As such, the Supreme Court of Canada has adopted stringent norms to ensure its protection.

The gatekeepers of the solicitor-client privilege are the lawyers themselves. They act and are ethically bound to protect the privileged information that belongs to their clients. What is it exactly that is subject to this stringently protected category of solicitor-client privilege? It is privilege that will attach to every communication between a lawyer and a client that is for the purposes of giving and receiving legal advice and that is intended to be confidential.

• (1055)

[Translation]

The privileged nature of a document or the information it contains does not depend on the category of the document but on its content and what it can reveal about the relationship and communication between a client and his or her notary or lawyer. All communications between a solicitor and a client directly related to the seeking, formulating or giving of legal advice are privileged, along with communications within the continuum in which the solicitor tenders advice.

According to the Federal Court, the continuum protected by privilege includes “matters great and small at various stages... includ [ing] advice as to what should prudently and sensibly be done in the relevant legal context” and other matters “directly related to the performance by the solicitor of his professional duty as legal advisor to the client.”

In determining where the protected continuum ends, one good question is whether a communication forms “part of that necessary exchange of information of which the object is the giving of legal advice”.

If so, it is within the protected continuum. Put another way, does the disclosure of the communication have the potential to undercut the purpose behind the privilege, namely, the need for solicitors and their clients to freely and candidly exchange information and advice so that clients can know their true rights and obligations and act upon them?

Business of Supply

For example, where a director of a government department receives legal advice on how certain proceedings should be conducted and the director so instructs those conducting proceedings, the instructions, essentially cribbed from the legal advice, form part of the continuum and are protected. Disclosing such a communication would undercut the ability of the director to freely and candidly seek legal advice.

[English]

Public sector counsel is in the same position as private sector in-house counsel with regard to solicitor-client privilege. The client of government lawyers is the Crown, that is the executive. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that solicitor-client privilege attaches to communications between government employees and government lawyers, many of whom belong to the Department of Justice.

As stated by the Federal Court, “The Attorney General and those working for him [or her] as legal advisors are solicitors for the purposes of advising the executive branch of the government of Canada.”

In the public sector as well, solicitor-client privilege has permanence. The privilege belongs to the client not to the lawyer. Courts will not permit a lawyer to disclose a client's confidence. Solicitor-client privilege enjoys a status more elevated than that enjoyed by almost any other recognized privilege, given the central role that this doctrine plays in the effective operation of our legal system, and has for centuries. It is in the public interest that the free flow of legal advice between a lawyer and a client be encouraged and protected. As noted by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 2008 Blood Tribe decision, “Without it, access to justice and the quality of justice in this country would be severely compromised.”

[Translation]

As previously mentioned, solicitor-client privilege attaches to communications between solicitors and their clients, communications concerning a consultation, or legal advice that the parties intend to be confidential.

• (1100)

[English]

In the government context, the client is the Crown. Who can waive the privilege within government can be a complicated question. Court decisions considering this question have often been inconsistent. However, consistent guidance has been provided on when privilege can be considered to have been waived, whether in the private or public sector context.

[Translation]

For a waiver to occur, the client must be aware of the existence of the privilege and voluntarily express the intent to waive it.

[English]

For waiver to occur, disclosure must be voluntary. Courts will only find waiver, whether express or implied waiver, when they are of the view that an objective consideration of the client's conduct demonstrates an intention to waive privilege. For example, this may occur where the privileged communication is shared with a third party, or where the privileged communication is relied on as an

element of one's claim or defence. Disclosure compelled by statute is not voluntary and, therefore, cannot constitute waiver of solicitor-client privilege. This is sometimes called the limited waiver exception in legal parlance. It should not be confused with the doctrine of partial waiver, to which I will now turn.

It should not be assumed that if a client waives privilege over one communication that privilege over every other communication is also waived. Clients, the holders of the privilege, have the ability to waive privilege over none, some or all of the confidential communications they have with their lawyers. In considering whether a partial waiver, meaning a voluntary waiver over a particular piece of privileged advice, resulted in a broader waiver, courts will consider all of the factual and surrounding circumstances.

The answer is never easy. As in the case of a partial waiver, it is also the case that not every disclosure will result in a waiver of solicitor-client privilege. For example, common interest privilege allows parties with interests in common to share certain privileged information without waiving the privilege at all. The roots of common interest privilege as an exemption to the waiver are in the litigation context, where sharing in the contents of reasonably anticipated litigation does not result in a waiver of litigation privilege itself.

Some courts have also extended common law interest outside of litigation to the commercial transactions context. Parties that have a common interest in the successful completion of such a transaction may be able to share solicitor-client privileged materials without a waiver occurring. As with traditional solicitor-client privilege, the communication between the parties sharing the common interest must be made on a confidential basis.

I have just referred to what is known as litigation privilege. Litigation privilege protects against the compulsory disclosure of communications and documents with the dominant purpose of the preparation of litigation. Although litigation privilege differs from solicitor-client privilege in several respects, the two concepts overlap to some extent. The classic examples of items to which litigation privilege applies are the lawyer's file and oral or written communications between a lawyer and third parties, such as witnesses or experts, prepared in the context of reasonably anticipated litigation.

Litigation privilege is a common law rule of English origin. It was introduced in Canada in the 20th century as a privilege linked to solicitor-client privilege, which at the time was considered to be a rule of evidence necessary to ensure the proper conduct of trials and legal proceedings. Because of these origins, litigation privilege has sometimes been confused with solicitor-client privilege, but indeed the two are distinct even though they overlap at times.

However, since the Supreme Court of Canada rendered its decision in the case of *Blank v. Canada* in 2006, it has been settled law that solicitor-client privilege and litigation privilege are distinguishable. In *Blank v. Canada*, the Supreme Court of Canada stated, “They often co-exist and one is sometimes mistakenly called by the other's name, but they are not coterminous in space, time or meaning.”

Business of Supply

In that decision, the Supreme Court of Canada identified the following differences between the two concepts. The purpose of solicitor-client privilege is to protect a relationship, while that of litigation privilege is to ensure the efficacy of the adversarial process. On the one hand, solicitor-client privilege is permanent, whereas litigation privilege is temporary and lapses when the litigation ends. Unlike solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege applies to non-confidential documents. Litigation privilege is not directed at communications between the solicitor and client as such.

The Supreme Court of Canada also stated, “Unlike the solicitor-client privilege, [litigation privilege] is neither absolute in scope nor permanent in duration.”

While it is true that in the decision of *Blank v. Canada* the Supreme Court of Canada identified clear differences between litigation privilege and solicitor-client privilege, it also recognized that they do have some characteristics in common. For example, the court noted that the two privileges “serve a common cause: The secure and effective administration of justice according to law.”

More specifically, litigation privilege serves that cause by ensuring “the efficacy of the adversarial process” and maintaining “a protected area to facilitate investigation and preparation of a case for trial by the adversarial advocate.”

• (1105)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt, but there is a lot of talk going on right now and this room echoes. I ask members to please respect the fact that there is a session going on right now and that there are people speaking. In preparation for questions and comments, I ask members to take their conversations outside.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, to justify these requirements, the Supreme Court of Canada relied on the unique and foundational importance of solicitor-client privilege, which is “fundamental to the proper functioning of our legal system.”

The Supreme Court cited a significant body of case law to the effect that the privilege is a “fundamental policy of the law” that must be as close to absolute as possible to ensure public confidence and retain relevance. In that case, the court also noted that solicitor-client privilege is of paramount importance because it promotes access to justice, the quality of justice and the free flow of legal advice.

[*Translation*]

There is of course no question that litigation privilege does not have the same status as solicitor-client privilege and that the former is less absolute than the latter. It is also clear that these two privileges, even though they may sometimes apply to the same documents, are conceptually distinct. Nonetheless, like solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege is “fundamental to the proper functioning of our legal system”. It is central to Canada's adversarial system.

As a number of courts have already pointed out, the Canadian justice system promotes the search for truth by allowing the parties to put their best cases before the court, thereby enabling the court to

reach a decision with the best information possible. The parties' ability to confidently develop strategies knowing that they cannot be compelled to disclose them is essential to the effectiveness of this process.

In Canada, litigation privilege is therefore inextricably linked to certain founding values and is of fundamental importance. The Supreme Court of Canada has concluded that litigation privilege, like solicitor-client privilege, cannot be abrogated by inference and that clear, explicit and unequivocal language is required in order to lift it.

[*English*]

I would like to conclude on that note by thanking you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to canvass these important issues of solicitor-client privilege and the privilege concept more generally. It is a concept well known in law and well known to the lawyers who participate in this House. It is a fundamental aspect of our legal system, founded upon hundreds of years of jurisprudence that dates back to our commonwealth heritage.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague, the MP for Parkdale—High Park, went into one aspect of the motion today, solicitor-client privilege. I did not hear him speak about the launch of a public inquiry.

I have to say that over the last week, I have been hearing from my constituents, as I am sure he has in Parkdale—High Park, about what we have watched unfold on the national stage and the questions Canadians legitimately have about what the truth is in this situation. The member referenced the legal system seeking to shine a light on the truth. Today is an opportunity for Liberals in this House to do the same, to shine a light on that truth.

To a government that promised to be accountable and transparent, and to the member for Parkdale—High Park, why will the member not support a public investigation into these deeply troubling allegations?

• (1110)

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Essex for her contributions in this House today and on other occasions.

In respect of the second part of the motion, it is clear that what is being sought in the motion presented by the members opposite is a public inquiry. I would return to the intervention I made earlier today, which was that in this context, on a matter on which transparency is wanted and clearly sought on both sides of the chamber, the Ethics Commissioner's investigation that has been opened on this matter provides a more robust mechanism for that investigation. It provides for clearer tools that can be used, greater powers that can be used, and most important, an apolitical and non-partisan forum for seeking that information being sought.

In response to the question from the member for Essex, that forum is clearly a more appropriate forum, given the tenor of the debate we have seen in just the first hour of debate on this motion.

Business of Supply

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about solicitor-client privilege. The current Attorney General stood in this House and said that the Prime Minister and the PMO did not pressure him, and he was able to do that without violating his solicitor-client privilege. That means that the former attorney general could stand and say the same thing without violating her solicitor-client privilege. The Prime Minister said that the fact that she is in cabinet speaks for itself, and then she resigned from cabinet and lawyered up. To clear all this up, would the member agree that if there is really nothing sinister going on, the former attorney general could stand and simply repeat what the current Attorney General said?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, in terms of the statements made by the current Attorney General in this chamber in respect of what involvement or communications he has had, I would simply note, for the purpose of this debate, and also for the members of this House, who I presume are very well aware, because they are reading the same media coverage I am reading, that the very issue of the nature of the privilege is the subject matter of legal advice being sought by the former minister.

Secondarily, in the context of my intervention, I indicated that the issue of a potential waiver of privilege is always case dependent, and needs to be, for the purpose of a full and rigorous legal analysis. Therefore, moving that there be a waiver or implied waiver at this juncture is simply inappropriate for the purposes of this debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, the motion moved by our NDP colleagues is entirely appropriate for one aspect of this scandal, namely the disastrous mismanagement shown by the Prime Minister's Office. Our colleagues who sponsored the motion are right to say that we need to hear from Ms. Wilson-Raybould and that we need a public inquiry. I support these requests—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind hon. members that they are not to mention other members by name. They must only refer to them by title or by name of riding.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, you are right. I apologize.

Regarding the utter mismanagement, I absolutely agree with the position taken by our colleagues from the second opposition party. I support a public inquiry and I agree that the former attorney general of Canada should testify.

That said, we must also consider the equally devastating consequences of this scandal on the third parties involved, namely, the SNC-Lavalin workers, who have nothing to do with the fraudulent acts committed by the former executives at that company. For the workers, suppliers and other third parties who do business with SNC-Lavalin, reaching a remediation agreement seems crucial to me.

Why is there nothing in the motion moved by the second opposition party regarding the importance of reaching a remediation agreement as well as protecting Quebec's civil engineers and their expertise?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, this does not happen very often, but in this case, I actually agree with the Bloc Québécois

member. I must point out that he is representing his constituents in the province of Quebec.

As I mentioned earlier in this debate, remediation agreements already exist all around the world, particularly in the United States and Great Britain. It is also important to note that having a system of remediation agreements enshrined in law does mean giving businesses a free pass.

• (1115)

[*English*]

What I will explain in English is that there are aspects of this that require an admission of responsibility, that require penalties to be paid, that require the forfeiture of funds and that require participation in ongoing investigations to address the very needs outlined by the member opposite that take into account the very significant needs of workers, not just in his riding in Quebec but throughout the province of Quebec and throughout Canada, who worked directly or indirectly with an entity as large as the entity being implicated here.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, through a question, my colleague talked about the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament. I wonder if the member could explain the difference between the ethics officer, for example, and a standing committee. A standing committee might have a very strong partisan element. Could he expand on his thoughts on the two?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner's investigation is important.

First of all, the actual investigation was sought by the opposition and was agreed to on the part of the Ethics Commissioner.

Second, the Ethics Commissioner is independent of any of the parties in the chamber. The Ethics Commissioner is appointed by Parliament and responds to Parliament. The Ethics Commissioner also has more robust mechanisms, including the powers of subpoena, of compelling documents and of compelling information from individuals.

Most important, the Ethics Commissioner operates outside of what is, unfortunately, some of the political theatre that surrounds us in what we do, which Canadians are now seeing even in the context of today's debate. Partisanship is part of this process, which we all knew when we signed up to run for office. However, sometimes partisanship is not the best antidote for what is clearly an important question Canadians are seeking clarity on. In that context, a non-partisan, apolitical investigation, led by a person without political affiliation, outside the realm of theatre, is likely much more appropriate and will provide a much more measured response.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the speech from the member for Parkdale—High Park outlining solicitor-client privilege and litigation privilege.

What is interesting, as he would know, is that litigation privilege only attaches when the parties believe that there is pending litigation. It appears that really quickly, the PMO determined that there might be litigation with respect to the departure of the former attorney general.

Business of Supply

Litigation privilege also can be waived by one of the participants talking publicly about it. As we have heard the Prime Minister publicly talking about his engagements with the former attorney general, the Prime Minister has de facto waived such litigation privilege.

Was the PMO asked to retain documents in relation to the demotion of the attorney general, because the retention of documents usually starts once the parties realize that there is probably going to be litigation, with litigation privilege attaching. Since the member talks so much about it, has the PMO been asked to retain its documents?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, with respect to my reference to litigation privilege, if the member was listening over the din of conversation during my 20-minute intervention, he would have noted that I talked about many types of privilege. I also talked about common interest privilege, for example. It was in the context of discussing solicitor-client privilege and outlining its contours.

Is there an implied waiver that exists right now? As I said in my opening intervention, that would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

In respect of whether anyone has been asked to retain documents, I have absolutely no information whatsoever in that regard.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Milton.

[*Translation*]

I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for moving this motion today. I am proud to say that the official opposition will support it unanimously.

Before speaking to the importance of holding a public inquiry, I would like to talk about why this issue matters to us, as a country. We are and must always be a country governed by the rule of law. This essentially means that when we, as parliamentarians, pass a law on behalf of those who elected us, we are not above that law.

● (1120)

[*English*]

We are all subject to the rule of law. We are all equal under it. We are bound by its conventions, and our political or societal status does not entitle any one of us to special treatment under it. These core principles of the rule of law must be upheld for any democracy to function. As history tells us, whenever the rule of law is impeded or subverted or corrupted, the consequences can be extreme. We cannot claim to be a country under the rule of law when political agendas can dictate the course of justice, and that is precisely what the Prime Minister and his office stand accused of.

To understand the severity of these allegations, which the Prime Minister has yet to credibly refute, we have to go back to 2015. SNC-Lavalin, a major Canadian construction firm, was charged with bribing the Libyan government under dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Eager to avoid prosecution, the company launched a massive two-year campaign to lobby the new Liberal government for a special judicial proceeding that would get it off the hook. The lobbying worked. The mechanism to secure that ruling was wedged into an 800-page omnibus budget bill and became the law of the land.

Up until this point, no laws had been broken. The aggressive lobbying and legislative manoeuvres that followed were certainly suspicious, but not illegal. However, that all changed when the push to cut SNC-Lavalin a special deal met resistance inside the justice department.

[*Translation*]

After carefully examining the SNC-Lavalin case, the director of public prosecutions decided to move forward with criminal prosecution. That is when the political operatives of the Prime Minister's Office sprung into action.

According to the *Globe and Mail*, the Prime Minister's Office pressured the then attorney general to overrule the decision by the director of public prosecutions and to grant SNC-Lavalin the special deal that the company had sought for some time.

[*English*]

When the justice minister did not do it, presumably out of devotion to the rule of law she was duty bound to protect, the Prime Minister fired her. At the time, she said in a written statement, “It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence.”

We did not know it at the time, but that statement foreshadowed what would later come to light: the alarming possibility that the Prime Minister's Office exerted its power to influence the administration of justice, or to put it another way, when the justice department said no to SNC-Lavalin, the Prime Minister's Office would not take no for an answer.

Many have attempted to describe the profound seriousness of these allegations, but none have done so better than the former Ontario Liberal attorney general, Michael Bryant, who said that when he was prosecuting cases, if a politician had ever called him up, he would have put down the phone and called the police.

Since these allegations have surfaced, the Prime Minister and his office have engaged in an obvious cover-up. He refuses to waive solicitor-client privilege, as prime ministers before him have done when the public interest has demanded it. Doing so would allow the former attorney general to speak to tell Canadians her side of the story, but the Prime Minister has kept her silent to protect himself.

Last week, the Liberals on the justice committee voted in lockstep to keep the truth from coming out, defeating a motion calling on several key PMO and government officials, including the former attorney general, to testify in front of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister continues to change his version of the facts and to hide behind others. He blames everyone, from his own office's staff to Scott Brison, and even the former attorney general, for the mess in which he finds himself. Those are not the actions of a prime minister with nothing to hide. He is mistaken if he thinks that the resignation of his closest advisor is going to make this go away.

Business of Supply

Thus, I will request once again that the Prime Minister immediately waive solicitor-client privilege and allow the former attorney general to speak.

• (1125)

[English]

The way in which the story has unfolded, with almost daily changes to the Prime Minister's version of events, high-profile resignations, anonymously sourced smear campaigns, and coordinated cover-up manoeuvring, suggests this is not an ordinary political scandal. Something more sinister is at play here.

Section 139 of the Criminal Code deals with obstruction of justice. I draw the attention of the House to subsection (2), which reads:

Every one who wilfully attempts in any manner other than a manner described in subsection (1) to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.

[Translation]

It would be up to the police to decide whether what transpired between the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general of Canada was criminal. I expect this matter to be brought to their attention shortly, if it has not already.

I have always said that all options were possible. If a crime has been committed, then those responsible have to be punished accordingly.

[English]

Today I am proud to stand with my colleagues to support this motion urging the Prime Minister to waive privilege in this case. Canadians are tired of hearing him speak for the former attorney general. It is time Canadians heard from the former attorney general herself.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened closely to my hon. colleague's speech. He met with officials from SNC-Lavalin and I know that others in his circle did as well.

I am curious, as I am sure the House is, to know how the hon. member feels about the remediation agreements and what information or opinions he may have shared with SNC-Lavalin.

Can he inform the House of his position on this?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, that is true, but my team and I have always been transparent about that meeting.

That being said, in the case before us, the Prime Minister failed to monitor the discussions his team was having with SNC-Lavalin. We are very curious to know whether the government met its obligations.

[English]

I know the parliamentary secretary would very much like to distract Canadians and this House from aspects of these types of things. Parliament is free to set whatever law it likes. It is free to set whatever penalties it likes.

However, what Parliament and the government are not free to do is pick up the phone and interfere with an ongoing criminal proceeding. That is the crux of this matter. That is what the Prime Minister stands accused of.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the opposition leader if he agrees that this motion calling for a full public inquiry seems all the more necessary given the fact that the Liberal majority on the parliamentary committee torpedoed the possibility of a thorough inquiry. That is why we now have no choice but to call for a full public inquiry via this motion.

I just spent a week in my riding, and people were talking to me about this. Quebec is very concerned about all the SNC-Lavalin workers. We need a full public inquiry to find out if there was political interference.

Does my colleague agree?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, this motion is clearly necessary because, just last week, the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights blocked the measures we wanted to take to get to the truth.

We invited people at the centre of the scandal to appear before the committee to talk about their version of events. Every Liberal member of the committee voted against the motion. What a coincidence.

• (1130)

[English]

This motion is extremely necessary, because we saw what Liberals did when they had a majority on a committee. We wanted to invite the key figures at the centre of the scandal, those individuals who had meetings with SNC-Lavalin and those individuals who then went on to have meetings with the former attorney general.

Instead, the Liberals used their majority on that committee to invite three people who had no knowledge of the events at the time. In fact, the current Attorney General told the House that he was not privy to any of those discussions. Why would the committee need to hear from people who do not have any knowledge of what went on?

When Liberals have majorities on committees, they play their partisan games. They thwart the course of justice. That is why this motion to have an inquiry in full public light is so important.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, over the last week, what has concerned me as a parliamentarian is that the Prime Minister, his representatives and his former principal secretary have stood up and spoken on behalf of the justice minister. They have said things that have or have not happened. At this point, it has now become a sort of he-said-she-said situation, except that the former minister cannot speak on it.

One of the most powerful things for gender equality is the agency granted by a woman's voice. It is the ability to stand up and speak truth to power and to speak truth to her situation. I wonder if the leader of the opposition can speak to the importance, especially for our super-woke Prime Minister, of being in a position right now to allow a strong woman to speak her voice.

Business of Supply

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, we are talking about an extremely serious allegation of potential criminal interference in an ongoing court case. This is about powerful people protecting their powerful friends. This is about one set of rules for some and one set of rules for everyone else. Apparently, the former attorney general took a stand, and we would like to hear from her as to what went on. I would like to hear her version of events.

The member described this as a he-said-she-said situation. I would say it is even worse than that. It is “he said, and he is saying what she said”. That is not right. It is completely unacceptable that the Prime Minister would allow this to continue. He has the power to raise the attorney general to the same level that he has been on for the past few weeks. He is putting words in her mouth and asking Canadians to take his word for his version of events. I am tired of that. I know Canadians are frustrated at the cover-up and the stonewalling. It is time he let her speak.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to be able to stand in the House and discuss this matter today, but it also brings great sadness because we find ourselves in a situation where, as parliamentarians, we are trying to force the government to do something that it should openly and honestly be embracing at this point in time.

As the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out very well, the sordid saga of what has transpired here to date is one that warrants public investigation. It warrants justice committee investigation. Indeed, it very clearly warrants a light being shone on it so that we can understand exactly what happened, including whether or not there has been criminality and whether or not there has been political interference in a criminal prosecution.

I was very pleased and honoured to be able to sit with the justice committee last week as we discussed, in public, our concerns with respect to the matter, and indeed put forth a list of witnesses that we would like to hear on the matter. Unfortunately, as everybody knows, that was not accepted by the majority of Liberals in the committee. Indeed, there were very troubling comments made during that justice committee meeting that really underscore the importance of having a public inquiry.

First and foremost, it was said by a member on the committee that we were making hay out of nothing. As well, a member indicated that this was nothing more than a witch hunt. We have heard those stories from the south as well, and it does not seem to be working that well in the United States, so I do not know why they would choose the term “witch hunt” to be their lead line up here.

Most importantly, the chair of the committee, and indeed every single Liberal member on that committee, indicated, full-throated, that they believed the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office, and that these allegations were unfounded. That was why they opted to have a very narrow legal conference on what certain principles of law are, much like the one the parliamentary secretary read to us this morning in his defence of why the government does not want to have a public inquiry.

We are asking for this public inquiry today because, quite frankly, we have taken the proper steps. During the cabinet shuffle in late January and early February, it was very interesting that the former attorney general issued a 2,000-word written statement, detailing not

only her accomplishments but also a warning. The warning was that we must speak truth to power, and that she spoke truth to power. Buried at the end of one of those paragraphs, which was very interesting to me, was when she said she expects that role to continue.

Why would the former attorney general say in a letter that she was concerned about world events where there is political interference trumping public policy, unless she herself had something to say about what had been transpiring within her party and within her cabinet?

We took the right path. We asked questions in the House. There were two questions. My colleague from Durham asked a question, and my colleague from Victoria asked a question about why the member had been fired from her position as attorney general.

The response was wholly inadequate, but more telling than being wholly inadequate was the fact that the Prime Minister did not take the opportunity to thank the minister for her work or say anything complimentary about her time as the minister. This was a glaring oversight, and incredibly classless when we think about it.

We proceeded to go to the justice committee in order to try to get more information after allegations were made in *The Globe and Mail*. We were told by the members that we should look past those allegations. They questioned whether there was anything behind the allegations, since they came from anonymous sources.

It is quite interesting that today we are in a situation where those anonymous sources have led to two incredibly high-profile resignations, both from cabinet and from the inner workings of the Prime Minister's Office. Surely somebody is taking these allegations seriously, even if it is Mr. Butts and even if it is the former attorney general.

Why should we have a public inquiry? A public inquiry, first and foremost, accepts evidence and conducts its hearings in a public forum, and focuses on a very specific occurrence. I can think of no other example in my 11 years here where we have needed to get to the bottom of something that is so crucial to the rule of law.

● (1135)

The extent of the media coverage has been enormous. The fact that it has reached into the living rooms and kitchens of Canadians is important because it puts upon us, as members of Parliament, the onus to shed light on the matter, so that we can go home and tell people exactly what has happened and what is going on, and have more to say than “This is a cover-up” and “This is stonewalling”.

Finally and foremost, why should members of Parliament, despite partisan leanings, vote in favour of this? In seven and a half short months we will be going door to door, probably sooner than that if we are doing our jobs correctly, and we will be asking our constituents to once again place their trust in us as their members of Parliament to represent them in the House of Commons. I emphasize the word “trust”.

Business of Supply

I have to wonder if, individually, all of us as members of Parliament, especially those who sit on the government side, are not troubled by the secrecy, because our constituents are. Are members not troubled by the smear campaign that was launched from the Prime Minister's Office on the former attorney general? Our constituents are troubled.

Are members not troubled by the Prime Minister's attempt, day after day, of spinning a narrative and dancing so close to the line on waiving privilege that we end up with a 20-minute dissertation on the floor of the House of Commons of what is or is not solicitor-client privilege?

Are members not troubled that there have been two high-profile resignations in no more than 11 days since this matter began? My constituents are troubled.

When Liberal members of Parliament go to the door what will their response be? Is it going to be that we have to trust the Prime Minister and that they believe in the Prime Minister and his team? Is that going to be enough? How will those members respond when they are asked the fundamental question, which I know it is going to be asked because it is being asked now: Why is the former attorney general not allowed to speak? What is the response that those members will give?

I am going to conclude with this. There are 40 special members of the Liberal caucus on the other side, 40 members who have indeed, like myself and many colleagues on this side, taken an oath in order to be a counsel, solicitor or barrister in this country. One of the key tenets of that oath is the phrase, "I shall champion the rule of law". The onus on those 40 members is, indeed, greater than the onus on the MPs who have not received that incredibly important burden in society of championing the rule of law.

Therefore, I encourage the members of Parliament for Scarborough—Rouge Park, Madawaska—Restigouche, St. Catharines, Scarborough Southwest, Charlottetown, Toronto—Danforth, Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Willowdale, Beaches—East York, Central Nova, West Nova, Regina—Wascana, Calgary Centre, Mount Royal, York South—Weston, Alfred-Pellan, Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Mississauga—Erin Mills, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Sudbury, Louis-Hébert, Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Ottawa South, Ottawa Centre, Eglinton—Lawrence, Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Brome—Missisquoi, Steveston—Richmond East, Newmarket—Aurora, Delta, Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Brampton Centre, Surrey Centre, Mississauga—Streetsville, Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Parkdale—High Park, St. John's East and Montarville to uphold the oath under which they deservedly became a professional solicitor in this country.

I encourage them to do the right thing, vote in favour of this public inquiry and shine a light on what is possibly a criminal matter, and to do it today.

• (1140)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will start with a comment and then two questions.

The comment would be apropos the previous speech given by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, who actually failed to answer in French. Therefore, I will ask again in English. What did he actually say at the SNC meeting and what is his position on remediation agreements?

The member opposite has just implored us to listen to our constituents. I would appreciate it if my colleagues would listen to me right now. However, what constituents have said to me, time and time again, is that there is too much partisanship in this place. What they have said to me is that we need a more robust mechanism for shining a light on truth and getting to the bottom of matters.

The point is this. Does the member opposite, after sharing her commentary, agree that actually ascertaining the truth in this matter would be better sought and pursued through a robust mechanism employed by the ethics investigator, who is not subject to the political whims of this place or other fora?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would just ask members of the opposition to hold back on their enthusiasm until their members have a chance to speak.

The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, first, as my leader has said many times, the truth is not partisan. We are seeking to get to the bottom of this matter.

Second, with respect, it was the justice committee, through its partisan stance, that shut down our ability to bring forward witnesses who are clearly important to the narrative and the true story.

Finally, we have had the Ethics Commissioner attempt to investigate the Prime Minister's Office. I was reminded by my colleague that the Prime Minister dodged meeting the Ethics Commissioner for two months during that process.

That is why this needs to be public. That is why it needs to happen now. That is why we are voting in favour of the motion today.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know SNC-Lavalin made donations to MPs and the Liberal government between 2004 and 2011. I would like to know what my colleague thinks of the sunny ways and transparency the government promised in 2015 and for many months here in the House of Commons.

Today, we are debating a motion by my colleague from Victoria calling for a public inquiry to shed light on this matter. If a government claims to be transparent and honest with Canadians, is that not what it should do?

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I agree that there were so many promises made in the 2015 Liberal campaign. The Liberals said they were branded by their feminism, their need to have reconciliation with indigenous peoples, their need to be transparent, their need to run small deficits, which ended up being massive deficits, as we know, and indeed their transparency.

Business of Supply

That is why we need to have a public inquiry. It would allow people to make written and oral submissions regarding not only what happened but why and how it happened. The most powerful place in the country is not a boardroom in downtown Montreal or Toronto. This is the nation's boardroom. This is where we have to ensure that we are doing what we need to do to protect the public from gross misuse of power, which is alleged against the Prime Minister's Office.

That is why we are happy to support the motion from the NDP, and we will listen intently to everything that its members have to say today.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Milton raised the question about what will happen when we go out door-knocking in 2019. Last week, I was on doorsteps meeting people. I met thousands of people over the last week. Everyone came to me and told me that they have full trust and faith in our Prime Minister. Members will see that, in the 2019 election, Surrey—Newton will stay Liberal.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, I am sure the member has had a number of supporters say this to him. Therefore, why would he be afraid of a public inquiry?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been said that complexity is the last refuge of those who have something to hide. The opposite side has been trying to over-complicate the solicitor-client privilege relationship.

The deputy leader of our party is a lawyer, so I ask her this very clearly. The Prime Minister is the client. Can he waive privilege and let her speak?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Madam Speaker, yes, he can.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on what is a fundamental issue in our democracy, which is the constitutional convention of an independent attorney general. Unlike some of the speeches we have heard today where people suggest it does not matter to constituents, be assured, it matters to mine.

This may not be the kind of issue, like climate change or the housing crisis, that everyone will say is on the top of their list, and that is not surprising. Because it is such a bedrock principle of our democracy, people in Canada happily take it for granted. They do not take it for granted in places like China, or in banana republics, but they expect an independent attorney general to act in that way. I will be saying in the course of my remarks just what this convention entails and ask the House whether or not this matter does not deserve a full inquiry.

We can see there are two parts to the NDP motion I presented today. The first one deals with the solicitor-client privilege. The government would have us believe this is somehow too complicated for Canadians or parliamentarians. I will try to refute that during my remarks.

The second principle is that the government be urged to launch a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act to give Canadians the transparency and accountability promised by the government when it was running for office in 2015, because this is all about what

happened and whether the Canadian public has a right to know. That is why it is such a fundamental issue.

I want to say at the outset that these are allegations of improper interference. I have no knowledge of what happened and neither do most Canadians. What we do have a right to know is the circumstances that have occurred, where two resignations have happened, one by the most senior political person in the PMO, namely the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, and the resignation by the former attorney general herself.

Canadians are asking what happened and why it matters. I am anxious for Canadians to use the justice committee, of which I am honoured to be the vice chair, as the vehicle to at least find out whether there was anything improper in the circumstances. I am not here to say there is anything improper. I do not know, but I do think Canadians deserve answers. The place to do that is the justice committee, at least initially.

For reasons I will describe, we also need an inquiry in the same way the Gomery inquiry was established under the Inquiries Act of Canada. It allowed for a number of things to be unearthed. That changed the course of our Canadian political history. This may or may not be in that category, and that is exactly why we need to know.

The question about solicitor-client privilege is not as complicated as the government would want us to think. Reasonable people can understand legal principles, and the question of whether or not the government can waive that privilege, whether that be the Prime Minister or the government at large, the Governor in Council if you will, is of course without question. The government can waive the privilege. Indeed, many prominent lawyers I have spoken to have said the government already has waived the privilege because the Prime Minister told us that he did not direct the former attorney general to do anything vis-à-vis SNC-Lavalin and the remediation agreement at issue. Therefore, it is already waived in the eyes of some.

Whether that is true or not, there are fundamental principles. The Shawcross doctrine, which we will come to, may or may not have been transgressed. I do not know. That is exactly why we need to have an inquiry. We need to start with the justice committee, and we need to have a full public inquiry so Canadians can see the state of their democracy at this moment in time.

The allegations are, of course, well known. We have had media reports, admittedly by unnamed individuals, whistle-blowers perhaps, that the Prime Minister or senior staff in his office pressured the former attorney general to interfere with a decision of the independent Public Prosecution Service to deny SNC-Lavalin a deferred prosecution agreement, sometimes called a remediation agreement, for charges of corruption or fraud relating to bribes paid to officials in Libya under the Gadhafi regime many years ago.

● (1150)

The Prime Minister's first line of defence was "I did not direct the former attorney general to do anything", but of course that is not the issue; the issue is whether or not improper pressure was exercised.

Business of Supply

Second, the Canadian public wants to know why she has chosen to resign and why she did a rather unusual, if not unprecedented, thing when she decided to put a letter out to her constituents and to Canadians saying that she was speaking truth to power now and wanted to assert the importance of an independent Attorney General. Then a few weeks later, she resigned even from the position that she was assigned in cabinet, namely the Veterans Affairs portfolio.

Canadians want to know why. Why did she feel she had to say that, and then why did she ultimately resign? Yesterday, why did the principal secretary, the leading official in the Prime Minister's Office, also say he had to resign? The line he used was that it was because he was becoming a diversion, and I would not deny that.

The Prime Minister removed her from office as justice minister, and people are asking serious questions as a consequence. Professor Craig Forcese has written a very helpful article on the whole public law aspect of this matter. He starts by saying that there are different degrees of influence that a government can exert on an Attorney General.

There is nothing wrong whatsoever in asking advice of cabinet colleagues. Indeed, as Lord Simon in the United Kingdom said, sometimes you'd be a fool not to do so, but where you cross the magic line of the Shawcross principle, first established in the 1950s and now the law in Canada as well—a constitutional convention, in fact—is that one cannot pressure or exert undue influence on the Attorney General. At the end of the day, he or she has to stand up and say, “The decision to prosecute or not to prosecute was mine alone. That decision to go into a remediation agreement or not, to tell the director of public prosecutions to do thus or so—that was my decision and mine alone.”

Obviously, someone thinks there was a problem here, including the former attorney general, who was removed from her office and then subsequently resigned. Canadians want to know why.

Why is the government, with its avowed commitment to transparency and accountability, not anxious to have her and Mr. Butts, the principal secretary, speak and tell their side of the story to clear it up? Maybe there is nothing here, but for the government to not want that to happen causes reasonable people to be concerned and to ask questions.

That is all that this motion is designed to do: to ask the government to please waive any privilege it thinks it has and that she might think she has and let her speak. Let her tell her side of the story, and also allow us to hear from the other side, the other alleged protagonist in this drama, Mr. Butts, and others who work for him in the Prime Minister's Office. Why would the government not welcome that? That is what is confusing, and it is actually adding fuel to this fire.

As Professor Forcese says, there are degrees of influence, and it matters whether it is pressure or whether it is direction. Canadians might be wondering why this matters and why it is such a big deal; it is because we cannot have partisan or political considerations in supervising prosecutions. It simply cannot be done if we are going to keep the convention of an independent prosecution, of an independent law officer of the Crown, which is what the Attorney General is.

In some democracies, such as England, the role of the Attorney General is separate. In that system, the role played by our Minister of Justice is played by the Home Secretary, so important is it that the Attorney General be seen to be outside political influence. That is what some countries do.

We have seen south of the border, with Mr. Trump and Mr. Comey, how that plays out. We in Canada have been proud, and justly so, of an independent prosecution service, and now people want to know if there were any problems that occurred in this circumstance.

● (1155)

In 2002, in the Supreme Court decision of *Krieger v. Law Society of Alberta*, the Supreme Court said:

It is a constitutional principle that the Attorneys General of this country must act independently of partisan concerns when exercising their delegated sovereign authority to initiate, continue or terminate prosecutions.

That is why it is a big deal. Was there anything that crossed that line, the Shawcross line? As we heard in the eloquent speech of the deputy opposition leader and justice critic for the official opposition, what is at the bottom line here is the rule of law.

The Attorney General owes her ultimate loyalty to the rule of law, not to the government of the day. That is a bedrock constitutional principle in our country that we sure hope was not transgressed in circumstances when pressure may have been exerted to enter into a deferred prosecution agreement when it was clear that the director of public prosecutions, that independent officer, did not think it was warranted. Our Attorney General appears to have not thought it was warranted either; then, poof, she was removed from her cabinet role in that regard.

Is that a problem? I do not know that it is or is not. I need to understand further.

Professor Forcese concluded as follows:

At risk of being very wrong, one might infer that people in the [Attorney General's] office thought a line had been crossed – someone was, after all, the *Globe [and Mail's]* source [for the story that led to this bombshell]. But if a clear Shawcross line was crossed, the expectation would then be that the [Attorney General] would resign.

Of course, that did not happen initially, but then eventually it did.

The government members have been speaking about just how difficult this whole solicitor-client business is, and about the independence of the prosecutorial function being so difficult and so forth. The late Mr. Justice Rosenberg of the Ontario Court of Appeal wrote down what he thought the five components of the Shawcross principle were. He said:

[T]he Attorney General must take into account all relevant facts [in making a decision to prosecute] including the effect of a successful or unsuccessful prosecution on public morale and order.

It is perfectly legitimate, in other words, to take those into account.

Mr. Rosenberg continued:

Second, the Attorney General is not obliged to consult with cabinet colleagues but is entitled to do so.

That is no problem. He went on to say:

Business of Supply

Third, any assistance from cabinet colleagues is confined to giving advice, not directions.

That is why, presumably, in his first original line of defence, the Prime Minister talked about direction so categorically.

Mr. Rosenberg continued:

Fourth, responsibility for the decision is that of the Attorney General alone; the government is not to put pressure on him or her.

That is the point.

Fifth, and equally, the Attorney General cannot shift responsibility for the decision to the cabinet.

Nor, I dare say, can responsibility be shifted to anybody else.

Having explained the Shawcross principle and explained for Canadians why this is such an important question before us, now we can talk about what to do about it.

We have asked, and I join the official opposition in that regard, for a justice committee to hear from the key principals in this story. We should invite our colleague, the now former veterans affairs minister and former attorney general, the Vancouver Granville MP, to come and tell her side of the story.

She is getting advice from an eminent former Supreme Court justice, the Hon. Thomas Cromwell, and we hope that some advice is provided that would let her feel comfortable in coming and telling Canadians her side of the story.

We have asked for that, and so far, sadly, that has not happened. The government members on that committee have somehow thought this was just politics, that there was nothing to see here, so drive on. They may be right, but why on earth would they not let us find out so we can put our minds at rest? The government members of the committee then, of course, accuse us of being partisan when we want to do our job as parliamentarians.

● (1200)

What else do we know? We know that there was a frenzy of lobbying for this particular company. It is an engineering company, so I would not be surprised if it was lobbying about bridges and roads and the like, but it was lobbying for something called justice and law enforcement, and that is a little unusual for an engineering company. It visited officials in the Prime Minister's Office 14 times over the period of a couple of years, 12 visits with principal secretary Butts and the Prime Minister's senior Quebec adviser, Mathieu Bouchard.

All we have asked for is for those two individuals to say what happened. Is that crossing some line? Are we somehow being irresponsible in wanting to know?

This is an unusual circumstance because, lo and behold, we soon thereafter had this brand new insertion in an omnibus budget bill, called a "deferred prosecution agreement". I am not here to say that those are horrible and improper at all times—not at all. There may be a legitimate role for them, and I am sure that was brought to the attention of the director of public prosecutions.

However, Transparency International and others lobbied to make sure that if we were going to insert that section into the code, it did not allow the national economic interest to be taken into account.

That is not a legitimate relevant consideration in granting one of these, so there is a question as to whether the DPA could even be appropriate in these circumstances. I do not know, and that, I gather, is still before the courts in some way.

Then the Prime Minister pivoted and said that he did not direct her at all, but that there was a resignation from cabinet by the former treasury board president, and had that not happened, she would still be Minister of Justice.

Hello? It seems a little odd in the circumstances to date that the sudden resignation would trigger all of this, and then yesterday his principal secretary decided to offer his resignation.

I salute Professor Donald Savoie of the Université de Moncton, who has written so much about the centralization of power in the Prime Minister's Office. I dare say that there are a lot of questions about whether it is the so-called board of directors of Canada that decides what goes on—what we used to think was the cabinet—or if it is really the Prime Minister's Office. I do not think a company of the sophistication and size and SNC-Lavalin would have been lobbying the Prime Minister's Office that many times if it did not also perceive that it had a lot of influence on cases of this kind.

It may be that the DPA is a legitimate exercise, but it is passing strange that we no longer have this individual in the cabinet and that individual in the Prime Minister's Office.

In all of these circumstances, I have to ask again: Why would the government not join us in trying to get to the bottom of this? Indeed, when the proverbial shoe was on the other foot, I note that the Liberals in opposition were anxious to have an inquiry before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics in respect of Senator Duffy. They put forward a motion to the government of the day that that the committee be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Duffy's expenses, that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness for a period of three hours and that the proceedings be televised.

It is kind of interesting, now that the shoe is on the other foot, that this seems radical and wrong, but I want Canadians to remember it only because when Liberals were in opposition, they understood what the job of an opposition is. When our democracy may be under threat, when there is a possible breach of a constitutional convention, I expect Canadians to have parliamentarians join together and get to the bottom of it, regardless of partisan considerations.

● (1205)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his contributions at the justice committee, of which he is a very important member.

I have one comment and then one question. The comment relates to the fact that much discussion has been made today in the context of the debate thus far about where the remediation agreements come from and how the process was done.

Business of Supply

The consultations that took place on remediation agreements were one year long. They were then announced in the budget and introduced in a budget bill, and that bill was then put before both the finance committee and, interestingly, in front of the justice committee, of which my friend is a member. It was most recently on November 7 that remediation agreements were before that committee for consideration.

I want to talk about the Forcese article that the member mentioned. I have read it myself, and it is very illustrative, but since the justice committee has agreed to pursue a study not just of the Shawcross doctrine but also of remediation agreements and to hear from witnesses, is that not precisely the type of study that needs to take place? Precisely in light of the contributions he has made today with respect to the Forcese article and in explaining what the Shawcross doctrine does and does not include, is that the kind of robust study that he wants to see at the justice committee, and would Craig Forcese be a good witness to hear from in the context of that study itself?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the first question from the parliamentary secretary was about the justice committee's role. I was on the justice committee. I had the benefit of hearing two witnesses testifying about remediation agreements. I can assure members that there never was any reference to SNC-Lavalin, nothing, no context at all. In fact, it was suggested that this had been done a couple of times in the U.K. and that we were modelling ours more on the U.K. and British model and so forth.

As for Professor Forcese's attendance before the justice committee, I have agreed with the committee chair and other members I have spoken with that we ought to have at least a day of hearings to learn about the intricacies of the Shawcross doctrine. As well, I agree entirely with my friend that Professor Forcese would be an excellent witness in that regard.

However, the punchline is that the government would not allow anybody who was at the meeting to tell his or her side of the story. Nor would it agree to invite the former attorney general, the member for Vancouver Granville, to appear. I am not interested in learning about remediation agreements, already been to that class, or hearing more about Shawcross, except by way of setting the stage for what the rules are and if they have been broken. That is what the justice committee should do.

• (1210)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Victoria had excellent arguments in favour of the motion. The Duffy and SNC-Lavalin scandals both have the same starting point, which is an all-too-powerful PMO that thinks it can do what it wants when it wants.

I will give another argument in favour of this motion for members opposite who may be thinking about voting in favour of it.

The government is hiding behind this concept of solicitor-client privilege, but there is a greater privilege that supersedes that solicitor-client privilege. That privilege is the democratic right of the Canadian people as expressed on the floor of this House of Commons and its committees. That privilege is guaranteed in the Constitution. Constitutional law supersedes statutory or common law. That privilege is guaranteed in section 18 of the Constitution

Act, 1867, which guarantees the privileges of the House of the Canadian people to hear and hold the government accountable.

It is the privilege that gives this House and its committees the right to hear from the former attorney general and the Prime Minister about what happened in respect of the SNC-Lavalin affair and to ensure that the rule of law and administration of justice were upheld and that there was no obstruction of justice.

This is one of the high courts of the land and it has the right to hear from the former attorney general and the Prime Minister. The government and members opposite should not be hiding behind solicitor-client privilege because there is a greater privilege, and that is the democratic right of the Canadian people to be heard.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I want to salute the member for Wellington—Halton Hills for his passionate defence of Parliament and indeed the champion of reforms to make this an even more relevant institution.

He started by talking about the Prime Minister's Office being too powerful. As I said, many people agree with that and wonder how we arrived here. If that had not been the case, we might not be here at all.

The member's point about rule of law is the most important one. We have to get to the bottom of this. He quite properly acknowledged that when the shoe was on the other foot and Senator Duffy was at issue, the scandal in the prime minister's office then, the Liberals were only too happy to go there. I do not think they would have hidden behind solicitor-client privilege at that point.

This is a complete smokescreen. We have to get to the bottom of this. If the government has such a privilege, it can waive it, if it has not already been waived. We must let the former attorney general tell her side of the story so Canadians can see exactly what is at stake in this case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, when we were all far from Ottawa, in our respective communities and ridings, the member for Victoria decided to write a letter calling for an emergency meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I would like to ask him why he thought it was so important to convene an emergency meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Hochelaga talks about being far away in her riding. I must point out that it is not that far to Montreal from here. It is a little farther to Victoria.

However, I put forward an emergency motion precisely for the reason about which the member for Wellington—Halton Hills talked. We are an important institution, a committee that has the responsibility to get to the bottom of this should do so.

Business of Supply

We have called for a public inquiry and we know how long that will take and how many rocks it will turn over. However, what we need to do right away is get it to the committee, have the protagonists speak, learn what the rules are and then see whether those rules were transgressed on behalf of the Canadian public, and in public. That was the purpose of the emergency motion. I hope that when the committee resumes this afternoon, its members will see it in that manner.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that SNC had met with and lobbied both sides of the House. We had posed the question earlier to the leader of the official opposition with respect to the Conservatives' position on remediation agreements. I wonder if my colleague would share with the House if he or the leader of the New Democratic Party met with this organization. Also, could he give his party's position on remediation agreements?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I understand there were dozens of meetings with the Prime Minister's Office and officials and that there was a well-known meeting between the then attorney general and the principal secretary, Mr. Butts, which has been recorded as well.

I believe this massive company had lobbied a lot of people. I am told that one of my colleagues and the leader of the New Democratic Party met at the end of a meeting involving business leaders where this issue was raised, according to one report in the lobbyist registry. Indeed, we are told that the official opposition leader also met with that company.

However, my position on the remediation agreement, with all due respect, is utterly irrelevant. I have indicated in my remarks that I think there could be a purpose for them, but that is not what is at issue here. It is not the issue at all. Nice try in trying to change the channel.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to serve as a co-vice-chair of the justice committee with the hon. member for Victoria. We saw the sad spectacle last week of members of the committee doing the bidding of the PMO.

The central issue here is what was said, by whom and when to the then attorney general. It would seem to me that it would be imperative to hear from the former attorney general. If the government has nothing to hide, then let her speak.

Would the hon. member for Victoria agree that by virtue of voting against calling the former attorney general that there is only one conclusion that can be drawn, which is that the Liberal MPs on the committee are voting in favour of a cover-up.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton and I have put forward motions that would allow for certain people to come and testify and for certain records to be produced. I am not yet prepared to conclude that the committee, which he and I have the honour of being vice-chair on, will not do its job. We will find out today. I live in hope.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a nation governed by the rule of law. This basic premise is not only written into our Constitution, but it is also found in the actions of our political actors and in the structure of our executive, legislative and judiciary institutions, as well as how they relate to one another.

Upholding the Constitution requires not only respect for the supreme law of the land, as set out in the provisions of our Constitution, but also rules and practices that reflect and support constitutional values.

As a member from Quebec and someone who has worked in the legal field in several jurisdictions, including in Europe, the United States and Quebec, but mainly in Quebec, I found it very troubling to hear certain members and media outlets suggesting that Quebec does not uphold the rule of law to the same extent as other provinces. That statement is completely false and utterly shameful.

[English]

In our parliamentary system we must adhere to and respect well-established constitutional principles and conventions. Foremost among them is the principle of separation of powers, which our Supreme Court has emphasized in a principle that is fundamental to the workings of Parliament and the courts. This principle requires that each branch of government recognize the role of the other branches and respect the appropriate limits of its own role.

As Justice McLachlin, later the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, wrote in *New Brunswick Broadcasting* in 1993:

It is fundamental to the working of government as a whole that all these parts play their proper role. It is equally fundamental that no one of them overstep its bounds, that each show proper deference for the legitimate sphere of activity of the other.

In 2005, Justice Binnie observed that it was a wise principle that the courts and Parliament strive to respect each other's role in the conduct of public affairs. He went on to state:

Parliament, for its part, refrains from commenting on matters before the courts under the *sub judice* rule. The courts, for their part, are careful not to interfere with the workings of Parliament.

• (1220)

[Translation]

We have emphasized, here in the House, the need to respect parliamentary privilege. As Justice Binnie indicated, “[p]arliamentary privilege...is one of the ways in which the fundamental constitutional separation of powers is respected.”

However, we also need to remember that the separation of powers requires respect for the constitutional principle of the independence of the judiciary and that we need to refrain from interfering either directly or indirectly—and that is important to note—in the adjudicative function of the courts. That applies particularly to courts that deal with criminal and other related cases.

[English]

One way we in the House continue to protect the principles of the separation of powers and judicial independence is through respect for the *sub judice* rule. That rule is embodied in a cherished constitutional convention.

Business of Supply

Democratic government under the rule of law has been under attack lately domestically and abroad. Continuing to ensure respect for constitutional conventions is one of the ways our political culture supports a modern parliamentary democracy that is also attuned to the values Canadians cherish, including the independence of our courts and the right to a fair trial.

[Translation]

Similarly, we need to abide by the *sub judice* convention because it contributes to respect for the principles of separation of powers and independence of the judiciary, which are fundamental to any pluralistic democracy.

We need to strike a balance between the powers, roles and duties of the executive, legislative and judicial branches, and this long-standing convention is an important means of accomplishing that.

Parliamentarians should be very familiar with the *sub judice* convention. There has been enough talk about it.

In fact, it is described at length in the authoritative guide to the workings of the House of Commons, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which I hope everyone has read, as an “exercise of restraint on the part of the House in which restrictions are placed on the freedom of Members to make reference in debate to matters which are *sub judice*, that is, awaiting judicial decisions. It is also understood that matters before the courts are also prohibited as subjects of motions, petitions or questions in the House.”

This book goes on to note that this “restriction exists in order to protect an accused person or other party to a court action or judicial inquiry from any prejudicial effect of public discussion of the issue. The convention recognizes the courts, as opposed to the House, as the proper forum in which to decide individual cases.”

It is also worth noting that the convention “has been applied consistently” to “all matters relating to criminal cases”.

[English]

In our parliamentary system, speaking of a matter that is before a court of justice, particularly a court seized with a criminal matter and related proceedings, may risk prejudicing the outcome of a trial and may affect the protection of due process, including the presumption of innocence afforded to accused persons in our society.

Let me say this. Over the last few days, we have seen a rush to judgment and politicalization by certain opposition MPs. While I hasten to say that I offer no excuses for SNC-Lavalin, and indeed it is fully capable of defending itself, I find it highly troubling that some colleagues would readily condemn it for their own personal political gain.

When I meet lobbyists, which we have bandied about as almost a dirty word, it is highly informative of what goes on in Canadian society. I choose carefully who I meet. It is not a one-way discussion; it is a two-way discussion. I ask them what they can do for the citizens of Canada.

As we who have been elected to this House know, our duty in this House is to be the representatives and voices of our constituents, not just the ones who voted for us but all the constituents in our ridings. That does not mean that we can ignore what businesses say to us,

because they employ a lot of people in our ridings. In the centre of Montreal, they employ many people who are not necessarily capable of voting for someone like me, because they come in through the 14 metro stations in my riding. That does not mean that I will not stand up for those people, the employees, if there are circumstances that affect their families, whether or not they have chosen to vote for me.

My job is not to protect business but to protect the people in my riding: their charter values, their livelihoods, and first and foremost, their physical integrity and their right to have gainful jobs and to contribute to this economy. Therefore, when a company, whether large or small, comes into my riding, my principal focus is the employees and ensuring that good jobs for Canadians are maintained in my riding.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms constitutionally guarantees the right of a person charged with an offence to be presumed innocent until proven guilty, according to the law, in a fair and public hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal. I am certain that no one in this chamber would want to undermine that fundamental constitutional right by discussing a matter that is within the rightful purview and jurisdiction of the court and is before it pending a decision.

In the case at hand, it is reasonable to ask this: After a proper accounting is made of white-collar crime and the actors are punished and fines are levied, what is left? It goes back to what I said earlier. The answer, more often than not, is employees who may see their families and livelihoods jeopardized by further prosecution. In this sense, and I will stress that I have no direct evidence of what has been discussed, the Prime Minister's Office would have been remiss not to seek advice from the then attorney general, and the then attorney general would have been remiss not to give that advice.

I want to take a moment as well to pay homage to the work done by the former minister of justice in advancing key elements of our platform. Whether it was the legalization of cannabis or assisted-dying legislation, they are elements that touch upon moral values and go beyond legislation. I want to pay tribute to the work she did in that role in advancing the values of Canadian society.

She has also helped me, on personal level, deal with issues of which I know very little. In that sense, I refer to indigenous issues, which are top of mind for this government. I want to thank her for her service in that respect.

• (1225)

[Translation]

This brings us back to the reason for the rule, which is to protect not only the constitutional rights of accused persons, but also the constitutional principles of judicial independence and separation of powers.

In the House, which respects these principles as well as constitutionalism and the rule of law, we need to do everything in our power to prevent interference, or the perception of interference, in due process, the broader principles of fundamental justice and the impartiality of the courts.

Business of Supply

• (1230)

[English]

Let me discuss this concept in some detail. As I have said, by convention, members of Parliament do not comment on matters that are pending before the courts. This is known, as I said earlier, as the *sub judice* rule, which is just fancy Latin for matters under judicial consideration.

The rule is appropriately described in Beauschene's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada*: "Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals which are courts of record."

Why do I mention this? It is because, so far, despite many media reports, what we have are unsubstantiated allegations. Indeed, we have had two high-profile resignations, but we do not know the substance of those allegations. I know many people will stand in the House and say that we should get to the bottom of this. What I have said in the last few minutes as an answer speaks for itself.

If anything, the motion today is premature, absolutely premature, with very few substantiated facts. The members opposite, even some reputed legal minds, in fact legal minds I respect quite profoundly, would hasten to waive solicitor-client privilege. We could have a long discussion as to whether it has already been waived.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: It has.

Mr. Marc Miller: I thank the member for Durham for pointing that out. We worked in the same firm, but not contemporaneously. He has suggested that it already has, and again, he is substituting his mind for other legal minds. I know, despite that, that he is a humble man.

Solicitor-client privilege is a basic tenet of our democracy, of common law courts more particularly. As applied to the relationship between the Prime Minister's Office and the Attorney General, it has a number of particular legal twists. However, the fundamental tenet remains the same. It allows the client, in this case the Governor in Council or the Prime Minister's Office, whatever we call it, to get full, complete counsel on matters that are of capital importance. The corresponding role of the lawyer is to give free and unfettered advice back.

Again, as many members have pointed out, it is a privilege that can be waived by the proverbial client. Whether it should be is an entirely different consideration, because we are talking about complex matters that, as we have seen in the last week, have been highly politicized and based on what we know to be, so far, unsubstantiated reports.

Members may take different positions on this motion, and indeed different positions may be taken within our caucus and with respect to other parties in the House, but there is a level of prematurity here that we cannot deny.

I have heard a number of arguments given here today. I am studying the motion, and indeed, my colleagues are studying the motion, in depth. We need to take a deep look at where we want to go with this. These are matters before the court, and as I mentioned, I

am in no position to, nor should I necessarily have to, defend one of Canada's largest companies. It has wise counsel.

Yes, there may very well be jobs at risk, regardless of the province they lie in. I have no direct evidence that discussions occurred, but the very difficult discussions that may have occurred between the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general were most likely appropriate under the circumstances, and correspondingly, the former attorney general's advice had to be heeded. Attempting to open that process to a highly politicized inquiry through which members may very well, wittingly or unwittingly, compromise judicial positions in court, with potentially unintended consequences, is cavalier, particularly in the face of unsubstantiated evidence.

I would readily concede that we do not know enough. The issue is whether we are publicly entitled to know enough. The only things that prevent that are solicitor-client privilege, which is a basic tenet of a pluralistic democracy, and various levels of confidentiality that may or may not be asserted. This lies at the very core of what we are as a country and as a democracy, which is respect for the division of powers, respect for judicial process and respect for the right to be presumed innocent until proven otherwise in a court of law.

I respectfully submit to the House that before implicating any particular company, or importantly, any person, it is important that we exercise the requisite prudence and refrain from discussing these matters, not only to protect the parties but because the trial could be affected by debate and conjecture in the House.

[Translation]

I ask all my colleagues in the House to join me in reflecting on the importance of maintaining respect for the *sub judice* convention and the broader constitutional principles that have been developed specifically to protect criminal matters and related proceedings.

• (1235)

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations knows I hold him in high regard. In fact, I saw him on television last night in a photograph of several young men holding up the Prime Minister. One of those young men is now no longer holding up the Prime Minister, so I guess more of it falls on his shoulders. He knows how I have admired his work on indigenous issues, particularly his growing proficiency in the Mohawk language. It is very impressive, and part of reconciliation.

What I am going to ask him about is what I mildly heckled. The Prime Minister engaged several times in the media with his version of dialogue with the former attorney general, suggesting he left the decision in her hands with respect to prosecution, and suggesting that it should have been up to her to come to him about pressure from figures in his office. We have heard the Prime Minister commenting in a fair degree of detail on conversations they are now hiding behind solicitor-client privilege. When the principal client, the Prime Minister, leader of the government, engages in dialogue about those privileged discussions, in common law that waives the privilege.

Business of Supply

The parliamentary secretary opened his remarks with the fact that that might exist. I would like him to comment on that. Not only has the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege by engaging in the media with discussions about his conversations with the former attorney general, but he has also created a perverse situation where the member for Vancouver Granville loses her privilege to talk about the conversation from her point of view.

That is what concerns all members of the House. It is what concerns the member for Milton, as she said in her speech. The hon. member for Vancouver Granville deserves the ability to comment to the same degree on conversations the Prime Minister has commented on, but that several members now suggest is privileged.

My question is simple. Did the Prime Minister's comments to the media not waive solicitor-client privilege?

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, it is no secret to this House that my friendship with the Prime Minister goes back quite some time. The member opposite opened the door; it is not my position to speak about that relationship. I will simply underline that one of the reasons I dropped quite a decent job to run to represent Canada was based on four decades of experience of the honesty and integrity of the person who is the current prime minister.

I will also say this about Gerald Butts, who has just resigned. His resignation is a loss for Canadians, and it is a loss for Canada. It is something we will have to reconstruct as a government in order to move on and pursue the work of someone who is so passionate in the defence of Canadians and of progressive, non-partisan politics in our country.

As much as people may object to that and think it is the contrary, that is absolutely not the case. Gerald Butts has nothing but Canada and Canadians at heart. He has sacrificed a tremendous amount to do that, and I hope he continues to do that over the next few years.

I am not going to talk about when and where privilege gets waived. It is a highly opportunistic argument from the member for Durham. In that regard, it is up to the former attorney general to take a position. She has retained wise counsel in that regard, and no doubt she will be speaking up and speaking truthfully, as she always has in the past, when she gets the opportunity to get proper counsel on that matter.

• (1240)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary spent a lot of time talking about the solicitor-client privilege issue, which I concede and agree with him is a constitutionalized matter in our Constitution.

However, there is another constitutional convention. According to the late Marc Rosenberg of the Ontario Court of Appeal, it is the most important constitutional convention. He said, "Although the Attorney General is a cabinet minister, he or she acts independently of the cabinet in the exercise of the prosecution function."

We have these two principles at stake, and the solicitor-client privilege to which he refers would appear to have nothing to do with whether or not the former attorney general was pressured to take a certain position, solicitor-client privilege being about the advice a lawyer gives to a client. It is a bit of a stretch, therefore, to

understand whether it exists here or whether it has not been waived because of the Prime Minister's comments to the media.

In a contest between these two constitutional conventions, is the most important one not that Canadians be assured that our rule of law system exists and that there be no political interference with the exercise of prosecutorial discretion?

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I will readily concede that what is missing here are the facts. It requires the House to speculate. Thus far, that speculation has been based on unsubstantiated claims of pressure, which may be entirely licit or illicit, and that an investigation should be launched. In my mind this is entirely premature.

I worked in the corporate field in a number of jurisdictions, with both larger and smaller companies than the one at issue. Clients need to have a comfortable area in which they can talk to their lawyer openly. They will go through strategy sessions, asking, "Can we do this? Can we do that?" If a client suggests that their lawyer should do something that the lawyer cannot do, that lawyer must speak up and report up. Lawyers need to have that confidence with their client to report it up. If a client orders them to do something, their lawyer must resign and refuse to do it.

Again, I am speculating, but if I were in that position I would expect the former attorney general to do precisely what it was her job to do. I have no doubt that she did it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to continue on from my colleague's comments, right now we have the Ethics Commissioner's involvement. The Prime Minister has been most welcoming in terms of wanting to provide that insurance. We have been very open and transparent in saying that this is a fine thing to be happening. We also have a standing committee that is taking a look into the issue.

I wonder if my colleague could provide his thoughts, particularly with respect to the Ethics Commissioner, which is an independent body. Both in Canada and abroad, many of our parliamentary institutions, such as the Ethics Commissioner, have been recognized as being apolitical. It may therefore be one of the more appropriate venues to provide comfort to Canadians, as both my colleague and I believe that the Prime Minister has done absolutely nothing wrong on this file.

• (1245)

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has pointed out, there are many venues through which to get a proper ventilation of what is going on. His basic point was that we need someone independent, who is apolitical and has a judicial or quasi-judicial role, and who is able to look at the facts soberly and clearly to come to a conclusion. That will enable Canadians to get the certainty that a number of members opposite have attempted to politicize. Clearly, the Ethics Commissioner will exercise that role wisely, apolitically, and with a sober eye to the facts.

Business of Supply

This is a process that perhaps, because the facts may stay confidential, will not be ventilated in the public sphere and perhaps even used to some people's political advantage. However, we trust the Ethics Commissioner's work, which we have seen a little of. We trust that he will come to a conclusion that, in my mind, will absolve the Prime Minister of any wrongdoing.

Again, this is not my decision to take. It is properly vested in the Ethics Commissioner, as well as any other bodies that may be seized of it. I certainly welcome the investigation and look forward to seeing its results.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this new chamber for the first time, question period notwithstanding, to speak to a very important topic. I will be sharing my time with the member for Essex.

Most of the speeches we have heard on this topic, or at least those from this side of the House, have stressed how important it is for us, as parliamentarians, to be transparent with and accountable to Canadians. This is the role of all parliamentarians, regardless of their political affiliation.

The opposition motion moved today by my colleague from Victoria calls on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege for the former justice minister, who was demoted and changed files on January 14. It was surprising to see the justice minister move to veterans affairs, but it was even more surprising to see her issue a statement about this change in responsibilities. I found one sentence from this statement particularly interesting, and I will quote it. The former minister of justice and member of Parliament for Vancouver Granville said:

[English]

The role of the Attorney General of Canada carries with it unique responsibilities to uphold the rule of law and the administration of justice, and as such demands a measure of principled independence. It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence.

[Translation]

It was very surprising to read this, because a minister who is moved to another portfolio rarely writes this kind of statement. Her statement was surprising because there was no context until recently. Many MPs, experts, journalists and Canadians wondered why the former attorney general felt the need to express that sentiment. Obviously, everything that has happened since then has created context for her statement. Solicitor-client privilege prevents her from speaking about the circumstances that led to her dissatisfaction and, shortly afterward, to her resignation from cabinet.

We do not have all the details or all the information, and that is why the solicitor-client privilege must be waived. We are hearing about the rule of law. I believe that every MP here in the House recognizes that Canada is a country that respects the rule of law. In this regard, waiving solicitor-client privilege does not undermine the rule of law in any way.

In the solicitor-client privilege relationship in this case, it is up to the client to give their lawyer permission to disclose information. The Prime Minister is free to give that permission. What we are

calling for today is clarification on the troubling situations that have resulted in two weeks of confusion and chaos and yesterday's surprise resignation of the Prime Minister's principal secretary.

We deserve to hear the truth about what happened because, as I was saying, we have the *sub judice* rule. We live under the rule of law. Some journalists have pointed out that this rule of law, this way of doing things, is what distinguishes us from countries like Libya, where the rule of law is tenuous.

We need transparency and the appearance of justice. We have to ensure that there is no political interference in the judicial process. That is why we moved this motion to call on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege and allow the former attorney general to tell her side of the story. The Prime Minister and a number of government MPs have given their side, but the former attorney general has not had the opportunity to respond.

This past weekend, even the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and the Minister of Public Services and Procurement said they needed to hear the former attorney general's side. We need to hear it. We moved a motion at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to try to invite her and the Prime Minister's former principal secretary as witnesses.

● (1250)

That motion was voted down by the majority of members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which obviously has a Liberal majority. The Liberals proposed a resolution to call witnesses who do not really have anything to do with the situation and ask them to talk about the possible relationship.

We expect the same thing will happen this week when a motion is tabled in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to learn more about the suspended or deferred prosecution process. However, that is not the issue before us now. The issue before us now is whether there was political interference in the decisions that the former attorney general and minister of justice had to make.

The fact that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is currently unable to do its work fully justifies the second request set out in the opposition motion, namely to launch an independent public inquiry into what happened. It is clear that the Liberal majority on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights does not want an independent public inquiry, since it refuses to call witnesses who could shed some light on this complicated situation. If the committee is unable to find out what happened, we need to find another way to do that, and that involves an independent public inquiry.

My colleague from Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs said we need to be careful with solicitor-client privilege. That relationship is sacred and must not be jeopardized. We must also be careful with matters before the courts. The *sub judice* rule forces us to keep quiet and ensure that, as parliamentarians, we do not interfere with matters before the courts.

Business of Supply

Here is an example of how the Standing Committee on Finance used the *sub judice* rule. Members will recall that we did a study on connections between KPMG and alleged activities on the Isle of Man, activities that may have amounted to or could have been interpreted as tax fraud or as incitement to tax fraud.

We tried to investigate KPMG the same way American committees investigated KPMG. In a similar case in the United States, committees did not hesitate to use all the strength and power they had to ensure that KPMG executives went to jail in the United States.

There were no concerns regarding the *sub judice* convention. The legislature felt it had a duty to use its powers to get to the bottom of the situation. We did not do that, even though our parliamentary committees here in Canada have essentially the same powers as those in the U.S. Congress.

We refuse to give ourselves the authority to investigate because the *sub judice* convention is being interpreted too broadly and in such a way as to shut down any relevant questions if the government itself decides to use a court of law, like the Federal Court, or if KPMG decides to appeal to the Tax Court of Canada to try to make its Isle of Man scheme legal.

Quite frankly, the *sub judice* convention is being used far too broadly in the context of our Canadian Parliament and within our committees, and this is preventing us from doing our job.

That was the case at the Standing Committee on Finance. Based on what I witnessed last week at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and what I expect to see on Wednesday, the committee cannot play its full role, which is to seek the truth in situations dealing with how our country functions under the rule of law and how we apply the rule of law.

The bottom line is that we are in a situation where the government claims to have done nothing wrong, despite some considerable doubts raised by statements made by the former minister of justice. We on this side of the House have questions about some very serious allegations, and our questions deserve an answer, for the sake of transparency and respect for the rule of law.

That is why I am proud to support this motion to waive solicitor-client privilege and launch an independent public inquiry into the allegations.

•(1255)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for his comments.

I would like to ask him a question concerning his constituents and the importance of the economy in the province of Quebec and across Canada.

During today's debate, we have already discussed the economic consequences of a remediation agreement.

[English]

I have outlined that remediation agreements are actually becoming very much the norm throughout the world. They have been in place since the 1990s in the United States. They exist in France, Singapore, Japan and in the United Kingdom.

We have a remediation agreement that exists now, and that remediation agreement includes things such as specific aspects of culpability of the potential corporate offender: an admission of guilt, forfeiting of any benefit, paying a penalty, paying restitution, implementing a change of behaviour and co-operating with any further investigations.

Is that the type of mechanism that can assist in addressing corporate malfeasance but at the same time ensure that the workers in his riding and in his province, and indeed throughout this country, are not affected disproportionately by corporate malfeasance in a given case?

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I can tell him what I have heard in my riding. My constituents want to get to the bottom of this troubling business. They want the government to be transparent and accountable. They also want to make sure people pay for the crimes they commit, which is not happening right now in some cases. Given what we are seeing with tax evaders, people feel that the government is going after the small fry and ordinary taxpayers while letting the big fish get away.

What my constituents want is fairness, transparency and accountability. That would ensure that we could find out the truth about situations like the one we are discussing today.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the NDP parliamentary leader and member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

The NDP parliamentary leader's comments were very interesting and pertinent. As he said so well, in recent days we were in our ridings and we found that our constituents were increasingly pressing for answers.

In the beginning, when the story broke, people had some questions. However, since late last week, Canadians have been asking for specific, clear answers.

I would like to hear the NDP leader's thoughts on the statement made last week by the Prime Minister. First, he said that the fact that the former attorney general was still in cabinet showed that everything was fine. Then, the next day, she resigned. At that point, the Prime Minister personally attacked the credibility of the former attorney general. Then he attacked former minister Scott Brison. That came out of nowhere.

Could he comment on that?

•(1300)

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, what is troubling is not the situation itself, but all of the different versions we have been hearing since this whole thing began.

Business of Supply

In two weeks, we have heard no fewer than five versions, including the fact that if the member for Central Nova had not stepped down, the former justice minister would still be on the job. This makes no sense.

At the end of the day, if the Prime Minister did nothing wrong, if there was not any undue influence, he could have said so. I think that he could trust in the good faith of the former justice minister to confirm this, since the two versions must be fairly similar.

A meeting in which a minister of justice asks for advice from her office is warranted. Having directives and pressure from the Prime Minister or his office is what makes the difference.

If there was indeed no undue influence, if there was simply a discussion between the two parties, then the versions should be consistent. However, we will never know, if the former justice minister does not have the permission to speak. This will require waiving the solicitor-client privilege.

[English]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise as the member for Essex on our NDP motion today. I want to thank the member for Victoria for his hard work.

The motion asks members of the House to call on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege for the former attorney general with respect to allegations of interference in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin and to urge the government to launch a public inquiry into this scandal. This is important to repeat because so many people in Essex have asked me about what is really happening here. They deserve answers and the motion seeks to find them.

It has been quite a week in the wake of reports alleging the Prime Minister or senior staff in the PMO pressured the former attorney general to interfere with the decision of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada to deny SNC-Lavalin a deferred prosecution agreement for charges of corruption and fraud relating to bribes paid to officials in Gadhafi's Libya between 2001 and 2011. This saga has played out in national headlines, and the bombshells just kept coming this week as the story grew every day, becoming more bizarre and unbelievable.

Canadians now have every reason to believe the Prime Minister fired Canada's first indigenous justice minister for speaking truth to power because she would not shield alleged corporate criminals at SNC-Lavalin. This was followed by her quitting her current cabinet post and quickly seeking legal counsel. What has ensued is a story that is changing faster than my kids' when they get in trouble and are trying to get out of it.

The Liberal Party cannot keep its story straight. The Prime Minister has denied these allegations and pointed to the former justice minister's continued presence in cabinet as evidence that nothing happened, which begs the question of why she would resign and seek legal advice.

To Canadians, this is a clear case of the Liberals showing who really matters to them. It is not GM workers in Oshawa, Sears workers across our country or postal workers who were forced back to work by them. They compromised the independence of the justice

system to bail out their corporate friends from serious criminal charges of fraud and corruption.

Liberals, like Conservatives before them, used an omnibus bill, a monster legislative tool, to jam things into a single vote. This is an erosion of our democracy, and New Democrats have been consistently critical of this blunt tool. I have never heard a government member cite the deferred prosecution agreement as a piece of the omnibus legislation, nor have I ever been supportive of these being used as they are undemocratic tools. Now we find out exactly why SNC-Lavalin had 50-plus meetings with the PMO and related ministers.

Continuing on the theme that there is nothing to see here, we move on from all the good corporate goodies that were buried in the Liberal omnibus bill to the discovery that SNC-Lavalin was rewarded for its endless lobbying efforts with the creation of a piece of legislation that would let it get off any charges without going to court and getting its due. Instead, it can ask the government just to write it a parking ticket and let it walk away.

I ask Canadians watching this at home if they are not tired of watching these two parties write rules for corporations while they are forced to play by the rules and be held accountable? This is what I am hearing from my constituents. They are tired. How many Canadians do we meet with who are looking for legislation to help their families and loved ones? Lyme disease patients, seniors and people who cannot afford their housing or medication would give their eye teeth to get one meeting with the Prime Minister to let him know how broken our systems are and how much Canadians are suffering.

However, they cannot get in to see the Prime Minister. They cannot get into that office, but SNC-Lavalin, a construction firm, can get endless meetings in order to change the rules so it can break the law without any consequences. Canadians are tired of having two sets of rules: one for corporations and the rich and another for everyday people.

That is not even the worst of it, or the reason we all watched this play out this week. We need to be clear that SNC-Lavalin received its get out of jail free card from the Liberals in the omnibus budget bill, but that was not enough. It had the free card, but it was itching to use it. It wasted no time lining up to be the first to use its shiny new legislation. It submitted to have its case put under deferred prosecution, and that is where the allegations begin, allegations of pressure from the PMO on the former attorney general and her team to accept its submission.

Business of Supply

• (1305)

This is where it starts to get shady, in case Canadians did not think it was already shady. I will repeat that the AG alleges that she felt pressured to accept the deferred prosecution agreement and let SNC-Lavalin avoid a criminal trial, and she did not want to. This is the root of why we are here today, why we need the truth and why we need to hear from the former justice minister.

There has been a lot of worry about what this investigation would mean for workers at SNC-Lavalin in Canada. I share that worry, how it might hurt them and their communities. In all of this sordid affair, it is once again working people who are stuck between a corrupt company that wants to skirt the rules and the worry over their jobs to keep their families thriving. This is unfair.

The story keeps changing day after day, at times blaming the previous justice minister after her resignation, implying that it could be because she did not speak French, or maybe because Mr. Brison resigned, all the while witnessing an ugly whisper campaign that is being waged on her personally. We saw this play out on social media. I hope this campaign did not come from people who were sitting with her on that side of the House. I hope they were not spreading this misinformation about her to discredit her from speaking up, as she should, on behalf of all Canadians.

Then we find ourselves at the justice committee, where the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley represented the New Democrats well. He brought reasonable amendments to the government motion to invite the former justice minister, Gerry Butts and Mathieu Bouchard to appear before them as witnesses. Those amendments were struck down by the Liberal members on the committee.

Those Liberal committee members are stonewalling, making a parliamentary committee unworkable. I echo the member for Victoria, as he heads into that committee today as vice-chair for our party. He is hopeful that today the committee will revisit this, that there will be a conversation about bringing folks who were involved in this directly to that committee. I do hope that happens. These individuals hold the truth. Unfortunately the Liberal committee members voted against these witnesses, trying to deflect onto the piece of legislation they changed and its validity. Instead they should be focusing on what was said by whom and when to the former attorney general.

Canadians expect their government to work for them, and that is what New Democrats are committed to doing. That is why we are calling for an independent public inquiry into the Prime Minister's SNC-Lavalin scandal to provide answers. We are also calling on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege for the former attorney general and let her speak her truth to power publicly.

The NDP has also called on the Ethics Commissioner to investigate, which we are thankful has been accepted. This will not be the first time the Ethics Commissioner investigates the Prime Minister; it is the fifth time. Even when he was found in breach of ethics, twice, there were limited tools the Ethics Commissioner had to hold the Prime Minister and the government to account. The government members who are getting up today, saying that it is good enough that the Ethics Commissioner is investigating, know this very well. They know there will be no consequences if it is indeed

found that there is a breach of ethics. It is a long process. We need this to be cleared now.

If Liberals truly have nothing to hide, then this will be an easy vote. Supporting our motion today will signal to Canadians that Liberals will stand with New Democrats and the opposition members in wanting the truth to come to the light of day. The Liberals keep telling us how important an independent justice system is, but it all goes out the window when it is their friends in trouble.

The Attorney General cannot be pressured by the Prime Minister. This allegation is an erosion of trust in a pillar of Canadian democracy. The need for a public inquiry is clear. Canadians deserve a government they can trust. The Liberals have an opportunity here to end the speculation that is playing out in our headlines and support the truth being set free.

• (1310)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one comment and one question for my friend opposite, the member for Essex.

She talked about the transparency of the process, lamenting the fact that there was not enough transparency from her perspective. What I would put out there are five points for the purpose of this debate.

There was a one-year consultation process on remediation agreements. The remediation agreements were flagged in the budget. They were implemented in the budget implementation bill. That bill was then studied in three parliamentary committees, justice and finance in the House of Commons, and in the Senate. Then the matter was gazetted.

With respect to my friend opposite, I know she is concerned about trade and I know she is also concerned about fairness for workers. I would put this to her. Five members of the G7 with whom we trade have implemented remediation agreements. We have a mechanism to give prosecutors additional tools to use on how they proceed so they can hold corporate leaders responsible, including admissions of guilt, fines, penalties and forfeiture and not directly impact the livelihoods of the workers who the member and her party advocate for in the chamber. Is that a useful tool, one for harmonizing our relationship with our other trading partners and for ensuring the livelihoods of the workers in the province of Quebec and throughout Canada are not disproportionately impacted?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to have that conversation on another day. Today, the motion before us is about whether the Prime Minister will waive the privilege and whether there will be an independent inquiry. That is why we are today. We are not here to debate the merits of this piece that was brought in. Although, I did raise it in my speech because, once again, it was being shoved down into legislation where Canadians could not see it and it did not see the light of day for average Canadians.

Business of Supply

If we head to Tim Hortons in Puce right now and we talk about these deferred abilities for corporations, those Canadians would have no idea about what was going on in legislation that was being rammed through by the government. However, one question they will all be asking in Tim Hortons in Puce today is this. When will the government have an independent inquiry into these allegations?

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is striking that the Liberals today only want to talk about remediation agreements, when they did not want to talk about that at all in the past. They want to talk about it today only because they feel it is less politically damaging than the actual substance of the motion, which we need to be discussing.

I wonder if the member could emphasize again the importance of allowing the former attorney general to share her perspective on this policy issue and, more fundamental, what happened, what was said to whom and when about the possibility of SNC-Lavalin getting a special deal. I wonder if the member has comments on the fact that the government does not want to address that issue today and how important it is from the perspective of the public interest for us to hear what the former attorney general has to say and for the public to come to its own conclusions about this.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Today, we have from the Liberals discussions about remediation or discussions that are quite legal in nature, breaking down the attorney-client privilege. Neither of these things answer the fundamental question of why we cannot have an independent inquiry. That is the root of why we are here today. Therefore, I agree with the member that this is the most important piece.

The one person who can shed light on all of this is the former attorney general and justice minister. When she is given that ability to do so, the truth will come out. However, we have seen not only her stunning resignation, but the stunning resignation of the principal secretary, who is a long-time friend and strategist to the Liberal Party. Again, for people in my riding of Essex, where there is smoke there is fire. People do not resign from positions in political life, which has been their entire career, because there is nothing happening.

There is a simple solution. It is time to bring this to the light of day and for the Liberals to vote for our motion, along with the opposition, and let us get down to the bottom of what has really happened.

• (1315)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time this afternoon with the member for Surrey Centre.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I was disappointed to see the former member for Vancouver Granville resign from cabinet. I was fortunate to have many conversations with her when she was the minister of justice about a variety of issues. I always appreciated her passion.

Yesterday, a man who was committed to the country and worked tirelessly to make Canada a better place for all its citizens resigned. Gerald Butts always had all the time in the world to listen to me when I had suggestions, comments or concerns. I will miss him in the Prime Minister's Office.

The truth is out there and no one seems to want to listen. The Prime Minister has already made it clear there was no wrongdoing. I am not going to repeat his statement today. What I will say, though, is that there was a time when people were taken at their word, and I take the Prime Minister at his word that neither he nor anyone in his office pressured or directed the former attorney general in this matter.

The opposition talks about this being a non-partisan issue, yet refuses to allow the processes already in place to take their course. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has launched an independent investigation into this matter. I, along with our government, welcome the opportunity to clear the air and for the commissioner to provide an independent assessment. As well, the justice committee is seized with this matter.

I would like to speak about something that has been troubling me for some time, about how politics has become so hyper-partisan. Civility and respect seem to be cast aside in the interest of seeing who can score the most political points. People have retreated into their corners and shout into the middle, not listening to each but rather screaming to see who can be the loudest. We type rather than talk. Our world is moving at lightning speed, social media amplifies negative messages and it has become a race to see who can be first rather than who can be the best. When I speak to people in Oakville North—Burlington and across the country, they want it to stop. They are becoming cynical about politics.

The member who sits opposite from me in the House, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, without fail, speaks with wisdom and civility and is able to set aside partisanship in order to thoughtfully and respectfully debate issues. We may not always agree on policy, but I would never turn down the opportunity to work with her.

I am blessed to do what I do, to represent the fine people who live in my riding and to take part in debates in this place.

Before he passed, my friend Arnold Chan gave a powerful speech in the House. He said:

It is the basic common civility we share with each other that is fundamental. It is thanking our Tim Hortons server. It is giving way to someone on the road. It is saying thanks. It is the small things we collectively do, from my perspective, that make a great society, and to me, that is ultimately what it means to be a Canadian. We are so privileged to live in this country, because we have these small acts of common decency and civility that make us what we are. I would ask members to carry on that tradition, because that is the foundation of what makes Canada great.

When we think about it, is that not what makes us proud to be Canadian? Arnold expressed these concerns in 2017, but I fear it has only become worse since then.

The residents in my riding are working hard to pay their bills, look after their family, make their community better and find some time to enjoy life. Our government is working hard to ensure that people do just that, to help them get ahead, see a brighter future for their children and ensure their parents can enjoy their golden years.

Business of Supply

The Canada child benefit is a great example of this. When I speak to those who are receiving it, they tell me it has made their lives easier. In my riding, families have received \$70 million in Canada child benefits since 2018. In the Halton region, that number is over \$245 million. That money is not only helping families, it is boosting our local economy and businesses. Kristen, a single mom with a beautiful daughter, has told me what a difference this payment makes in her life.

Scotiabank just released a report that showed our government's Canada child benefit was providing \$3,350 more to a family with a net income of \$35,000 and \$1,848 less to a family with a net income of \$250,000, compared to the previous Conservative government's program. Our government is lifting children out of poverty and focusing on those who need it the most.

We have lowered taxes for the middle class. It was the first thing we did. The average family of four is \$2,000 further ahead today than it was in 2015.

We invested in public transit, both local transit and GO trains, so Oakville and Burlington residents could get home faster and enjoy time with family, friends or attend their child's lacrosse game or music recital.

● (1320)

I know that Oakville North—Burlington residents are passionate about the environment. They treasure our green space and are outspoken advocates for taking action on climate change. In fact, they demand action on this issue. Our climate plan would put a price on pollution and put eight out of 10 families further ahead in 2019.

I meet with small business owners who thank me for the changes we have made to the small business tax rate, lowering it from 11% to 9%. I visited businesses like EarthFresh Farms and UPC, which are thriving because of our focus on innovation and clean technology.

There is no doubt in my mind that we have changed the conversation around gender equity since taking office, in my riding, across Canada and around the world. I am always deeply touched when a young girl tells me she appreciates what I am doing in Ottawa and that I am not what she expected in a politician.

I am inspired when I visit employers who are mentoring young women during the young women in leadership program I developed in my riding. I look at some of the incredible programs that are being developed in Halton like Camp Molly, which is being organized by Deputy Fire Chief Monique Belair of the Oakville Fire Department to encourage young women to look at firefighting as a career choice.

The first year I ran young women in leadership there was not one young woman who chose firefighting as her career. The second year we changed a few things and were able to send three young ladies there. In May, at Camp Molly, there will be dozens of young women from across Halton who will experience the variety of career options within the fire service, showing them that fire services is not just about putting wet on hot. I hope that my staff and I have played a small part in broadening horizons for young women and opening their eyes to the endless possibilities before them.

Our historic investment in the national housing strategy with \$40 billion over 10 years ensures that groups like Habitat for Humanity—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Hochelaga is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, could you ask the member whether she plans to get back to the motion at hand, or whether she plans to continue ranting about all sorts of other topics?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Normally, the question would not be directed at the Chair, but since it is on a point of order, I think it has to do with the relevance of what the member is saying.

[*English*]

The question was on relevance on the speech that is being given. I will leave it to the hon. member to come back to what we are debating today.

The hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I would argue that I am talking about the motion today because I am talking about what is important to the residents in my riding and what I am hearing in the Tim Hortons in Oakville North—Burlington. They are talking about things like the Canada summer jobs program where our government doubled the funding for this program, which provides students with valuable job skills. I speak to students who say they never thought they would get a job in their field, but they did because of this program, or employers who say that they would never have been able to expand their programming without Canada summer jobs.

We have invested in child care and new parental leave policies to make it easier for young families. Our government plans to invest \$7.5 billion over 11 years to support and create more high-quality affordable child care spaces. Our programs are working. Unemployment is at a 40-year low and more people are finding work than ever before, with real wages rising at the fastest pace in nearly a decade. Canada has the fastest growth rate of all countries in the G7.

These are the issues that matter to Canadians. These are the issues that are important to my constituents in Oakville North—Burlington. I am proud of our record as a government and look forward to continuing to do the hard work to ensure that all Canadians can succeed.

● (1325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I go to questions and comments, I want to remind hon. members that if there is a point of order, the member stands and is recognized. The point of order is taken, and the point is not shouting what they think should be happening across and hoping that they remain anonymous.

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Questions and comments, the hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am not so sure that is what people have been talking about at Tim Hortons since the weekend, but that is another issue.

Throughout her speech, the member for Oakville North—Burlington talked about partisanship. Can she think of anything more partisan than a group of Liberal MPs with a committee majority deciding not to call witnesses whose testimony is germane to the matter we are discussing today? Does that not strike her as kind of partisan?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I believe the committee was going through the witness list this morning. I am not on that committee, so I cannot say for sure.

Committee selection is done in camera. It is always done that way in all committees. I will trust the committee, which does act independently. I know the chair of the committee and how passionate he is about ensuring that the committee behaves in an independent manner. I trust that it will do the work that it has been seized with.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought it was interesting that instead of talking about the issue at hand, which is a motion that the nation is seized with, that being corruption at the highest levels of the Prime Minister's Office and the government, the member opposite decided to talk about how we need to get partisanship out of politics and how great a job her government is doing compared with the previous government.

While I would like to take this time to talk about the phenomenal job that the Conservative government did under Stephen Harper, I will instead ask a very straightforward question of my colleague across the way.

An hon. member: Let's hear a little more about that.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I would absolutely love to, but what people are talking about in the Tim Hortons in my riding and across this country is the corruption, the corruption that led to the resignation of the Prime Minister's principal secretary and that led to the firing of the now former attorney general.

The justice committee had asked to hear from Gerald Butts and the fired attorney general. Does the member opposite think that this afternoon we should ask the Liberal-dominated committee to hear from those two key players in this Liberal scandal?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I first want to clarify the record, Mr. Speaker. The member for Vancouver Granville actually resigned. She was not fired.

I will also leave it up to the members of the justice committee to determine what witnesses they feel are best to appear before the committee. Quite honestly, there are unsubstantiated anonymous allegations that have been made at this point. I am going to leave it at that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her very kind words about my

role in this place. I do try to be non-partisan and it is never anything but entirely productive. For me, it is a real privilege to work with the hon. member across the way. We have done some good things in committee on a number of amendments related to justice.

My question is from the bottom of my heart. I am not rushing to judgment, I just want the former attorney general, former minister of justice, to be relieved from solicitor-client privilege so that she can directly answer the questions. It would clear the air. Goodness knows there are critical issues that this Parliament should be discussing.

I know this issue is loaded with hyper-partisanship and I understand why some of the Liberal benches find it too much, but honestly, from where I sit, being as fair as I can be, the Prime Minister should relieve the former minister of justice and former attorney general of the constraints of solicitor-client privilege so that she can freely answer questions and clear this up.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I am going to be honest. Solicitor-client privilege is a complicated issue. I am not a lawyer and I do not feel qualified to answer that question. I will leave that to the lawyers, and I know there are many, who can give a better response than I can.

● (1330)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the greatest admiration for my colleague the MP for Vancouver Granville, who is an instrumental member of the Pacific caucus and who has been and continues to be a strong advocate for her riding.

I also have the utmost appreciation for former principal secretary Gerald Butts, who has always served this country with integrity and advocated for positive politics. I hope he will continue, and I expect him to continue, to serve Canadians in whatever endeavour he takes on.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to some of the matters raised by the member opposite's motion. There are already two processes under way that are investigating the allegations raised by the motion. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights will be holding hearings on this issue and the Ethics Commissioner will be conducting an investigation. I am confident that these two processes will be completed in a fair and thorough manner and will provide Canadians with the answers and the information they seek.

There is every reason to believe at this time that these two groups, one composed of Canadians' elected representatives from both other parties and one representing a non-partisan perspective, are up to the task of considering the questions that Canadians are asking. That said, it would be helpful to discuss the roles, responsibilities and powers of each of these two processes.

Let me speak about the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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With the exception of standing joint committees and certain standing committees, the Standing Orders set out a general mandate for all standing committees. They are empowered to study and report to the House on all matters relating to the mandate, management, organization and operation of the departments assigned to them by the House. More specifically, they can review and report on: the statute law relating to the departments assigned to them; the program and policy objectives of those departments and the effectiveness of their implementation; the immediate medium and long-term expenditure plans of those departments and the effectiveness of the implementation thereof; and an analysis of the relative success of those departments in meeting their objectives.

In addition to this general mandate, other matters are routinely referred by the House to its standing committees, such as bills, estimates, order in council appointments, documents tabled in the House pursuant to statute, and specific matters that the House wishes to have studied. In each case the House chooses the most appropriate committee on the basis of its mandate.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has the power to review and report on the policies, programs and expenditure plans of the Department of Justice, which has the mandate to support the dual roles of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada, the chief law officer of the Crown.

The committee also has the power to study the policies, programs and legislation of the following entities: the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada, the Courts Administration Service, Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

In particular, the committee may review proposed amendments to federal legislation relating to certain aspects of the Criminal Code, family law, human rights law and the administration of justice, notably with respect to the following statutes: the Criminal Code, Youth Criminal Justice Act, Divorce Act, Civil Marriage Act, Canadian Human Rights Act, Judges Act, Courts Administration Service Act, and the Supreme Court Act.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights may also undertake studies on subjects related to its mandate, either as referred to it by the House of Commons or on its own initiative. For example, it recently conducted a study on juror mental health and prior to that it conducted a study on human trafficking in Canada.

In the course of a study, the committee holds public meetings, considers evidence from witnesses and reviews written submissions and other authoritative documents. In the case of its human trafficking study, the committee also travelled across Canada to hold private sessions with witnesses who were uncomfortable testifying in a public forum. This enabled it to hear from witnesses that it otherwise might not have been able to hear from but whose testimony was crucial to the study.

At the conclusion of a study, the committee usually reports its findings and makes recommendations. The committee may request a government response within 120 days.

As to the Ethics Commissioner, under the Conflict of Interest Act, a member of the Senate or House of Commons who has reasonable grounds to believe that a public office holder, which includes the Prime Minister, has contravened the act may, in writing, request that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner examine the matter.

● (1335)

In conducting this investigation, the commissioner has the power to summon witnesses and require them to give evidence orally and/or in writing, under oath or affirmation and produce any documents and things that the commissioner considers necessary. For the purpose of enforcing these powers, the commissioner has the same powers as a court of record in civil cases.

The subject of the complaint also has an opportunity to make submissions to the commissioner. The commissioner's investigation is required to be conducted in private. The commissioner is required to provide the Prime Minister with a report setting out the facts in question as well as the commissioner's analysis and conclusion in relation to the request made by a parliamentarian. The report is to be provided to the person who made the request, to the public office holder who is the subject of the request and to the public. The commissioner may not include in the report any information that he or she is required to keep confidential, unless the information is essential for the purposes of establishing the grounds for any conclusion in a report.

As I have explained, these two processes are already under way. Both will investigate the allegations raised by the motion moved by the member opposite, and I am confident that these two processes will be thoroughly and fairly conducted and will provide Canadians with the answers and information they seek. There is every reason to believe that these two groups are up to the task of considering the questions that are being asked.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a fascinating explanation of how committees work for people back home who may want to talk about what they are learning in high school.

It is amazing that through all that explanation of all the little things about committees and what doors they can go in and out of, the member overlooked the two key elements here.

One is that the Ethics Commissioner does not have the power to look into the allegation that the Prime Minister's Office and Gerald Butts, his right-hand man, attempted to strong-arm the Attorney General into deep-sixing a legal case. He does not have that authority.

As for the amazing reports of the justice committee and how it puts its reports together and how people sit around the table, the member did not mention the fact that it was the Liberals on the justice committee who made sure that any key persons who know whether crimes were committed in the Prime Minister's Office were not allowed to be brought forward as witnesses, so it does not have credibility.

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Therefore, I am asking my hon. colleague to stop hiding. His Prime Minister is bleeding credibility. Why are the Liberals afraid of an independent inquiry by an independent judicial person who could get to the bottom of whether the Prime Minister of this country directed the Attorney General to interfere with one of the biggest corruption cases in Canadian history? It is a simple question.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Speaker, Canadians have confidence and the government has confidence in the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has the duty, has the role, has the powers and has the responsibility to investigate these questions. As to the committee, the Privy Council chief, Mr. Wernick, is also part of that investigation and is an independent bureaucrat who is not a political operative.

Therefore, all the appropriate bodies and people who are involved have been and will be investigated in this matter. We have full trust and confidence in the Ethics Commissioner to come out with an investigation and a report that will be satisfactory to Canadians and to the constituents in my riding.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see that the Liberals want to avoid discussing the particulars of the issue at all costs. However, I know the member for Surrey Centre and I know that in the past he has been able to find his voice to criticize decisions of the cabinet that he disagrees with. I know he came out before Christmas and criticized the actions of the public safety minister in terms of a report and the language he used in that report. We have seen this member have the willingness to criticize the actions of the front bench, and I applaud him for his willingness to do that. Therefore, I wonder if in this case he will find his voice to do the same and recognize that, yes, all of us want to see the work being done by the various bodies that are doing investigations, including the Ethics Commission.

However, to allow that work to take place properly, the former attorney general has to be able to speak. She has to be able to tell her side of the story. The government must waive solicitor-client privilege and allow those investigations to be informed by what the former attorney general has to say.

The member for Surrey Centre has found his voice before. Will he find it again to recognize the problems with what the government is doing, and call for the former attorney general to be able to speak on this matter?

• (1340)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Speaker, I have always ensured that my voice is heard and I have never been afraid to use my voice in the House or elsewhere.

Solicitor-client privilege is very treasured in our judicial system, and it is the responsibility of the Attorney General of this country to defend the interests of this country.

These matters are still before the courts and prosecution decisions still need to be made. With regard to giving away privileged information, I have never seen anyone in any court decision ever give away strategies or discussions to the opposing side prior to prosecution. It does not work that way, as I think the member opposite knows.

As to trust, we have two investigations. If we do not have trust in the highest ethics commissioner in this country and trust in our judicial committees, then in whom do we have trust? Only after those investigations conclude will we see whether this solicitor-client privilege should be waived. If the conclusion is that there will need to be a further investigation, that would occur after the two reports have been tabled.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend, the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

It is very revealing for me to listen to the Liberals here today. One after another, they want to tell us all about the inner and intricate workings of any committee in the House of Commons and want to debate *sub judice* rules and all sorts of protocols and doctrines rather than speak to the heart of what New Democrats have brought forward as a motion here today.

I thought my Liberal colleagues would have taken the motion seriously, because it deals with our very trust and confidence in government itself, never mind the day-to-day eroding of trust and faith in this particular government and its own credibility. Instead, Liberals have spent the entire day avoiding the elephant in the room, the very central questions that Canadians are asking about what exactly is going on in the Prime Minister's own office with this scandal. They refuse to believe that Canadians are somehow not going to be satisfied with the constantly evolving stories coming out of the Prime Minister's own mouth and the fact that every time they say there is nothing to see, another shoe drops, giving even more compelling reason for Canadians to suspect the allegations they first read about just over a week ago are of merit and may in fact be entirely true.

Let us walk ourselves back to exactly how we got here today, when New Democrats are moving a motion calling on the Prime Minister to waive his solicitor-client privilege, which has effectively silenced the former attorney general of Canada but has not silenced the Prime Minister. He has gone on day after day, talking about all their private conversations. He actually ends up contradicting his own version of events day after day. Meanwhile, his former attorney general cannot speak at all because the Prime Minister refuses to waive this privilege, maintaining that she is unable to speak without breaking that privilege.

We also asked for a public inquiry. Canadians, a surprising number of them, watched last week's emergency justice committee hearing as we sought to have the most fundamental elements of this story discussed and debated at committee and to call the most relevant witnesses. They watched a two-and-a-half-hour spectacle, as Liberals, claiming independence and innocence, stonewalled and refused every attempt to actually hear from people who were involved. They wanted to hear from witnesses who had no idea what actually went on between the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general. They only wanted to hear from those people, the current Attorney General and others, who had no clue what happened. However, when we asked for people such as Mr. Gerald Butts and the former attorney general and on down the list, the Liberals refused.

Business of Supply

We asked them to also encourage the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege so the former attorney general could speak. The Liberals refused. At one point I said it would be really good for Canadians to hear from the former attorney general. One of the Liberal committee members said she agreed. I asked then why she had just voted against it; she said she had not, when 10 minutes before that, she had voted against that exact proposition.

I am not sure what world they are occupying, but it is a troubling one, because at the heart of this matter is the confidence Canadians must maintain, regardless of their political persuasion, in this institution and the ability of government to work on their behalf, not just on behalf of the wealthy and the well connected.

Dozens of times this very well-connected company met with the Prime Minister's Office, met with Gerald Butts, met with the Prime Minister's principal secretary in Quebec, pleading, asking, demanding for the law to be changed to allow a company that is convicted of fraud and bribery charges, as SNC-Lavalin has been, to continue to bid on federal government contracts.

The Liberals in fact buried that change in the law in a 550-page omnibus bill. Even Liberals on the finance committee said it was inappropriate. Even the chair of the finance committee said it was the wrong place to discuss it, and it was never discussed. The concerns we raised were dismissed, and the Liberals, one after another, voted for that change to allow companies to plead out—to admit guilt, take a fine, pay back the bribery charges, and then continue to bid on those lucrative contracts.

There are two sets of rules here. One is for average, ordinary Canadians who face obstruction of justice or bribery charges and face the full weight of the law. Another set of rules is for well-connected folks who can lobby the Prime Minister's chief adviser, lobby the chief architects and strategists of the government and lobby the Prime Minister himself in order to get the changes made.

• (1345)

After succeeding in getting those changes, the government needed one final step. It needed the public prosecution office to actually allow this company to plea out.

Listen to the Liberals as they talk about this, about jobs and how they need this plea deal for this company to protect jobs. Written into the law itself is that one cannot argue economic missed opportunities to get a plea deal. One cannot say that because there may be job losses, a company should be allowed to avoid the full weight and punishment of the law. One cannot apply a plea deal. Properly, the public prosecution office has refused to do that.

The allegations that appeared told us that. Someone from the Prime Minister's Office was applying pressure to the former attorney general of Canada to push for this plea. When she resisted, she may have been fired. It was inexplicable why eight months before an election, and just six months after a cabinet shuffle, the Prime Minister needed to shuffle her out of justice and out of serving as the attorney general. She was the first female indigenous attorney general and justice minister in Canadian history.

We all watched the swearing-in ceremony. The former attorney general was clearly not pleased. She was clearly upset with what the Prime Minister did.

When the Prime Minister eventually saw her leave his cabinet, did anyone notice that he did not have anything nice to say about her? Did anyone notice that in his public utterances, it took him more than a week to deny the sexist and racist smear campaign against her that was coming out of the Prime Minister's own office? It took him seven days to say how terrible the comments were that she was prickly and difficult to work with. As one Liberal member said anonymously, if she thought that being a woman and being indigenous protected her somehow, she was wrong. Think about that. A Liberal MP went, on background, to a national newspaper to say that she must have thought that because she was indigenous and a woman, it somehow protected her.

The Prime Minister, a so-called feminist, has said that there is no relationship more important to him than the one with indigenous peoples. It took him a week to publicly denounce those comments, comments that may have come out of his own office. One wonders what exactly is going on.

At the very heart of this is the independence of our courts to apply the law equally to all Canadians. We have a Liberal Party that stated that it was going to be different. The Liberals were going to be open by default. They were going to be transparent. However, when we sought that openness and transparency, what did the Liberals do? They voted against all our efforts and then said that the committee should go in camera, behind closed doors, to discuss sensitive things. They want to talk about these witnesses, but they do not want to talk about those witnesses. It is incoherent.

The good thing about telling the truth, I would offer the Prime Minister, is that it is easy to repeat, because it does not change. I noticed that with the Prime Minister, day by day the story was different: the allegations were entirely false; the evidence that nothing untoward happened was that his former attorney general was still in cabinet. The next day, where was she? She was out of cabinet, having resigned.

The Liberals know how bad this is. If they do not, shame on them. They stand up, one after another, and say that the Prime Minister does not need to waive solicitor-client privilege, that we do not need to hear from the former attorney general at the justice committee and that the Prime Minister's word is good enough for them. The Prime Minister's word has not been consistent at all in this scandal.

I will remind my Liberal colleagues, because many of them were not here, that back in 2013, there was an opposition day motion the Liberals moved in Parliament:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that the Prime Minister be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

Business of Supply

That is what the Liberals thought in opposition when the whole Nigel Wright-Mike Duffy payoff was going on. They thought that a good person to hear from was the Prime Minister himself. Now they flip over to being in government and they say, "Oh my, the Prime Minister told us several versions. We believe them all. We are Liberals. We are somewhat morally flexible when it comes to the truth."

The Prime Minister said something on Monday that was different on Tuesday and changed again on Wednesday, but it all sounds right to the Liberals. Canadians are left wondering who these guys are. They are three years into governing and cannot find the truth with both hands.

The Liberals are looking around and wondering why no one believes them when the head of the Liberal Party, the Prime Minister of Canada, has implicated himself in a scandal that goes right to the heart of our faith and belief not only that government but that our courts are independent and that all Canadians, regardless of their stature or connections, will experience a fair hearing and trial.

● (1350)

We see two sets of rules in place, one for well-connected and wealthy people and another for everyone else. Canadians deserve the answers. Canadians will eventually get the answers. It is only a question of when and how.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a rush to judgment. The NDP will never be found lacking in the way its members can ramp up political arguments to try to justify whatever it is they want to achieve.

We on the government benches, and I would hope most members of Parliament, would appreciate the independence of the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner is, in fact, involved in this and is looking at it. The Prime Minister himself has welcomed the involvement of the Ethics Commissioner. I believe what is being said. I believe that this government will continue to remain focused on what is important to Canada's middle class, which is developing our economy and building good, solid policy into the future.

The member opposite wants to exaggerate an issue, which is no doubt of a serious nature, and that is why the Ethics Commissioner is looking into it. Does the NDP have any confidence in the independence of the Ethics Commissioner? Surely to goodness he would recognize that it is an independent office that does not have the political partisanship we have witnessed here today.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, for a bunch of innocent people, they sure have a way of acting guilty.

The Ethics Commissioner's investigation, as my friend, I hope, understands, does not deal with political interference. The centre of this story is about political interference.

We have total faith in the Ethics Commissioner. That is why my colleague from Timmins—James Bay and I wrote to him and asked him to investigate. Do members know what the Liberals said? They said, "There go the NDP looking for something where nothing exists." Do members know who agreed that something exists? It was the Ethics Commissioner, who will investigate under section 9.

My friend knows full well that the allegations against the Prime Minister and his office are about political interference and the potential for obstruction of justice, neither of which the Ethics Commissioner can investigate. He knows that, but he is going to keep saying this. I love when I hear my Liberal friends say that they believe the version of the Prime Minister. This is my only question to them. Which version do they believe, or is it all of them?

● (1355)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley talked at length about what happened at committee this past week, and I have to agree with him. What happened was unbelievable. Members of the House were saying that a committee of the House of Commons was not the right place to adjudicate this, that the House of Commons was not the right place to deal with this. This is the place. The House and its committees are the places where this thing should be adjudicated.

In fact, committees have all the powers of a court. They have the power to compel evidence. They have the power to summon witnesses. In fact, I remember sitting on the opposite side when a committee of the House took Karlheinz Schreiber out of an Ontario jail, in handcuffs, to bring him up here to testify in front of a committee. Why? It was because the committee felt that the matters at hand were important enough that someone should be brought in front of the committee to explain what had happened in that affair. The same thing goes for this matter, which I would argue is much graver than that matter back in 2007, because the matter in front of us today is about the current Prime Minister in office and a former attorney general. It concerns the administration of justice and the rule of law in this country. Therefore, a committee of the House and the floor of the House are the right places to adjudicate.

I hope members on both sides vote in favour of the motion in front of us to ensure that we protect this institution and pass on to our children and grandchildren institutions that are capable of putting checks and balances on the Prime Minister's power and that ensure that the rule of law and our constitutional order are upheld.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for his question, comment and memory of what committees have the power to do, because governments have extraordinary power themselves. The entire existence of this place is to hold that power in check and be a counterbalance to that power.

I would remind my Liberal colleagues, those not sitting in cabinet, that they are not part of the government. Their job also is to hold government accountable. I have watched my Liberal colleagues on the justice committee put the blinkers on over and over and say that they see nothing untoward here. One Liberal member actually said that committees are not the place for investigations. What planet are they occupying? How can it possibly be true in their world and their view that this power should go unchecked in all regards and that whatever the Prime Minister says is the law without question?

We are here to question. We will keep questioning until we get the answers Canadians deserve.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

[Translation]

HAITIANS WITHOUT STATUS

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has at last halted deportations of Haitian citizens and refugees because of the violent crisis that has been raging for months in Haiti. That does not make up for the many years during which it treated Haitians without status as numbers.

The Bloc has been calling on the government to regularize their status for the past five years. Three months ago, as the crisis was escalating, we asked the government to suspend deportations. It refused. For the past three months, Ottawa has been deporting families to a country rocked by violence. On Thursday, a father and his 11-year-old daughter were arrested and deported in the midst of a full-blown crisis.

The government has finally woken up, but the Haitian community is wondering when deportations will resume. The least the government can do is issue a moratorium for as long as the situation in Haiti remains unsafe.

* * *

[English]

MATILDA MURDOCH

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Miramichi lost a great legend this month, when Matilda Murdoch passed away just days after celebrating her 99th birthday.

Matilda was a renowned fiddle player and composer. After teaching herself how to play the fiddle as a child, she composed hundreds of pieces of music and spread her musical influence throughout the world.

Her outstanding playing earned her a number of awards and honours. She was inducted into the New Brunswick Country Music Hall of Fame, awarded the Order of Canada, the Order of New Brunswick and received the East Coast Music Awards' Stompin' Tom Connors Award for her lifetime achievement in music. She appeared on the popular *Don Messer's Jubilee* and had several songs recorded by Messer himself.

The sweetheart of Loggieville was a world-renowned fiddler, but Miramichi was her home. Her music was inspired by life on the river and she shared her gift by helping to found the Miramichi Fiddlers Association.

Her music and wonderful spirit will truly be missed, but will live on forever. I am sure she is doing the Loggieville two-step right now in Heaven.

* * *

●(1400)

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest joys of my life is being a father and a grandfather. My wife and I raised our children to be honest, work hard, contribute to society and have a positive influence in the

community. However, it profoundly troubles me to see the effects of the current Liberal government.

The Liberal Prime Minister is raising taxes and making life more expensive for all Canadians. Two of my sons and their spouses are residents of the riding of Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas. They, as well as all Hamilton residents, are feeling the negative effects of the Liberal government. My children are now raising children of their own and it is becoming harder and harder to do this under those Liberals.

The question on whether my family can afford things is something that concerns me and consumes their everyday life. If my granddaughter Nola wants to play soccer, my son and his wife now have to evaluate whether they can afford it because these Liberals are taking away benefits from my family and taxing them higher.

When will the Liberal government realize it is not helping Canadians? When will it stop penalizing working families trying to create a future for themselves and their families?

* * *

SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have wonderful news to share with the House today. Sara Jane Daigle, who is a long-time resident of the city of Dollard-des-Ormeaux, is an exceptional member of the West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped.

This March, Sara will be heading to Abu Dhabi to compete in the Special Olympics World Games as one of Team Canada's top swimmers. Sara can do it all. She trains weekly in track and field, bowling and swimming. Not only that, back in 2005, Sara was at the Special Olympics in Japan. There she won a gold medal and two silver medals in the wonderful sport of snowshoeing.

Sara will be proudly representing Canada once again and I am certain all members of the House encourage her and are very proud of all our special Olympians. I invite all members to join me in saying: Go, Sara, go.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not all heroes wear capes, such as Elaine Travers, a constituent in my riding, and today I pay tribute to her bravery and selflessness.

Elaine's close friend Cathy was diagnosed with kidney disease 20 years ago. In early 2018, Cathy had 90% kidney failure and Elaine decided to donate a kidney. Surgery took place January 15, and both Cathy and Elaine are doing well. However, this is not an event without unnecessary hardship.

Statements by Members

Elaine and Cathy are like most people. They cannot afford an extended period of time off work and our current EI system forces them back to work before they are ready. Elaine could only afford to be off for two weeks. A kidney donor requires six to eight weeks recovery, but Elaine is already back at work. Elaine could not afford her income to be cut by 45%, the terms of our current EI sick leave. Cathy's recovery is four to six months and she, too, is facing a major reduction in income.

No one should be prevented from getting a life-saving organ transplant because it is unaffordable. Elaine is a hero to us all. We thank her so much and give a big thanks to other donors in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

VALUE VILLAGE

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to draw your attention to the presence of several executives from Value Village on Parliament Hill today.

This global thrift retailer, which is very well known in Canada, employs 10,000 people in 136 stores, including in my riding of Vimy. Value Village is a leader in environmental protection and invests in local communities.

I am pleased to have its representatives here with us today and to congratulate them for the \$123 million they have given to Quebec charities over the past 10 years, for the 320 million pounds of used goods that they keep out of Canada's landfills thanks to their resell and recycle model, and for their commitment to improving the lives of Canadians.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed something on my commute back from the GTA this weekend. The communities in Ottawa South and Ottawa West—Nepean are facing the same challenges with the Liberal government that we see in Durham.

Taxes are up on families, particularly those with kids in fitness and music. Taxes are up on seniors, particularly those who saw the tax-free savings account cut back. We see small businesses being hit by payroll taxes that came in in January. Ottawa faces transit gridlock as well, slow infrastructure money moving from the Liberal government and a cut to a transit tax credit that now means it now costs people up to 15% more to take the transit to work.

Whether it is the GTA, Ottawa South or Ottawa West—Nepean, Canadians are getting squeezed.

We are seeing a resignation each week with the Liberal government. However, on October 21, Canadians can resign them all.

● (1405)

[Translation]

HOOKED ON SCHOOL DAYS

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this month, I would like to talk about Hooked on School Days, which took place from February 11 to 15.

[English]

School perseverance is a demonstration that our kids are committed and determined to achieve their goals and nourish their dreams. It is this fire burning in their eyes that moves mountains and shapes the artisans of tomorrow.

[Translation]

Hooked on School Days is a celebration of their hard-fought battles, class after class, grade after grade, and year after year. It is the encouragement students get from teachers, family and friends that really makes a difference.

I would like to congratulate students of all ages for their daily efforts, their courage, their determination and the work they do every day. I wish them every success.

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[English]

VETERANS

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I delivered for Valentines for Vets and met merchant navy veteran John Stevenson, who shared with me his stories of service and memories of lost comrades at sea. He asked me to share this poem with the House and all Canadians in remembrance:

In ocean wastes no poppies blow,
No crosses stand in ordered row,
There young hearts sleep...beneath the wave...
The spirited, the good, the brave,
But stars a constant vigil keep,
For them who lie beneath the deep.
'Tis true you cannot kneel in prayer
On certain spot and think "He's there."
But you can to the ocean go...
See whitecaps marching row on row;
Know one for him will always ride...
In and out...with every tide.
And when your span of life is passed,
He'll meet you at the "Captain's Mast."
And they who mourn on distant shore
For sailors who'll come home no more,
Can dry their tears and pray for these
Who rest beneath the heaving seas...
For stars that shine and winds that blow
And whitecaps marching row on row.
And they can never lonely be
For when they lived...they chose the sea.

Lest we forget.

*Statements by Members***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is in chaos, which means it is not spending any time fixing the energy sector crisis it created.

Today, the United We Roll convoy arrived in Ottawa. Its purpose is principled and worthy as it creates awareness for the oil and gas industry and raises concerns about the carbon tax and repealing the “no more pipelines” Bill C-69, and Bill C-48.

Its members are concerned, like millions of Canadians, that the current Liberal government has not, and is not, supporting them, their families, their communities or the energy sector. They feel they have lost their voice to a government that no longer works for them and they will not be ignored any more.

Our Conservative leader said:

The #UnitedWeRoll convoy is a testament to the importance of Canada's energy sector and the crisis it's facing. Canadian energy workers deserve a government that supports their industry and champions it worldwide. Conservatives will fix the Liberal mess & get people back to work.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month has always been about celebrating the achievements of black Canadians both past and present. This year's theme of “Black Canadian Youth: Boundless, Rooted and Proud” is the perfect opportunity for me to highlight a young girl in my riding of Brampton North, Malia Alstrom, who shows every sign of being a leader among the young Canadians of tomorrow.

For four years running, Malia has sold hot chocolate in her driveway to support the Peel Regional Police's Toys for Tots program. She was just six years old when she started, and has since raised close to \$3,000. This money helps buy Christmas toys for children in my riding who are most in need.

I thank Malia for her hard work and for helping her fellow Bramptonians. I look forward to seeing her make a difference in our community and perhaps all across Canada.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I hosted a town hall meeting in my riding with a panel of seven people, all of whom are living with intellectual disabilities. I was impressed with Dewlyn, who told me, “Don't see my disability, see my ability.” The message from the panellists was clear: they want to work, just give them a chance.

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

People with intellectual disabilities have the highest rate of unemployment in the country. However, once again, it has been proven that, with the proper support, they can succeed in the labour market.

[*English*]

The federal government needs to be a leader in this regard. Local organizations like the Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, OCAPDD, and LiveWorkPlay have long been supporting those with intellectual disabilities to find work in the private sector and the public service.

I am pleased that with the support of the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Public Service Commission, LiveWorkPlay has now facilitated the employment of 75 people with intellectual disabilities in 25 departments. We need more of these kinds of partnerships so we all see the ability.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian dream represents an opportunity, an opportunity to build a brighter future for our kids. As a father of three, I know how expensive it is to raise a family. Programs like the children's fitness tax credit were critical for us to be able to afford our kids' volleyball, hockey and dance.

However, a trust fund Prime Minister felt that as a young family we were too rich to have those tax credits and took them away. Instead, he is raising taxes on Canadian families with a carbon tax, EI and CPP. On April 1, taxes go up again on beer and wine thanks to the Liberals' unprecedented escalator tax.

Because of failed Liberal policies, Canadians are paying more for housing, gas and groceries, and also for their children's sports, arts and school textbooks. Liberal deficits are getting deeper and our taxes are getting higher. The Liberals are spending the Canadian dream out of reach.

The Conservatives will stand with hard-working Canadian families. We will scrap the carbon tax, we will build pipelines and we will get Canada back on track.

* * *

HALIFAX TRAGEDY

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the city of Halifax is in pain.

Residents of Quartz Drive in the neighbourhood of Spryfield were awoken last night by a loud bang, screams and the truly horrifying sight of their neighbour's home engulfed in raging flames.

An update from the Halifax police tells us that while the parents remain in hospital, the lives of all seven children from the same family have been lost. Further reporting from the harrowing scene tells us that the nine refugees were from Syria. They came to Halifax in 2017 in search of a better life.

I have spoken with Imam Abdallah Yousri of the Ummah Masjid mosque in Halifax and I am reassured that our city is coming together to support the survivors. The loss, however, is immense.

Oral Questions

Tonight I am going home to our grieving community. It is still early, but in the days ahead we will surround one another with love, support and strength in the wake of this profound tragedy. I know Halifax will rise to the occasion, as it always has.

* * *

FROM SOUP TO TOMATOES

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Susan Clarke is a diabetes educator making a big difference in people's lives. She noticed people could easily find expert advice on education, nutrition and stress management, but recognized a gap for those who needed to exercise.

Inspired by studies that showed using something as simple as two cans of soup to exercise just 10 minutes a day was beneficial for health and fitness, Sue put together a program for her clients, calling it "From Soup to Tomatoes". She knew any program had to be free, easily accessible, designed to address mobility issues and, above all, be led by a professional to ensure safety and avoid injuries.

Thirteen years ago, classes started in Espanola. A few years later, the program began webcasting so people could exercise remotely at home and in group settings. Now, with a website and a YouTube channel, From Soup to Tomatoes is helping people around the world become healthier while saving health care dollars.

Today, I thank Sue for her vision and encourage everyone to look for From Soup to Tomatoes online.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to bring attention to the questions raised by #LavScam and whether the rule of law in Canada has been compromised.

The office of the Attorney General must remain autonomous and maintain its independence from political pressure. It is in fact the cornerstone of our democracy. The member for Vancouver Granville was very succinct on this point in her most recent public letter. One part that particularly resonated with me is the following:

It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence.

That is why it is imperative that the former attorney general and Mr. Butts be allowed to speak at the justice committee. Canadians must have the assurance that the rule of law in Canada has been upheld and in no way has been brokered or suppressed. It is fundamental and must be applied equally to all persons. As Martin Luther King stated, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

● (1415)

[Translation]

LOUIS RIEL DAY

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 2008, the third Monday of February in Manitoba has been dedicated to the memory of our great Métis leader, Louis Riel.

Louis Riel Day is a day for us to celebrate his vision for a province where all cultures would be respected. He recognized the equal status and importance of French and English in Manitoba.

To advise his provisional government, Riel created the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia. This assembly laid the foundation for the current Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. Of the 24 elected members in the assembly, 12 represented the French-speaking population and 12 represented the English-speaking population. Additionally, three-quarters of the members were Métis.

Louis Riel defended the rights of Manitoba's Métis with courage and tenacity. That is why we pay tribute to him on that day.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's principal secretary resigned yesterday. We know that it is because of the corruption scandal involving the Prime Minister's Office, but his trusted adviser and confidant claims that he has done nothing wrong.

If the principal secretary is innocent, why did the Prime Minister accept his resignation?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I accepted Gerald's resignation as principal secretary.

Gerald Butts served this government and our country with integrity, sage advice and devotion. I want to thank him for his service and continued friendship.

Mr. Butts has always believed deeply in the respect that Canadians must have for our institutions and indeed in what we are doing. That is why he decided to resign.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if that is the case, then why did Mr. Butts resign? The Prime Minister's story on this has changed multiple times since the scandal was first brought to light. Now we find out that the key strategist in the Liberal Prime Minister's Office, the architect of the Liberal government policy, has resigned. However, in so doing, he is pretending that he has done nothing wrong.

If the Prime Minister is so sure that these allegations are false, and if Mr. Butts did nothing wrong, why did the Prime Minister accept his resignation?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Gerald Butts has always believed in the confidence that Canadians must have in our institutions, and indeed believed deeply in the work that this government needs to continue to do to deliver for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. That is why he made the decision to step away: because the work this government is doing, and indeed the confidence that Canadians must have in their institutions and their processes, comes before all else.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are losing confidence in the government because every single day the story changes. Now the explanation is that Gerald Butts was so good at his job that he just had to resign amid scandal, but it is a continuation of a theme we have seen for days now.

First, the Prime Minister tried to blame the former attorney general. Then he tried to blame Scott Brison, all the while he was directing Liberals on the justice committee to block attempts at inviting key officials to testify.

Do these sound like the actions of a man who has nothing to hide?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always stood up and will always stand up for the institutions and principles that underlie the strength of our democracy. We are unequivocal about that. That is why, whether it is respecting the independence of members of parliamentary committees or making sure we are allowing for the full scope of judicial independence, we will always defend the systems and institutions that keep Canada safe and prosperous as a democracy.

* * *

● (1420)

JUSTICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when these allegations were first raised, the Prime Minister tried to dismiss them as being completely false. His story then changed multiple times. He has blamed several individuals, and now his principal adviser has quit.

However, there is one person who could clear up a lot of the issues around this situation, and that is the one person the Prime Minister will not allow to speak. He continually speaks for the former attorney general, but I believe Canadians would like to hear directly from her.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, waive the attorney-client privilege that he claims to have, and let the former attorney general speak?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in everything this government has done domestically, internationally and internally, we consistently stand up for the rule of law and the independence of our judiciary. We will continue to do that and will continue to do the right thing.

In the matter of solicitor-client privilege, the member opposite must know that there are real dangers of unintended consequences, particularly on the two court cases currently wending their way through the courts. That is why I have asked our Attorney General to give me advice on the very important matter.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the unintended consequences he is worried about are losing more key staff in the Prime Minister's Office as the truth comes out on this. It is clear that we are just going to get the reshaped talking points and the Prime Minister's rhetoric, trying to convince Canadians that there is nothing to see here.

I will ask a specific question that should be easy for him to answer. The Budget Implementation Act became law on June 21, 2018, which means that is when deferred prosecution agreements became possible. Can the Prime Minister tell the House how many times since June 21 of last year Gerald Butts met with the former attorney general?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our cabinet gets together every Tuesday to talk about a broad range of issues. We continue to meet regularly as MPs and caucus members. Members in my office are engaged constantly with various departments and with ministers to stand up for Canadian jobs, to make sure we are moving forward in the right way, and to make sure we are standing up for the institutions and principles that underpin our democracy. We will always work hard to make sure we are delivering properly for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and the Minister of Public Services and Procurement went on television and said that it is important that we get the former justice minister's version of events. We agree. The problem is that the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Justice prevented that and said no to having the former justice minister and Gerald Butts appear before the committee.

It is clear that the hon. member for Vancouver Granville wants to share her version of story. The Prime Minister has given us five different versions so far.

Will he allow us to get the other side of the story by waiving solicitor-client privilege?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Attorney General for advice on solicitor-client privilege. The government will always ensure its work is done properly, in compliance with all rules and laws.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all the Prime Minister has to do is waive solicitor-client privilege to allow her to give her side of the story. He refuses to do so.

The justice committee refuses to do its job and look into serious allegations of political interference.

Canadians want the truth. They also want transparency. Most importantly, they want to understand why the former justice minister had to write:

[*English*]

It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

If he will not waive solicitor-client privilege, will he at least allow an independent public inquiry?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have full confidence in the work of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. We supported his announcement that he would be looking into this matter, and we welcome this work.

As the member opposite should know, members of parliamentary committees make their own decisions on what these committees study.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Gerry Butts, the architect of sunny ways, has been packing under a storm of corruption. It is up to the Prime Minister to come clean over allegations that his office attempted to strong-arm the former attorney general into taking a fall in one of the biggest corruption cases in memory.

The Prime Minister promised to do things differently, but the SNC scandal is corroding his credibility. He needs to stop hiding.

Will he waive solicitor-client privilege? Will he agree to an independent inquiry to restore the confidence of the Canadian people in him as prime minister?

•(1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to determine the reality in issues just like this. He is pursuing his investigation, and as I said from the very first day, we welcome that work.

The matter of solicitor-client privilege is obviously one we have to consider very carefully. There is a real risk of unintended consequences, particularly in the two court cases currently under way. I have asked our Attorney General for advice on this matter.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am listening really hard, and for a Prime Minister who claims to be innocent, my God he is sounding guilty. The client here is the Prime Minister, and the question is whether he tried to strong-arm his former attorney general and then had her fired because she would not take a fall in one of the biggest corruption cases.

Stop hiding behind the legal games, and let her speak. Enough with this he said, and then he said something different, and when that did not work, he said something else about what she was supposed to say.

Just let her speak. Do the right thing.

The Speaker: I remind the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay of the rule, which of course he is familiar with, that one must direct one's comments to the chair.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member opposite, who is speaking disparagingly about laws and legal issues, we continue to respect our system of

justice. We respect the independence of the judiciary, and we will always do our work that way.

That is why we welcome the news that the Ethics Commissioner is going to be looking into this matter. We will co-operate fully with him. That is something Canadians expect as we uphold the highest standards of their faith in our institutions.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians are asking very clearly and very simply is, why do we have to continuously hear the story from the Prime Minister's point of view as opposed to hearing it from the former attorney general's point of view? I know one could possibly say as an excuse that sometimes we perceive situations differently depending upon what gender we are, but this is the rule of law, and what Canadians want to hear specifically is what the former attorney general has to say.

Will the Prime Minister waive his solicitor-client privilege?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the Prime Minister has asked me for a legal opinion on the question of solicitor-client privilege. I am studying that issue—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I am having trouble hearing the hon. Minister of Justice. I know members want to hear both the question and the answer, so we will have a little order.

Hon. David Lametti: To continue, Mr. Speaker, I am studying the issue and will provide my legal opinion in due course. It would be inappropriate for me to say anything more.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Attorney General has already said many things about what he believes the former attorney general believes, thinks or even did, so it should take him very simply not much time to determine whether or not she can go ahead and speak.

Now that I have him on his feet, I am very curious. Last week a newspaper reported that this Attorney General had indicated that the matter regarding deferred remediation agreements and SNC-Lavalin was very much still alive and sitting on his desk.

I would like to ask the member, conveniently from Montreal, whether or not he has made a decision on the SNC-Lavalin issue.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stated in that interview the law of Canada as it was passed and as is still the case, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the former justice minister resigned. Yesterday, the Prime Minister's top adviser, who is also his best friend, resigned. This all came about in the wake of serious allegations that the Prime Minister's Office pressured the former attorney general of Canada regarding a fraud case. Canadians want the truth, and only one person can give it to us.

Why will the Prime Minister not waive the former attorney general of Canada's solicitor-client privilege?

Oral Questions

•(1430)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister's former principal secretary shared his letter with all Canadians.

I think we can agree that all members and their teams are here to work hard for Canadians. That is my priority, my government's priority, and the priority of all members on this side of the House.

We will continue to work for Canadians. That is what we have been doing and what we will continue to do.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day since the Globe and Mail broke this story, the Prime Minister has given us a new version. Oddly enough, his story changes day by day.

Yesterday, his principal secretary and close personal friend resigned from his job while saying he had done nothing wrong. However, the situation is serious. This is about political interference in the justice system. There is one person who can give her side of the story and tell Canadians the truth, and that is the former attorney general of Canada.

Could the Prime Minister just let her speak?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way knows full well that the Prime Minister's former principal secretary put out a letter explaining the reasons for his resignation. The Prime Minister accepted Gerald Butts' resignation.

We on this side of the House are going to keep working hard for Canadians. We respect the independence of the justice system, and we encourage them to do their work.

[*English*]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the last 13 days the Prime Minister's answers on this issue have been all over the map. First he denied. Then there was a whisper campaign out of his office, insulting and disparaging the former attorney general. Now there is the answer of "It's not my fault; it has to have been somebody else's fault", and his principal secretary has resigned, but for no reason. The Liberal government is in absolute chaos and disarray.

Canadians deserve answers. We need to hear from the former attorney general. Will the Prime Minister waive privilege and let her speak?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated in French, I will now state in English once again that the former principal secretary to the Prime Minister has shared his reasons publicly with all Canadians. The Prime Minister has accepted his resignation.

When it comes to the independence of our judicial system and of officers of Parliament, we respect their work. That is a clear contrast to the previous government, which constantly undermined the work that they did.

We will not do that on this side. We will continue working hard for Canadians, the very people who sent us here.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): That was not an answer, Mr. Speaker, and it is frankly embarrassing to see the government House leader do that.

There is nobody who is watching this scandal saying that there is nothing to see here. From political commentators to the media to legal experts, there are questions that have to be answered. The actions of the current government are actions of a government and a Prime Minister who have something to hide.

There is somebody who can answer; that is the former attorney general. We want answers. Canadians want answers. Will you let her speak?

The Speaker: I remind the hon. opposition House leader to direct her comments to the Chair.

Order. The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has asked me for advice on the question of solicitor-client privilege. I am studying the issue and will provide an answer in due course. It would be inappropriate for me to comment any further.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I guess he is on the clock, Mr. Speaker.

For the Prime Minister, some good advice is that the best thing about telling the truth is that it is easy to repeat because it does not change. However, this Prime Minister treats the truth like his socks: He has a different version for every day of the week.

His most trusted adviser has resigned under a cloud of controversy. In an attempt to change the channel, the Prime Minister's Office ran what many saw as a sexist and racist smear campaign against the former attorney general. In my experience, powerful people do not quit their powerful jobs because they are innocent. Will the Liberals finally work with us to get the answers that Canadians rightly deserve?

•(1435)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can state that I know that committee members have been having this conversation. We know that members from all sides have been having that conversation. I understand that a Liberal member will be putting forward a motion today at committee to have the access that members are asking for. We are the government that increased resources to committees so that they can do the important work they do.

No differently, we respect the work of officers of Parliament. We respect the independence of the judicial system. We believe they should do their important work rather than continue to speculate, as that member chooses to do continuously.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember when this story first broke, and the Prime Minister said it was entirely false. Canadians just are not buying what he is selling.

Oral Questions

The former attorney general warned us in her letter, while she was being removed from that office, that the Attorney General must be free from political interference. However, for these Liberals there are two sets of rules: one set of laws for the wealthy and the well connected and another set for everybody else.

This Prime Minister promised to be different, to work for all Canadians. However, people are not buying the Liberals' story, so will they finally get on the right side of this scandal and join with us in getting to the bottom of this sordid affair?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are confident that both the Ethics Commissioner's investigation and the work that is being done by the standing committee will proceed independently and proceed as they should under our current parliamentary procedures. I will fully co-operate with these processes and so will my colleagues. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the substance of the matter any further.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Gerald Butts resigned without giving any reasons.

Eventually he claimed that he was innocent, but innocent people do not resign.

Will the Prime Minister allow Mr. Butts to appear before Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights so that we can find out the real reasons behind his resignation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister's former principal secretary shared his reasons for resigning. The Prime Minister accepted his resignation.

The committee operates independently of the House. It is going to do its work, and I encourage the committee to keep doing that work.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Mr. Butts left yesterday, he categorically denied the allegations of political interference in the justice system levelled against him.

Now it is important to know the truth. If the former attorney general testifies before the committee, the committee will have to hear from Mr. Butts too. People cannot just run away like that and say everything is fine. We want the truth. Canadians want the truth.

Will the Prime Minister allow Gerald Butts to appear before the justice committee or not?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we are confident that both the Ethics Commissioner investigation and the work that is being done by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights will proceed independently and in accordance with very high standards. The committee is independent, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Liberals on the justice committee did the PMO's bidding by voting against calling key witnesses, including Gerald

Butts, the Prime Minister's top political adviser, as well as the former attorney general.

Allegations that the former attorney general was pressed by officials in the PMO to interfere in a criminal prosecution are as serious as they get. Will the Prime Minister stop the cover-up and allow Butts and the former attorney general to come to committee, and waive any purported solicitor-client privilege involving the former attorney general?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, there are two processes ongoing, both of which are independent. The first is with the Ethics Commissioner; the second is the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. They are independent committees.

I will co-operate fully with these investigations, as will my colleagues. It would be inappropriate for me to comment any further.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, former attorney general of Ontario Michael Bryant stated that allegations involving top PMO officials, including Gerald Butts, are “the kind of allegations that can lead to criminal investigations.”

Canadians deserve answers, not a PMO-driven cover-up. Once again, will the Prime Minister stop the cover-up and allow Butts and the former attorney general the opportunity to speak so that Canadians can get the answers they deserve—yes or no?

• (1440)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are confident in our government institutions. We are confident in the work of the Ethics Commissioner. We are confident in the work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want a Prime Minister who tries to improve their quality of life, not one who makes backroom deals with multi-nationals.

It is now clear that when Bay Street asks for help, the Liberals jump up and act quickly, but when Canadians need help, they make them wait. People deserve a transparent and honest government that will fight for them.

Why do the Liberals prefer to give the wealthy a free pass instead of working to improve the quality of life of Canadians across the country?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I believe that all members are here to work hard for Canadians. That is precisely our priority as the government. We will continue to make investments that help Canadians succeed. That is exactly why we established programs like the Canada child benefit. We can see that it is delivering results that help Canadians succeed.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have spent the day urging the Prime Minister to waive any solicitor-client privilege that may exist here and allow the former attorney general to speak to troubling allegations of alleged political interference.

Within the hour, the justice committee will meet to discuss witnesses. The Liberal members on that committee will have the chance to do the right thing. Canadians deserve answers.

Does the Prime Minister not agree that the justice committee, at a minimum, must hear from those at the centre of the story: the officials in the Prime Minister's Office—Mr. Bouchard, Mr. Butts, and others—as well as the former attorney general?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I reiterate that our government is confident in the work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, as we are confident in the work of the Ethics Commissioner. Those are independent committees. They will do their work under the public eye. We will fully co-operate with both of them.

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POVERTY

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has shown as unprecedented commitment to the fight against poverty.

Since 2015, we have helped Canadians through the Canada child benefit and enhanced benefits for seniors. More than 650,000 Canadians have been lifted out of poverty.

In the Poverty Reduction Act, the government outlined its goal for achieving the lowest level of poverty in Canada's history. Could the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development tell this House what further actions we will be taking to meet this ambitious target?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville for his hard work on behalf of his constituents.

From day one of our mandate, we worked very hard to give every Canadian a fair and real chance to succeed. That is why in July 2016 we introduced the historic Canada child benefit, which every month is lifting out of poverty 300,000 children. That is why in a few weeks from now we will introduce the new Canada workers benefit, which is going to lift out of poverty 75,000 lower-wage workers. That is

why next year we will be introducing a new Canada housing benefit, giving 300,000 families—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Michael Bryant is the former Ontario Liberal attorney general. He said this: "A lot of police officers have laid a lot of obstruction of justice charges on a lot of ordinary Canadians, with a lot less evidence than this".

Could the Prime Minister confirm if any member of his office, past or present, or any member of his cabinet has been contacted by the RCMP in relation to this matter.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated time and time again, we on this side respect the independence of the RCMP. We respect the independence of officers of Parliament. The RCMP will do their work. We will not comment on that situation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP will do their work and she will not comment on that situation. That is an interesting answer because the Prime Minister's top adviser, of decades long, resigned suddenly and inexplicably yesterday, and interestingly, before anyone on this side had even asked for such a resignation, which raises the question of whether or not there is something more that we do not yet know about.

Could the Prime Minister tell us if any member of his staff has been contacted by the RCMP on this matter?

●(1445)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Prime Minister's former principal secretary, he has put out a public letter. He has shared it with all Canadians. He has given his reasons. The Prime Minister has accepted his reasons.

What I know is that it is clear that all members on all of our teams want to work hard for Canadians. That has been our government's focus. It will remain our focus, and moving forward, that is our priority. It is to ensure that Canadians have a better quality of life. That is exactly what our record shows. That is exactly what the results show.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious and very important question. A former attorney general for the province of Ontario said that if a politician had ever called him up about a criminal case or a court case, he would have put down the phone and called the police immediately. That is exactly what we are talking about in the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

The question is very simple. Has the Prime Minister, Gerald Butts or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office been contacted by the RCMP yet about the SNC-Lavalin scandal, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former principal secretary to the Prime Minister has shared his reasons in a letter to all Canadians. Anyone can read it.

Oral Questions

The Conservatives continue to talk out of both sides of their mouths. In French, they are claiming that they have no intention of hurting SNC-Lavalin employees, as the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles said. However, in English, it is a completely different story. Some members, like the member for Carleton, are making it very clear that they want to shut this company down.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Liberal government has about five different versions of the current scandal involving SNC-Lavalin and the former attorney general. However, the question is very simple. There is one person in Canada who knows what happened. There are 330 members here, and that person is one of them.

Will the Prime Minister finally give the former attorney general the freedom of speech that all Canadians want her to have?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has asked me for a legal opinion on the question of solicitor-client privilege in this case. I am studying the issue and will give a legal opinion in due course. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment further on this matter.

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[English]

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when General Motors announced the closure of the Oshawa plant, thousands of workers and their families were left twisting in the wind. The Prime Minister is siding with GM's corporate greed and not on the side of Canadians when he is all talk and no action.

Oshawa auto workers have called on the Liberal government to not purchase GM vehicles not made in Canada for government procurement. The Prime Minister talks about supporting the workers. Here is a specific request on the table. Will he do what they have asked?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been absolutely clear when it comes to supporting the automotive sector and the auto workers. We, through our programming and policies, have seen significant investments in the automotive sector since 2015. With the recent announcement by BlackBerry QNX, that takes us to over six billion dollars' worth of investments.

With respect to Oshawa, we have been very clear. When it comes to Unifor, when it comes to GM, we will be at the table. Part of the solution is to protect those jobs going forward.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): No one has even seen you in Oshawa.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear this—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I guess it has been a while since I have been in Oshawa.

I remind the hon. member for Essex to direct her comments to the Chair.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Speaker, no one has even seen a Liberal in Oshawa.

It is clear the Liberal government would rather invest its time and energy to help rich, corrupt corporations get off the hook instead of standing up for the thousands of GM workers who are scrambling to ensure a future for their families. Canadians deserve a government that is willing to stand up and fight for their jobs and communities.

The Canadian government has spent \$320 million over the last 10 years buying GM vehicles for public use. Will the Prime Minister stand up for Canadian workers and commit now to stop buying GM cars, with taxpayer money, that are not built or assembled in Canada?

• (1450)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always defended and supported the auto workers. We have always stood up for the automotive sector. It is through our policies and programs that we have seen historic investments. We actually turned the corner because under the previous Conservative government, 50,000 automotive jobs were lost in the first three years and two years before it was 20,000 jobs, before the recession even hit.

We understand how important Oshawa is. We will continue to work with Mary Barra, GM and also Jerry Dias to find a solution to protect these very important jobs in Oshawa.

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JUSTICE

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's most trusted adviser has now resigned over the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

I swore an oath to serve and defend this country, as did many of my colleagues on both sides of the House. This is not about partisan politics. It is about trust in our democracy and a judicial system—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We need to hear the question.

The hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, luckily, on this side of the House, I have the opportunity to speak.

The question is simple. Has any current or former cabinet minister or member of the Prime Minister's staff been contacted by the RCMP on this scandal?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say that we have no knowledge of such activity.

To refer to the member's other comments, I, on this side, am very proud of the work that we are doing as a government. We can see that the results speak for themselves. The investments that we are making are seeing 300,000-plus children lifted out of poverty. We see that our communities are growing. We see the investments in infrastructure are working. We see our municipalities are stronger than ever before. We should be very proud of this work and we know that we have to continue working hard so that Canadians can succeed. That is exactly who we are here for.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague may be forgetting that as a minister of the Crown, she swore an oath to faithfully execute the power entrusted to her, which includes protecting our judicial system from political interference. If a minister will not stand up and be counted to defend the principles of our democracy, who will?

The question is simple. Has any current or former cabinet minister or staff been contacted by the RCMP on this scandal?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have no knowledge of any such activity. I think that is a fairly clear answer.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one might think that if the RCMP had contacted former or current cabinet ministers or current or former PMO operatives, they might know about that. The fact that they do not know whether the RCMP has or has not started an investigation is troubling. This is a scandal that goes right to the heart of the Prime Minister's Office.

I will ask again. Has the RCMP contacted any current or former cabinet minister or staff, or any current or former Prime Minister's Office individuals, in order to get to the bottom of this obstruction of justice case?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have no knowledge of any such activity.

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CARBON PRICING

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, economists are virtually unanimous in the view that carbon pricing reduces greenhouse gas emissions at the lowest possible cost to the economy. It is disappointing that while climate change is having a real impact on the health and well-being of Canadians, Conservative politicians are wasting millions of taxpayer dollars fighting climate action in court. Meanwhile, they still have no plan to protect the environment.

Can the minister please update the House on the actions our government is taking to fight climate change, while growing our economy?

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

It was great to see last week in Saskatchewan at the court that we had farmers represented, we had young people represented, we had environmentalists represented, and we had doctors, health professionals and economists represented. They were saying that we need to put a price on pollution. We need to take action on climate change.

Oral Questions

We know that we can do it in an affordable way, an effective way, by giving money back. A family of four in Ontario would get \$307, more than eight out of 10 families will pay.

It is unfortunate the other side does not—

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beau-pré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

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[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beau-pré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1999, we had Shawinigate. In 2004, there was the Gomery commission. In 2017, a Prime Minister was found guilty of ethical breaches for the first time in history. Today, we have political interference in a judicial process.

The Liberal government is losing the confidence of Canadians. On the heels of the third resignation of an influential person, namely the right-hand man and friend of the Prime Minister, Gerald Butts, people are entitled to real answers.

In light of this damning state of affairs, will the Prime Minister agree to shed light on this business and vote in favour of holding a public inquiry?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are confident that the two independent processes currently under way will be completed in a fair and thorough manner and will provide Canadians with the answers and information they seek. We have confidence in both the Standing Committee on Justice and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

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[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, part of the arena roof of the Algonquin community of Timiskaming First Nation collapsed overnight. Then the structure caught fire. The community has worked very hard to build this arena and all their efforts have disappeared in smoke. They need our help.

Can Timiskaming First Nation count on the Liberals to rebuild the arena?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my department and officials will look into the matter immediately. Wherever we can be of assistance, we will be. We always look for a community-led solution wherever we can.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport met with his provincial and territorial counterparts in January to discuss the future of vehicle electrification.

Can the minister tell us how our Liberal government plans to fight climate change?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Steveston—Richmond East for his excellent question.

We recognize the importance of climate change and the need to encourage the purchase and adoption of zero-emission vehicles. Despite Tory negligence, we are proposing concrete measures. While the Conservatives continue to deny climate change, as we still have not seen their plan for the environment, we are taking concrete action to ensure that our children and grandchildren have a healthy environment.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a time when men could tell women, “Sh, honey, nothing to see here. I’ll speak for you.” By refusing to allow the former justice minister to speak on allegations of using his office to influence the outcome of a massive criminal corporate corruption case, and speaking for her, the Prime Minister is saying that time has not passed.

Will the Prime Minister allow her to freely speak, instead of telling Canadians day after day that yet another woman experienced things differently than he did?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has asked me for advice on the question of solicitor-client privilege. I am studying the issue and will provide my legal advice in due course. It would be inappropriate for me to comment any further.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone wants the white-collar criminals who were running SNC-Lavalin to be held accountable and brought to justice. That is unanimous.

However, what we in the Bloc Québécois do not want is to lose another head office and thousands of jobs in Quebec. When I put it like that, it sounds simple enough. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister keeps digging himself in deeper and deeper in this matter, desperately trying to blame someone, anyone, for his fiasco.

Can he guarantee that the workers at SNC-Lavalin will not be the ones to suffer because of the many mistakes he has made in this matter?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has done its work properly. We follow the rules and obey the law. We stand up for the principles of judicial independence and the rule of law. We

will always respect the law and the commissioner's work, and we will always work hard for all Canadians.

• (1500)

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the number of mistakes that keep piling up in the management of the SNC-Lavalin crisis is unbelievable. What an utter disaster. Compared to this, Trans Mountain almost seems well managed.

While the Prime Minister digs himself into a deeper hole, the jobs of thousands of workers in Quebec are in jeopardy.

Will the government take action within the parameters of the law to protect SNC-Lavalin's head office in Montreal and the thousands of jobs connected with it, or will I continue to make the Prime Minister yawn?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. In our parliamentary system, we can represent the interests of workers, retirees, suppliers and any Canadian company while complying with the ethics and legal rules surrounding these discussions.

We will always stand up for workers, we will always stand up for the rule of law in Canada, and we will always follow the ethics rules surrounding discussions.

* * *

[English]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade.

It was recently announced that the long-awaited Arctic and northern policy framework may finally be ready for release in June. Past actions by the government affecting indigenous people, like the Indigenous Languages Act and the draft indigenous child welfare act, have been more showpiece than substance, more buzzwords than actual impact.

Will the minister assure the House that this new policy framework will actually have the teeth to effect meaningful change?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question of my colleague from Nunavut is very important to many Arctic and northern people in our country.

We know and understand that if we are going to succeed in the north and Arctic regions of Canada, people have to be the architects of their own vision and be able to move forward. As the Government of Canada, we are working in partnership with the territories, provinces and indigenous governments to do just that. We are co-developing a policy that will lead to a strong economic and tremendous growth in the Arctic and northern regions.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion: That, in the opinion of the House, the government must do everything in its power and within the bounds of the law, as set out in subsection 715.31 of the Criminal Code, to reduce the negative consequences of the reprehensible acts of certain SNC-Lavalin executives on individuals, be they employees, clients, retired employees or others, who did not engage in the reprehensible acts, while holding responsible those who did engage in said reprehensible acts, in order to preserve thousands of jobs in Quebec and Canada and to ensure that the company's head office remains in Montreal.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, you will find consent for the following motion: That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Timmins—James Bay, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 20, 2019, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1505)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to speak to this matter, which I consider it to be very important, both as a member of Parliament and also because of my background as an environmental enforcer.

I take very seriously that when we are dealing with the enforcement of a federal or provincial law, whether it is the Criminal Code or regulatory statute, we have clear procedures that are open and transparent in how we apply those statutes. Many across the country are deeply disturbed right now that there is no clarity on what is going on with this new unique provision.

I am pleased to stand in support of the motion by my colleague from Victoria, calling on the Prime Minister to waive the solicitor-client privilege for the former attorney general with respect to the allegations of interference in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin and to urge the government to launch a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act.

Very serious questions are being raised by Canadians about recent decisions and actions by the government. Any intervention by any elected member of this place or the Prime Minister's Office is a serious matter involving a matter before a prosecutor. They are concerned about the amendments to the Criminal Code to create alternative processes to respond to white collar crimes with the result of avoiding a criminal prosecution and the direct result to take away the bar to further federal contracts. They are concerned about the tabling of these measures within an omnibus budget bill.

Canadians are also concerned about the limited review only to the finance committee and not to the justice committee. They are concerned about possible interference in the exercise of discretion by the Attorney General in the decision to prosecute or utilize the new deferred prosecution agreement. They are concerned about whether that interference resulted in the resignation of a cabinet minister, the former minister of justice and attorney general.

Finally, they are concerned about the denial by Liberal members of Parliament to allow thorough consideration of these matters before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Through yet another omnibus budget bill, the government chose to amend the Criminal Code of Canada. As many have said in this place, this is despite its stated position while in opposition to oppose omnibus budget bills and changes to law and policy unrelated to economic measures made through budget bills. These Criminal Code amendments, these significant reforms, were made through an omnibus budget bill tabled by the finance minister, not the justice minister.

I wish to concentrate my remarks on the second aspect of the motion, which is the call for a public inquiry.

The process of the application of a deferred prosecution agreement mechanism in the case of criminal charges brought against the company SNC-Lavalin and any involvement of government parties outside of the Attorney General and the public prosecutor merit open and transparent review.

The government's defence of the use of the budget bill to reform criminal law procedures is a pretty clear indicator of the fact it was of the belief that economic advantage could be gained and prevail over rule of law and justice. In the case currently at hand, the charges are brought under a law that actually prohibits any consideration of economic benefits. Some elected officials, particularly at the provincial level, and others are saying that we should not be convicting this company because there may be a loss of jobs, yet the law itself forbids that to be considered at all in the decision by the Attorney General or public prosecutor.

Business of Supply

The intended effect of this provision is to enable justice officials to treat a specified list of economic crimes, such as obstructing justice, money laundering, tax evasion, forgery, bribery of officers, fraud, including frauds on the government, through an alternative legal process that avoids criminal charges or convictions. As well, it is on condition of admission of a violation of the law and specified undertakings being given by the person potentially charged to take remediation measures and self-reporting by the parties at fault. It has been suggested in the media that these are exactly the circumstances that have not occurred in this case. Therefore, questions are being raised as to why consideration is being given to this deferred prosecution agreement, when the criteria have not even met the criteria the government has chosen to put in law.

• (1510)

These DPAs have been used in the United Kingdom and the United States, but in quite different ways.

As mentioned earlier, while the law establishing the DPAs prescribes conditions, it does not include a number of matters that were actually recommended by Canadians during the consultation period before the matter came before the House. A condition that has not been included, as recommended by some, was that the decision be in the interest of justice as opposed to the public interest. This is an issue being raised in environmental impact assessments of major projects in that no matter what the criteria are, in the end, the government can just say that it is a matter of national significance or a matter of public interest, so therefore it is going to do it. The suggestion was that the decision be in the interest of justice, as we are dealing with the Criminal Code.

A question raised was whether it should be a condition that would actually serve as a deterrent, yet that is not in the conditions in the DPA. Another condition suggested was whether it would genuinely promote compliance, but this was not an included condition. I find this very odd, as a former law enforcer. Those are the obvious mechanisms we look to in framing prohibitions and framing our enforcement compliance process.

It is noteworthy that the law specifically prohibits consideration of national economic interests when the offence comes under the Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act, yet in this case, that is precisely the statute the company is being prosecuted under.

I found it very interesting, and we found the same thing with Bill C-69, that the government entertained a period of consultation, in particular with business but also with some judicial officials and some NGOs, before it tabled the bill in the House to enact this provision on enforcement, yet when the bill came up for debate in the House, the government, in its wisdom, chose to add this significant amendment to our main criminal justice statute, the Criminal Code of Canada, at the tail end of an omnibus budget bill.

The Liberal government said that it would not follow what the Conservatives did before. Never would it include provisions that were not economically related. Of course, the bill was tabled by the finance minister, not by the former justice minister.

I want to share with the House what the finance minister said in the House in defence of the mechanism to opt out of being prosecuted:

Mr. Chair, we have put forward a budget, and of course in the budget there are things about how we can make our economy work well. That is the function of this budget. What we have said is that we believe that our approach to deferred prosecution agreements will enable us to pursue an approach that is functioning and doing well in other economies, one that will result in more effective continuation of business success by companies once they have paid their dues to society.

In one case, and the case before us now, one federal statute actually prohibits consideration of the economic impact on the Canadian economy or the economy of a foreign national, yet that is exactly the rationale the finance minister gave for bringing forward this provision. Apparently that was the rationale given, allegedly, to the former attorney general and the public prosecutor. It is very interesting.

The Liberal government, in its wisdom, even though it has brought forward a lot of amendments to the Criminal Code, and in one case actually in an omnibus Criminal Code amendment bill, chose not to bring this significant measure to ensure compliance under the Criminal Code. It decided to do it in a budget bill.

When the matter was referred to committee for review, that aspect of this omnibus budget bill was put before the finance committee. When we look at the proceedings of the finance committee, we see that many members raised concerns that it was not the place for the consideration of an amendment to the Criminal Code. It was the justice committee. The finance committee was not used to reviewing these laws and members said that the bill should be referred to the justice committee. Eventually, the justice committee did call for aspects to be looked at, but then the full review was cut back, because certain Liberal members did not want to consider it.

Why the government chose to bring forward this mechanism the way it did is completely puzzling. It is important for the public to find out exactly how the government is planning to apply this mechanism. We have heard concern after concern about the way this mechanism is opting out of the need for a prosecution and conviction for a serious criminal offence.

• (1515)

Why did the government go this way, and how is it actually applying it in practice? I think it is very important that we have an open and public inquiry so that there is openness and transparency in how the government of the day is intending to apply this mechanism under the Criminal Code.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two comments and a question.

Business of Supply

The member for Edmonton Strathcona lamented the lack of transparency in the context of this bill. I just want to make sure that the record reflects that one year of consultations took place in respect of this very issue of remediation agreements. First, the matter was flagged in the budget. Second, the matter was presented in the budget bill. Third, it was studied by no fewer than three parliamentary committees: the finance committee, which she alluded to; the justice committee, on November 7; and the Senate committee. Fourth, it was gazetted.

In terms of an observation, remediation agreements are not an invention of this Parliament. They exist among five members of the G7 now, France, Japan, the United States, the U.K. and Canada, as well as in two other international jurisdictions.

The point I want to raise with the hon. member is the issue of the ethics investigation, which was actually requested by the party opposite that is moving this motion, the party that member represents. It sought that ethics investigation because some of the powers of the ethics investigator include the power to command evidence orally, in writing or under oath; the power to produce documents and have them produce anything the commissioner considers necessary; and the ability to enforce those powers in such a manner that the commissioner has the same powers as a court of record.

Are those the reasons the Ethics Commissioner was solicited by the NDP? Now, in this House, does the member for Edmonton Strathcona question the independence of that ethics investigator?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that I do not intend to give a doctoral thesis in response to what was supposedly a question. I want to give a brief response so that other people can ask me questions.

What I will speak to is the deeply troubling response that the government allowed for the review of this major and significant reform to the Criminal Code of Canada and that there was ample opportunity for the review of that provision at the finance committee and during debate on this omnibus budget bill. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Absolutely, this is the way the government operates. It likes to go out and consult, and in particular, even in proceedings, it says that it mostly consulted with business. The idea of the DPA came from business to begin with. That is why the government initiated it.

Why did the government not allow adequate time in this place for the elected officials to actually discuss this matter, and why was it not tabled as an amendment to the Criminal Code rather than being in the budget bill?

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister or the PMO put pressure on the former attorney general in respect of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, and if the former attorney general refused to buckle under that pressure and refused to issue a directive to the director of public prosecutions and refused to gazette that directive, and if then the Prime Minister used his Crown prerogative to move the former attorney general out of her position and into another position, I believe that is obstruction of justice and a violation of the administration of justice and the rule of law. I do not believe that the Crown prerogative extends to giving the Prime Minister the right

to shuffle any attorney general out of that position to put in place a more compliant attorney general to get what he wants in respect of a criminal prosecution.

My question for the member for Edmonton Strathcona is this. Does she agree with that assessment?

• (1520)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, at the heart of this is a concern about whether there was an obstruction of justice. As we all should know, it is an obstruction of justice if any elected person in this place tries to become engaged in or involved in a decision to prosecute or not prosecute an offence. In this case, we have a whole new mechanism, where the attorney general has the authority to say yea or nay.

In my mind, as a lawyer and as a person who worked in the field of enforcement, it sounds to me like the matters that have been proceeding are completely inappropriate. That is why we need the air cleared. The Liberals do not appear to want to bring the proper witnesses before the committee, and that is why there is this call for an independent judicial inquiry at this stage. I think it is important.

In our committee right now, we are studying how Canada can better help the world in becoming more observant of democracy and human rights, yet here we are in this place talking about significant harm, potentially, to the rule of law in our own country. We need the air cleared on this matter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to try moving a motion again. There have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Timmins—James Bay, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 20, 2019, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the member for Beloil—Chambly have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am rising to speak to the opposition motion that has been brought forward by the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Business of Supply

Before I make some comments on the substance of the opposition motion the House is currently seized with, I would like to take a few moments to thank two individuals. First and foremost is the member for Vancouver Granville. When she was Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, I served as her parliamentary secretary and I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude for her work and her contributions to that portfolio. Certainly, it speaks for itself in terms of how we advanced the overall causes toward justice, and her leadership on the indigenous file reaches beyond her time in government here.

I would also like to take a moment to express gratitude for the work of Gerald Butts. I have come to know his family. I am keenly aware of the sacrifices that both he and his family had to make in order to put country before personal time. Obviously, it goes without saying that his loss will be felt by our team. However, we will remain focused on the work he has been committed to in the public interest for many years.

Turning to the opposition motion, as I read it, it calls for two things. First, it calls on the government to waive solicitor-client privilege for the former attorney general with respect to allegations of interference as it relates to an ongoing SNC-Lavalin prosecution. Second, it urges the government to call for a public inquiry in order to provide Canadians with transparency and accountability by the Liberals as promised in the 2015 election.

Going back to those campaign promises, we have indeed made significant strides when it comes to making government more open. I highlight a number of examples, including the introduction of Bill C-58, as well as Bill C-76, which would in fact undo some of the harm caused by the last Conservative government so that we can ensure that every voter has the right and can fully appreciate the right to vote. Bill C-50 would shed more light on political fundraising activities.

As it relates to the justice system, I am very proud of the work our government has done when it comes to ensuring that our judicial appointments process is open, transparent and merit-based. We have also introduced legislation that would improve access to justice. Here, I am referring to Bill C-75, which I know is continuing to be studied by the other place. We look forward to receiving its report back so that we can ensure our justice system is serving all Canadians.

These are all concrete measures that have raised the bar when it comes to open government and having a government that is transparent and accountable to all Canadians. We have supported each and every one of these measures with full and fair debate in the House and in the other place. What did the opposition members do when they had a chance to support those measures? They voted against those measures. That is indeed regrettable, because their voting record, in standing in opposition to those measures, actually speaks much larger volumes about how they feel about open government, as opposed to some of what I have heard from the other side of the aisle today.

The allegations that have been levied against the government are indeed serious. No one on this side of the House takes them lightly. However, as in the case of any allegation, we have to begin by

looking at the sources. Who are the sources? Are they reliable? Have they been independently verified? Have they been substantiated?

Here is the truth of the matter. At present, the sources of these allegations are unknown. They are anonymous. They are not corroborated. They are not verified. They are not substantiated. This should be of great concern to not only the members of this chamber who are currently debating the motion. This should be of grave concern to all Canadians. Why is that? It is because in the place of facts, evidence and circumstances that would underlie and underpin these allegations, we have the opposition embarking upon a campaign of conjecture, speculation and a rush to judgment. While indeed I will concede that this does make for good political theatre, it does not advance the pursuit of truth.

The Prime Minister has been clear that at no point did either he or his staff direct the former attorney general or the current Attorney General on the matter of SNC-Lavalin. He has been abundantly clear that at no point did either he or his staff wrongly influence the former or present Attorney General when it comes to the SNC-Lavalin matter.

● (1525)

I understand from the opposition that in answer to those statements made by the Prime Minister they would hear from the former attorney general, the member for Vancouver Granville. It is not for me to speak for the member for Vancouver Granville. It is not for the opposition to speak on her behalf, as I have heard some of my colleagues from the other side of the aisle purport to do over the last number of days.

I understand from media reports that the member for Vancouver Granville has sought legal advice. I imagine she is certainly taking that legal advice into consideration. Coincidentally I would note that the legal advice itself is privileged and I will come back to the importance of that principle in a moment. I want to underscore that it is a decision of her making as to if and when she will make a further comment about this matter in public.

In regard to the merits of the motion, the Prime Minister has indicated today, as has his Attorney General, that he has sought and is in the course of seeking legal advice on the matter of solicitor-client privilege as it applies to the motion. Let me say a few words about the importance of solicitor-client privilege.

This is not only a legal principle recognized in the common law. It is not only a legal principle that has been enshrined in various statutes. It is a principle that has been elevated to constitutional status by the Supreme Court of Canada. It is permanent. It survives the relationship between the parties and it is, as the Supreme Court of Canada has held, fundamental to the proper functioning of our government and to our democracy. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada has held that without solicitor-client privilege, the administration of justice, and by extension our democracy, would be compromised. We cannot take for granted what is at stake when we put into play the questions of when solicitor-client privilege applies.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister and the government, as some of my colleagues will have served in the last administration will recall, some of whom indeed were in cabinet themselves, no doubt understand first-hand the importance of this principle as it relates to the day-to-day functioning of our government. It is required in order to ensure that there is an atmosphere, an environment in which the government can seek legal advice on how best to undertake policy and legislative initiatives so that they are consistent with the charter.

Without that environment, without that space, in order to have a free, fair and flowing exchange of ideas, different perspectives and different voices, there would be an undermining of the proper functioning of government. We place this privilege at the very pinnacle of our justice system and it does not just apply to government. It applies to all Canadians. If at any point in time Canadians have either retained a lawyer and have come into play with the justice system, they will understand the importance of having a confidential relationship with their lawyer so that their lawyer can best serve their interests. Canadians would understand that they would not want their lawyers to flippantly waive that privilege. We need to be sure that we put this issue into its proper context in the debate of the opposition motion that is on the floor today.

It is true that in law there are some limited exceptions to this privilege and I understand that members of the opposition are calling with great fervour for the waiver of privilege in this case as it relates to their allegations and the former attorney general of Canada. To my mind, in order to waive this privilege, we need something more compelling, more confirmed and more corroborated than the anonymous sources that have appeared in a number of media reports.

• (1530)

I look to my colleagues in the opposition, and in particular to those who have been called to the bar who have a deep understanding of and I would hope a profound respect for this principle, to substantiate their claim beyond the hyperbole, the exaggeration and the stretched statements that I have listened very carefully to throughout the course of this debate. I am still waiting.

The second part of the opposition motion urges the government to initiate a judicial inquiry, something that my Conservative colleagues have had some experience with themselves. In some cases, there were obvious social causes for which the public requested, of the last Conservative government, the compelling need for an inquiry and the Conservative government refused. One such case was the call for an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. The last Conservative government consistently, in the face of an ongoing systemic tragedy in our justice system, refused to undertake one. I will let members opposite defend that decision, and I will stand here and explain my reasons the call for a judicial inquiry is, at best, premature.

Currently, there are a number of processes unfolding in Parliament and within the law by statutory parliamentary officers to provide a degree of accountability and transparency in response to the allegations that have been put forward by the opposition.

The first comes from the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which is meeting at this very moment, if I am not mistaken, to determine which witnesses it will hear from. Once

more, the opposition has rushed to judgment. It has made this a partisan matter without waiting to see the full list of witnesses who will be called by that committee.

Respectfully, I would suggest that my colleagues and friends on the other side of the aisle let that process unfold and place faith in the independence of that committee, in which members on this side of the House place great faith, and in its members' capacity to bring their own ideas, their own thinking and their own principles. I suggest they see where that committee takes this, rather than claiming that on the one hand the committee should do its business, and on the other hand, it is essentially fraught with partisanship. It is either one or the other. Either members of the House will come to that committee with an open mind, an appreciation of independence and an understanding of the importance of this work, or they will not.

Certainly for my colleagues who work on that committee, I have faith in their independence and integrity. I speak on behalf of all members on this side of the House when I say that we all look forward to their ongoing work at committee.

We have also heard from the opposition that we need to have a judicial inquiry because the Ethics Commissioner does not have the sufficient ability or capacity, the statutory mandate, to look into the allegations that are the subject of the opposition motion. In particular, my colleagues in the NDP have expressed their concerns and frustrations regarding the Ethics Commissioner's lack of capacity to do his job.

• (1535)

The first observation to make is that it was the NDP members themselves who decided, of their own volition, which parliamentary official to bring this allegation to.

We are not saying, one way or the other, whether this was the right choice. That was a matter for the NDP to determine. However, listening to the NDP members today in question period, it was somewhat ironic to hear them say on the one hand that they filed a complaint with the Ethics Commissioner and then on the other hand, virtually at the same time, that the Ethics Commissioner did not have the ability to look into the very allegations that they were bringing forward. It is inconsistent and incompatible with basic logic that they would have submitted those allegations to the Ethics Commissioner in the first place if they believed that the Ethics Commissioner was unable to look into them.

We have said that we believe in the work of the Ethics Commissioner. This is a parliamentary officer. This is an officer who is independent from government. This is an officer who is not part of the partisan exercise and debate that is the *sine qua non* of this place. This is a parliamentary officer who has the statutory mandate to examine the circumstances and the allegations put forward by the opposition.

As we have said repeatedly, we place faith in the office and the people who serve in that office, and we will co-operate at every step of the way, as we have in the past.

Business of Supply

There are many other fora and venues for the opposition to make their case. It is not for the government to set those steps or to provide that road map for them. The opposition will determine what it wants to do. However, in the meantime, in addition to all of the remarks that I have made about the subject of this motion, I hope Canadians view this matter as not just simply turning a blind eye. There will be transparency. There will be accountability. I am confident in what the Prime Minister says in saying that there has been no direction and no wrongful influence as it relates to the former attorney general or the present Attorney General, because I know that this is a government that has great respect when it comes to the independence of our judiciary, when it comes to the independence of the legal profession and when it comes to the independence of the administration of justice. I believe firmly that our work speaks to those values.

At the end of the day, what matters more than the theatre and the drama—which can make for good reading on a weekend or at night if there is nothing else to do—is the work, the work of the government, the work to ensure that every Canadian has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential. It is the work to serve the most vulnerable, which was a campaign promise, a belief on which the government was elected, and work that we do each and every day, together, united in solidarity. It is bigger than any one of us. It is bigger than all of us. It is the very reason we are here: to serve the public, to serve the public interest.

For all those reasons, I am going to encourage my opposition colleagues to reconsider this motion and to put our focus and our energies back on the people who sent us here—Canadians.

• (1540)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was listening to the parliamentary secretary's speech, and I will give him an A for effort in trying to spin this issue.

The Liberals' communications strategy over the last week has been a slow-moving train wreck. I would offer to him that *The Globe and Mail* does not publish a story on its front page unless the sources have some credibility.

Then we can look at all of the actions since then. There is the Prime Minister's ever-changing commentary, saying that the former attorney general's presence in cabinet spoke for itself, and then her subsequent resignation. There is this changing narrative, the character assassination comments coming out of the PMO, and so on and so forth. We have had five different versions of this story.

Then the justice committee voted against having the witnesses who are at the centre of this storm appear. Yes, the committee is meeting today, but it is meeting in camera, so we will not find out what the deliberations are and the Canadian public will not know what goes on at that committee, because we cannot speak about it.

Does the parliamentary secretary realistically expect Canadians to believe that these are the actions and words of a government that has nothing to hide?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. However, I feel obliged to point out in regard to the statements that were reported in the press in relation to the member for Vancouver Granville and former attorney general of

Canada, particularly those statements that were offensive, racist and sexist, that the Prime Minister unequivocally disassociated himself from all of those, as do I and as does every decent member who serves in this chamber. Such remarks have no business to exist, not only here but in the public domain. As somebody who had the opportunity to work with the member for Vancouver Granville, I was deeply offended by them.

There are important issues here and there are important allegations here, but what I said during the substance of my remarks is that it will take more than the anonymous, unverified, uncorroborated sources that we have thus far heard from.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, if the House or its committees do not vote to get to the bottom of this issue, do not vote to compel Mr. Butts and others to testify in front of committee to clear the air, then this place has become a Potemkin village. Sure, we have spent billions of dollars on beautiful wood and stone carvings here, but the hold that the government has on its members clearly shows that the processes and procedures in this place are broken.

The government is hiding behind solicitor-client privilege, but solicitor-client privilege does not exist in this chamber and it does not exist in its committees. There is good precedent for this. According to precedent, the attorney general, the prime minister or anybody else who is asked for information must provide it to the House of Commons. In fact, this past fall, when the U.K. government and the U.K. attorney general refused to provide the advice the AG had given to the government, they were found in contempt of Parliament. As well, Speaker Milliken found the former government in contempt of Parliament for refusing to release information on the basis of national security.

The government cannot hide behind solicitor-client privilege and not release the information. It has an obligation under section 18 of the Constitution to do exactly that.

• (1545)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the parliamentary secretaries that they do know better, that they should be a model here in Parliament and they should not be interrupting while somebody else is speaking.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague who rose with the question clearly has a very selective memory when it comes to the last Conservative government's record on open government.

Openness, transparency and accountability are all principles and values that seemed to be very elusive under Stephen Harper. I can think of two examples which come readily to mind, both when a government that my hon. colleague served under was found in contempt for not bringing forward documents that were sought by this very chamber, which he voted in favour of opposing—

Hon. Michael Chong: No. Simply not true.

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Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, I will let him correct the record on that. Maybe it was on principle, but certainly that was the first time a government had been held in contempt in this chamber. That was when he served under the last Conservative government.

Also, when it comes to the matter of calling for an inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women, where was his moral suasion then? It was nowhere to be seen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, first the Prime Minister blamed the former justice minister because she did not complain about not being pressured. Then he said that it was Scott Brison's fault. Surely the Prime Minister mixed up the SNC-Lavalin fiasco with the Davie shipyard file. The latest development is that his top adviser has stepped down, refusing to take the blame for something he did not do and not wanting to be a distraction, though he did in fact become one. It is easy to get lost in all of these versions. This is "Fifty shades of Butts".

Meanwhile, no party in the House seems concerned about the future of the thousands of workers at SNC-Lavalin.

Can my colleague explain how this motion helps, or does not help, the thousands of SNC-Lavalin workers?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Our government is working very hard for the province of Quebec and for the rest of Canada.

[*English*]

This is a government that believes in pursuing an economic agenda that provides good jobs for any Canadian who wants one. I want to assure my colleague that this is true both for his province and for every province and territory that we represent.

With regard to the rest of my colleague's question, I will reiterate what I said during my remarks. The Prime Minister has been abundantly clear about the allegations. There has been no direction or wrongful influence as it relates to the former attorney general and the current Attorney General, as it relates to this matter. While the opposition will continue to pursue various venues in which to have an answer to this allegation, we remain, on this side of the House, focused on the work of Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my colleague can just add some further thought in regard to the independence of the office of the Ethics Commissioner. That is something that the Prime Minister has welcomed. Could my colleague also reinforce the important role of standing committees in situations of this nature?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our government believes in the independence of parliamentary committees, and we place confidence in the members who serve there. I hear my colleagues chuckling across the way. I put some confidence in the members of the opposition who serve on those committees as well, and I know some of those colleagues. We have to allow those processes to unfold.

To the other part of my colleague's question in relation to the Ethics Commissioner, this is a parliamentary officer created by statute. The Ethics Commissioner is independent and non-partisan and is granted the powers to both require evidence and determine whether there has been any breach of the high standards of ethics that Canadians demand of our government. We place faith in that individual and in that office as well.

● (1550)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have so much to ask.

The question today is whether the Prime Minister or a staff member directed or pressured the former attorney general to stop the criminal prosecutions of SNC-Lavalin.

As was mentioned previously by a colleague, the conditions laid out in the remediation agreement state very clearly that the director of public prosecutions is within her rights to refuse to negotiate remediation, that she would be breaking the law if she did pursue such a negotiation with SNC-Lavalin and that the attorney general cannot instruct the director to let SNC-Lavalin or any other off the hook.

As in the words of Andrew Coyne, I would like to pose this question. Since it is very clear that this is not possible, what on earth was there for the Prime Minister or his staff to discuss with the Attorney General in the first place?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, as I said during the course of my remarks, this is a government that respects the independence of the office of the Attorney General. It is a value that has been adhered to consistently and has manifested itself in various ways.

I know that my hon. colleague wants answers with regard to some of the substance of the allegations that have been made. Thus far, what we have are anonymous sources. They have not been corroborated. They have not been substantiated. I know that there is much debate on this floor, but we place faith in the processes that are currently under way to get to the bottom of the matter.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor West.

As always, it is a great honour to rise in this place on behalf of the fantastic residents of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, and especially on a very important motion.

As our party's former justice critic, I enjoyed a very good working relationship with the member for Vancouver Granville when she was the minister of justice and attorney general. Although we differed on some policy areas, I knew her to be a person of the utmost integrity, a woman who has stood by her principles and has had a long and storied history both as a public prosecutor and a B.C. regional chief. She commands a huge amount of respect in my home province of British Columbia.

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That is why, in her role as the country's first female indigenous justice minister, I was so perplexed and puzzled when I saw the news reports in January that she had been removed from her post and demoted to Veterans Affairs. Normally, I would say that serving our veterans is one of the highest callings in this land. Indeed, being the Minister of Veterans Affairs should be that. However, it is a demotion under the government, because we have seen its policies with respect to veterans and know it is not walking the talk with respect to the people who once wore the uniform. I get that feedback from veterans in my riding and I know the member for Courtenay—Alberni, who serves as our Veterans Affairs critic, also gets it from veterans right across the country.

The other puzzling thing about that demotion was the letter she released to the public, in which she talked about speaking truth to power and that our justice system must always be free from political interference. Those comments, made without any context, puzzled many people and they questioned why the former attorney general would go out of her way to make these obvious statements. We started to connect the dots when *The Globe and Mail* came out with its huge bombshell story on February 7.

As I said in my questions and comments to the previous speaker, the parliamentary secretary, Robert Fife and *The Globe and Mail* do not put a story of this magnitude on the front page unless they have gone out of their way to verify the sources of the story. They do not put their careers and indeed the reputation of one of our oldest newspapers on the line with unsubstantiated reports. It is obvious that they spoke to someone with insider knowledge of what went on in the Prime Minister's Office.

The fact is that although the Prime Minister and various Liberals have said that at no time was the former attorney general “directed”, that word was never used by *The Globe and Mail*. Rather, the word it used was “pressured”, which can be many different things and can come in many different forms. That is worrying because one of the pillars of our democratic system is the separation between the branches of government, and the executive branch of government in particular with the awesome power it wields, and our judiciary. It must be able to operate in a clear and unobstructed manner to ensure that the principles of justice are carried through.

There are other dots that connect this story.

Let us look at the fact that the deferred prosecution agreement provision of the Criminal Code was snuck in. The Liberals might say there were a lot of consultations, but it was extremely undemocratic for them to put this major change to the Criminal Code at the tail end of a budget omnibus bill that clocked in at over 550 pages. Even the Liberal members at the Standing Committee on Finance were questioning their own government as to what this provision was doing there. The government used time allocation to force that bill through. Therefore, did it get the proper oversight and deliberations it deserved? I would say no and venture that most Canadians would agree with me. This is coming from a party that promised Canadians it would do away with the undemocratic process of omnibus bills. What a sham. It is another broken promise in a whole list of them.

• (1555)

The Liberals say that there is nothing wrong here, that there is nothing to hide, but what further corroborates the story is the

changing nature of the narrative. We know the Prime Minister spoke to reporters and stated that the former attorney general's continued presence in cabinet spoke for itself, only to result in him having egg on his face the very next day when she tendered her resignation. Does someone who resigns from cabinet lawyer up with a former Supreme Court justice if there is nothing to hide? We have to put all of these things together, the changing narrative and the resignation of one of the top ministers of the government, and ask ourselves if these are the actions and words of a government that has nothing to hide.

That brings me to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. My Liberal friends across the way keep talking about its purported independence. I served on that committee as vice-chair in 2017, and I have a lot of respect for all colleagues who serve on it. However, I was extremely disappointed in their actions last week.

Last week, the Liberals on the committee did not demonstrate independence; they demonstrated they were the loyal foot soldiers of the Prime Minister's Office. This is not a government by cabinet; this is a government by the PMO. That is precisely why SNC-Lavalin met no fewer than 14 times with PMO officials. Why would it waste its time meeting with the PMO if it knew that was where the buck stops? One does not go to the minister of justice or any other minister. One goes to the PMO because one can talk to Gerald Butts, Katie Telford and other major officials in the PMO. That is how one gets things done with the government.

The meeting last week was a bit of a farce. Despite the Liberals' claims of committee independence, they voted down every key witness who would have anything of relevance to say about this whole sordid affair. Yes, the committee is meeting now, but it is meeting in camera, so there is no way the Canadian public is going to know what the deliberations of that committee are. We are not going to know how Liberal members voted. We can tell the public what motions the NDP is intending to move at the beginning of the committee, but Canadians are going to have to read the minutes of the proceedings to find out what motions were passed. We cannot, because we risk violation of parliamentary privilege, talk about what goes on in that committee or what is happening right now. To say that this is open and transparent is a farce.

I am pretty disappointed in my former colleagues in the justice committee. I still have a lot of respect for them. I give every member of Parliament in this place the benefit of the doubt. We all come here to serve our constituents and do the best we can for the country. However, Liberal backbenchers have to ask themselves if they were elected on the ideals that we are seeing today. Are they here to protect their political masters in the Prime Minister's Office or are they here to join with us in the opposition to shed the light of day on this issue, to agree with the NDP's motion to have the Prime Minister waive solicitor-client privilege, to allow the former minister of justice and attorney general to speak, to give her side of the story? All we have heard are the Liberals talking for her; we have not heard from her. It is her right and privilege as to whether she speaks, but we should at least afford her the opportunity to do so.

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I was very surprised last week at how many people in my constituency approached me on this issue. The Liberals have to be very careful because these are the kinds of actions that have a very corrosive effect on our politics: the changing nature of the story, the reaction to the scandal and not being truthful with Canadians. It is corrosive for this entire body. In order to salvage what little reputation they have left on this issue, I ask Liberal backbenchers not to side with the PMO but to in fact vote with us to have the Prime Minister waive solicitor-client privilege and to call for a public inquiry to give this issue the airing it fully needs.

• (1600)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to raise two points and then ask the member a question. First, I agree with him completely that the member for Vancouver Granville acquitted herself extremely well and with distinction as a minister in her time serving and in her work with the justice committee, of which he was a part.

The second point I raise is that it is important the record clearly reflect what was decided at the justice committee. By vote at the justice committee last Wednesday, it was decided to undertake hearings into three specific areas: the issue of remediation agreements, the issue of the Shawcross doctrine and the issue of calling witnesses in public to address what was at issue with respect to the allegations.

With respect to the ethics investigation taking place, it has significant powers such as compelling evidence, compelling documents and enforcement similar to a court of law. That investigation was initiated by the NDP. Does the member continue to believe in the independence of the ethics investigator and in the validity of that investigation?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, it goes without saying that I have absolute confidence in the office of the Ethics Commissioner, which is why we requested the investigation in the first place.

The parliamentary secretary does not inform the House as to why the government cannot walk and chew gum at the same time. What plausible reason is there that we cannot have two concurrent investigations? The office of the Ethics Commissioner is going to be looking at whether the Prime Minister used his office to further the interests of another individual. That is a very narrow band of investigation.

What we want to know, through a public inquiry and by hearing from the former attorney general is whether any political pressure was brought to bear on her with respect to SNC-Lavalin to instruct the director of public prosecutions not to go ahead with a remediation agreement. That is a very separate investigation. I do not see any reason the two cannot happen concurrently.

• (1605)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier we heard the parliamentary secretary for infrastructure calling on the opposition to unite in order to deal with this issue. The call from us should go back to the government to cooperate with our position and let the committee do its job without

any interference or pressure. In the meantime, I am not sure if the hon. member agrees with me that the government is signalling that there is nothing bad but not walking the talk. I would like the hon. member to comment on that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, with respect to the committee's work, the parliamentary secretary said that it was important for the committee to study the Shawcross doctrine and other things and to kind of get lost into these legalese arguments. Anyone with a good textbook or access to Google can find out about the Shawcross doctrine. However, the fact remains that when Liberals were at committee last week, which is all on the public record, they were offered the chance to expand the witness list to include those people who had a direct knowledge of this affair and refused it. That is the fact.

With respect to the former attorney general, as a Crown prosecutor, she knows fully well what she can and cannot say at committee. We should afford her the right to determine that for herself, with the expert legal counsel she has now retained.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Canadians' confidence in the independence of the judiciary is being called into question, and I have to wonder what the implications are—

An hon. member: The member is not wearing a tie.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I understand that the chamber is a little longer, but the member does have a tie on so this is not a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, perhaps we can give the government members glasses to help them see their colleagues across the way.

The specific question I was asking had to do with Canadians' confidence in the independence of the judiciary. This scandal is clouding judicial independence, which is why we have to shed light on it.

Can my colleague comment on that?

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, if what the former attorney general is reported to have done is true, that she stood up to the PMO and refused their advances on SNC-Lavalin, then I think she did our justice system a great service. Am I confident in the government's oversight of the justice system? With the recent reports and what we have learned over the last two weeks, it has thrown a lot of that into disrepute.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to talk about this issue. I am going to read the motion first. It is important because it is a straightforward motion that is important for this debate and important for the vote that will come up. Instead of getting into the weeds on things, it gets to two specific areas that I will touch upon. The motion is this:

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That the House: (a) call on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege for the former Attorney General with respect to allegations of interference in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin; and (b) urge the government to launch a public inquiry, under the Inquiries Act, in order to provide Canadians with the transparency and accountability promised by the Liberals in the 2015 election campaign.

Our leader, Jagmeet Singh, has been clear about the need for a public inquiry. As a criminal defence lawyer, I would argue that his skills are very much needed here in Ottawa. It is important that we get due process for this because this is touching some of the cornerstones of old political power and the colonial type of structure that still influences our democracy today.

It was interesting that when the issue of SNC-Lavalin first reared its head, the first things I heard were the catcalls and the heckling from the Liberals asking why we were against jobs. One of the most important things that I have noted, having been in the House for 16-plus years, is that before something goes into a media frenzy as this case has, especially with the Prime Minister's chief of staff Gerald Butts' resignation, there is the fact that the sensitivity of that thing gets to the magnitude it did already.

It is important to distinguish that, even through our local procurement projects in Windsor, what we are talking about here is, of course, concern about the jobs of the people at SNC-Lavalin and their innocence, but the reality is that those jobs still exist in the procurement field regardless.

One good example of that is the Gordie Howe international bridge being built in Windsor. Ironically, it is being built by Aecon Construction as part of a larger consortium and it was the New Democrats who fought against Aecon being bought by the Chinese government. We knew that this type of acquisition by a Chinese state-owned organization would lead to further complications. In fact, having them build an international border bridge between Canada and the United States, which we have so much dependency on in my region, the U.S. being 35% of our daily trade, would be hazardous and foolhardy.

Reluctantly, the government finally blocked that sale. Aecon eventually won the bid for the bridge being built between our two countries. The runner-up was SNC-Lavalin. The important lesson is that the jobs are going forward and the construction is taking place. We want to make sure that people in this situation are going to be protected, but there is a corporate culture problem at SNC-Lavalin that, if we do not deal with it now, will continue to re-emerge. There is a pattern of behaviour.

The government in an omnibus budget bill that is 600 pages long tried to bury a change. This is important for Canadians to understand. The government was trying to protect individuals from criminal liability who we know at the very least were doing business with Moammar Gadhafi that was sketchy. They were doing sketchy, despicable business with a dictator from Libya and the government was allowing people, basically, to pay a parking fine for the criminal convictions that could take place. The unbelievable truth behind all of these matters is that we would instill a process right now that would further encourage that. The reality is that it would reward potential criminal problems, rather than eliminating them, because people would know they could just buy their way out of it.

Imagine the Liberal government members, who talk about the platitudes of human rights, social justice and all those things, changing this in a budget bill. This way they avoided committee and avoided parliamentary oversight. They avoided bringing in witnesses, whether they were for or against this type of bill. They avoided that process. They avoided the public and the media having an opportunity to have that dialogue. They avoided this chamber having a discussion about that.

● (1610)

Therefore, we will let dictators and despots, basically those we were doing business with by some of corporate Canada, have a free pass and the people who were complicit in this behaviour, whether it be drug smuggling, human trafficking or arms dealing, and all of those things, can basically be let off the hook as if paying a parking ticket. That is what the Liberals have done with our democracy. That is what they have set as an example.

This is the first case to come forward that we know of, but this country used to stand for something. It used to stand for some international rules and standards that set us apart and made us an example. Instead, what the Liberals have done is what they usually do in a lot of different things. It is ironic that their scandal, which is leading to resignations in the PMO, is not over child care and the fact that they have not done anything on that. It is not over gender equality and the fact that we still have a gap between men and women on living wages and the problems that we have. It is not over the numerous issues we have with indigenous affairs and our communities. It is over the fact that the Liberals have a culture and a community of corruption that is part of the foundation of the Liberal Party.

In fact, the reality in this situation is that, from 2004 to 2011, Liberal candidates and Liberal members received over \$100,000 in political donations by SNC-Lavalin that were illegal. We know that as a fact. We have people who are voting in this chamber to this day who could have received illegal campaign donations. I have been around this where we have seen Conservatives in the past, one even having to resign related to this in terms of illegal campaign donations.

Here we have, right now, a situation in front of our democracy where the Prime Minister will not even waive client privilege to get to the root and the facts of this. That is the reality. We still do not know where that \$100,000 went to. Why should that \$100,000 not be tracked down? When campaigns are won and lost on a few percentages and a few votes, that money matters. It makes a difference in local ridings. It is the ads they buy. It is the people they influence with regard to advertising or having volunteers who turn into paid staff working on different things and the muscle they can put behind their campaign. Money, unfortunately, in politics makes a difference.

Ironically, it was Jean Chrétien who ended some of the corporate attempts to influence government because at that time, and I was here in this chamber, we had the Martinites and the Chrétienites fighting each other, which led to the new law that we have, which is a good law, limiting corporate donations and union donations to the parties. The mere fact that we have our system today was actually to devolve ourselves from that.

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However, here we have at this moment now an influence that exists in the House and we do not know who that is and why that is. We know the \$100,000 is out there. I hope there is going to be more investigation into this because people either in the House or through campaigns are wandering around, having campaigned with dirty money either knowing or not knowing. That is crucially important as we go through the series of examinations as to how power and how influence take place. That is why a public inquiry is so important, as Jagmeet Singh has called for. He has called for that because the public inquiry would allow people to glance into the window of what should be shaking the foundations.

I was here for the discussions and the stonewalling that took place with regard to the Gomery commission with the Adscam, or sponsorship scandal, as it was known in the Ontario area. For months, the government denied that it was taking place. Finally, it ripped the band-aid off and our democracy got better from that public inquiry.

I would argue that we need the same thing here. When we look at SNC-Lavalin, there is a history of fines, penalties, political-donation schemes, lawsuits and a series of different things that shake the foundations of many people's lives, not only the people who work at the company but also the other people who lost jobs because they lost bids because of this behaviour.

• (1615)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have one clarification. My understanding is that there was indeed improper funding of money to both the Conservative Party of Canada and the Liberal Party of Canada by SNC-Lavalin, but every single amount of those monies has been returned. That is important to state for the record.

The second point is that my friend, the member for Windsor West, has indicated a lack of transparency. I want to again outline for the House that there was a one-year consultation on the remediation agreement. It is flagged in the budget and it is presented in the budget bill. That budget bill is debated in this chamber. It goes before three different committees, finance, justice and a Senate committee, and then it is gazetted.

The third point is that I know the member opposite to be a fierce defender of the rights of workers and the rights of labour and that is important. In the context of that, where remediation agreements allow us to look after prosecuting the corporate leaderships and holding them accountable so that the workers under them, who are not responsible for the leadership decisions, are able to maintain their place of employment, is a remediation agreement in that context useful and is that the reason why it has been done in five members of the G7 thus far?

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I know that the new minister served on the industry committee as a parliamentary secretary and was recently elevated to one of the most important positions in the House. It was rather unexpected, by any means. It is important that there is at least some time to look at these things.

Perhaps the member and the parliamentary secretary would understand, though, that even though the campaign donations were

returned, it does not mean that they were not used for political advantage at the time when the money came in. We have seen that in other campaigns. We saw that with the Conservatives and Dean Del Mastro, for example, where money was used to get power and there were still consequences. Returning the money afterward is not sufficient.

• (1620)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government cannot hide behind solicitor-client privilege. The government must provide the House of Commons or its committees the information with respect to what happened to the former attorney general.

There is good precedent for this. This past fall, the British government would not release the legal advice that U.K. attorney general Geoffrey Cox gave to the government regarding Brexit. The U.K. attorney general also refused to provide that information and advice to the U.K. House of Commons. On December 3, 2018, Speaker Bercow ruled that the government was likely in contempt of the Commons and the next day the Commons voted to hold the government in contempt. It was only then that the prime minister and attorney general released the information to the Commons.

There is precedent for this in Speaker Milliken's ruling of 2010, where he found the government in contempt for refusing to release information because the government said it was injurious to national security. On May 2011, the House of Commons voted to hold the government in contempt of Parliament for refusing to release information. Both the Canadian and U.K. Houses of Commons have rights and privileges and immunities that guarantee us the right and privilege to get this information from the government. Therefore, the government should quit hiding behind this solicitor-client privilege argument and tell us what happened to the former attorney general.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills. I had a chance to meet Speaker Bercow with an all-party delegation during the Brexit discussion that continues there. There is a stronger and better democracy for it.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned the Criminal Code and provided an explanation with regard to allowing corporate criminals to get off. We did not have to have an either-or situation with this law. The reality is that we were not allowed to go through the proper parliamentary process to submit amendments. We could have a law that does both things, protects those who are innocent and also gets criminal convictions against people who commit the most dastardly deeds, as opposed to what is happening here. Liberals are protecting the strongest component of the corporate culture that still exists and they decided to side on that element and that protection now as a get out of jail free card, which is totally unacceptable. This type of behaviour is just not acceptable.

Doing business with Moammar Gadhafi, getting off scot-free and having to pay a fine, is that really what these Liberals are about?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will sharing my time with my colleague from Oxford.

Business of Supply

I am very pleased to rise today to support the NDP motion. We rarely agree, but for once, we will fully support the motion moved by our NDP colleagues. It may not seem like it, but this might be a historic moment in Canada's Parliament.

Let us review this whole story. It all started not that long ago, on February 7, 2019, when *The Globe and Mail* broke the bombshell story that there might have been some political interference in Canada's justice system. Events unfolded from there. First, we learned why the former attorney general of Canada had been demoted, removed from her position and sent to Veterans Affairs. Many things became clear.

Every day for a week, or nearly 10 days, we saw the Prime Minister weaving a tangled web of stories. He even went so far as to say that it was because Scott Brison left, and yada yada yada. It was all hooey.

How did we get here?

It all comes back to the problems with SNC-Lavalin, a company facing corruption charges all over the world, including here in Canada. It is a very complex issue. The important thing to understand is that the Liberals agreed to give that company a helping hand. They will say they did it in order to save jobs. We are okay with that. They are trying to say that we in the Conservative Party are talking out of both sides of our mouths and that we do not want to protect jobs. That is false. We realize that there are employees who have nothing to do with the corruption the company is charged with. However, something still needs to be done to punish those in charge, the ones responsible for the corruption.

Let me start at the beginning. In response to pressure from that company, the government worked secretly. This comes as no surprise from the Liberals. They slipped a provision into the budget to amend the Criminal Code regarding section 715.3 and subsequent sections. They included this in an 800-page omnibus bill last year.

We all know how it works. We obviously did not read all 800 pages. That approach is used when a government wants to push something through quickly without anyone noticing, but our colleagues on the Standing Committee on Finance noticed. Even the Liberal member for Hull—Aylmer was very surprised to see that. The Liberals said that this measure was to protect white-collar criminals, but they did not really say what it was doing in the budget. Everyone saw it and said that the so-called remediation agreement was going to help someone, but things went no further.

Now, we know that the measure was created and implemented to help SNC-Lavalin. This story has been gaining momentum over the past two weeks. In September, the director of public prosecutions looked into this approach. She said that it would not work and that it was a boneheaded approach. I am speculating here because I do not have an exact answer. Today, we know that the measure that was drafted and included in the law will not help SNC-Lavalin. That was one part of the problem.

The second part of the problem occurred when SNC-Lavalin was informed of the situation. I have here the message that the company sent to its shareholders in October. It advised them that the director of public prosecutions had warned the company that she would not be able to hold discussions to negotiate a remediation agreement.

Enter the budget bill. In September, the justice analyst said that it would not work. Then, in October, SNC-Lavalin acknowledged that it would not work. After that, there is silence. We would not have heard anything anyway because we did not go there. It was not up to us. The justice system would deal with it.

There was a cabinet shuffle after the holidays. Well now, what did the justice minister, our attorney general of Canada, do to be demoted like that? In a fine little Facebook post, she said that she would always stand up for justice and for the law. That was around the middle of January. We did not really understand what was going on. Then, along came that fateful February 7, and we figured it all out.

● (1625)

All the pieces are falling into place. Something happened between October, when SNC-Lavalin representatives indicated that they were unable to make a deal with the government, and the cabinet shuffle. That is when a problem arose, and that is what the motion is all about. We need to conduct an inquiry because it seems that there was political interference in the justice system.

Someone, somewhere, probably in the Prime Minister's Office, asked that something be done to resolve the problem. It is likely that the then attorney general replied that the law would not permit it. Then the other person reiterated their request. I think that is probably pretty much what happened.

Since February 7, as I just mentioned, the Prime Minister has been saying all sorts of things. For our part, we moved a motion on February 13 to call nine people to testify, including the former attorney general, former adviser Gerald Butts, Ms. Telford and six other people working in the Prime Minister's Office.

I was at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights last week. Instead of adopting our motion and shedding some light on this matter, our Liberal colleagues pulled a fast one on us. They showed up with a nice little watered-down motion, saying that they would hold meetings to examine the Shawcross Doctrine and that the new Attorney General would be reconvened, along with two others. The political games persisted. They clearly had no desire to shed any light on this matter.

Yesterday, another bombshell hit Canadian politics. The Prime Minister's friend and adviser, the man who had been behind him from the very beginning, whose strategies got the Prime Minister to where he is today, was leaving. He said that he was leaving but that he had done nothing wrong.

Today they are trying to convince us that there is nothing to see here, but the fact is that things have gotten even more interesting because the head strategist, the power behind the Liberal Party of Canada and the Government of Canada, the guy who told everyone what to do and what not to do, is leaving, and he says he did nothing wrong.

Business of Supply

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is meeting in camera at this very moment. Obviously, Liberal friends do not want this to play out in public. The Liberal Party is awfully fond of secrecy. During question period, I got the news via a tweet by a Liberal committee member that the committee will be calling the former attorney general to appear. Things are getting interesting indeed. First they try to make someone obey, but she stands up and says no, so she gets the boot. Then another guy says he is out of here but did nothing wrong. Suddenly it seems like things are working out after all, and the former attorney general will probably come back as though nothing happened.

Nevertheless, I can assure the House that we will keep digging. We moved a motion today, and our NDP colleagues will work with us to shine a light on what happened. The only way to do that is to launch an inquiry to get the real facts. We see what the Liberals are up to, and it is not okay. Things have not been okay for three and a half years, but now they are worse than ever. I am not really surprised, because it is in the Liberals' DNA, but for the sake of Canadians, we need to shine a light on this.

• (1630)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention and for supporting our motion calling for an independent public inquiry to get to the bottom of this scandal, which has become surprisingly complex.

I am also pleased to see the Conservatives' new passion for independent, transparent and open committees, rather than in camera meetings. Considering what I experienced between 2011 and 2015, I am surprised to see their new passion for transparent committees. We will see if that holds for the future.

That said, I would like to know whether my colleague, like most Canadians, believes the Prime Minister's version of the facts, since this is essentially about public trust in the Prime Minister and what he says.

Based on the information we have so far, and after everything that has happened over the past week and a half, is my colleague satisfied? Does he believe the Prime Minister's version of the facts, or would he say that he is not satisfied and would like to take this further?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his question.

I promise him that as of October 22, we will always be as open as possible with our colleagues.

My colleague asked me a question on a fundamental point. He asked me whether I believe what the Prime Minister of Canada is saying. My answer is no, I do not believe him at all.

We believe it is abundantly clear that there have been incidents and interference. I cannot prove it, but I can say that when I am asked whether I believe the Prime Minister of Canada, the answer is no.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my friend from Charlesbourg

—Haute-Saint-Charles whether 8,700 employees of SNC-Lavalin are guilty of a crime and therefore should lose their jobs.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Since the scandal broke on February 7, the Liberals' communications strategy has been to claim that we want to attack the employees. It is normal to want to defend oneself when faced with a difficult situation and when in trouble.

I hope with all my heart that SNC-Lavalin employees, the engineers and staff, will continue to be employed. The fact remains that I have always said that the company's executives should be brought to justice, that they should be punished and suffer the consequences of their actions. I believe that the two parties on this side of the House are on the same page in that regard. We understand that the employees should not pay the price. Is that easy to do? No, it is not.

The Liberals included a piece of legislation that does not even work in the omnibus bill. They created the problem. In September, the director of public prosecutions had to tell SNC-Lavalin that unfortunately, she could not help them and that she would have to proceed with a criminal prosecution.

The Liberals should look in the mirror. There are 40 Liberal MPs who are lawyers, and they were not even able to address the situation correctly.

They really should not be lecturing us.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for his recap of the events.

As everyone knows, the member was previously in the military, but he also founded a magazine. At one time, he was a journalist.

The Globe and Mail published a hard-hitting front-page article by three veteran journalists. Based on his experience in the publishing world, could the member tell me whether this is major news that is deserving of all this attention because it is raising all kinds of questions for Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his question.

Indeed, when Robert Fife and Steven Chase, both journalists for The Globe and Mail, publish a front-page story like that, it certainly cannot be called fake news.

This is the age of fake news, but these are credible journalists. The stories they publish are based on facts. That is guaranteed.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 Calgary Shepard, Carbon Pricing; the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Health; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment.

Business of Supply

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Oxford.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak in support of the motion put forward by the New Democratic Party.

The Conservative Party stands with the NDP to call on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege and to urge the government to launch a public inquiry to provide Canadians with transparency and accountability with respect to allegations of interference in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

The rule of law is a framework of laws and institutions that embodies four universal principles.

One is accountability, the idea that the government as well as private actors is accountable under the law.

Another is just laws, laws that are clear, publicized, stable and just. They are applied evenly and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons, contract and property rights, and certain core human rights.

A third principle is open government, such that the processes by which the laws are enacted, administered and enforced are accessible, fair and efficient.

The fourth principle is accessible and impartial dispute resolution, such that justice is delivered in a timely fashion by competent, ethical and independent representatives and neutrals who are accessible, have adequate resources and reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.

Any member of a police force, and I as a former chief of police, understands how the rule of law dictates our daily life. This continues to be something I aim to uphold as a member of Parliament. It is important in our roles as politicians to uphold these core principles of the rule of law, as they must be upheld for any democracy to function.

Last week the Liberal Party blocked all attempts of accountability at the justice committee meeting. There was an opportunity to be open and transparent on the SNC-Lavalin affair. Instead, the Liberal majority at committee attempted to cover up and block the search for the truth on this affair. Opposition MPs worked together to come up with a reasonable witness list, with three key individuals. The Liberal Party offered up its own watered-down motion that excluded key witnesses and called for a closed-door meeting, with no media present or transcripts provided.

Though the Liberal members hold a majority on the justice committee, they had an opportunity, with the motion they put forward, to make an amendment and not hold the consideration and selection of witnesses in secret this week. Though it may be a tradition that those deliberations be done in camera, there was an opportunity in these exceptional circumstances to avoid the perception that there is something to hide. I must say that earlier today, one of the Liberal members publicly posted a tweet that she was going to ask the former attorney general to speak. That was not done in private, but certainly in public.

As we speak, this meeting is happening. However, the Canadian people will be unable to see or read what transpired. This is not the

open and transparent government that Canadians were promised during the last election. The Prime Minister tried to assure Canadians that nothing unethical took place, citing that the former attorney general's presence in cabinet would speak for itself. Lo and behold, the former attorney general resigned, making it crystal clear that the Prime Minister is trying to hide from the truth with respect to the SNC-Lavalin affair.

It is clear that the Liberal Party has no interest in finding out the truth. The former attorney general has once again been denied an opportunity to speak.

To top it off, yesterday one of the Prime Minister's closest and most trusted political advisers resigned from office. This resignation is the clearest indication yet that there is much more to the SNC-Lavalin affair than we know.

The events that have transpired in the last several days are not the actions of someone with nothing to hide. This resignation does not settle this matter; instead, it only presents more questions that must be answered.

Canadians are rightly concerned about this issue, and we want to make sure that Canadians understand what has happened. My office has been flooded with emails and phone calls from Canadians across the country. They are concerned about this issue. My staff have received calls and emails from Canadians—not constituents of mine, but Canadians across the country—who have been unable to reach the offices of their Liberal MPs. We are hearing from frustrated Canadians expressing their disbelief on how the government is covering up this affair.

One email says that something is still going on in the justice committee. All the writer asks is to have the justice committee follow the rules, do the job and respect the rule of law to fix a serious problem for this country.

There have been troubling allegations with respect to possible interference by the Prime Minister's Office in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin and inconsistencies in the response from the Liberal Party. This is not a government that shows Canadians it is under control but a government in total chaos, and it raises critical questions of ethics and conduct from the highest-ranking office in this country.

The Conservative Party supports the NDP motion to call on the Prime Minister to waive solicitor-client privilege and urges the government to launch a public inquiry.

● (1640)

In 2015, the Liberal Party promised transparency and accountability during the election campaign. Today, we call on the Liberal Party to uphold that election promise.

Canadians are rightly concerned about the allegations of political interference in a criminal prosecution. Canadians expect the truth, and we have the power here to make sure they get it. The Prime Minister refuses to waive solicitor-client privilege as prime ministers before him have done when the public has demanded it. This would allow the former attorney general to speak, to tell her story, but the Prime Minister has kept her silent.

Business of Supply

The story has been unfolding in a bizarre way, with almost daily changes to the Prime Minister's versions of events. High-profile resignations and coordinated cover-up manoeuvring suggest this is not an ordinary political scandal.

I am proud to stand with my colleagues today to support this motion urging the Prime Minister to waive privilege and launch a full public inquiry.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member across the way expressed some interesting comments. I cannot help but reflect on whether it is that member or other members of the New Democratic Party who, it would appear, have lost confidence in the independence of the Ethics Commissioner, and there is also a concern in regard to the standing committee and the procedures I have witnessed over the last number of years. We even have a Liberal member who made reference to it in his comments. A Liberal member has put forward a notice of motion for the committee to actually hear from the former minister, but the member seems to see that as a bad thing.

We will see, through the independent office of the commissioner and by allowing the committee to do its work, a positive outcome for the government and the Prime Minister. I believe the Prime Minister did not assert any sort of pressure in regard to this issue.

My question is this: Why the loss of faith in the Ethics Commissioner's office, and does he not have any faith in the Conservative members of the committee?

• (1645)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Madam Speaker, the member opposite raised so many issues. He is right that one of their members today sent out a tweet that she was going to bring forward a motion to allow the former attorney general to come to committee. Last week, they would not do that.

The other interesting part is that it is going to be at an in camera meeting today. No one is going to know what happened and whether she will be allowed to speak or not.

There is no question that I have faith in the Ethics Commissioner. I am not sure that what the Ethics Commissioner does will make Canadians feel any better, because so much of what he will do will also be behind closed doors.

I will tell members who I do have faith in: the RCMP and other police agencies. I have faith that if there is criminal activity here, they will get involved and investigate the criminal activity so that Canadians know exactly what happened.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his support for our motion.

As a member from Quebec, I am keenly interested in the issue of jobs. There seems to be some suggestion that the Prime Minister's bad behaviour can be forgiven because he was standing up for jobs. We all want to protect jobs and the flagship companies of Canada or Quebec. What we take issue with is corporate corruption, of course, but also the fact that the Prime Minister is using workers to justify

unacceptable behaviour in a society founded on the rules of justice and law. Let me elaborate.

Why did the Liberals change the law so that Air Canada would no longer have to meet its legal obligations with regard to jobs at Aveos?

Why did they decide to force Canada Post workers back to work when all they wanted was pay equity and a pension system that was not two-tiered?

Why did they reject the NDP's proposals to update the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to protect retirees who worked at companies like Sears or Nortel?

The Prime Minister tends to support companies, not workers. Can my colleague tell us why it is suddenly so important for the Prime Minister to help his friends? Why can he simply not state that this was unacceptable behaviour? Why not shed light on this controversy?

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Madam Speaker, I think my colleague is absolutely right that there is so much in this whole picture that gets blurred. When the Liberals try to defend themselves, not defend SNC-Lavalin but defend themselves, they bring up the issue of jobs. I can tell members that there are people right out in front of this building who are here fighting for 100,000 jobs in western provinces.

We are also fighting for those jobs, and we are fighting for SNC-Lavalin jobs. These are good people. These are engineers and others with SNC-Lavalin. It is not their fault that they are in this position, but we should not throw them into the equation or throw them under the bus, as the Prime Minister has done with the former attorney general. We respect SNC-Lavalin employees. We know that they are good people. They do not all work in Quebec. Many of them work in Ontario and in other provinces.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to offer some arguments in support of the NDP's motion, which is designed to try to bring some clarity to the scandal that has been dominating Canadian politics for the last couple of weeks. It is alleged that senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office put pressure on the now former attorney general to reach a deferred prosecution agreement with SNC-Lavalin with respect to bribery charges. The allegation is that SNC-Lavalin spent almost \$50 million bribing officials in Libya to get contracts there.

Everybody is agreed that it would be inappropriate for the Prime Minister and his office to lean on the attorney general not to pursue criminal charges against a particular individual or corporation. That is a long-standing and well-respected principle, not just of Canadian politics but in Canadian law. It is certainly not one we want to see any deviation from.

Business of Supply

However, there are a couple of things that have created a barrier to getting straight answers. One is the Prime Minister's repeatedly saying that the discussions between the former attorney general and the PMO are protected by solicitor-client privilege. Our NDP motion calls for the Prime Minister to waive that and put it beyond any shadow of a doubt that the former attorney general has the freedom to express her views as to what happened so that Canadians can judge for themselves whether anything inappropriate went on.

The second aspect of our NDP motion, beyond just waiving the solicitor-client privilege, is to have a full public inquiry. Canada has seen this before, particularly in instances where Liberal governments' sense of entitlement got the better of them. This seems to be one of those situations, and New Democrats think a public inquiry would be the best way for Canadians to judge whether that is the case. I will come back to this, and apologize if I repeat some of my remarks.

I have heard a number of the Liberal members who decided to engage in today's debate reference some investigations that are already ongoing. One is by the Ethics Commissioner at the request of the NDP, although the Ethics Commissioner chose to use a different section of the act from the one we originally requested, one that does not in and of itself necessitate any public reporting on what may or may not have happened.

The second, if we can call it an investigation, which I am a little leery of doing, is happening at the justice committee, on which the government has a majority of members who have refused to invite a number of key witnesses. Things have changed a little today based on the justice committee meeting. I will not pretend to be apprised of all the details as I am not on the committee and I was not there, but I know there are a number of key witnesses that so far the committee has said it does not wish to hear from.

Essentially, the point I am driving at is that the scope of any one of those two investigations is sufficiently narrow that Canadians are not going to get a real picture of the relationship between the current government and SNC-Lavalin and what did or did not happen between the PMO and the former attorney general. Those are questions that it is very clear Canadians are interested in knowing the answers to. It is going to say a lot, ultimately, about the character of the government. How it chose to conduct its business with respect to this charge and whether the PMO thought it was appropriate or that it had any right to interfere in that process will say a lot about the government.

It is important that we get to the bottom of it, and a full public inquiry at this point is the way to do it. We have seen that government members on the justice committee want to constrain the scope of the study and not get at the core of the issue. While the Ethics Commissioner has important work to do within his mandate, his mandate does not include enough scope to capture that whole picture. That is why a public inquiry is warranted.

• (1650)

I would add at this point for those listening at home, if they are experiencing a sense of frustration, that we are talking about the extent to which the government is willing to protect its insider buddies instead of talking about whether there was a fair CPP increase in the last year or two; whether they have good access to health care services close to home; whether the affordability crisis in

Canada is being addressed, which can have do with housing or the cost of prescription drugs; or whether they are frustrated because we are not talking about the imminent and catastrophic effects of climate change. On that I share their frustration, as that is what I ran on and came to Ottawa to talk about.

To people feeling that sense of frustration at home, I will try to explain why it is important that we address this issue. All the conversation in the media and the House over the last number of weeks is not the distraction that we need to be concerned about. However, this discussion is symptomatic of the fact that the government has been distracted from dealing with the serious issues, because there are only so many people in government. Time and resources are limited, and it has clearly been dedicating a lot of its resources to looking out for its corporate buddies.

I will not repeat all the statistics that have been cited in this place today, but we know there have been dozens of meetings with the PMO that have to do solely with SNC-Lavalin, never mind other companies. A number of those meetings have been under the rubric of justice and law enforcement. It is interesting that this company would be meeting with the government on such issues, given that it is effectively a construction company.

We are getting a better picture of why they were meeting, but we need a public inquiry to have the whole picture. Therefore, I share the frustration, but I would tell Canadians that the problem is that the distraction to this point has not been with the business in the chamber, but that the government has been preoccupied with looking out for those people, for all sorts of reasons.

Before the story broke in *The Globe and Mail* on Wednesday of our last sitting week about potentially inappropriate communications between the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general, I was standing up in this place during question period, raising the issue of a former SNC-Lavalin executive who had pleaded guilty to subverting Canada's political financing laws to make illegal donations to the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. I mean, we know this is going on. We know there is a cozy relationship there. We know it is a relationship that is particularly acute in the case of the current government.

However, the last government essentially privatized all the nuclear assets of the country under AECL and transferred them to a new shell company called Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, which is being run by a consortium that includes SNC-Lavalin. We are talking billions of dollars of assets.

There is a project going on right now to rejig, reform, change or alter a central heating and cooling plant in downtown Ottawa and ultimately privatize the operations of that plant, which up to now has been successfully run by the public sector. One of the major members of the consortium that is going to be operating that plant is SNC-Lavalin.

This is a company with its fingers in many pots. It has a former executive who has pleaded guilty to funnelling money to the Liberal and Conservative parties. Unfortunately, this is the kind of thing that promotes a lot of cynicism about politics.

Business of Supply

It is frustrating for me to be standing here addressing those issues. It is something I wish would not happen, but it is not going to stop happening unless we get serious about accountability for the people who are allowing it to happen.

Now in terms of legal accountability, one of the things we are upset about today is that the law had changed to make SNC-Lavalin accountable for the bad deeds it is doing in other countries. Libya is the example here, because that is where the bribery is alleged to have taken place that is precipitating these charges. However, Canadian law changed a number of years ago in order to enable us to prosecute Canadian companies to put them on their best behaviour internationally. I have not heard anybody today say they want to rethink that, which is right and good. We should be holding Canadian companies to Canadian standards and having them be good ambassadors for Canada and conduct business well across the country.

• (1655)

The problem is now that the law has changed, the way to get accountability from companies is to make them compliant with the law when they refuse to be. This company lobbied the government not to change that law.

I invite members who are okay with allowing Canadian companies to bribe governments to get up and say so. Nobody is going to make that case today. That law was a good law, but the government said, "Why not change the law to give the company an out?" Instead of holding it accountable under the law, and instead of having it suffer the consequences of breaking the law, the government wanted to give the company a way out.

That is what the deferred prosecution agreement was. The Liberals sneaked that into an omnibus budget bill so it did not get the attention it deserved. The allegation is that the Prime Minister's Office became involved once that was in place, to try to get the former attorney general on board with using one of those agreements instead of laying the criminal charges.

There is no question SNC-Lavalin is one of those wealthy insider companies that is getting special treatment. When the law did not work for it, the Liberals were willing to change the law. When even that was not working, the Liberals appear to have been willing to exert political influence and political pressure in order to make it work.

That is not the way Canadians want their government to work. That is not the way they want their corporate culture to work either. When Canadians think of themselves as competing on the world stage, they think of themselves as good actors. They think that in addition to making money, as Canadian companies do internationally, we are setting an example at the same time of companies that are following the law and abiding by appropriate rules. Canadian companies are competing based on the rules, and winning that competition. We want to think that is what our companies are doing, and we want a legal regime that supports that. Canadians do not want their government circumventing it.

We saw something similar with KPMG. A large scandal was revealed that indicated it had been helping people avoid paying what they owed in taxes through any number of different methods. When

most Canadians get into trouble with the CRA, they are dogged until they pay back all the money they owe, with interest. KPMG received a sweetheart deal that made the problem go away.

What is going on here is some unearthing of the process by which that happens. It is ugly. It is messy. People know it is happening in other places, but they expect better of Canada and they should expect better of Canada. It is distressing to see the government's level of complicity in this. We can talk about the complicity of Liberal backbenchers, but in the case of the government itself, it was actively involved in trying to get special treatment for SNC-Lavalin. Joe Canadian would love to have that kind of muscle behind his tax return. I am sure he would appreciate that.

We just hosted in my riding an evening with an official from the CRA, to talk about what tax credits and benefits my constituents are eligible for. We heard a lot of stories of people becoming really frustrated at not even getting a phone call returned by an entry-level CRA employee, never mind getting the Prime Minister's Office to talk to the Attorney General about fixing things up for the company because it made a few mistakes and maybe paid tens of millions of dollars in bribes to government officials in order to get work.

The levels of magnitude involved here are totally different. It makes no sense to pursue the average Canadian with the full force of government, while people who are playing a much bigger game with higher stakes get a get out of jail free card, which is essentially what we are talking about.

I have certainly heard heckling today by Liberal members who say we must not care about the jobs involved. Nothing could be further from the truth. The NDP has done a great job of advocating for jobs for Canadians in this place, and we will continue to do that. When executives of a company break the law and there are serious charges, we should not laugh off the bribery of public officials.

• (1700)

This is not okay. It should not happen. When the executives of a company go out and do that, they ought to be held to account. We can work to find a plan for jobs. A lot of the work SNC-Lavalin does is subcontracting. There is a lot of great construction workers in Canada and if somebody else gets those contracts, they will be subcontracted to do that work too. There is core work for SNC-Lavalin. We are concerned about that too.

However, it cannot be an excuse for being able to go around breaking the law. How is that acceptable? On what planet do we think that somehow because there is a lot of jobs at stake, the company can do anything it likes? Pick a law and have a company break it, and it is okay because it employs a lot of people?

Business of Supply

I have a lot of sympathy for those workers. However, if those charges proceed and are ultimately proven in court and if SNC-Lavalin is prohibited, as it should be under the law, for 10 years from federal contracts, the government will then turn its mind to the workers. If it would devote half the energy to figuring out what to do for the SNC-Lavalin employees who will be out of work as it did trying to get SNC-Lavalin executives off the hook, those workers would be well-served. The government has clearly put a lot of time and energy into that, when it should be thinking about the workers first instead of its corporate buddies. If it did that, we would not be in this mess.

In fact, while we talk about the law and jobs, it is a little rich to hear the Liberals say that they do not care about jobs because they believe in the integrity of the criminal justice system. When there was a law on the books that said Air Canada could not outsource its maintenance work, the government just changed the law. Where was the concern for the workers in that? We had a law protecting those jobs. The government changed it and allowed Air Canada to ship that work offshore. There was no concern for the workers there and no concern for the law as a matter of fact.

When we talk about the collective bargaining rights of Canadian workers and concern for workers and their rights, I think back to the debate we had in the fall for Canada Post workers who wanted to go to the bargaining table to engage in fair bargaining. Early on, the government came out and threatened back-to-work legislation and then followed up with it, getting the job done for Canada Post. Where was the concern for workers' rights? Once again, the government used its legislative powers to put workers down.

It is a little rich for me to hear the Liberals say that because we think corporate criminals ought to do their time, somehow we do not care about jobs.

When GM said that it was going to close the Oshawa plant after it won awards for productivity and good service, the same government said that this was the market, that it could not do anything about it. When that happens in the market, the government is powerless to help workers. It is powerless to lean on companies. However, if a corporate executive breaks the law, then the government is not powerless and it can do something. It can change the law to make deferred prosecution agreements possible. Then the PMO can go ahead and lean on the Attorney General. If that is not what happened, then let us have the public inquiry to figure that out.

We have credible career reporters at The Globe and Mail saying that they understand this is what happened. We have no good reason to take the Prime Minister at his word that it did not. If it comes down to a well-documented article by The Globe and Mail and Robert Fife or the Prime Minister's good word, members will excuse me if I side with The Globe and Mail on this one.

The government wants to talk about workers. When VIA Rail just recently awarded a contract not to a Canadian company that was qualified to build those rail cars but to a German company that would produce them in the U.S., the government said that this was the market, that there was nothing it could do.

Let us all get on the same page and be really clear. A government that really cares about workers and jobs in this country would not

only care when it is its corporate buddies who have plead guilty to skirting election financing laws to pad its political pocket, that is not the only time the government would care about jobs, if that is what it really cared about.

It is pretty clear to Canadians where the real priorities of the government lie. This developing story is putting that in evidence. If that is not the case, a public inquiry is the way to clear the air. All members of the House should support a public inquiry to get to the bottom of it.

● (1705)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to clarify a couple of things in response to the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

In putting aside the notion that we are not concerned about jobs, independent of the lowest unemployment rate in 41 years and the fact that we have created 800,000 jobs, I think it is important to clarify that subsection 715.34(1) of the Criminal Code, which actually addresses the remediation agreements my colleague was speaking about, talks about requiring an admission of guilt, forfeiture of any benefit, payment of a penalty, payment of restitution, a change in behaviour and co-operation with any further investigation. I think that needs to be clearly stated, for the record.

Second, the member opposite, if I heard him correctly, said that the ethics investigation is too narrow. What the ethics investigation actually allows for is the power of the commissioner to summon witnesses and to require those witnesses to give evidence orally or in writing, under oath or affirmation, and to produce any documents or things that are necessary. In these investigations and in this format, the commissioner has the same powers as a court of record.

Given that mechanism and those significant powers, I would put it to the member that this is precisely why his party initiated an ethics investigation and why it was agreed to by the ethics investigator. Is that no longer the member opposite's position? Does he question the validity of that process and the independence of the ethics investigator?

● (1710)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in my speech, we are not saying that the Ethics Commissioner's investigation should not take place, nor have we ever questioned the independence of the Ethics Commissioner. That is just not on. I do not know where the member heard that.

Private Members' Business

Our concern is that the scope is narrow. I am not prepared to cite the sections of the act, but I do know that we requested an investigation under one section of the act that would require public reporting, the section of the act under which an investigation is being pursued. It is the Ethics Commissioner's right to pursue it under whatever clause he would like, but it does not necessarily entail any public reporting, and it is confined to a more limited question, which is whether the Prime Minister, and again, I am not quoting, was acting to promote the particular interests of an individual. In this case, it could also be a company. I think there is a lot more to this when we talk about the potential firing of a minister and various kinds of political pressure from the Prime Minister's Office.

Our position is not that the Ethics Commissioner's investigation should not proceed or that there is no value in it. Our contention is that the scope of it is going to be too narrow because of the section under which it is being pursued and that there are a lot more questions that deserve a lot more answers than the Ethics Commissioner is going to be able to pursue within his mandate.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I spent a lot of time on the ethics committee with the hon. member earlier on in this Parliament, and he did a great job while he was there.

My colleague has already elaborated on this a bit, but can he explain a little more why the Ethics Commissioner's investigation, by itself, is certainly nothing to make light of but is not going to bring everything to bear, with its limited scope?

My understanding is that the justice committee is still meeting and is still in camera, which is essentially a cover up. Can my colleague elaborate on why, with the shenanigans that are going on right now, it is so important to actually have a public inquiry to clear up this mess?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, there is the nature of some of the justice committee meetings happening in camera, for instance. As everyone here knows, but maybe people at home do not know, it means that it is not public. It is not televised. There is no public written record of what is discussed. If these important questions are going to be dealt with at the justice committee, for instance, in camera, that is not enough.

A public inquiry would happen in public. If the terms of reference were right and we got to the point where the government felt sufficient pressure to launch a public inquiry, the devil would be in the details of its mandate.

I think what we are seeing now is a story that involves the firing of a minister from one particular position, the resignation of that minister subsequently, the resignation of the Prime Minister's principal secretary and a number of different charges against SNC-Lavalin. There is the charge of interference in public prosecutions, but there was also the guilty plea a few weeks ago for SNC-Lavalin illegally funnelling money to the governing party, over six figures' worth. There is a big and developing story here.

I think the idea that the Ethics Commissioner's investigation, with a limited scope under his mandate, is going to be able to accomplish everything Canadians would like to see answers to is just not realistic. What is the mechanism or what is the body or what is the tool that is going to be able to achieve that? Only a public inquiry

with satisfactory terms of reference will accomplish that. That is why it is important that this motion pass today and that the government respect the motion once passed.

• (1715)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 20, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect that if you were to canvass this House, you might find unanimous consent to call it 5:30 p.m. at this time so that we could begin private members' hour.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL PROPERTY REPATRIATION ACT

The House resumed from November 28, 2018, consideration of the motion that Bill C-391, An Act respecting a national strategy for the repatriation of Aboriginal cultural property, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-391, an act respecting a national strategy for the repatriation of Aboriginal cultural property.

While I am on my feet, I would like to begin by acknowledging that the lands on which we are gathered here in Ottawa are part of the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

According to current knowledge, the lands of the greater Drummond area were transit points where the Abenaki, Mohican, Huron, Algonquin and even Iroquois peoples stopped to portage, camp or fish.

Yolande Allard of the Drummond historical society has prepared a map that very clearly indicates the various sites that were used and their Abenaki names all along the Saint-François River transportation network. She and the Drummond historical society have done an excellent job of helping us better understand how indigenous peoples used these lands.

This bill refers to a very important issue. We are finally beginning to recognize the historical events that led to the erosion of indigenous cultural heritage. That is why the return of seized objects is an important part of the healing process for communities and for reconciliation between the colonial state and indigenous peoples.

Private Members' Business

The connection between returning objects and healing and reconciliation is extremely important. We have been working on this issue for years, and it is very important to us.

The NDP will support this bill at second reading, but we do have some questions. For example, we would like to know who was consulted about this bill.

Any time a bill affects indigenous peoples, they must be the first to be consulted so they can provide guidance. We do not know exactly who was consulted as this bill was being drafted.

As I said, it is extremely important to enable indigenous peoples to preserve and protect their ancestral, religious and cultural property and to have access to that property.

The Government of Canada and foreign governments must respect the collective rights of indigenous peoples with respect to the return of ancestral remains and sacred, funerary and culturally important objects.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms this right, and the Government of Canada fully and unconditionally supported this declaration and plans on supporting Bill C-262. That bill was introduced by my New Democrat colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. During the 41st Parliament, he also introduced Bill C-469, an act to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

That bill set out the fundamental restitution rights in international law and then became Bill C-262 when it was introduced in 2016. The bill is now at committee stage, and we are confident that it will be improved and strengthened.

My colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou is working with the government to make sure that the bill truly reflects the objective of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Radio-Canada recently published an article online about the repatriation of indigenous property and how it keeps a culture alive. It was interesting to see how Sandy Raphaël, an indigenous woman who is the heritage and culture director of the Mashteuatsh band council, felt when she was able to repatriate some cultural property.

• (1720)

I will read a few excerpts from the article.

Why repatriate?

Sandy Raphaël remembers exactly how she felt when she saw some objects that belonged to her nation, such as drums, tumplines and a moosehide coat, at the National Museum of the American Indian, or NMAI, in Washington.

This is what Ms. Raphaël said:

It is quite moving to see the beauty of these objects, their life, their history, because they were made by our people. If they could speak, I would want them to tell me their story. I already had a sense of attachment to them.

A little further on, Sandy Raphaël states the following:

Seven grade nine students from the community, accompanied by Sandy Raphaël, went to the museum in June 2013. The young people returned with shining eyes, feeling even prouder of their identity.

I am reading out these excerpts to show why it is important to repatriate the cultural objects of indigenous peoples. It will give them back their identity, their culture and their history. That is extremely rewarding.

Studies have shown that young people who have access to strong cultural components, such as their language, ceremonies, ancestral property and education, are less likely to commit suicide, drop out of school, become addicts or engage in other harmful behaviour. It is clear that these elements and the repatriation of cultural property are important.

Bill C-391 is a step in the right direction. There is currently no federal legislation designed to facilitate the return of property stolen from indigenous communities. That is why it is important to pass this bill. As I already mentioned, Bill C-391 will have a positive impact on many members of Canada's indigenous communities.

A law to facilitate the repatriation of property will help indigenous youth connect with their culture and their language. Young people are the leaders of tomorrow. It is important that they are familiar with this identity and culture, so it is in our interest to give them the tools they need to thrive. In the case of indigenous youth, we also need to make sure that they connect with their culture by facilitating the repatriation of property.

The return of stolen cultural artifacts will also empower women and help restore the traditional balance between men and women. These artifacts teach about identity, the cultural nature of gender, roles in the community and the personal behaviours that enable individuals to define themselves. That is also a very important benefit.

The repatriation of property will also enable two-spirit people to reclaim their heritage.

However, I have some concerns about the bill. First, the bill does not contain any enforcement measures. It talks only about promoting and encouraging, and that is problem. Second, the implementation is not cohesive enough. There are so many stakeholders that there could be inconsistencies and contradictions. Fourth, some communities are unable to conserve their artifacts even if they want to and will be forced to give them to museums because of budgetary constraints. There are no financial resources allocated to help preserve these precious and sometimes fragile artifacts. Fifth, the bill does not take into account the complexity of the repatriation of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the bill does not propose any concrete solutions in cases where organizations refuse to return legitimate property. Finally, indigenous peoples were not consulted enough during the drafting of this bill, and something needs to be done about that.

I am sure that the corrections needed to improve this bill can be made when it is examined in committee.

• (1725)

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the person responsible for Bill C-391, the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Private Members' Business

The repatriation of cultural property and ancestral remains lost by indigenous communities under a range of circumstances is a significant issue for indigenous communities all across the country, as we have heard from several others in the House.

It is also an important factor in the relationship between those communities and cultural institutions in Canada and around the world, such as museums. I say “around the world” because important aspects of Canadian indigenous culture are not found just in Canadian collections; in fact, many important items were removed to foreign lands by explorers, missionaries and academics early in our history. I have an example of my own that came to a successful conclusion just recently, and I will touch on that issue in just a few moments. These items exist in public and private institutions around the world in the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America.

How can a national strategy support this process of repatriation? The most important part of developing this type of strategy is to hear from all stakeholders who have experience with repatriation and hear what has worked for them and what has not, hearing about best practices from the people who have experience with this sort of procedure, including the government. We also need to hear from those who would engage in repatriation but do not feel they currently have the capacity to do so. Perhaps personal history for them dictates that they should have a say in what is going on, and we certainly do want to hear from them. We consider them as very important stakeholders in this process of repatriation.

Without prejudging what all the stakeholders might say, Bill C-391 needs to make sure the government, in developing a national strategy, has enough flexibility to listen to what it will hear during the consultations and what to take into account.

We are here to consider Bill C-391. The bill does not legislate rules for repatriation, of course. That is an important point, and one of the strengths, one of the great things about this particular bill.

We have heard from members of indigenous communities that they do not want the government to create the rules or add elements of bureaucracy to what should be a direct dialogue between them and the people involved directly in the repatriation, certain expert and historians alike. This is a big part of the bill that opens up the dialogue to others and would allow the people who share a common history to have direct input.

Bill C-391 speaks to the role of the federal government in repatriation.

I would like to point out that the bill no longer includes a definition of what is meant by “aboriginal indigenous cultural property”. That is a very important point. It is a commonly used term, but it is not defined in law. It is not even defined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Definitions can be complex things. No matter how comprehensive we try to make them, something will always be unintentionally excluded, or they become so general as to be meaningless or hard to interpret. As well, if we define in a piece of legislation a concept that is not defined elsewhere, people can still refer to it for reasons that were not intended. The result of removing the definition is that the scope of the strategy and what it covers would still be determined, but would

be done together with stakeholders when strategy is developed, not ahead of the time when other people become involved. The bill would give the government enough flexibility to listen to stakeholders and to be guided by what it hears. That is essentially the spirit of what we are trying to achieve through Bill C-391.

I think we would all agree that these are the first steps in a long path toward reconciliation, a path that we are still on. Bill C-391 signals that next step.

I want to remind everyone here that it is not the kind of thing that took place in other countries at the time. It was based on collaboration and dialogue. The principles it advocated were negotiated solutions, taking place on a case-by-case basis.

What role has the government continued to play since the task force? The government introduced a category. Given the comprehensive range of consultations, to plan meaningful consultations, undertake them, analyze what is heard and develop the options for a strategy will take time. If all that had to happen within two years, the consultation phase of the process would be severely reduced, and this is too important an issue not to take the time to do it right.

● (1730)

I will talk about my situation once again. Back in the early 1800s, a situation took place that led us to today. We are talking about a situation just shy of 200 years ago. A native group was established on the Island of Newfoundland centuries ago called the legendary Beothuk. The last known Beothuk passed away in 1829. Her name was Shawnadithit. She passed away in St. John's. She succumbed to tuberculosis. She had members of her family involved in a situation that took place near the town of Buchans and Buchans Junction at Red Indian Lake.

In the mid-1820s, a group of explorers travelled up the Exploits River to seek out the natives. A confrontation took place and one individual Beothuk named Nonosbawsut was shot and killed by the explorers.

At that time, a lot of conflict was taking place and the Beothuks succumbed to that and also to disease. Two Beothuks were buried in that area. Cormack the explorer found the remains of the two Beothuk and he took their skulls back to Scotland, where he was from, for academic study. For close to 200 years, those skulls remained in that museum, not even on display.

Several years ago we had a ceremony commemorating the Beothuk and we brought up the idea of these skulls being repatriated. We contacted the Government of Scotland, through the U.K.'s Royal Museum, and asked it to repatriate the skulls. Within the last month, the Government of Scotland said it would do just that. It engaged the Government of Canada, after responding to a request from the Department of Canadian Heritage. Now we are embarking upon the journey for these skulls to come to Canada and then to Newfoundland. What we do at that point involves stakeholders.

As I mentioned, the spirit of Bill C-391 talks about the collaboration of stakeholders. Five indigenous groups within Newfoundland will have their say. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador will have its say and all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will have input into this.

Private Members' Business

What is the best way to commemorate the spirit and memory of the legendary Beothuk of our province, my province, the province of the member for St. John's East as well? This is incredibly important to us. Do we take the remains back to the place where they perished? Do we do an initial study? All these issues have to be discussed. What has happened here, what is the most essential component of this is that these people who lived in Newfoundland for centuries, the legendary Beothuk who unfortunately do not exist today, have to be commemorated in a way that is completely and utterly respectful to how they lived and how they would want to be remembered.

For that reason, I strongly endorse Bill C-391 and the spirit of what it would do. For the member for Cumberland—Colchester, this is a fine point, a cherry on the top of a fine career, I might add. He has established a fantastic bill and I congratulate him. Through the examples of the repatriation of the Beothuk remains, Bill C-391 should be supported by all of us. I am sure it would be supported by all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

• (1735)

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill C-391, which has been proposed by the member for Cumberland—Colchester.

As my colleague previously stated, the bill is not perfect. There were some amendments to it that the Liberals should have taken into consideration at the committee stage. However, ultimately, reconciliation is important and is something that this side of the House takes very seriously. Repatriating indigenous human remains and cultural property is a crucial step in that process. It is also something that is very important to Canada's indigenous people, and I respect their desire to achieve this. Because of that, my colleagues and I can ultimately support the bill and its intended purpose.

I would like to provide some background on the bill we are discussing today, the aboriginal cultural property repatriation act.

It should be noted that aboriginal cultural property is defined in the bill as “objects of historical, social, ceremonial or cultural importance to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada”. If passed, the bill would require the Minister of Canadian Heritage to co-operate with first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada to develop and evaluate a national strategy on aboriginal cultural property repatriation.

This is important because many items of aboriginal cultural property were taken, purchased, traded and gathered by different groups, including missionaries, collectors, government agents and others, during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Some of these items are as precious as ancestral human skeletons and sacred objects. Many of these items have since been placed in museums and institutions, where they are on display or studied. For the most part, this was done without any consultation or approval from aboriginal communities. They were left out of the decision-making process. They are now requesting to be involved and in some cases to have the property returned to their people. This is not an unreasonable request.

The bill is an important step in supporting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a call to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, two things that those of us on this side of the House have supported. We believe in

the importance of broadening Canadians' historical literacy and appreciation, and we support initiatives that educate and that celebrate Canadian history. This obviously includes the rich and important history and culture of Canada's aboriginal peoples.

The purpose and the important step toward reconciliation that would be facilitated through the bill has been reiterated by various stakeholders. Hearing from these stakeholders is an important part of the process and also of determining the appropriateness of legislation like this.

For instance, we heard Millbrook First Nation Chief Bob Gloade tell the CBC that his community has been working on repatriating several important artifacts. In reference to this piece of legislation, he said:

It has cultural significance and it has historical importance to have it back....

Having federal legislation will make it a little easier with the support of the federal government....

• (1740)

The committee had the opportunity to hear from Mr. Clément Chartier, the president of the Métis National Council, who stated:

Bill C-391 is a good first step for Canada to reconcile these injustices. It will serve to make way for indigenous peoples to reclaim their cultural property and to guide all involved in processes that should ultimately make everyone feel that this is the right course of action. The repatriation of aboriginal cultural property is going to speed up the process of cultural renewal for indigenous peoples. It will reflect a time Canadians should not be proud of, and support a time in which Canadians can take great pride.

The committee also heard from Ms. Aluki Kotierk, the president of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. She also stated her support for Bill C-391:

...I will say that when I'm reading this bill, it indicates that artifacts can be used for educational purposes. This is very important, in my view. It is very important to us Inuit that Inuit artifacts be inside Nunavut, which they are not. They are housed somewhere else.

The young people should see their own way now in Canada.

That is an important point. The process would allow indigenous young people to actually see items and artifacts of significance from their history that reflect their heritage. They can learn from seeing these items with their own eyes and develop a strong sense of pride in their history and ancestors.

There are still steps needed to figure out how to deal with what was often mentioned by stakeholders during committee meetings, but taking this first step is important and significant and is one my colleagues and I are supportive of.

That being said, I would be remiss not to reiterate what my colleague has previously stated, which is that this bill must not in any way tamper with private property or force anyone to give up legally acquired artifacts. It is important that this concept be respected, even though we only have verbal assurances, because the bill does not specifically mention the protection of private property. Therefore, we are expecting that there would be no consequential changes to private property in Canada.

Private Members' Business

I need to bring this point up because even though we have been assured by the member for Cumberland—Colchester that this would not be the case, there are stakeholders who have voiced concerns about this. Because the Liberals were not in favour of amendments proposed by concerned stakeholders, it is important that verbal assurances be upheld on this point.

To conclude, I want to thank the member for Cumberland—Colchester for bringing forward this bill. It is an important step in the right direction. I am happy to support this legislation, and I know that my colleagues are also in agreement. I think there are some important elements that need to be respected. Ultimately, I am pleased to support this bill, and I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on this important subject.

● (1745)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise in the House and speak to this bill at second reading. Bill C-391, An Act respecting a national strategy for the repatriation of Aboriginal cultural property, is something New Democrats are supporting.

It is very important for us to acknowledge that some of the historical events that have taken place have had injurious effect and harm that we need to address. In fact, we see it not only with regard to the specific things in museums and private collections, but also within pop culture and everything from cinema to other things where the cultural appropriation of a number of different objects and items has violated the culture of many different groups. It is unfortunate that this has taken place.

In fact, some of it even goes back to the Roman Empire. Cultural appropriation was of trophies during colonialism and other types of territorial occupations that have taken place to this day. Cultural appropriation involved everything from smaller, more easily carried objects to larger institutional statues and other types of materials and substances that were quite laborious to transport.

This bill, in second reading, is part of a larger discussion. I sit on the innovation committee, where we are studying copyright and doing the five-year review of the act. One of the important things we are looking at is copyright belonging to indigenous peoples. We had testimony as we went across the country related to how to go about protection and then inclusion, and we heard differences of opinion about copyright and also heard from cultures that have a different set of systems from the copyright system that we have through our existing colonial laws. That discussion is ongoing and is going to be one of the more interesting aspects of our report, which is now being compiled.

All political parties sit on this House of Commons committee, and we will discuss these issues. This committee has been functioning very well, not only in terms of how it operates in general but also specifically on the copyright issue in this component.

Today we are talking about Bill C-391, and it is appropriate that we will be addressing some of the things that have taken place in the past. However, the issue over copyright is that it is also about addressing things that are taking place right now and in the future.

What we need to understand is that with the cultural appropriations we have had and the historical events that have taken place on

indigenous cultures and heritage, repatriating items is very important. People have had human rights violated when cultural heritage has been disturbed, stolen, excavated, exchanged, taken under duress, studied, exhumed and moved beyond the boundaries of their territories in Canada without free and prior consent.

It is important to talk about that, because many of the problems that we face are a result of unilateral action. It is not good enough for us to rely on the thought or the argument that it is just science or it is history or it is being done in order to share and exchange. Especially given the fact that it has been done unilaterally, that is not good enough for then and it is certainly not good enough for now. This bill looks to take those things and to restore the ownership that has been lost. Even funerary objects have been taken. We have seen cases of people's privacy and personal items being very much at stake.

It is important because Canada has signed on to the universal declaration with regard to indigenous rights and culture. We have had that in the past. In fact, it goes back to a time when laws and United Nations resolutions were passed in the 1970s and 1980s, which we were supposed to follow but did not.

● (1750)

It is good to see a bill that addresses the national front because international agreements certainly do not complete the circle of responsibility that is required. For us, as a country, to absolve ourselves of doing so without a legislative footprint is certainly not acceptable. Therefore, getting the bill to the next stage is important.

Some of my family history is from England. People had curio cabinets. They would place items and objects from distant lands on display privately or donate them to museums. It was seen as an attempt to showcase worldly visions of the British Empire and the elements that it touched. At one point it was quite significant across the globe. Treasure hunting and the appropriation of cultural items was seen as a social status, a way of displaying one's wealth and important position in society. We cannot forget this. It was a cultural component. Displaying things on a regular basis was seen as a family's social status and position in society. The way people arranged their homes was to showcase that element. That was often done at the expense of other people and done unilaterally without support.

Just because a family passes on an item, or a piece of art or whatever to a museum, a not-for-profit organization or a charitable organization does not take away from the responsibility we have in trying to make amends with those individuals and families that were injuriously affected by that. The possession-based element cannot be excused because an item, at the end of the day, ends up in a university setting, or a museum or a not-for-profit organization. Even if it is used in the private sector to attract tourism or some other economic activity does not excuse the fact that a restitution process is required. That is important not only for the credibility of the organization, but how we go about making amends and the long-term effect. This is one of the reasons I like this bill as a starting point.

Going back to the 1800s, there were attempts to establish some rules or controls on the appropriation of a number of different items, including even funerary objects, that were quite intimate to families, but this egregious situation still took place.

Adjournment Proceedings

I look forward to the bill moving to the next stage.

• (1755)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was just sitting here listening to all the members of Parliament and thinking about what a wonderful place this is. We are talking about repatriation of indigenous artifacts, and I have heard members from all parties speak in support of that.

Members may not have noticed, but from time to time this place can be a bit partisan. However, tonight we are talking about the repatriation of indigenous artifacts, and I am grateful to every single member who has spoken in favour of it and helped us with it. A lot of members and a lot of senators have been involved in the drafting of the bill, amending it and making it as good as it is. I know that it is not perfect, but it is a very good step in my view and I thank everybody for that.

I want to thank Heather Stevens, a young Mi'kmaq woman at Millbrook First Nation near Truro, Nova Scotia. She inspired this by telling me about a Mi'kmaq artifact from Millbrook that was taken to Australia years ago, and they have tried to get it back. I talked to my assistant about what we could do. I am not sure whether it was his idea or mine, but we agreed that we would draft this bill, and that is all it was.

I want to thank Joel Henderson. If I were allowed to point out that he is in the gallery I would, but I am not allowed to point that out. He was my executive assistant and developed much of the bill. He made endless contacts, endless consultations with museums and the people involved every step of the way. We were dealing with indigenous peoples from all walks, MPs, senators, chiefs, community leaders and historians. It was a learning experience. It was an amazing journey to go through this and listen to our indigenous people talk about their artifacts and how important they are to them.

This was an amazing journey that started with a particular issue, which, as I mentioned, was a Mi'kmaq robe that ended up in a Melbourne museum. When I tabled the bill, I spoke for two minutes and 37 seconds. Three weeks later, the ambassador from Australia, Her Excellency Natasha Smith, came to my office and said that she had been in touch with that museum and was going to try to help us get it back. I asked why she was doing this. She said that they have indigenous artifacts that they want back in Australia that are very important to them.

I started to get an idea of how important this indigenous artifact issue is. It is not just a small thing. It is a big thing. Then someone pointed out that the bill, Bill C-391, was written up in China and in the Netherlands, and has been talked about in a lot of different countries. It was a journey of learning for me about how important artifacts are to indigenous peoples. It is important for reconciliation, as some members mentioned. It is important for history. It is important for their culture. It is important for the indigenous youth to be able to see how their ancestors lived, the things they were able to make, the talents they had and the wonderful abilities they brought forward. I want to thank all the members who were involved, and everybody who was involved.

Today is my birthday, so I want to thank everyone for coming to my little party. I am very grateful for this. I am grateful for the opportunity to be here and to be part of something like this. It is

something that I will remember forever and I thank you all for it. Hopefully the bill will go forward and will make a difference for indigenous people everywhere, not just in Canada but in other countries. Other countries have contacted us and asked if they could use this as a template for legislation in their legislatures.

Thank you very much everybody. I do appreciate it.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1800)

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising tonight during adjournment debate to follow up on a question I asked the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

The question was related to the cost of the carbon tax, specifically to new information coming out of a government ministry showing that, in fact, the cost of the carbon tax for the average family would not be based on the \$50-a-tonne carbon tax but would be closer to a \$300-a-tonne carbon tax.

The government documents have been coming to opposition members in trickles. The government is typically not willing to act transparently by simply disclosing the information ahead of time. What we have been calling a carbon tax cover-up for several years is related to documents the government has in its possession demonstrating the cost impact, for the average Canadian family, of a \$10-, \$20-, \$30-, \$40-, and \$50-a-tonne carbon tax. That is the information we want so we can pass it on to Canadians.

What we are looking for is to help Canadians, those opposed to the carbon tax, those opposed to bad tax policy. It is not an environmental policy; it is a tax policy. What we want for Canadians is not for them to just be getting by. What we want to ensure is that Canadians are getting ahead. That is not what we are getting with the carbon tax.

I am up on this adjournment debate to follow up on the question I had for the minister. Hopefully a parliamentary secretary can answer it for me. Perhaps I will get an answer tonight. Why is the Prime Minister forcing struggling families to pay for his mistake with this punishing new tax? That was the focus of my question.

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The mistake is that the carbon tax is not an environmental policy. It is a tax policy. It is simply extracting money from tax-paying Canadians who are already paying too much in taxes. The cost of living has gone up. Many have lost jobs in my community. I represent the deep suburbs in the southeast of Calgary. They are being asked to pay even more.

The government's reply is that we should not worry about it, that the government is actually giving the money back. This begs the question: why would the government collect the money in the first place if it is simply going to recycle it and give it back to Albertans? Why is the government asking them to pay it up front and supposedly giving it back on the other end?

The other thing I will mention is that the government's line at the beginning was that the carbon tax was going to be simple to implement. In fact, it is a 200-page document that provides for any number of exceptions and special dispensations, to be given to whomever the minister chooses to give it to. It is supposed to be a way to ensure that we maintain our competitiveness and our productivity somehow. We know that carbon displacement will happen. Industries heavily hit by the carbon tax will be unable to remain competitive. All those costs will be passed down to the consumer and to taxpayers.

Again, why is the Prime Minister asking hard-working Canadians to pay for his mistake with his punishing new carbon tax?

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government knows that it is possible to have a strong economy that also promotes and preserves a clean and healthy environment. We also know that pricing pollution is the most efficient way to reduce our emissions at the lowest cost to the economy. By pricing pollution, we can invest in a cleaner tomorrow for our kids, our grandkids and help Canada compete in an emerging global low-carbon economy. In fact, in 2017, the provinces with a price on carbon pollution also led the country in economic growth.

Experts similarly agree that pricing pollution is the most effective way to reduce our emissions. The 2018 Nobel Prize for Economic Sciences was awarded to William Nordhaus for his groundbreaking work on pollution pricing.

Proceeds from the federal system will be returned to the province or territory they came from. For provinces that have not committed to pricing carbon pollution, the federal government will return the majority of direct proceeds from the charge on fuel in the form of climate action incentive payments that will go directly to individuals and families in the province of origin. This will make life more affordable for families in provinces without their own provincial system in place, including Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and my home province of New Brunswick.

Proceeds from pricing carbon pollution can be used to support Canadians, grow the economy and protect the environment. We have seen that already in B.C., Alberta and Quebec. B.C. has reduced income and business taxes and provided northern and rural homeowners a benefit of up to \$200 annually. Alberta provides rebates to low and middle-income households.

The costs of pricing carbon pollution for Canadians will be modest. We are talking about a few cents on a litre of gasoline in 2019, plus most households will get back more than they pay. For example, in Ontario, the estimated average cost impact for a household in 2019 is \$244. That is less than the average climate action incentive payment of \$307.

Under the federal system, the average cost impact for a household in New Brunswick is \$202 in 2019, which is less than the corresponding average for climate action incentive payments, which is \$248. What this demonstrates is that we can take concrete action to reduce our emissions and leave families better off.

A growing number of countries around the world are addressing climate change by putting a price on climate pollution. According to the World Bank, as of 2018, 70 jurisdictions, representing about half the global economy and more than a quarter of global GHG emissions, have implemented or are scheduled to implement carbon pollution pricing.

Carbon pricing is just one part of the national plan to tackle climate change and grow the economy. Our plan includes over 50 concrete measures, from policies, regulations, standards and investments, to achieve our goal.

In addition to putting a price on carbon pollution, the plan also includes complementary measures to reduce emissions, like regulations for electricity, vehicles and fuels. It also includes financial support, such as the low-carbon economy fund, which supports emissions-reduction projects across Canada.

• (1805)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for that answer as it lays the groundwork for what I am going to say next.

I have a Yiddish proverb, and I use these quite often, "Together with the shrub the cabbage is beaten." The government has run multi-year deficits so far, billions of dollars. In its search for a cabbage in the shrub, it has gone after the taxpayer every time through higher payroll taxes and a higher cost of living, with the carbon tax being applied at the consumer level. This means that companies are paying and passing it on to the consumers. People in Alberta are now seeing a carbon tax levy being directed onto their heating bills, and we have had a few weeks of very cold weather. Therefore, it is compounding the problem for families trying to make ends meet at the end of the month.

We are literally going after the shrub, the cabbage and everything. The government is beating every bush it can find to draw out more revenue. It was supposed to have a billion dollar surplus in 2019. Instead, it is a near \$20 billion deficit so far. Therefore, I ask the member again—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by directing the member opposite to look at the costs of inaction on climate change.

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Our government is demonstrating leadership by putting a price on pollution. The clean growth and innovation spurred by pricing carbon pollution will help position Canada for success in the economy of the 21st century. Pricing carbon pollution will reduce our impact on the environment, at the lowest costs for consumers and businesses, for the sake of future generations.

Canadians want to take advantage of the significant economic opportunities of the low-carbon economy. Analysis by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate estimates that transitioning to a low-carbon economy will deliver a direct economic gain of \$26 trillion U.S. and generate 65 million new jobs worldwide by 2030.

Our approach to tackling climate change will create new jobs in the clean economy and leave families better off.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saannich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in adjournment proceedings to pursue a question I originally asked late last year. The question was asked in advance of the Conference of the Parties, which took place in Poland in December. I asked a question of the Prime Minister some time in November in question period. It related to the urgent warnings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its special report on 1.5° Celsius, which was issued on October 8, 2018.

As quite often happens when people refer to this report, it gets called the doomsday report or a serious wake-up call. I want to again lay out why that report is so important.

The report said that the IPCC was asked by the negotiating countries in Paris, at COP21, what the impact would be of allowing the global average temperature to increase by 1.5° and what the impact would be at 2°. The Paris negotiations had landed on 1.5°. The goal is to avoid the global average temperature going above 1.5° Celsius, but there is some secondary language that says, “or at least as far below 2° as possible”. What is the difference between 1.5° and 2° in terms of impact? That is an important question.

Second is a critical question: Can we still hold to 1.5° Celsius? The advice from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was that 2° is far too dangerous. There is no point in speculating. Do we hold to 1.5° or just stay below 2° as best we can? No. We have been told very clearly by science that if we want to survive as a human civilization, if we want our children to have any kind of quality of life at all, and even worse, if we want to avoid those runaway global warming scenarios that lead to extinction, including our own, we have one chance, and it is to hold to 1.5°.

The second part of the report, and why this is not a doomsday report, says that we still can do it, but it will require Herculean efforts, transformative changes that are not transitions over time. They are changes needed now. We are in a climate emergency.

I asked the Prime Minister if we were prepared to improve our targets to show global leadership, because the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report said clearly to us, the community of nations, that greenhouse gas reductions must meet 45% below 2010 levels by 2030 or it will be too late to save ourselves. It was not a gray area. It was now or never.

Although I have begged the government to improve the target we currently have, which is the same target put in place in May 2015 by the Harper Conservatives, to show leadership, and to go to COP24 in Poland with Canada leading the world to a new pathway, unfortunately, the Prime Minister's answer was that we are working hard to meet our 2030 targets. Those are the targets I just mentioned, the ones put in place by Stephen Harper. They are wholly inadequate for us to save ourselves.

When I went to COP24 in Poland, there was no global leadership from industrialized countries. Canada still needs to take up that challenge. All nations on earth must reduce greenhouse gases far more rapidly than is currently planned.

• (1810)

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by emphasizing that our government does know the importance of taking concrete measures to reduce emissions and combat climate change. In fact, our plan includes over 50 concrete measures from policies to regulations, standards and investments to achieve our goal.

Last year, the intergovernmental panel on climate change released its special report on the 1.5-degree temperature increase. The report makes it clear that we are the last generation to be able to prevent the worst climate change impacts.

The Paris Agreement is key to global efforts to limit warming to 1.5° Celsius. That is why, immediately following Paris, the government established the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change to position Canada to meet our Paris Agreement greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 30% below 2005 levels by 2030.

A landmark achievement of the pan-Canadian framework is the first climate change plan in Canada's history to include joint and individual commitments by federal, provincial and territorial governments, and to have been developed with input from indigenous peoples, businesses, civil society and Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

As I mentioned, the pan-Canadian framework outlines over 50 concrete measures to reduce carbon pollution, help us adapt to and become more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate, foster clean technology solutions and create good jobs that contribute to a stronger economy.

Adjournment Proceedings

I am pleased to say that we have covered a lot of ground since launching the framework, and we are starting to see the results. To date, we have developed a pan-Canadian approach to pricing carbon pollution, as well as new policies, programs and regulations to reduce emissions in every sector of the economy, including regulations for coal- and natural gas-fired electricity generation, regulations to reduce methane emissions in the oil and gas sector, measures to increase the use of low-carbon fuels and funding for clean technology and energy efficiency.

As reported in Canada's most recent greenhouse gas emissions projections from December 2018, Canada's GHG emissions in 2030 are expected to be 223 million tonnes lower than projected prior to the adoption and implementation of Canada's climate plan. This improvement in Canada's emissions outlook reflects the breadth and depth of the pan-Canadian framework.

Additional reductions will come from measures such as investments in green infrastructure, public transit, clean technology and innovation, as well as future actions by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Full implementation of the policies and programs under the pan-Canadian framework will allow Canada to meet its 2030 target and position Canada to set and achieve deeper emission reduction targets beyond 2030, as required by the Paris Agreement.

As the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands knows, Canada remains steadfast in its commitment to the Paris Agreement, including its full implementation. She saw it first-hand as part of the Canadian delegation to COP24 in December, alongside the hon. members for Repentigny, Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, Parkdale—High Park, and Vancouver Quadra.

• (1815)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands does not know very well that this government is committed to the Paris Agreement. That is because the 2030 target, which keeps being repeated as what the government is committed to achieving, is inconsistent with the Paris Agreement.

The 50 concrete steps proposed by the Government of Canada are wholly inadequate. To preserve life on this planet, to protect our children, we cannot be incremental. We cannot tweak around the edges. We are in a climate emergency. We must plan the end of dependence on fossil fuels and have a plan to cut them in half by 2030. That is not the reductions currently planned, which we do not even have a plan in place to meet.

Fortunately, there are things we can do. We must do them. I urge the government to meet its own rhetorical hype and actually plan for human survival. We are in a climate emergency. We cannot any longer accept pabulum and half measures.

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart: Mr. Speaker, Canada will continue to take a leadership role to tackle climate change and grow a cleaner economy. We understand the huge economic opportunity of clean growth, and we want to leave a cleaner, healthier planet for our kids and our grandkids.

At COP24, Canada did play a leading role in negotiations to secure robust guidance for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, which sets the foundation for raising global ambition on climate change for generations to come. The Paris Agreement will ensure that all countries take greater, more transparent action on climate change in order to limit global temperature increases and adapt to the impact of climate change.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*English*]

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:18 p.m.)

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