



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 384 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 21, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 21, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-430, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (organic farming tax credit).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise this morning to introduce my bill, an act to amend the Income Tax Act, to create an organic farming tax credit. The bill is the result of the Create Your Canada contest that was held among the high schools in my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford last year, where students were invited to research and develop their ideas for legislation to change our country for the better.

I sincerely congratulate Hannah Pachet and Morgan Bottomley from Chemainus Secondary School, who are the winners of that competition and who are here in Ottawa with me today to watch their idea come to life as this bill.

Organic production is a holistic system designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of diverse communities within the agro-ecosystem, including soil organisms, plants, livestock and people. The principal goal of organic production is to develop enterprises that are sustainable and harmonious with the environment.

The bill recognizes the efforts that organic farmers put into these production systems by proposing to amend section 127 of the Income Tax Act to create a tax credit for their expenses incurred in relation to organic farming.

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

PETITIONS

GATINEAU PARK

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today regarding protecting the future of Gatineau Park. I know Gatineau Park is near and dear to the hearts of many people here in the chamber. If any members have not been there, they really have to go. Over 1,600 people have signed, both on an e-petition and a regular petition.

Gatineau Park is really important right across the country. It has almost 2.7 million visits a year. I am the critic for national parks, so I know how significant that number is. There are 90 endangered plants and 50 endangered animals in the park. It contributes almost \$242 million to the local economy, and 4,728 full-time jobs.

However, the boundaries of the park are not protected currently. Therefore, this petition calls upon the House to amend the National Capital Act to give Gatineau Park the necessary legal protection to ensure its preservation for future generations.

I encourage everyone in the House to support the petition. Gatineau Park really deserves long-term protection.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions from hundreds of residents of my riding in South Okanagan—West Kootenay. They both cover the same subject. The petitioners point out that animal testing is unnecessary to prove the safety of cosmetic products, and a ban on cosmetic animal testing would not impact current cosmetic products for sale in Canada. The European Union banned cosmetic animal testing in 2013.

Petitioners point out that Canadians overwhelmingly support a ban on cosmetic animal testing, so they call upon the House of Commons to support Bill S-214 and ban the sale or manufacture of animal-tested cosmetics and their ingredients in Canada.

* * *

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?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the question of privilege raised on February 8, 2019, by the hon. member for Mirabel regarding the reply to an oral question the previous day.

As members will recall, further to a point of order raised by the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île at the end of oral questions on February 7, 2019, I explained clearly the circumstances surrounding my decision to allow the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to answer his question, one which had been directed to the chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

[English]

Nonetheless, the member for Mirabel raised the matter again, stating that, as committees of the House are not servants of the government, the parliamentary secretary breached the House's privileges.

The member also asked that the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île be granted a supplementary question.

[Translation]

Without revisiting my original decision—since all members know that the Speaker's decisions are not subject to appeal—the precedents supporting my decision to recognize the parliamentary secretary are well established. In a situation similar to the one before us, Speaker Milliken, in a ruling on February 8, 2008, said at page 2836 of the Debates of the House of Commons:

I do not think the question is whether anyone else is allowed to answer or not. The question for the Speaker of the House is to take a look at those who are standing to answer and choose who is going to answer.

In the case before us, since the chair of the committee did not rise immediately, I called upon the only person who was standing at that point to answer the question, which is the prerogative of the Chair.

[English]

In another ruling on November 2, 2011, which can be found at pages 2861 and 2862 of Debates, my predecessor stated:

Simply put, it is not for the Speaker to judge who possesses which information and, thus, who might be able to provide the information being sought...

Nothing in this incident should be interpreted to mean that members should not continue to direct their questions to those who are properly accountable for answering them. It is also entirely reasonable to expect that those to whom questions are directed, in this case the chair or vice-chair of a standing committee, would automatically be recognized by the Chair to respond, provided they are, of course, rising.

●(1010)

[Translation]

Accordingly, the Chair does not find this to be a *prima facie* question of privilege.

I thank all honourable members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

**CANADA–MADAGASCAR TAX CONVENTION
IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2018**

Hon. Bill Blair (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill S-6, An Act to implement the Convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Youth Economic Opportunity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to this important piece of legislation that will help to advance the government's tax fairness agenda.

The legislation we are bringing forward has a single objective: addressing tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance schemes in order to ensure that the tax system operates as fairly and effectively as possible. My colleagues in the House would agree that this is absolutely essential. It is about making sure that all Canadians pay their fair share.

Ensuring tax fairness demands engagement on many fronts. That is why Canada continues to expand and update its network of tax treaties and tax information exchange agreements. Canada has an extensive network of income tax treaties, with 93 comprehensive tax treaties currently in force. Worldwide, the OECD estimates that there are currently over 3,000 tax treaties in place.

Tax treaties are fundamental to trade and investment by eliminating double taxation. They provide the certainty needed to support open and advanced economies. They also permit the exchange of information needed to prevent international tax evasion.

Bilateral double tax conventions are used to eliminate tax barriers to trade and investment between two countries. They achieve their purpose in a number of ways.

First, they provide greater certainty to taxpayers regarding their potential liability to tax in the foreign jurisdiction. Second, they allocate taxing rights between the two jurisdictions and provide for the elimination of double taxation. Third, they reduce the risk of burdensome taxation due to high withholding taxes. Fourth, they ensure that taxpayers will not be subject to discriminatory taxation in the foreign jurisdiction. Fifth, tax treaties authorize the exchange of tax information to prevent tax avoidance and tax evasion. Finally, tax treaties provide a mechanism for jurisdictions to resolve tax disputes.

These are all important goals, and they are goals we can achieve with today's legislation. By updating the tax dimensions of our relations with Madagascar, we can strengthen trade and investment between our two countries.

It is important to the government and to all Canadians that we deliver the programs and services that Canadians need while keeping taxes low for small businesses and middle-class families.

Government Orders

When our government took office over three years ago, we made a commitment to invest in growth while upholding the principle of fairness for all taxpayers.

A fair tax system is key to ensuring that the benefits of a growing economy are felt by more and more people, with good, well-paying jobs for the middle class and everyone working hard to join it.

Let me remind my colleagues that one of the government's first actions was to cut taxes for the middle class and raise them for the wealthiest 1%, an action that directly benefited some nine million Canadians.

After moving forward with a middle-class tax cut, we then took action to replace the previous system of child benefits with the Canada child benefit, or the CCB. Compared to the old system of benefits, the CCB is simpler, more generous, and better targeted to those who need it most. It is also entirely tax-free. Today, nine out of 10 Canadian families are better off thanks to the Canada child benefit. It has helped to lift more than 520,000 people out of poverty, including about 300,000 children.

On average, families benefiting from the CCB are receiving \$6,800 this year. That amount will help them afford the things they need for their families. It will help put healthy food on the table, pay for lessons and sports activities, and buy clothes and school supplies. The CCB is particularly helpful for families led by single parents. These families are often led by single mothers, and tend to have lower total income.

However, our government's commitment to supporting the middle class and those working hard to join it is also about helping the small businesses that families and communities depend on. That is why the government is supporting small businesses in Canada by reducing the federal small business tax rate.

• (1015)

We cut the small business tax rate twice. Specifically, the rate was reduced from 10.5% to 10% as of 2018 and to 9% as of last January. For the average small business, this will mean an additional \$1,600 per year that they can use to reinvest in their business and create jobs. With these two small business tax rate deductions, the combined federal-provincial-territorial average tax rate for small businesses is now 12.2%. This is by far the lowest in the G7 and fourth-lowest among countries in the OECD.

Tax fairness has been and will continue to be a cornerstone of our government's promise to Canadians to strengthen and grow the middle class and grow the economy now and over the long term. In each of our past three budgets, our government has taken legislative actions on both international and domestic fronts to enhance the integrity of Canada's tax system and to give Canadians greater confidence that the system is fair for everyone.

An important focus of our efforts has been cracking down on tax evasion and tax avoidance, which create serious financial costs for the government and all taxpayers. Since budget 2016, the government has boosted the Canada Revenue Agency's capacity to crack down on tax evasion and combat tax avoidance. Investments made over the last two years have enabled the CRA to better target persons who pose the highest risk of tax avoidance and evasion and

to be more effective in fighting tax avoidance and evasion. Those efforts are showing concrete results for Canadians.

With the new system, we are able to review international electronic fund transfers over \$10,000 entering or leaving the country. This adds up to more than one million transactions each month. Reviewing these transfers helps us do a better risk assessment for unfair tax avoidance by persons and businesses.

Over the last two fiscal years, our government reviewed all electronic fund transfers between Canada and eight jurisdictions or financial institutions of concern. This amounted to 187,000 transactions, worth a total of more than \$177 billion. Working closely with partners in Canada and around the world, we now have more than 1,000 offshore taxpayer audits under way, and more than 50 criminal investigations with links to offshore transactions.

Our government is also pursuing third parties who promote tax avoidance schemes. In the last fiscal year alone, it has imposed roughly \$48 million in civil penalties on these third parties.

This year, we are also gaining better access to information on Canadians' overseas bank accounts, as we've put in place the common reporting standard. With this new system, Canada and more than 100 other countries will be exchanging financial account information to help us identify when Canadians are avoiding taxes by hiding money in offshore accounts.

We have also expanded our specialist audit teams, which focus on high-net-worth individuals. About 250 auditors are now checking to see that high-income earners and high-net-worth individuals are paying their fair share.

Another important means of ensuring tax fairness is knowing clearly who owns what. That's why the government is working with our provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure that Canadian authorities know who owns which corporations in this country.

We are also working to better harmonize requirements for corporate ownership records across our jurisdictions. This information will help Canadian authorities take appropriate legal action when people are hiding criminal activities behind corporate vehicles. In this way, we will be rooting out international tax evasion and avoidance, money laundering and other criminal activities.

I would like to note one further way that the government is acting to prevent misuse of our tax system. Canada is part of the OECD-G20 project to address the inappropriate shifting of profit offshore and other international planning by corporations and some wealthy individuals to avoid tax. That project is known as the "Base Erosion and Profit Shifting" project, or BEPS for short. The OECD's work on BEPS identified a number of instances in which the terms of current tax treaties could give rise to potential abuse. To address those concerns, it has recommended changes to the design of tax treaties that countries could use to close loopholes in their treaties with each other.

Government Orders

•(1020)

However, given the large number of treaties in existence and the long time it would take to renegotiate each of these treaties bilaterally, a new approach was developed to implement these changes more quickly. The result of this effort is the multilateral convention to implement tax treaty-related measures to prevent base erosion and profit shifting, also known as the multilateral instrument or MLI.

Based on the work of the OECD's BEPS project, this convention was developed and negotiated by more than 100 countries and jurisdictions, including Canada. The MLI would enable jurisdictions that become parties to it to change their bilateral tax treaties quickly to incorporate the OECD's BEPS provisions. It would also help the international tax system function better and provide greater certainty for Canadian taxpayers by improving dispute resolution under Canada's tax treaties. As it committed to in budget 2018, the government has tabled legislation in the House to enact the MLI into Canadian law.

This government is ensuring that Canada is known to the world as an outstanding place to invest and do business. We do this because Canada's economic success rests not only on the hard work of Canadians, but also on strong trade relationships and foreign direct investment.

Together, Canadians have built a country offering a distinctly attractive set of assets. Today our key strengths include the most educated workforce among the OECD countries and a highly competitive corporate income tax system, one of the most competitive in the G7. Also, no other country demands fewer days to start a new business, and Canada is the only G7 country holding trade agreements with every other G7 member. We have done this through the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. The tax treaty with Madagascar that we are now considering is in keeping with our approach to strengthening our international ties and co-operation.

By cracking down on international tax evasion, we are building on the tremendous advantages that Canada enjoys. We are also ensuring that the government has the money needed to deliver programs that help the middle class and people working hard to join it and that Canada remains positioned as an attractive place to work, invest and do business.

As I have made clear today, we have already made tremendous progress toward a stronger Canada, but as I also noted, tax fairness is a complex goal needing engagement on many fronts. That is why we will continue to address tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance schemes to ensure that the tax system operates as fairly and effectively as possible. The legislation we have introduced today represents an important step toward meeting this goal. I encourage all honourable members to support this legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by acknowledging and thanking my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. I have often enjoyed serving and crossing swords with her at the finance

committee. I imagine we will have the pleasure of debating many economic issues over the next few weeks and months, and obviously during the election campaign.

I want to mention at the outset that our party, the official opposition, supports this bill. We support any and all measures to help combat tax evasion and ensure greater flexibility to facilitate trade between Canada and countries around the world. We will have another chance to talk about that later.

I would like to point something out, however. The bill was introduced, yes, and while we recognize this is an important bill, a number of important aspects could not be debated properly here in the House.

For example, let us not forget Bill C-74, which was more than 800 pages long. Technically that bill would implement the budget passed by the House of Commons. However, there were clauses slipped into that omnibus bill, clauses 715.3 to 715.37, that were on everything but the budget. We call that an omnibus bill with clauses slipped in for the purpose of passing something without properly debating it in the House of Commons.

Bill C-74 and the clauses I mentioned included content on the remediation agreements, the very topic at the heart of the Liberal government scandal involving SNC-Lavalin.

If the government had acted as swiftly on Bill S-6 as it did on the very important issue of remediation agreements, things might be different—but they are not.

I have a very simple question for the parliamentary secretary: does she believe that Bill C-74 could have been split to allow for a fair and equitable debate on the issue of remediation agreements, as we are currently doing with the Canada-Madagascar tax agreement?

•(1025)

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his work on the finance committee with me.

There are a couple of items in there that the House should note.

One is the fact that the remediation agreements and those consultations started under the Harper Conservatives, so it is a little rich for the Conservatives now to be suggesting that they were in some way rushed through Parliament when in fact they were the ones who started the consultations and they were the ones who wanted to move forward with this legislation, which, by the way, is similar to legislation that a number of other countries have. By no means should the Conservatives suggest that this was legislation that started with us. In fact, it started under the Harper Conservatives.

Government Orders

In addition to that, I was on the finance committee during the budget implementation act, and in fact there were opportunities. Other committees were invited to hold hearings on portions of that legislation and refer back to the finance committee if they had recommendations or suggestions. Unfortunately, some committees decided not to take the chair up on that offer. That does not mean that the committee did not hold significant consultations and hearings.

Frankly, the Conservatives are just not interested in moving forward on initiatives and plans that are going to help the middle class and Canadians. The Conservatives want to stall at all costs, but we are moving forward to ensure Canadians are better off and that our economy is growing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I am always happy to debate with her.

I would like to come back to Bill S-6, which is before us today.

Bill C-82, which is currently being examined by the Standing Committee on Finance, would renew all tax conventions, if the two countries come to an agreement that, according to the government, is renewed and improved.

We have before us a new tax convention with Madagascar. I have a very specific question about this bill. I would like to know whether the convention with Madagascar uses the same renewed and improved text that is set out in Bill C-82 and whether the government is trying to incorporate it and renew it with all of the other partners with whom we have tax conventions.

Are we in the process of passing a bill that contains the old version or the new version of the conventions?

• (1030)

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague is passionate about dealing with tax avoidance and tax evasion, and I have enjoyed working with him as well.

In regard to the technical question on the renewal, I will have to get back to the member opposite to make sure I do not misrepresent in this House, but I will ask that specific question on the renewal.

When it comes to this legislation, we are working to make sure that all pieces of legislation moving forward on tax evasion and tax avoidance are in keeping with international standards. Again, as I said in my speech, Canada wants to ensure that we continue to be a place that attracts foreign direct investments while protecting Canadians and ensuring that everybody is paying their fair share. These are the principles that we move forward with and that will guide us in all of this work.

I will get back to the member opposite in regard to the renewal question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for endeavouring to give the House a straight answer. I believe that this is a fundamental issue related to today's debate.

The other question that I would like to ask is whether the government is prepared to continuously monitor tax conventions.

I will come back to the debate on Bill C-82. The one thing the government and its officials have admitted is that tax treaty abuse does occur. Bill C-82 is before us so we can renew and improve tax conventions.

The question I have for my colleague concerns the conventions in general. I would like to know if the government is engaging in any monitoring or some sort of control of conventions to ensure that, over time, countries with which Canada has double taxation conventions do not become tax havens. Naturally, we hope they are not, but we need to ensure that, over time, they do not become countries with low rates of taxation.

Is the government carefully and continually checking that those countries that Canada has agreements with do not become tax havens and that taxpayers cannot abuse these conventions?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an excellent point. That is why I am happy the government is moving forward with the MLI. The real way to deal with tax evasion, tax avoidance and the various treaties is with a global initiative. That is why the OECD and the G20 are coming together to create a body and a set of standards that we can use collectively. This is a complex issue on which we need international partners.

This is precisely why I am glad we are moving forward in that way. We can look at and review best practices and standards and move forward in a way that is effective not only in Canada but globally to ensure that Canadians and citizens around the world are treated fairly and that countries do not create tax havens to avoid paying their fair share.

This work will continue. I look forward to the interventions of the member opposite on this. I know he cares deeply about this issue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has been very passionate, as has the Prime Minister, about Canada's middle class. She has made reference to the issue of trade and how important it is to Canada.

Could the member provide her thoughts on how trade could build Canada's economy, thereby supporting our middle class?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know how important trade is to our economy. That is why I mentioned the fact that we were the only G7 nation to have trade agreements with all G7 partners. Canada relies on that and Canadians expect. It allows us to share our innovation and ideas around the world, as well as to provide good-quality goods to consumers and to grow our economy.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise on behalf of the official opposition at this stage of Bill S-6.

As I mentioned earlier, I want to assure members right off the bat that the official opposition supports this bill, the spirit of the bill and the measures it proposes, and we understand that there is still a lot of work to be done to combat tax evasion. We believe that this bill is a step in the right direction.

First, I want to give some background about what we are talking about. Bill S-6 is a Senate bill that seeks to facilitate work and trade between Canada and Madagascar by cracking down on tax evasion and eliminating some of the problems that could be created by differences in administration in Madagascar and Canada and the taxation principles underlying trade relations between the two countries.

This bill contains measures to eliminate double taxation, which is good for international trade. The bill also contains measures to eliminate discriminatory taxes. The field needs to be as open as possible to facilitate trade. Every country has its own measures, which is fair. However, some tax measures can undermine things more than others. The bill would therefore eliminate discriminatory taxes. It counters tax evasion. We will be able to talk about this later, but tax havens obviously warrant closer scrutiny, and this is not an issue that can be solved with a snap of the fingers. It takes time, co-operation and the support of some 180 countries on this planet. This is not a problem that can be fixed overnight, but we must do everything we can to fix it, and this bill is a step forward.

Furthermore, this bill would create mechanisms in the unfortunate event of a challenge on either side. These mechanisms will help find a way forward for finding a way forward with trade agreements.

Lastly, this bill will enable different administrations to share information when an investigation is required, for a company or individual, either in Madagascar or in Canada.

In essence, there are five measures in this bill: eliminating double taxation, countering tax evasion, eliminating discriminatory taxes, allowing for information sharing, and creating mechanisms to settle disputes.

We agree with these principles. We also agree that this should become Canada's 93rd treaty with other trade partners to simplify the tax system and boost trade. This is not a free trade deal per se, but it will allow for better agreements and greater flexibility. Madagascar may not be the best-known country in the world, or indeed among Canadians. It is an island in the Indian Ocean off the eastern coast of Africa. It is actually quite a big country. The island is about 1,500 kilometres long and 800 kilometres wide. Fifteen hundred kilometres is like the distance from the Alberta Rockies to the Ontario border, spanning the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. That should give everyone a rough idea of the size of this country, which has a population of 25 million.

History tells us that Canada and Madagascar share similar roots, because Madagascar is a francophone country. We both belong to the Francophonie. We know that the Francophonie summit was held there a few years ago and that Madagascar was a French colony that

gained independence in 1960 when a wave of decolonization swept through British and French societies around the globe. The decolonization movement reached Madagascar in the 1960s.

We should also know that Canada and Madagascar have had a trading relationship for years, particularly in the mining sector. A Canadian company has set up shop there, so to speak, to operate one of Madagascar's biggest mines. Furthermore, trade between Canada and Madagascar hovers around \$100 million or \$115 million.

● (1035)

Canada buys roughly \$100 million in goods and services from Madagascar and in return Madagascar spends roughly \$20 million buying in Canada. For the record, that represents 0.001% of our volume of trade with our biggest partner, our friends and neighbours, the U.S. Yes, that is significant. We recognize that, but we should still maintain some degree of perspective in terms of Canada's trade with Madagascar and our trade with the U.S.

The thing about this bill that we need to discuss is the issue of tax evasion. I addressed it briefly earlier. Tax evasion is an ongoing challenge facing every country in the world. Yes, we must make an effort. We certainly did when we were in government, and efforts to combat global tax evasion must continue. That is why the 180 or so countries on this planet cannot work in isolation in that regard. Everyone must join forces, work together and share the knowledge, efforts, energy and potential talent of each country and each country's experts in order to combat the scourge of tax evasion.

Canada is making an effort. With Bill S-6, we have a treaty that will help us move in that direction. That is largely why we support this bill. It is important to always be alert and always keep in mind that tax evasion is a blight on our planet that must be tackled in a serious and rigorous manner. However, no one can do it alone. Major countries need to join forces, and tax havens, the smaller countries that unfortunately serve as tax shelters for some people, need to do their part to combat this situation. We completely agree with the principle that everyone must pay their taxes fully and legitimately. Everyone must pay them, and no one should be able to resort to tax havens, for when they do, Canadians do not get value for their money.

I am very concerned about this bill. We agree that this situation should be debated in the context of a truly independent bill. How many issues are never properly debated here in the House of Commons? This is a problem.

Government Orders

A year ago, the government tabled Bill C-74, an omnibus bill that is almost 800 pages long. Ostensibly, the bill implements budget measures, which is fine because that is how things work. However, scattered throughout the 800-page bill are measures that have absolutely nothing to do with the budget tabled by the Minister of Finance.

Need I remind the House that the Liberal Party was elected nearly three and a half years ago? I would say it was a sad day, but democracy is what it is, and we respect the choice Canadians made. Those people were elected on the strength of a clear promise.

I have here the Liberal Party's platform, which was called "Real Change: A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class". The title sure sounds good. On page 30, under "Prorogation and omnibus bills", it says:

We will not resort to legislative tricks to avoid scrutiny.

How interesting. That is exactly what is going on with Bill C-74.

[The former Prime Minister of Canada] Stephen Harper has used prorogation to avoid difficult political circumstances. We will not.

That is the Liberal Party of Canada saying that.

Stephen Harper has also used omnibus bills to prevent Parliament from properly reviewing and debating his proposals.

That is exactly what is going on with Bill C-74. Here is the end of the paragraph:

We will change the House of Commons Standing Orders to bring an end to this undemocratic practice.

That is the Liberal Party promise.

●(1040)

Bill C-74 flies in the face of the party's promise. This reversal should certainly not come as a surprise. I remind members that in their document the Liberals said that they would run three small deficits in the first three years and would then balance the budget in 2019. In reality, the three small deficits they promised were three times higher than projected. The budget that was supposed to be balanced will be presented soon, as the Minister of Finance announced yesterday, but we know that it will not be balanced. There will be a deficit in the neighbourhood of \$20 billion or more.

In that same document, the Liberals also spoke about electoral reform. Did that happen? No. This is the very essence of the Liberal Party's privilege. It was elected on its promises, but it did not keep its word. On October 19, 2015, Canadians elected the Liberal Party. I respect democracy, but as they say, the people's will is not foolish, but the people can be fooled. This is exactly what is happening here.

Bill C-74 is supposed to implement budget measures, but dozens of items that have nothing to do with the budget were slipped into the bill, in particular clauses 715.3, 715.31, 715.32, 715.33, 715.34, 715.35, 715.36 and 715.37. This is no small matter. These clauses are found in the section "Remediation Agreements". I do not have the time to read all of them. They directly address the problem that the government and, unfortunately, Canadians are grappling with today, and have to do with the special agreements that the government can enter into with corporations that, sadly, have failed to fulfill their responsibilities and find themselves in court on fraud charges.

That is exactly the crux of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, which broke two weeks ago. Every day new situations arise that are an embarrassment for the government. The problem is that they are not only an embarrassment for the government but also for Canadians, who want answers.

I would like to remind members that these clauses were inserted into an 800-page bill. Earlier, the parliamentary secretary said that we could have discussed it in committee. Quite frankly, how would he expect us to directly address this issue if we have to study an 800-page bill. Today, we are spending many hours, and rightfully so, studying Bill S-6 on trade and tax agreements between Canada and Madagascar. However, we did not have the time to appropriately debate a matter that has embarrassed the Government of Canada and, consequently, Canada and Canadians.

Unfortunately, that is typical of this government, which says one thing and then does the opposite. When it comes time to get to the bottom of things, the Liberals trip on their own shoelaces, which results in what we have been seeing for the past two weeks. It has been a real comedy of errors on the part of the government, which is incapable of telling Canadians the truth about the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal. What is more, the government is preventing the former attorney general from giving clear and specific explanations.

Day after day, we have been asking the Prime Minister very simple questions. On September 17, 2018, he met with the former attorney general. Yesterday, in the House, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister more than a dozen times what was said at that meeting and who asked for the meeting to discuss what has now become the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal. The Prime Minister never gave a clear answer to the very simple question of who asked for the September 17 meeting. The same goes for the other very important meeting in the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal, the meeting that took place on December 5, 2018, at the Château Laurier, between the former attorney general and the Prime Minister's former principal secretary, Gerald Butts.

●(1045)

Once again, yesterday, the leader of the official opposition asked the Prime Minister a very simple question: who asked for the meeting between the Prime Minister's top adviser and the former attorney general?

The Prime Minister did not give anything remotely resembling an answer, even though it was a very simple question. Which one of them requested the meeting? He was not even able to answer that. Canadians want answers. They have the right to know what happened.

●(1050)

[English]

Canadians deserve clear and simple answers to clear and simple questions on this issue. The Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal is totally unacceptable to Canadians.

Government Orders

What we have noticed is that we are debating this bill in the House for many hours today, which is fine. I agree we have to debate Bill S-6, with respect to taxation between Canada and Madagascar. This is an important issue and we have to take the time to address it. On the other hand, why did the government dodge its responsibility to address the specific issues we find in proposed sections 715.32 to 715.37 of Bill C-74, an omnibus bill of more than 800 pages? Those sections in the bill addressed the specific issue that we have today with the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal.

This is the trademark of the Liberals. They say one thing during their electoral campaign and do the exact reverse during their mandate. Do members remember that they had clearly indicated in their platform that they would never table omnibus bills containing other issues that do not address the main omnibus bill, which is the budget implementation bill?

Unfortunately, they failed to do what they had promised Canadians, just as they failed to bring about the electoral reform they promised in their electoral campaign. Everybody knows they failed to budget the Canadian economy properly. During their campaign, they said there would be three small deficits in the first three years to invest in infrastructure and then a zero deficit in 2019. This is not the situation. During the last three years, the current government has tabled three huge deficit budgets. That is the reality of the situation. It is three times more than was expected and what they promised.

Also, 2019 was supposed to be a zero-deficit year. That is not the case. We are talking about at least \$20 billion of deficit. The government has failed its responsibility and nobody in the government knows when the budget will balance, or I should say, when the budget will balance itself. That was the famous economic theory of the Right Hon. Prime Minister of Canada, who is the only person in the world to table that economic theory, which is absolutely stupid. However, this is the Liberal trademark.

Talking about deficits, let me remind members that, during the election, the Liberals said they would run small deficits because they wanted to invest in infrastructure. Let me remind hon. colleagues that the plan was to invest \$180 billion in infrastructure over the next 10 years, starting in 2015. Only 10% of that amount has been invested in infrastructure. Therefore, the huge deficits were not for infrastructure but for the daily business of the government, which was not elected to do that.

[Translation]

I want to reiterate that our party supports Bill S-6, but unfortunately, although we are spending plenty of time debating the omnibus Bill C-74, which is perfectly normal, there are other very important elements that the government snuck in and that should have been debated. If they had been, maybe the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal we are facing today would not have happened.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much the member opposite's support of the legislation being debated. In part of his speech, he talked at length about commitments and promises. It is really important we recognize that the government has fulfilled many promises. There is

always room for us to do better, and we have a Prime Minister who is committed to doing that.

The most significant commitment that this Prime Minister and government gave was to improve the standards for Canada's middle class, and we have been very much focused on Canada's middle class. Even when the opposition has been focusing its attention on personal attacks on the Prime Minister, we have continued to stay focused on Canada's middle class and those aspiring to become a part of it.

We see this in our policy decisions and legislation such as Bill S-6, as well as tax treaties. We have been expanding the whole area on international trade, which adds to our economy and gives strength to Canada's middle class. That was a solemn commitment given to Canadians in the last election, and one that we fulfill, day in and day out, through very progressive measures such as tax cuts to the middle class, increases to the Canada child benefit and the GIS, as well as so many other things.

Does my friend acknowledge that the legislation we are debating today is yet another piece of the puzzle that ultimately builds Canada's economy through the expansion of trade, which helps Canada's middle class?

• (1055)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg North talked about personal attacks. I remind him that it is nothing personal. Liberals were elected on a platform that talked about small deficits. It is not a personal attack when we raise the issue that it is no longer a small deficit but a huge deficit. They were elected on a promise that 2019 would be a zero-deficit year. It is not a personal attack when I raise the fact that it is not a zero-deficit year and that they have no idea when we will get back to zero deficit. It is not personal. It is a fact.

It is a fact that before being elected, Liberals said there would be no more omnibus bills, but that is not the reality. This is exactly the issue we have with the SNC-Lavalin scandal. It is because they put something in an omnibus bill. Therefore, there are no personal attacks.

We recognize the fact that we have trade agreements with other countries. We had one with Europe, which was done when the Conservatives were in office. We worked so hard with the hon. member for Abbotsford to get a deal with the Pacific, which we achieved. Also, this is the first time in history we have a trade deal with America that is worse for Canada than it was before. That is the heritage of the Liberal government.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his contribution to the debate. We could also spend all day talking about the Conservative government's legacy. The Conservatives seem to have forgotten everything that happened before 2015. Even in his own speech, the member mentioned that the Conservatives took tax evasion seriously and devoted considerable efforts to fighting it, yet that is totally false.

If there is one government that was soft on tax evasion, it is the Conservatives. The Liberals are hard to beat on that score, but I have to say that the Conservatives outdid them. That goes without saying. As the minister often reminds us, the former revenue minister, Mr. Blackburn, said himself that tax evasion was not a priority under the Conservatives. I am certain that my colleague and other Conservatives are aware of this.

Could my colleague confirm whether the Conservatives are now making the fight against tax evasion a priority? What solutions would he propose? Apart from stating that it is a priority, the Conservatives need to come up with solutions, as the NDP is doing. How exactly would the Conservatives fight tax evasion? Do they have any solutions, like a total overhaul of the tax system?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Sherbrooke whom I respect and hold in high esteem. I appreciate his contributions to the debates here in the House and in parliamentary committees.

I did say in my remarks that tax evasion is a fight that should not be fought alone and that Canada should contribute to the effort. Did we do enough when we were in government? The NDP naturally does not think so. We believe we made an effort and took steps in the right direction.

I did mention in today's debate that we have to move in the right direction. We believe that Bill S-6 moves in the right direction, and in fact, we had taken similar steps ourselves, and if Canadians should decide to put their trust in us in eight months time, then we will continue in that direction.

Solutions are not limited to the debates we have here in the House or the measures we propose here. It is a step in the right direction, but this is a fight that needs to be taken up internationally in a joint effort by every country around the world. As long as there is a loophole in any country that leaves room for tax evasion, any effort or will to combat it is a step in the right direction. We understand that, but everyone has to do their part if we are going to get concrete, real, or tangible results in combatting tax evasion.

• (1100)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can come up with all the regulations we want as an individual country. Parts of Bill S-6 and Bill C-82 are about that. However, he talked about the importance of working with other governments from other countries.

Could he perhaps exemplify what he meant when he said that it was important that we work with other countries?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I want to pay my respects to my hon. colleague, the member for Yellowhead. In the last three and half

years it has been a privilege to work with him and to know him better.

As a reminder, a few days ago he talked about his experience as an RCMP officer and having contact with first nations people. This is what MP work is all about. It is based on our own experience, talking about it and sharing it with people, to provide good legislation.

I will get back to my hon. colleague's question.

[*Translation*]

We believe that if Canada takes action to prevent tax evasion but other governments, countries or administrations do not, the miscreants and scoundrels of that world who live in Canada will be able to use the loopholes in these other countries to pay less tax. They will avoid their social responsibility and the responsibility that we all have as Canadian workers. That is what we must fight against. There needs to be more of these types of agreements. This is the case today with Bill S-6.

Are we doing enough? We can never do enough.

Are there any improvements to be made? Certainly, more than ever.

Should we sign new agreements with as many countries as possible, or even global agreements for the whole world? That is the objective we need to have.

Until then, every step is a step in the right direction.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I do not wish to take away from any of time for further questions and comments, but I should clarify that while the rule generally is that a member must rise uncovered, as they say, which means no hat and no sunglasses, I know members have been having some concerns.

While we are all very happy with the wonderful work done to prepare this interim chamber, the lights are quite bright and some members are having trouble with that, and it is bothering them. Therefore, I understand why members in some cases may feel they have to wear sunglasses. Where it necessary to do so, we understand that.

In the meantime, I want to assure members that the administration is working to try to remediate this problem. I think it is a little less bright this week than it was previously, but these LED lights are very strong. I hope we can find other ways to resolve this.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for recognizing that. I normally never wear sunglasses. Even as a policeman, I never wore sunglasses. The decor is great, the chamber is great, but the lights are bothering a lot of members. The last few days I have been going home with headaches and my eyes have been watering badly. I normally never have that problem. That is the only reason I am wearing them. I think some other members are starting to wear them too, just to protect our eyes so we can get through the day.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, it may not seem like it, but I have some expertise in this area. Having worked as a television journalist for 20 years, I know a little bit about lighting issues. I sat in the National Assembly, and I even worked on the TV broadcast of the National Assembly debates 30 years ago. I will not recount my life story, but I can say that I know a little bit about it.

If, by chance, it can help the people who have done an excellent job, I will say that some adjustments do need to be made.

I will not go into detail, because it does not concern Bill S-6, but I will say that the lighting in the National Assembly is much more focused and more vertical. Based on my experience in TV, that is my humble suggestion.

● (1105)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill S-6, following two of my colleagues who have already spoken on this subject.

At first glance, this bill may seem a bit dull. I will therefore try to be as interesting as possible to ensure that Canadians tuning in know how important these issues are and that there are risks associated with establishing tax treaties with other countries. That is what is at stake here. A new tax treaty is being proposed to us. As we already have 93 of them, this would be our 94th tax treaty. That is not a small number. Consequently, we should not take this new treaty lightly, since it will be one of a series of treaties we have with many countries that have significant tax implications.

All Canadians feel concerned about tax issues because they all file a tax return each year to pay their dues and get all the credits to which they are entitled. They all know that taxation is an extremely important issue related to fairness and justice.

I have said this before, but in our country, we are fortunate to have a tax system that allows the federal, provincial and municipal governments to deliver services to the public. In some provinces, there are even school boards with a tax system. The ultimate goal of taxation is to ensure that the government can operate, but the government's primary focus is to serve the public and provide the best possible services to Canadians. They deserve value for their money, as they say in the business world.

When we buy a product or service, we want value for our money. The same goes for taxation. When we pay taxes to different levels of government, we hope to get our money's worth and get good services. The problem is that some Canadians feel like other taxpayers like them, usually the rich, are getting out of paying taxes by hiding their money either in Canada or offshore.

Some cases involve domestic tax evasion. For example, there are people who work under the table and hide their cash under a rug or in a mattress. We have all heard of that before. In other cases, people hide their money in tax havens. In both cases, the principle is the same, namely to avoid paying their fair share of taxes to the system that helps provide services to all Canadians.

As I have said in other debates on taxation, most Canadians receive more in services than they contribute in taxes. That much is clear when we add up all the services they receive. This means that

we have a fair system, but it needs to be even more progressive so that the least well off can still receive the best services.

No one wants to live in a country or a society where a person's wealth determines the services they receive from the government. It is therefore important to make sure that the wealthy contribute their fair share, especially multinationals and Canadian banks, which post record earnings in the billions of dollars every year, and which make use of many tax havens. This is fundamental to preserving Canadians' trust in our tax system.

● (1110)

This is perhaps a brief preamble to the debate we are having on tax treaties, which avoid double taxation.

I will use an example that many Canadians will recognize. Consider a Canadian company that has a U.S. subsidiary or does business there. If that company pays taxes there, where rates are similar or even higher than ours, it will not be taxed a second time when its profits are repatriated to Canada. That is the basic premise of tax treaties, and it is a matter of fairness. If the taxpayer pays taxes in another country, that money should not be taxed a second time when it is brought home. The main purpose of a tax treaty is to avoid taxing the same income twice.

Having said that, this makes sense in the case of countries like the United States, which has tax rates that are comparable to and even higher than ours depending on the state. However, in the case of other countries with which we have tax treaties, we must ask ourselves what the real purpose of the treaty is. Take for instance Barbados, with which we have a tax treaty. Barbados is a small country. For reasons that are still unclear to me, even though I have asked many questions about it, this country ranks third, and sometimes even second, in terms of countries where Canada makes direct investments abroad. This information comes from Statistics Canada. Barbados, of all the countries in the world, ranks third in terms of Canadian investment. After the United States and the United Kingdom, Barbados often ranks third or fourth in terms of our foreign direct investments. We have to ask ourselves why.

The answer seems simple to me. We have an agreement with Barbados to prevent double taxation, and Barbados has a tax rate ranging from 0.5% to 2.5% for foreign companies. We need look no further to understand this. This is not new, but from 1982. It was one of the first international tax treaties we signed.

Government Orders

When we ask questions about this agreement with Barbados, we hear snippets about why, historically, we have this very close relationship with Barbados. It is hard to find it anywhere in writing, but Barbados being Canadian companies' gateway to the rest of the world actually seems to be part of Canada's tax policy. If a Canadian company wants to do business abroad, Barbados is the gateway to those countries with its low tax rates ranging from 0.5% to 2.5% for foreign corporations. A Canadian company that establishes a subsidiary in Barbados will do business with countries from around the world, and since their revenues are reported in Barbados, that is where they are taxed. Instead of being based in Canada, the company uses Barbados as the gateway to the entire world. The government will not admit it but, unofficially, during many discussions, I heard that this tax policy dates back to 1982, and that Canada adopted it because that is what every other country was doing. We are being told that we have to do this because everyone else is. If everyone is doing it, why should Canada be put at a disadvantage by not doing it? That is what we are hearing.

It is extremely important now, more than ever, to have a real discussion and to work together on tax havens, even though the current and former governments have never taken real action on this. More than ever, we need to put an end to these dishonest practices by many taxpayers, especially companies and multinationals, which use shell companies in tax havens all around the world.

• (1115)

Barbados is the preferred tax haven for Canadians. Other countries will have another. We need to put an end to this practice for good. All industrialized countries that are missing out on taxes and whose tax base is incorrect as a result of these practices need to get what they are entitled to. They are owed the taxes that these multinationals generate on their billions of dollars in profits every year. These billions made all over the world are hidden away in bank accounts, in tax havens, to avoid fair and equitable taxation that would be used to provide public services.

The worst is that these companies are often the first to make use of these public services. They are the first to use the infrastructure that our industrialized countries have built. Their employees are the first to use roads, public transit and public services like education and health care. It can therefore be argued that they are taking advantage of Canada. They are taking advantage of Canada's system and of its generosity, and they are then hiding their money abroad, without contributing to our system in return.

What we keep hearing from governments, especially Conservative ones, is that there is not enough money. Fortunately, not all of them are sending that message, but around the world, more and more of them are saying that the money has run out and that governments no longer have the means to provide services to Canadians. Governments are drowning in debt, they cannot balance their budgets, and they have to cut services, yet billions of dollars are being hidden abroad, where they are not contributing to society as they should. We want to see more services, better services, services that benefit everyone, including people in Canada, of course.

That is the crux of the matter. That is why it is important to consider this issue carefully. Far from being a boring bill, Bill S-6 is exciting. The tax convention with Madagascar may enable continued

abuse of a convention. I am not alone in saying that tax agreements are being abused. Bill C-82 is being debated at this very moment two floors down in a committee room.

As finance departments officials themselves have admitted, taxpayers can and do abuse tax treaties. That is why Bill C-82 was tabled. It is clear, it has been said in so many words, which is fortunate. I think this was the first time I heard anyone admit it out loud. Earlier I was saying that we often hear things through the grapevine that are never said out loud into a microphone. However, it was said loud and clear that tax treaties do get abused, which is why Bill C-82 had to be tabled and now has to be passed.

My question for the parliamentary secretary, who did not seem to know the answer, was related to that. I actually know the answer to my own question. Bill S-6 follows the old tax treaty model, which, by the government's own admission, produced tax treaties that get abused.

Today we are debating a bill on a tax treaty with Madagascar. In this case, it seems all right. As I said earlier, we do not want double taxation. Madagascar has reasonable tax rates that are comparable to those in Canada. That is fine, but we do not want tax treaties to be abused.

However, Bill C-82 demonstrates that tax treaty abuse is already happening. Also, Bill S-6 seeks to adopt a treaty just like the ones that the Liberals themselves admit are open to abuse. That makes no sense.

They should have taken the time to negotiate the treaty using the new model developed by the OECD to come out with a better agreement. I am not saying it would have been perfect—and I will be saying that in committee—but at least it would have been a step in the right direction. They acknowledge that tax treaty abuse is a possibility, and they are making an effort to close these loopholes in the treaties to keep that from happening. However, by the government's own admission, taxpayers could abuse this treaty.

• (1120)

That is why I wanted to say in my speech today that the government has a responsibility to make a clear commitment to ensure that these conventions cannot be abused over time. As I was saying earlier, a convention with Madagascar is a good idea because its tax rate is similar to Canada's.

However, this does not mean that five years down the road, Madagascar will not become a tax haven or will not change its tax laws to lower the tax rate of foreign companies operating on its territory. We need to ensure that there is a monitoring and control mechanism. We need to monitor the 94 conventions that are in place to ensure that they do not become tax conventions that can be abused. That is extremely important. Unfortunately, the government did not commit to monitor the conventions and ensure that they do not become gateways to tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance for Canadian companies. As everyone knows, tax evasion is reprehensible and illegal.

Government Orders

The government talks a lot about tax evasion and says it is doing great things to address it, but the Liberals do not have any results to show Canadians.

The Conservatives got zero results in that regard, and they had no intention of doing anything to address tax evasion. For the benefit of Conservatives who may be listening, I repeat, a former minister of national revenue even admitted that tax evasion was not a priority. I did not address that in my speech, but I did mention it in a question I asked my Conservative colleague, although that member made no reference to the issue. Jean-Pierre Blackburn admitted that tax evasion was not a priority.

This government promised to do more to combat tax evasion, but it has no results to show for it either, even though concrete results are all that matter. It is all well and good for the government to say that it is doing what is necessary, it has invested \$1 billion and it hired 1,300 auditors, but if there is nothing to prove that the plan is effective, then clearly it is not working. This government does not have the motivation or any real intention of getting to the heart of the problem. The government is actually only scratching the surface.

Since the Liberals took power, there have been three tax and financial scandals: the Bahama leaks, the Paradise papers and the Panama papers. In all three cases, it was determined that many Canadians were involved in these scandals. Today, three years later, no taxpayers have been convicted of tax evasion. Worse still, no charges have been laid against even one taxpayer involved in these financial and tax scandals. This clearly shows that the system is not working and that it is flawed.

Even if they invested \$1 billion and hired 1,300 auditors—as the Minister of National Revenue says every day—if the system is flawed, nothing will change. Taxpayers will still be able to shirk their responsibilities. That is the crux of the matter, but the government refuses to see it.

The tax system needs to be reformed as a whole. It is not enough to close a few loopholes here and there. The first version of the tax code was 15 pages long. Today, the code is 1,800 pages long. This is proof that the system is flawed.

Canada's chartered accountants are calling for a comprehensive reform of the tax system. That is what is at issue today, and that is what the government needs to address. Otherwise, investing \$1 billion and hiring 1,300 auditors will not change anything. The government must review the Canadian tax code from top to bottom, to simplify it and ensure that everyone pays their fair share. It is often easier to comply with something simple.

I hope that the government will also study this issue. The NDP is committed to reviewing the entire tax code in order to close all loopholes and have a simple tax code.

Canadians expect to receive quality services commensurate with the money they invest in the system.

• (1125)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech on Canada's 94th agreement with another country to curb tax evasion and his

warning that we should not let this come back to haunt Canada and its taxpayers.

He also told us that he is in favour of reforming the tax system. I would like him to comment on the fact that Canadian families currently pay more taxes under the Liberal government, considering that the benefits it gives with one hand are clawed back with the other. The Fraser Institute released a study to that effect today. Canadian families currently spend more on taxes than on food and shelter.

Is the government headed in the wrong direction? Does it rely on deficits and have a spending problem? Has it lost control of its spending? I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that my colleague and I will be able to come to an understanding, since the Conservatives often do not have the same definition of tax. In their definition of tax, they include anything they possibly can, just so that they can say that Canadians are paying more taxes. They even consider Canada pension plan contributions to be taxes. In my opinion, this makes their calculation incorrect, which leads to some false conclusions. Investments in a public or private pension plan are investments, not taxes, as the Conservatives claim.

Unfortunately, my colleague's question today follows the same pattern. The Conservatives see taxes everywhere, even in things that are not taxes. An ideological bias prevents them from seeing the truth, from seeing that taxes are also necessary in a society if we want good-quality services, like access to health care and education, regardless of the individual's income. This is what the Conservatives do not want to see. In their view, there should be no government involvement. It is every person for themselves. Those who earn enough will be fine, and too bad for everyone else.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is the way I look at it from the New Democrats' perspective and these are the issues I have with them. Within the last couple of budgets, we have seen a serious commitment, hundreds of millions of dollars and getting close to a billion dollars, to go after individuals who are trying to avoid paying their taxes. This government has been focused very much on that issue.

Along with that issue, we have also been focusing attention on tax agreements with other countries as we expand. We recognize the importance of world trade and the benefits of that. The New Democrats tend to be reluctant to support the government when it moves into the area of expanding exportation or markets abroad. When we do that, tax agreements, such as the bill that we are debating today, become an essential part of ensuring a fairer sense of taxation, no matter where a person may go. We recognize and we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to get those tax avoiders. We are also putting into law agreements that will assist in ensuring there is a fairer sense of taxation.

Would the member across the way not agree that the NDP should be supporting this legislation and legislation like it?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I may have forgotten to mention that our caucus supports Bill S-6. As I am sure I mentioned, the reason we support this bill is that Madagascar's tax rates are comparable to ours. They are reasonable tax rates compared to those in Canada. That is why it is possible to accept a bill like this one on an agreement with Madagascar.

That being said, I would put a big asterisk next to tax treaties, because over time, they can be abused. We must ensure that these countries do not become tax havens, like Barbados, with which we have a tax treaty. That is why I am warning the government. By its own admission, as evidenced by Bill C-82, taxpayers abuse tax treaties. That is precisely the government's argument in the case of Bill C-82, and that is why I am cautioning the government against tax treaty abuse. I am only reiterating what the government is saying.

As far as investments are concerned, it is all well and good to say that \$1 billion has been invested and that we have 1,300 more auditors, but when the system is broken and no longer works, then it will not change anything. That is why the government has nothing to show for this investment. There have been no convictions or even charges related to offshore tax evasion. The government sent out 12 notices of assessment, and that is it. Congratulations.

• (1130)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, can my colleague tell us what kind of oversight could be included in a convention like this one to prevent abuse?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I think the best way to do that is to have a transparent approach. The process should be public, and the information should be available to Canadians.

We have 94 conventions. Every one of them should indicate the foreign corporate tax rate in the country in question. There should be absolute transparency, and that information should be updated every year. If countries change their tax rates significantly, Canada and Canadians will know about it. If necessary, we can change or repeal tax conventions that start to be abused. I think that is the best approach to oversight.

We can talk about other approaches, but I think the easiest way to keep track of things is to make the information public. We should be open and transparent about countries' tax rates. Finance Canada should keep that information up to date and take it into consideration.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the very interesting discussion on a tax treaty with Madagascar. Some people may have thought this would not be too stimulating a discussion, but he made it very interesting and very appropriate for the times.

I want to bring up one example of a tax haven, which I have brought up many times in the House. A mining company in Vancouver had a mine in Mongolia and made a huge profit there. Over a period of five years, I think it should have paid Canada \$600 million in taxes and should have paid Mongolia \$200 million in taxes, but instead, it opened a post office box in Luxembourg and paid Luxembourg \$80 million in taxes, about one-tenth of what it

should have paid. The kicker is that the company contacted CRA and asked if it was okay, and CRA said it was fine; Canada has a tax agreement with Luxembourg, so it could fill its boots.

I am wondering if the member could comment on the problem of these tax agreements being abused. I spoke to a tax lawyer once who said that the simplest thing would be to have a minimum tax put in these agreements, say 20%, so that the agreements could not be abused. Companies would be paying more or less the same tax they would pay in Canada so that they would not be tempted to funnel all their money out of our country, causing Canada to lose taxes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for that great question and for his expertise on this subject.

This is a glaring problem. The example he described is just one of many. Companies, especially multinational corporations, are using highly complex tax schemes because they can afford to do so. My neighbour in Sherbrooke cannot afford to pay an accountant to figure out how to exploit the same loopholes, because that would cost him far more than he owes in taxes.

Taxpayers like the mining company my colleague mentioned can afford to hire tax lawyers to explain how to use complex tax schemes. Even the CRA's top auditors have a hard time untangling all these schemes, especially in light of the bank secrecy arrangements that certain countries have. That means these companies get away with shirking their tax responsibilities.

It is important to do due diligence and monitor our tax treaties to ensure that they do not become abusive. It is also important to take measures to ensure that companies pay taxes at the correct rate in Canada, even when our foreign partners have lower tax rates. There are ways to achieve that, and it is important to study these kinds of potential solutions.

• (1135)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the existing tax convention with the Republic of Madagascar, which was signed at Antananarivo on November 24, 2016, contains an interesting element that is not systematically included in other agreements. That is what I want to focus on here.

I would like to draw the attention of the House to article 25 of the convention, which has to do with the exchange of tax information. The wording of that article is consistent with the standard established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD, on the exchange of tax information. Article 25 provides for the automatic sharing of the tax information set out by the OECD to address base erosion and profit shifting. The information is automatically transferred on both sides, and that is a very good thing. In other words, Canada receives all of that information automatically.

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We could relate that to Quebec's single tax return proposal. With an information exchange agreement like the one in this bill and with the co-operation of Ottawa, Quebec could have access to all of that information. Such a convention is therefore fully compatible with the much-talked-about proposal for a single tax return administered by Quebec, which we recently discussed here in the House.

The wording based on the OECD standards is used in a number of Canada's information exchange agreements. Unfortunately, however, it is not used in most of the agreements Canada signed with tax havens. I find that extremely disappointing.

Take Barbados for example. In the Canada-Barbados tax treaty, paragraph II(3) states that, "The existing taxes to which the Agreement shall apply [only] are, in particular: in the case of Canada: the income taxes imposed by the Government of Canada, (hereinafter referred to as "Canadian tax")".

A bit further, article XXVIII, which deals specifically with information sharing, states that the only information that Barbados is entitled to share within the meaning of the treaty are "taxes covered by this Agreement insofar as the taxation thereunder is in accordance with this Agreement."

In other words, it can share information only with Ottawa, it can share information regarding federal tax only, and it cannot possibly share any information that would allow the application of any Quebec tax law that is not an exact copy of federal tax law. The Canada-Barbados tax treaty therefore prevents Quebec from having access to tax information if its tax legislation differs from federal legislation. However, it is an old treaty from the 1980s. Let us look at another tax information exchange agreement concluded with another tax haven. One example that comes to mind is the 2011 agreement with Bahamas.

Article 3(1) indicates that the exchange of information, for the purposes of the agreement, pertains only to "existing taxes imposed or administered by the Government of Canada". I repeat, "imposed or administered by the Government of Canada", meaning the federal government. The same is true of the agreement with Barbados.

To summarize, when Canada signs information exchange agreements with countries that are not tax havens, in this case Madagascar, it has access to all of the information available, and that information can be used by Quebec, even if its tax law differs from Ottawa's, as long as the federal government co-operates.

On the other hand, when Canada signs information exchange agreements with tax havens, such as Barbados or the Bahamas, Canada no longer has access to all of the information available. The only information that can be obtained is what is specifically requested by Ottawa, according to its tax law, the wording of which conflicts with the OECD standards. This prevents Quebec from waging an effective war on tax havens and makes its single tax return proposal difficult to implement. I believe that the federal government, regardless of the party in power, did that deliberately.

Obviously, Canada does not want to share information about tax havens with Quebec, even though the current agreement with Madagascar shows that it is entirely possible to do so. This clearly shows that it is possible to reach agreements that are compatible with

Quebec's single tax return proposal. The problem is that we cannot tax income if we do not know that it exists.

• (1140)

In his testimony on this topic before the public finance committee of Quebec's National Assembly on September 15, 2016, tax expert André Lareau said right off the bat that we cannot control what we cannot see.

Access to tax information is crucial for the enforcement of the Income Tax Act. To that end, the federal government has entered into nearly 100 tax treaties and more than 20 tax information exchange agreements, which, despite their serious flaws, all include provisions related to the sharing of information. Without those provisions, the government would not have the information it needs to enforce its own legislation. Treaties are the cornerstone of international taxation.

The tax information sharing provisions in these treaties contain many flaws. For instance, they do not provide for automatic sharing of information. Requests must be very precise and refer to specific information on a clearly identified taxpayer, which makes it impossible to go after a taxpayer if we do not have details about their activities in tax havens. Above all, they pertain only to income tax collected by the Government of Canada and existing taxes established or administered by the Government of Canada.

In other words, only Ottawa can request tax information from other countries because only Ottawa signed the treaties, and it can only request that information for the purpose of enforcing federal tax law. Current agreements with tax havens explicitly forbid foreign countries from exchanging tax information except for the purpose of enforcing federal tax law. That works as long as Quebec's tax law is essentially the same as federal law, but if Quebec's law ever differed from federal law, the Government of Quebec would not have access to the information it would need to enforce its law. Basically, Quebec is free to come up with its own tax system, but if it exercises that freedom, it will no longer be able to enforce its law. Regardless of whether we have a single tax return, if Quebec wants to go after tax havens more vigorously than Ottawa, it will not be able to, because it does not have access to the information. Where agreements relate to tax havens, it does not have access to the information. Where agreements relate to countries that are not tax havens, like this agreement, it will have access to all the information. That is frustrating and outrageous.

Therefore, even though Quebec has autonomy in matters of international taxation, it is subject to restrictions. Quebec has autonomy on condition that it does the same thing as Ottawa. For all international aspects of Quebec taxation, including tax havens, this is unfortunately the crux of the problem, regardless of what the Constitution states. This agreement shows that we can do things differently.

I sincerely hope that all tax information exchange agreements with tax havens will be reviewed and amended to incorporate the wording based on the OECD standard that is used in this agreement with Madagascar. That was the main point that I wanted to raise.

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In my opinion, part of the reason for this new treaty is that, since the early 2000s, there has been a resurgence in oil development and uranium, ilmenite, nickel and even niobium mining. These are important areas of investment for Canada's oil and mining companies. This treaty will also include a foreign investment protection agreement, which has been signed but not yet implemented. That agreement contains a provision similar to what is found in NAFTA chapter 11, which protects foreign investment. It could effectively allow western oil companies and mining companies from Toronto and elsewhere in Canada to plunge Madagascar into bankruptcy. That is well known.

With this kind of investment protection provision, the foreign entity, the Canadian firm in this case, will have the power to take the Madagascar government to court over any changes in legislation or regulations that could reduce future profits. If environmental standards were implemented by the government, the Canadian company's profits might suffer and it could sue the government.

•(1145)

A standard to protect mining workers would do the same. The Canadian mining company could take the Madagascar government to court. However, that country's economy is struggling even more than those of developed countries, so a court case could bankrupt the government, which is a big problem.

The government boasts about establishing progressive agreements and partnerships that respect workers' rights and environmental rights. We do not know whether that is the case in the information exchange agreements currently being discussed. However, the problem is with the foreign investment protection agreement, which has been signed and will be implemented at some point in the future. I hope there will be an amendment.

With that, I conclude my speech.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Quebec for his speech.

Today, we are talking about tax evasion. This is the 94th agreement that Canada has proposed signing with another country.

My question is very simple. On the one hand, the government claims to want to put an end to tax evasion, but on the other hand, it is not controlling its spending. The gap between the government's potential revenue and the revenue it actually receives is growing. We must remember that families are spending more on taxes than on food and shelter.

Where is the government going? What does my colleague think could be done so that Quebecers pay less tax?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis for his question and comments.

I too find this troubling. Year after year, we have a deficit. The idea of running a deficit to stimulate the economy during a recession is plausible. However, since the economy is doing relatively well, it is really troubling that our deficit is so huge.

That money could be used to further stimulate Quebec's economy. We know that it has significant needs. We could support the green economy and transport electrification, for instance. Money has been

earmarked for infrastructure, but the funds set aside for Quebec keep getting held up. That is deeply troubling.

My colleague also said the government wants to fight tax evasion. Let me add a caveat. The government is always saying it wants to fight tax evasion and tax havens. In reality, we are still a long way away from achieving the expected results or matching the practices of European countries and the United States. My colleague from Sherbrooke mentioned the recent allegations published in the *Journal de Montréal* about the Panama papers. Of the 900 files that have been identified, only 12 have resulted in notices of assessment being sent out, and no criminal charges have been laid, as far as I know. We are still a long way away from a real solution.

The real problem with tax havens is the legal tactic used by big corporations, multinationals and especially Bay Street banks. The profits they earn in Canada and their biggest revenue-generating activities are reported in tax havens, enabling them to avoid paying taxes here in Canada. The most profitable companies are siphoning off value generated in Canada and shirking their social obligations. That is a serious problem.

The government should make the immoral illegal right away and ban companies, especially Bay Street banks, from legally using tax havens.

•(1150)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his expertise on the matter. I know that he also analyzed Bill C-82. I am sure that he fully understands the fact that this bill aims to renew and improve our tax treaties. Our partners must also accept the improvement of a treaty; it goes both ways.

Today, we are studying Bill S-6, a tax treaty with Madagascar. However, this treaty was modelled on the old system. The tax treaty was signed on November 24, 2016, and the multilateral treaty, which is the subject of Bill C-82, was signed on the same day in Paris. Therefore, while a treaty was being signed in Antananarivo, Madagascar, and another in Paris, two different things were being signed.

Can my colleague tell us about the difference between the new and improved OECD treaties, which were adopted in Paris, and the one signed in Madagascar, which is based on a version that the government believes taxpayers can abuse?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, under Bill C-82, future tax agreements will be based on OECD standards, which allow for comprehensive tax information exchange.

We will continue to support that bill as well as Bill S-6, the Canada-Madagascar convention. We believe that the convention honours the spirit and the standards set out by the OECD even though the wording itself is not exactly the same as what was signed in Paris. Again, that is based on my understanding of the file.

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Madagascar is not a tax haven at the moment, so, in my opinion, the wording about the information exchange agreement is fine. Obviously, it would be better if this were standardized across all our agreements, which is the goal of Bill C-82. The real problem lies with the tax information exchange agreements with tax havens, which make effective tax information exchange complicated or well-nigh impossible.

In such cases, the Canada Revenue Agency has to request specific information about a known taxpayer. We do not have enough information to monitor data about information exchange. If everything were available, auditors could identify situations in which tax fraud or tax evasion likely took place. That is what needs to change. Tax information exchange agreements with tax havens are the problem.

I would remind members that when these agreements were entered into with tax havens, the Income Tax Act was changed. It was not done openly, but hidden in the information on medical expenses, among the thousands of pages of the Income Tax Act. It stated that when Canada enters into an agreement with a tax haven, the portion of income that the Canadian corporation declares was generated in the foreign country will no longer be taxable here. The income will only be taxed in the tax haven, where the tax rate is zero or close to that. That is what we are speaking out against and it must change.

Canada is a lame duck in the fight against tax avoidance; it is letting the big banks and multinationals shift their profits to tax havens under these agreements. At the time, there were 22 agreements. This is still going on. Things have to change.

I introduced a motion in the House to do just that. Every Liberal, except for one, and every Conservative member voted against the motion. Do the parties that aspire to govern represent the Canadians who want to eliminate the use of tax havens, or do they serve the big corporations and major banks that are the main beneficiaries of these immoral schemes?

I think that in asking the question, we have our answer. This must change.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tax treaties involve more than just issues of tax avoidance. I would be interested in my colleague's comments with regard to this. In many ways, tax treaties take down barriers for trade and investment, which facilitates potential growth between both of the countries in question.

Could my colleague comment on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I completely agree with him. It is important to have rules to prevent double taxation in countries that have real tax laws instead of agreements with tax havens that facilitate tax avoidance. If a Canadian company does business with France and declares part of its income in France, or vice versa, it just makes sense that that income

should not be taxed at 100% in France and 100% in Canada. That company should pay the right amount of taxes, but just once.

We in the Bloc Québécois support international trade agreements. Quebec is a small, open economy and it needs to have several international partners. We have expertise in high tech sectors, such as aerospace and forestry, and so, exporting and importing are possible. It is important to facilitate trade. That creates jobs and improves quality of life. That is a general rule, but when it is applied correctly, it works.

The problem with tax information exchange agreements, in some cases, arises when the spirit of the agreement, with which I totally agree, is twisted to allow certain companies to take advantage of a situation and not pay taxes, which is what the big banks do.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from British Columbia, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

The hon. member came to Lévis in his role as the Coast Guard critic and we proceeded to launch the supply ship *Asterix*. That ship is the pride of the Royal Canadian Navy. It was a contract that the former Conservative government wanted to give to the Davie shipyard. We all remember the whole political interference mess. We will not talk about the Norman case here this morning or the scandal surrounding how this contract was awarded by the Liberals. Instead we will talk about tax evasion.

I want to thank my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George for his involvement in ensuring that the coast guard can play a role on the three oceans and on maintaining the St. Lawrence Seaway. The coast guard is currently struggling with its aging fleet to ensure that these major waterways can be used for shipping, and so, I thank the hon. member. Like me, he will rise to speak to the bill today. This is Canada's 94th tax agreement. This one is being concluded with Madagascar to reduce and prevent tax evasion and also to avoid double taxation.

We need agreements like this so that the state can fulfill its responsibilities. I just gave an example. The Canadian government is responsible for ensuring that our waterways are navigable and for protecting our sovereignty on the three coasts. This is why we need agreements with other countries, and this is why the countries need revenue to carry out their constitutional duties.

Canada has a constitutional responsibility to ensure that we have a fleet of Coast Guard ships to respond to increasing demands. As we are seeing now, this is a challenge. This winter, a number of ships got stuck in the ice on the St. Lawrence, and it is time for the Liberal government to take concrete action.

As my colleague saw at Davie shipyard, the workers are able to meet the Canadian government's needs. This is relevant, because we are talking about revenue. This revenue would be well spent by the government, because the workers have shown that they can meet deadlines, as was the case with the *Asterix*.

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That being said, I would simply like to remind the people listening that, if we count only the amounts owed by Canadian taxpayers, it is estimated that the government is losing up to \$17 billion as a result of tax evasion and tax avoidance. That is how much the public treasury loses each year in unpaid taxes, often because of wealthy people hiding income in tax havens.

Quebec authors have studied this issue, and in addition to individuals, there are companies as well. On that subject, I have here a study by the Conference Board of Canada, which indicates that, compared to other countries that experience loss of revenue due to tax evasion, if we consider the entire tax gap, including taxpayers and companies, we could talk about annual losses of up to \$47 billion. That is the magnitude of the problem.

Imagine what we could do with those billions of dollars. I gave the example earlier of the ships we could have for the Coast Guard. Those are just some of the needs that we have.

Just two days ago, a constituent in my riding called me because he has a serious health problem. He has paid into employment insurance all his life. Now, he is in a situation where he has to leave his job to focus on his treatments, and he is limited to 15 meagre weeks of employment insurance. He is unable to get any more assistance from EI.

●(1200)

I would like to remind the House that employers and employees pay the same amounts into the EI program. Of course, the government has financial needs and responsibilities. In this case, it is important that the government be able to collect all of the revenue to which it is entitled. However, the government also has a responsibility to control its spending. That is the important issue before us today. We are talking about a 94th agreement with another country, namely Madagascar. My colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent reminded us of the relative importance of this agreement compared to our trade with countries like the United States or China. He also reminded us that we must be vigilant in implementing such agreements. As they say, the devil is in the details.

My colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent gave us a good example of that this morning. Louis St. Laurent was the prime minister who opened the St. Lawrence Seaway, which the Liberals are currently neglecting to maintain.

My colleague reminded us of the importance of having agreements on tax evasion. He also mentioned that we need to ensure that our laws do not contain any irrelevant provisions or provisions that could constitute loopholes. In its most recent budget bill, the government included legal provisions to create a sort of remediation agreement. That puts the government in a difficult situation. We want to know what this government is trying to hide.

We will support the bill, but we also want to remind the government that it has the responsibility to allow us to openly debate the bills it introduces. Adding legal measures to an 800-page bill that will be studied by the Standing Committee on Finance is not the way to go about that.

Today we are discussing tax evasion, taxation and an agreement with Madagascar. The government is very bad at making sure that taxpayers receive value for their money. The average family pays

more income tax. The government has problems when it comes to spending. It is addicted to spending; although it earns revenue, it spends more than it takes in. The irony in Canada is that Canadian families pay more income tax. I have here a very recent study from the Fraser Institute. It is dated February 21. According to this study, most middle-income Canadian families pay higher income tax. According to the same study, middle-income Canadian families pay \$1,000 more in income tax each year.

Many studies and many statistics have shown this. We know that the Liberal government is always trying to increase its revenue. We believe that it should at least balance its budgets, but we are in a bottomless pit. Not only must families pay more income tax, their children will have to pick up the pieces. In terms of taxation, the government has no idea where it is going.

On March 19, the government will present its next and last budget. It was supposed to herald a return to a balanced budget, but that will not be the case. The government has lost control of the deficit. As we saw this morning, our veterans are paying the price.

We agree that we should have agreements with other countries—in this case, Madagascar—to limit tax evasion. However, that is not an excuse to make a mockery of Parliament by introducing bills or important elements concerning public confidence in institutions that are being threatened by certain sections of the bill. I hope to be able to address this again a bit later.

●(1205)

[*English*]

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

Mr. Speaker, in a question earlier, my friend across the way was talking about the issue of taxation. For me, I guess the proof is in the pudding. One of the very first things this government did, which I believe was in Bill C-2, was to give Canada's middle class a tax break, literally putting hundreds of millions of dollars in the pockets of Canada's middle class. That very member and the Conservative opposition voted against that measure.

Now, it is not the first time Conservatives voted against a measure of this nature. In the debate so far, the bill has often been referred to as a bill dealing with tax avoidance. When the government invested hundreds of millions of dollars, close to a billion dollars, to marginalize tax avoidance, again this member and the Conservative Party voted against it. This is money going into the pockets of Canadians.

The member can cite whatever he wants to cite. However, when it comes time to vote on the issue, can he explain why the Conservatives continuously vote against Canada's middle class?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. My answer is simple: my vote is based on reality.

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I am very proud to have voted against measures proposed by the government that increase income taxes for middle-class families so that the rich pay less and Canadians find themselves in an endless deficit and, on top of everything else, that do nothing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

When a student gets a grade of 55%, the teacher can choose whether to pass him or not. In this case, I think that teachers will have no problem failing the government.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is talking about tax measures that need improvement.

As my colleague from Sherbrooke said earlier, after years of trying to fix the tax code, it now has more than 1800 pages, which makes it the ideal playground for tinkering. We at the NDP want a complete reform of the tax code. In fact, this has been recommended by Canada's chartered accountants. We should clean up all the measures that were added to try to fix the system and address the current challenges and the problem we are now facing.

Our 94 tax agreements, many of which, unfortunately, were reached with tax havens, have ensured that not all individuals and businesses pay their fair share of income tax. Everyone needs to contribute if we are to provide the services Canadians need.

• (1210)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question and her work. In my speech, I mentioned the importance of putting a human face on the Employment Insurance system. My colleague has made significant efforts in this area, and we fully endorse them.

We need tax measures adapted to the changing Canadian population. That is what our government did. My colleague may remember that the Conservative government made tax changes to stop the subsidies for oil sands development. It also implemented positive measures to encourage industries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, we did so while effectively cutting taxes for the middle class and balancing the budget.

Next October, Canadians will have an opportunity to return to smart tax measures with a Conservative government led by our leader.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House and speak to Bill S-6, an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. It has been said that this is the 94th agreement of this type and it deals specifically with tax evasion.

In preparation for this debate, I did some research and homework on Canada's relationship with Madagascar. We established diplomatic ties with Madagascar in 1965. The latest data on our two-way merchandise trade shows a total of \$115.5 million. I enter that into this debate because the hon. parliamentary secretary mentioned that very often tax treaties are seen as a way to break down barriers to trade. That is something of importance.

I want to thank my hon. colleague who hosted me as we toured the Davie shipyard. The day we were there we saw the pride of hundreds of workers in the product they put forth. The *Asterix* ship is the pride of our navy.

Our hon. colleague also touched on my file. I am the shadow minister for Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard. Did members know that Canada has the longest coastline in the world, yet we have the oldest marine fleet to protect our sovereignty? Our marine fleet also ensures that all of our waterways remain open and free for the coastal communities that depend on them. It ensures that the transportation of good and people flows freely, that our trade can take place and that our waterways are safe. That is what the brave men and women of our Canadian Coast Guard do every day. Their service to our country should never be forgotten.

It is shameful that we have a government that makes a lot of promises. The Liberals like to stand in the House and on stages right across our country with their hands on their hearts to talk about their most important relationships. I do not know what number they are at now in terms of their most important relationships but there are a lot, and that is why we are here again today talking about a relationship between Canada and Madagascar.

I want to talk about our most important relationships and I want to go back to something my hon. colleague brought up about our brave men and women who serve our Canadian Coast Guard. We need to make sure that we outfit our men and women who serve, whether as first responders or in the military. Our Canadian Coast Guard needs to have the equipment necessary to fulfill its job and we know the government has not done that. The Liberals talk a good game but they have failed to do that.

The department has appeared before committee a number of times, yet the Liberals have failed to give any kind of schedule indicating when they will proceed with the procurement of new vessels to make sure that our waterways remain free. God forbid that we have an incident in the Arctic where we have to save a ship that is trapped or, heaven forbid, even in worse conditions.

This leads me to another part of why we are here today. We are talking about tax evasion and the estimated \$47 billion annually that is lost to our economy. I want to talk about our economy. Not only are we losing an estimated \$47 billion annually but we are losing investment in our country. Business is fleeing our country at record levels right now. The levels are astronomical. They are at 70-year highs. We have tax evasion and we have business investment fleeing our country at record levels.

• (1215)

Why is that? It is because of the policies and inconsistent messages the government has delivered in the short term it has been here. I would argue that it has been a long three and a half years. It feels very long.

Businesses appear before us every day. They come into our offices and talk to us about how concerned they are. They are no different than our constituents who come to us when we have our riding breaks.

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This brings me to the experience I had last week. An accountant in my riding talked about the mineral exploration tax credit for start-up businesses. The CRA has now deemed it assistance, so now companies have to claim it as income. It is another barrier, when we are talking about breaking barriers to trade. We need to do whatever we can to break the barriers to investment for businesses.

The Liberals like to talk about how many jobs they have created, but here is a news flash. Governments do not create jobs. Their job is to create the environment so that businesses can invest and create jobs. We know that the numbers are staggering. It was recently reported that nowhere has a government spent so much and received so little, boasted so loudly and spent so much to achieve so little.

We know that the Prime Minister, in the 2015 campaign, made a lot of promises. He promised to be different. He promised real change. He promised that there would not be omnibus bills and that he would not sneak things into these big bills. What we have seen in the headlines lately is that in the Budget Implementation Act, there was a little clause snuck in that was really a justice clause. Some could argue that this was sneaky and underhanded. Why was it in there and not where it should have been? Why did the former attorney general not put that forward if that was something they wanted?

The Conservatives on this side of House support this. We see the importance of breaking down barriers to trade and of making sure that the flow of dollars lost to tax evasion is stemmed. We want the legislation coming before the House to have fulsome debate, and we want the 338 members of Parliament who were elected to be the voices of Canadians to all have a say in those pieces of legislation.

The Prime Minister campaigned on being open and transparent, but the Liberals tell us to just trust them and that when it gets to committee, we will have that fulsome debate. We also know that the Liberal majority on committees shuts down that debate, and the conversations are very one-sided, as much as they like to talk about it being very collaborative.

I want to bring this back to our committee. We do good work when we put aside our partisan ideas and the committee works at arm's-length from the minister. We managed to do some great work that actually helped expose the clam scam issue, which then saw the former fisheries minister quietly shuffled in the middle of the summer to another position. Why? It was because the Liberals awarded a lucrative surf clam quota to a sitting Liberal member of Parliament's brother and a former Liberal colleague, also a relative of the then fisheries minister, as court documents now show.

Why does this side of the House have concerns? The government says that the opposition is loud and boisterous, but our job is to give sober second thought to what those folks are doing on the other side.

● (1220)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That is the Senate.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, it might be the Senate, but someone has to take a reasoned approach to legislation because of the parliamentary tricks the current government has continued to use to pull the wool over Canadians' eyes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member say that never have we seen a government invest so much and receive so little, or at least he could not remember a time.

I can certainly remember a time. It was the former government. The Conservatives were renowned for saying that they were doing so much but were actually doing nothing. That was obvious in our communities. I remember being mayor of Kingston, and John Baird showed up, because they did not have anyone to come to Kingston, so they said, "Let's send a Queen's grad. That must mean something". He showed up and dragged our municipal politicians to a bridge owned by the federal government just to announce that it was going to be repainting the bridge. It was taking care of its assets.

This government is actually investing in things that matter. It is building new infrastructure networks to grow our economy to see Canada develop and become a nation that can effectively trade and have new commerce opportunities.

The member opposite talked about an environment for businesses to thrive. This government lowered the small-business corporate tax rate to 9%. This government announced in the fall economic update measures to allow businesses to depreciate assets not only over a shorter period of time, but in some cases, in the year in which the expense is made. That is about creating an environment. For the member to stand up and say that this government is not creating an environment for businesses to thrive is disingenuous at best.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I was not part of government at the time, but we benefited from it. Our whole country benefited from the investments the government made.

When the Conservatives came in, there were five trade agreements. When we left, at the end of our term in 2015, there were over 40 trade agreements. Not only that, the Conservatives invested heavily in the Asia-Pacific gateway and Atlantic opportunities. That allowed Canada to move goods and people. They invested in airports. They invested in ports. They invested in bilateral agreements that were meaningful.

Only 3% of the Liberals' infrastructure spending has gone anywhere to boost our economy; that is 3% on trade and transportation and infrastructure. If we are not looking after our gateways, if we are not looking after our roadways and our networks and our infrastructure to move people and goods, we are going to lose our standing in this world.

I would argue that Canada's standing on the world stage has taken a fall from where we were in 2015. We have seen a mockery made of our country. I have said this before. We are now known more for what our leader wears than for principled policy, and that is shameful.

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• (1225)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is the thinness of the bill before us, Bill S-6, a convention between Canada and Madagascar to avoid double taxation and prevent fiscal evasion, that has led us to go so far afield from the bill at hand during the time available for debate.

The member for Cariboo—Prince George said he lamented, as I do, the use of omnibus bills and omnibus budget bills to sneak things through. I completely agree with him, as many members of this House do, that having a Criminal Code provision stuck into the back of an omnibus budget bill was inappropriate.

My only point, and it may seem churlish, because my hon. friend from Cariboo—Prince George is indeed a friend and was not here in the 41st Parliament, is that the previous Conservative government used omnibus budget bills far more often and far more nefariously.

Now that we stand in these beautiful new quarters in West Block, in a courtyard with a glass roof, we may in fact say that we live in a glass house. I would recommend that all members remember that we all live in glass houses, and we should not throw stones.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague knows that I respect her. As she said, I was not part of the previous Parliament. However, I can say that in the time I have sat in the House representing the good people of Cariboo—Prince George, I have been quite ashamed of what we have seen over the course of this term.

The government has completely forgotten rural Canadians and communities such as my riding of Cariboo—Prince George. It is making living more expensive for everyday Canadians while standing on the world stage being ashamed of our resource industries. In his very first statement on the world stage, the Prime Minister said that under his government, Canada would become known more for its resourcefulness than its natural resources. Again, that is shameful.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and address a bill that has really galvanized opinion in my constituency.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Oh, oh!

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is Bill S-6, an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

My friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands appreciated my quip at the beginning. I will say that I do hear a lot about taxation issues in my constituency—not as much about the particulars of our relationship with Madagascar, but a great deal about taxation.

I do think it ironic that the government is proposing the implementation of a bill for the avoidance of double taxation, because if we want to avoid double taxation, I might suggest that the government start at home in avoiding it.

This is a good bill. This is a good agreement. However, as they say, charity starts at home. This is not really a matter of charity; it is a matter of letting people keep more of their own money and avoiding

double taxation. How about if the government starts in an area of its own direct control?

Before I get into the particulars of this legislation and this issue, I want to mention that I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with Ms. Chemi Lhamo, who is the elected University of Toronto's Scarborough campus student union president, someone who has faced significant bullying, intimidation and threats from people who oppose her on the basis of her Tibetan background and her human rights advocacy on behalf of Tibet. There is indication that some of this intimidation and bullying may have as its source the nefarious inclinations of some diplomats here in Canada. This is a very serious issue in terms of freedom of speech on campus, and also in the way in which foreign diplomats may be engaging in intimidating Canadian students. Perhaps at a future point, the kind of response we as parliamentarians should have to these events should be the subject of detailed consideration and debate.

Having said that, I will now return to Bill S-6 and the proposal to seek, through an agreement with Madagascar, to avoid double taxation and address the issue of fiscal evasion.

I will make the case in my remarks that we should support this bill, but the first priority of the government should actually be to take the necessary steps here at home to address these very same issues: the tax burden that Canadians face and, in the area of fiscal evasion, the way in which the Canada Revenue Agency interacts with citizens.

On the issue of the Canada Revenue Agency and its relationship to citizens, it was interesting to see a post from the Minister of National Revenue, who is very excited that it is tax-filing season. I do not know if there has ever been a tax collector who was so enthusiastic about collecting taxes. Canadians are not enthusiastic about the taxes they are paying, and they are not enthusiastic about these incidents, which we hear about on a regular basis, of Canadians being harassed by the Canada Revenue Agency, having difficulty getting good information and having a hard time getting clarity and support around key issues.

That is why my colleague, the great member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, put forward a motion to give the Canada Revenue Agency a duty of care. Whatever people perceive to be the magnitude of the problems in terms of the behaviour of CRA in its interactions with citizens, giving the CRA a duty of care would ensure that citizens were treated well and fairly in their interactions with the agency.

Members in both the Liberal and NDP caucuses voted against this motion. That is interesting, because recently I have been hearing, in speeches being given by members of the NDP caucus, that they may have had a change of heart on this issue. We hear members of the NDP caucus speaking about instances they are hearing about in their ridings of CRA going after single moms and other citizens who do not have the lobbyists and connections of, say, an SNC-Lavalin. My friends in that section of the House have criticized the government for not addressing this poor treatment of citizens who lack those connections and points of access while at the same time exploring special deals with well-connected insiders.

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● (1230)

I applaud the direction of that discussion by my colleagues in the NDP, but I hope that in the future they will support measures like the initiative from my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge. They had an opportunity to show clearly with their vote that they have these concerns and that they are standing up for their constituents. Instead, they voted against that motion. It is better late than never if they want to now come onside and support that initiative. It is maybe a little too late for this Parliament, but if we have their support and they have changed their minds and recognized the problem, maybe we can move forward in the future.

Certainly, though, the government has had no change on the issue. It voted against the motion for the CRA to have a duty of care in its interactions with citizens. In all of its statements and interactions, it continues to seem to not appreciate the need to address this vital issue, the frustration that so many citizens have in their dealings with the Canada Revenue Agency.

The time the government spent and the energy and resources it put into certain problems versus others make it very clear who the government is invested in helping. Are the Liberals seized with the challenges of the middle class and those working hard to join it, or are they seized with the challenges of SNC-Lavalin and, maybe more importantly, the political implications for themselves?

There was a very long cabinet meeting two days ago, and one wonders about it. Were the Liberals discussing how to help struggling families or struggling energy workers? Were they discussing how to address the challenges we face on so many fronts and the way in which those challenges affect everyday Canadians? I suspect they were discussing how to politically manage the message, something they have failed to do until now, on the worst corruption scandal we have seen in this country in a very long time. Canadians at home are wondering whether or not the government cares about their priorities when it votes down motions like the one from my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge and continues to pile on taxes.

We should reflect not only on the failures of the current government to attend to the needs of Canadians but also on its general lack of interest in the plight of Canadians. Its focus is not on what people at home are thinking about or on struggling energy workers and auto workers, but on protecting well-connected insiders. That is what we have seen from the government in recent weeks. We have seen in how many meetings how eager it was to try to get a legislative change into a budget bill, and then there is the implication that the Prime Minister inappropriately tried to encourage the former attorney general to do something with respect to the SNC-Lavalin prosecution. These are serious allegations.

One thing we know from the government's repeated and ongoing conversations is just how seized it was with this issue, while there was a corresponding lack of regard and concern for the struggles that Canadians face, showing a disconnect between the priorities of the government and those of Canadians. We can see it in what the government spends its time on and what it talks about. We can see it in its legislative program. We can see it in how its members vote on key opposition proposals, such as the proposal from our leader, which would have made parental leave tax-free. The Liberal

members voted against that great proposal to cut taxes for new parents.

We also had a great proposal from our shadow minister for finance, the member for Carleton, for legislation that would have helped ensure that Canadians with disabilities are not penalized for entering the workforce.

Those are our priorities: cutting taxes for Canadians, helping Canadians with disabilities, helping new parents, and as my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge tried to do, helping those who have problems in their interactions with the CRA.

● (1235)

That is what we are trying to do on this side of the House. The government, though, is focused on helping well-connected insiders, and that disregard has consequences for people at home.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Keep a straight face.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: My friend across the way is heckling me. He does not appreciate the seriousness of this issue. Maybe when more of his colleagues come to hear this speech, then they can respond. I know he is carrying a lot of water for the team over there. Hopefully he is not too lonely.

I want to speak about the issue of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members that the rules, as we remember, state that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly. I want to point that out in case they are thinking of talking about other things. I am not sure what it is they are talking about, but I want to remind them of the rules.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I will do my best to avoid referring to the presence or absence of members for the duration of this speech. I appreciate the support of my colleagues as I deliver these remarks, but I understand why these messages are difficult for the government to hear.

I would like to speak about double taxation with respect to the carbon tax. We had another great legislative initiative from one of my colleagues, who is from Langley—Aldergrove, that would have tried to remove the GST being charged on top of the carbon tax. That is a pretty clear instance of double taxation. Right now the government is imposing a carbon tax on all Canadians. If the province does not agree or wants to go in a different direction in terms of its response to climate change, the government says no, it will impose a federal carbon tax.

The carbon tax will make everything more expensive. We can be sure that if the Prime Minister is re-elected, the carbon tax will go up significantly after the next election. He will not admit that right now, but he will not deny it either. If he succeeds in the next election, he will still want more of taxpayers' money, but he will not need their votes anymore. That is what we have to watch out for.

The carbon tax is already imposing pain on Canadians, but it will impose more pain as it goes up further. If the carbon tax goes up, then we will see an increase of the GST as well. The federal GST is charged on top of the carbon tax, and that goes directly into the federal coffers.

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The government has claimed that the carbon tax is revenue neutral to the federal government, which is a bit of a joke. By “revenue neutral”, the government seems to mean at this point that the money will all be spent.

Transparently, and quite obviously, charging the GST on top of the carbon tax is a form of double taxation intended to go directly to the federal coffers. As the government, given the opportunity, will increase and increase the carbon tax, necessarily the GST will go up with it. We know that the government would like nothing better than to hike the GST as well. After it was cut by former prime minister Stephen Harper, the Liberals continually mused about the possibility of raising the GST.

When the Liberals are running deficits in the tens of billions of dollars, far beyond what they promised in the last election, we know they have a plan to raise taxes. They will try and do it in a way that is least noticed. They will try to remove deductions. They will try to change the framework. They will try, through the CRA, to crack down on ordinary Canadians and penalize them even for doing things that have been common practice and accepted as allowable for a long time.

They will do everything they can to increase the tax burden on Canadians without ever announcing the major tax increases they are bringing in. They will do it. That is necessarily their plan, because they have no ability to control spending.

When governments run deficits like this, then they will increase taxes. What is needed instead is a new government that will have different priorities from the current government, that will instead truly focus on providing tax relief to those Canadians who need tax relief the most.

Let us recall that that is what Conservatives have always done. We have targeted vital tax relief to those who needed it the most. We introduced a children's fitness tax credit. We introduced a transit tax credit. Those tax credits were eliminated by the Liberal government as a way of increasing taxes. The Liberals will look for more ways of increasing taxes.

• (1240)

Conservatives also lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. Liberals are trying to collect more GST through double taxation on the carbon tax. We cut the GST from 7% down to 5%. We lowered the lowest marginal rate of tax. We raised the base personal exemption, which is the amount of money Canadians could earn without paying any tax. Our tax cuts were targeted at those who needed those tax reductions the most.

The Liberal government has raised taxes on Canadians through the carbon tax, the removal of these credits and deductions, and through all sorts of other changes. As well, it has not in any way changed the tax rate for those who are making \$45,000 or less a year. Its tax changes were more beneficial to somebody making an MP's salary than to somebody making \$45,000 a year. That person making \$45,000 a year experienced only increases, and most Canadians at all levels recognize they are paying more tax under the current government.

Canadians are paying for the mistakes of this Prime Minister. They are also paying for his lack of interest in their situation. When I

talk to people in my riding, they are talking about the issue of double taxation. They are talking about the piling on of what they feel is triple taxation and quadruple taxation through all the new taxation measures, and the targeting of small business that we have seen under the current government. They see this at the same time as the government is pursuing special deals with well-connected insiders.

We need a new government in this country that wants to move forward on the avoidance of overtaxation and wants to do that through partnerships and treaties such as this agreement between Canada and Madagascar, but that is also prepared to take the steps necessary domestically to do what we can on our own, which is to reduce the taxes all Canadians pay.

We need a government that will hold the Canada Revenue Agency accountable to ensure it is treating all Canadians fairly, through the duty of care measures proposed by my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge, as well as through providing tax relief to Canadians, especially those who need it the most.

My friend across the way was scoffing when I said the previous government provided tax relief to those who needed it most. I invite him to stand up in a question and counter what I said with actual facts and argument. If we look at the record, all the tax cuts—

• (1245)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Is it the Fraser Institute?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member is wondering about the source, and asks if it was the Fraser Institute. Maybe he spends time on Rebel Media, but I am not a subscriber. Maybe he is. He would know better what is being said over there.

However, my source is the mainstream media that reported at the time. He can look at the Finance Canada website for records about tax rates. I do not think it is a fact in dispute that the Conservative government lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, raised the base personal exemption, and lowered the lowest marginal rate of tax. It is a record of cutting taxes for those who need it most that any government would be proud of, and is something the current government should try.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member started by talking about how important this particular bill was to his community. I want to commend him for spending about 30 seconds of 20 minutes actually talking about the bill.

He questioned not being able to remember political scandal, but I have a difficult time understanding how he cannot remember the incident with a sitting senator of his caucus and the scandal he went through, or perhaps the individual who was led away in handcuffs for trying to fix an election. Is his memory so short that he cannot remember those political scandals?

I appreciated and took with great interest what the member contributed today. What he really brought out was to question what this cabinet and this government are up to, but he could not be further from the truth in his assessment. On a daily basis, this government and this cabinet are looking out for middle-class Canadians and working Canadians to make sure they have a better quality of life than what was left to them by the former Conservative government.

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I understand there is very little for the Conservatives to attack on, so they go to personal attacks. I can just imagine what it is like in the Conservatives' war room: "If we take this dot and try to connect it to this dot, and maybe blur the line along the way, Canadians will be subjected to believing our made-up fiction."

The reality of the situation is that this side of the House is looking out for Canadians on a daily basis, and that is being exercised and coming to fruition through the policies and laws adopted by the Liberal government.

• (1250)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, when he was asked about the situation of the member for Vancouver Granville, the Prime Minister at one time said her presence in cabinet speaks for itself, and then the next day that was no longer true. Now we are hearing that nobody has been led away in handcuffs yet, and that speaks for itself. I might say, stay tuned; we will see where this one goes.

The member is saying his government is looking out for Canadians, and the louder he says it, the more likely it is to be true. We know from the records of meetings with lobbyists and the government's own voting record that Liberals voted against giving Canada Revenue Agency a duty of care. They voted against taking the taxes off parental leave benefits. They voted against a private member's bill that would have given new opportunities to disabled Canadians trying to get work. They voted against these stand-alone private members' initiatives, perhaps because they were just too busy thinking about how to prevent SNC-Lavalin from getting a good deal.

The member can speak loudly and emphatically, but the record, the news, the reality, and the Liberals' own votes speak for themselves. The way they have increased taxes speaks for itself. The member should talk to his constituents in Kingston and the Islands. I am looking forward to spending a lot of time talking to constituents in Kingston and the Islands myself very soon. I know many members of my caucus have already, and what they are hearing from voters in Kingston and the Islands is a grave concern about the increasing tax burden from the Liberal government. The member needs to do better.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to point out that members are debating Bill S-6, which has to do with Madagascar. I want to make sure everybody is aware of that.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, your reminder is timely, but it does not hit its mark because the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan raised some other issues.

Because it has come up in the House so often and I have rarely had an opportunity to explain the background, I want to talk about the transit credit. It has been referred to as a credit that helped lower-income Canadians and was of great benefit. Former prime minister Stephen Harper introduced that credit, claiming it was a climate measure.

Because it did not put any additional buses on the road, because it assisted people who were already taking buses, and I appreciated that as someone who was taking buses, the net effect of it in terms of its

stated purpose, which was reducing greenhouse gases, was that it was the single most expensive, least useful measure of many expensive and useless measures from previous governments. It amounted to \$2,000 a tonne; \$2,000 a tonne for climate reduction was what it accomplished for its stated purpose.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We're not wealthy like your Green Party friends.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I know that the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay would like to have tax credits for—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, for working-class people who take transit. My daughter has to walk. I can't believe—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Excuse me, hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. I don't believe it is appropriate for you to be heckling me while I explain this.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. There seems to be a conversation or interference directly between members.

I understand the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I want to be really clear on this point of order. To hear this ridiculous attack on working-class people—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid that is debate.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is the Green Party policy that public transit should be free. The point of the boutique tax credit that the Conservatives brought in, they claimed, was that it was a climate change measure, and it was at a cost of \$2,000 a tonne. When the NDP decides to make public transit free, perhaps the member for Timmins—James Bay will have some additional points to raise.

At this point, I just want to clarify that this tax credit was rightfully removed, because it only helped people who could already afford to have transit passes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member for Timmins—James Bay is upset at the Green Party leader because he really wishes she had run a candidate in Burnaby South. That probably would have been better for his political plans.

In terms of the comments made by my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands, a policy measure can be both good for the environment and helpful to low-income Canadians. Some across the way think we have to make a choice. They think the choice is either impose a carbon tax on low-income Canadians and punish them as their desired climate measure, or not do that and let them off on the tax front, but punish them otherwise. Conservatives believe there can be measures like the transit tax credit that are good for the environment and lower the taxes of low-income Canadians. We believe on this side of the House, in this party, that both of those things can be done at the same time.

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To further respond, the member said the tax credit did not put new buses on the road. However, it made it easier for people to choose the option of using public transit, and it increased the volume on those buses. Of course, when there is greater demand for public transit, that creates more opportunities and more logic around further investments in the development of public transit.

• (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, to say the very least, to hear the comments from my colleague across the way. At times there needs to be a reality check.

The Conservatives like to talk as if they are the ones who give the tax breaks. The reality is that Bill C-2 has defied everything the Conservatives have tried to convince Canadians they do. Bill C-2 created a tax cut for Canada's middle class. That member and his caucus voted against that tax cut. They can say whatever they want, but they voted against hundreds of millions of dollars going into the pockets of Canadians. That is true. That is a fact. Look it up in Hansard. Look it up in the votes. There is no denying reality.

My question is related to this bill. We have talked about tax avoidance. We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in two budgets to deal with the issue of international and national tax avoidance. That investment is making a huge difference. Again, the Conservative Party voted against the budget that went after tax evasion and tax avoidance.

Maybe the member can answer that as the second part of the first question regarding how he will explain to his constituents that the Conservative Party voted against tax breaks to Canada's middle class.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member badly mischaracterizes Bill C-2. I am happy to remind him that Bill C-2 was in fact an omnibus measure that had multiple different elements to it. I proudly voted against it because it reduced the amount Canadians could put into tax-free savings accounts. The government attacked middle-income Canadians by reducing the amount they could save.

My friends across the way have clearly not looked at the data about who uses tax-free savings accounts. Tax-free savings accounts are demonstrably the preferred savings vehicle for middle-income Canadians, not the ultra rich, because of their tax treatment relative to RRSPs. Generally, for middle-income Canadians, TFSAs have relatively more advantageous tax implications compared to RRSPs. That is why those who open them and put money into them tend to disproportionately be middle-income Canadians.

The government's fundamental opposition and attack on the tax-free savings account was worth voting against. I will vote against the government's tax increases every step of the way.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I will again remind the hon. members, on all sides, that the bill at hand today is Bill S-6, not Bill C-2.

The hon. member for Central—Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in this place to

speak on behalf of the good people of Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, as well as to bring forward some of my concerns.

Obviously these tax treaties have existed for a long time. In fact, two of the tax treaties I looked at earlier were dated back before I was born in the late 1970s. These tax treaties have existed for a long time. They have developed over the years. It is important to note that double taxation should be addressed.

Canada, as an open economy where we try to attract foreign direct investment, should do all it can to provide certainty so that monies from other countries can come here to make many of the important projects go forward in places like Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. In my riding of Princeton, we have the Copper Mountain mine development. It is a very popular mine because it is one of the larger private employers in the area. That mine was the beneficiary of foreign direct investment.

When I did door-knocking in the 2015 election and introduced myself to the good people of Princeton, because the riding had changed, people pointed out that when the mine had originally closed for an extended period of time, the economy in Princeton had suffered greatly. The people benefited greatly from that mine both in terms of taxation, because now the community gets a share of the taxes that go to the provincial government, and from the employment and the services that the community is now able to have.

The same goes for the Highland Valley Copper mine just outside of the great town of Logan Lake. On a per capita level, Logan Lake and Princeton are some of the largest contributors to the net GDP of the area.

Before I go any further, I plan on sharing my time with the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill and I am sure she will be giving a much more informed view on things.

However, when we talk about foreign direct investment building certainty through international tax agreements, it is important we talk about the benefits we have.

A new flotation facility was put in Highland Valley Copper about four or five years ago, easily half a billion dollars worth of investment. Those kinds of investments do not happen in countries unless there is a stable framework and the rule of law, including tax treaties. Again, the Nicola Valley has prospered as has the Similkameen Valley prospered because of these large developments. The amount of capital it takes is not always possible to be raised here.

Sometimes Canadians ask me why we have foreign direct investment, why can Canadians not simply invest in our own projects. The answer is that there is so much opportunity in the country that we cannot on our own resources alone expect reasonably to see many of these projects go forward. Having that foreign direct investment, having that stable presence in terms of the rule of law is incredibly important.

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Bill S-6 is an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. To be very clear, these are not new. Under the previous government, led by former prime minister Stephen Harper, we saw the renewal of the New Zealand agreement and also the agreement between Canada and France was updated.

Consecutive governments of different political stripes have sought to put these things in place. Not only does it relate to double taxation, it also makes life a little easier. For example, students are covered and it defines what a student is. If those students are drawing income from the other country that is part of the agreement, they will not have to pay taxes in the country where they are studying. These things are important and they eliminate a lot of red tape for individuals. I think we can find some common ground on that.

•(1300)

I have talked about two things: first, the importance of certainty, because business, development and investment cannot happen without that certainty; and second, opportunity, meaning people have to feel if they put a dollar in, they can expect that money to come back with even a return on that investment.

I am fearful that while the framework of Bill S-6 is here, the government has eroded some of those areas of certainty and opportunity.

For example, we had an opportunity today. We had Kim Moody talk about the changes the government had made to the Income Tax Act, specifically around small businesses and Canadian controlled private corporations. I asked the Canadian Federation of Independent Business about this. The government likes to talk about lowering taxes for small business, but when I spoke to the CFIB, when I heard some of the testimony of Mr. Moody today, I found that the government had made it so difficult for many families to utilize a legitimate tax regime that was available to them in previous years. Because there is such a grey zone by the layering of rules, they do not have any certainty.

If we ask Canadians or people from other countries to invest in this country and if they find there is not the same certainty or opportunity they once had, they may choose not to invest. They may choose to not grow their business because they do not see the opportunity there.

Bill S-6 does add a little more certainty for people to come from Madagascar to invest in Canada, knowing the rules that would be applied to them under law. There would be a tax treaty to share information between jurisdictions to ensure they would not double taxed. However, when someone sees the absolute mess the government has placed our country in on responsible resource development, there is no certainty.

Look at the visiting convoy we had the other day. Those people want certainty. They want opportunity. They do not want bills like Bill C-69. They do not want to see foreign investment chased away.

While we are talking about chasing away investment, the government, through its failure to create a stable regulatory state, has allowed the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion to languish.

Private dollars were going to build opportunity for the people of Merritt. I am not sure I mentioned this before, but the community of Merritt was promised, under a community development agreement, that it would get certain funds to use for flood mitigation. However, because the company did not have that certainty and did not feel there was an opportunity, it decided to use its money to fund pipeline development in the United States. That is a real shame.

It is not just having the framework like Bill S-6 in place. There also has to be a sense that the rule of law will always be followed, that we are bound by the rules that have been put in place, that our word is our word, that there is no political interference once the Governor General has given the nod to a piece of legislation and it is the law of the land.

Mr. Speaker, earlier you raised the issue of you wanting all of us to talk about Bill S-6. However, the elephant in the room is we find out that cabinet confidences have been broken. We find out that caucus confidences have been broken on the Liberal side. It is all over the papers. When people find out that someone is allegedly trying to interfere in an independent prosecution case, they start to ask themselves if this is a country that follows the rule of law. That erodes confidence. That makes people say that perhaps they will not invest in Canada, that they instead will go to Australia, or the United States, where they have certainty and opportunity.

As a Canadian, this is so important for us. We have bills, like Bill S-6, that put forward proper frameworks. However, even if those frameworks are in place, if people do not feel that officials will follow those laws, both elected and bureaucratic officials, that dissolves or erodes the sense of rule of law. May we never find ourselves in such a state where people question the Canadian government or the Canadian people on our commitment to the rule of law.

I call upon the government to have that public inquiry. I call specifically for the Prime Minister to waive client-solicitor privilege for the former attorney general. Why? Because I am all about certainty, opportunity and feeling proud of our country and telling people that I am a proud Canadian. I am sure the people on the street are saying the same thing. It does not look good. It does not make us feel good. That needs to change.

•(1305)

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

Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is losing his focus in regard to the bill at hand. The government has not lost its focus as we continue to work, day in and day out, for Canadians in all regions of this country, dealing with issues that are of the utmost importance. These are things such as jobs, health care, services for seniors, ensuring we are lifting seniors and children out of poverty, and a litany of different activities all focused on improving the lifestyle of Canadians in all regions of our country. As a demonstration of that, over 800,000 jobs have been created in the last few years.

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When we talk about the bill that we have before us today, I would suggest these tax treaties are a good part of the outreach by this government in terms of expanding our markets. By expanding our markets and allowing additional investments and so forth, we are adding strength to the Canadian economy. By doing that, we are supporting Canada's middle class.

Would the member across the way not agree that by looking abroad at trade agreements and tax agreements, we are actually giving more strength to the economy and that all Canadians and all regions benefit from that? That is one of the reasons the bill should be passed.

● (1310)

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, first, the member said the current Liberal government and its caucus are working for everyday Canadians. Media reports show that the Liberals' caucus meeting yesterday was consumed not by the wish to work for everyday Canadians but to protect the Liberal Party. The cabinet meeting on Tuesday was all about the issue surrounding the former attorney general and the Prime Minister's role and the staff of the Prime Minister's Office in regard to potential interference in an independent prosecutor case. That is what the Liberal Party was up to this week, full stop.

Second, as I said, I support building that certainty and opportunity, but the current government continues to allow these things to erode. If we do not have the rule of law, what worth is this paper?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and the work he does on financial and tax matters on the Standing Committee on Finance.

He is familiar with our tax treaties. To return to Bill S-6, I was wondering whether my colleague shares the NDP's concerns that tax treaties can be abused over time, and that they can become a means of avoiding and ultimately evading taxes.

Does my colleague share these concerns about the treaties? Does he think that, as a country, we should not be blindly signing treaties with other countries? We have 93 or 94 such treaties now. Does he agree that we should not be blinded by these treaties but that we should do our due diligence to make sure that, over time, they do not end up facilitating tax evasion and abusive tax avoidance?

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's work on the finance committee. In fact, he and I could probably find some agreement that there are certain things that should be done as independent bills. Regarding the case that was raised on the deferred prosecution agreements that went to the finance committee rather than the justice committee, I hope we would agree that is definitely not the proper case and we should not have a blind sign-off, as the current Liberal government expected parliamentarians to do. To be fair, Liberal members made sure that piece of legislation went through.

I go back to my original statement. Many of these date back before I was born. Tax treaties create certainty. If there are issues with them, this is the place to raise them. Unfortunately, I find that

the New Democrats continue to be alarmist without actually bringing details. For example, the member said we should not be blindly doing it. The piece of legislation is right in front of us. These have been well used. In fact, there was the recent profit sharing and base erosion bill that the government brought forward here.

If the member has specific concerns, the finance committee and this place are the exact locations to raise them. However, they cannot just raise blind accusations and expect to have anything other than derision, confusion or a lack of action about their concerns.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating a bill called an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

For those who might not be aware of the process on how the legislative calendar is set in the House of Commons, it is important that people who are watching this debate understand that the government House leader found it proper and a great use of time to prioritize this piece of legislation in the House today.

My objection to the bill is an objection to the fact that it has been prioritized. This particular bill, a tax avoidance with Madagascar bill, has been prioritized for debate in the House of Commons today, when, arguably, the House is on fire. This is kind of like a "the House is on fire and the government is choosing to water the rosebushes outside" situation.

Let us recap the week. We are debating the implementation of the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation, after a convoy of trucks of out-of-work western Canadian energy sector workers had to drive to Ottawa to talk about the fact that we do not have a pipeline built, after the Prime Minister spent billions of dollars buying something that the private sector was going to build but then decided not to after he put in place legislation that has completely bankrupted the investment climate in Canada.

Maybe we could be debating that. Maybe we could be talking about getting energy sector workers back to work or the ridiculously poor investment climate for energy investment in Canada. That sounds important. However, I do not think the Prime Minister wanted to meet with any of those people. What we are talking about today is the Canada-Madagascar avoidance of double taxation bill. That seems about on par in terms of importance.

Government Orders

We could talk about the fact that we just found out this week that for refugee claims, after the Prime Minister has allowed 40,000 people to illegally cross the border from upstate New York, the haven of persecution that is upstate New York, to claim asylum in Canada, the wait times to hear whether or not their claims are valid, and they are coming from upstate New York, has ballooned past two years and is on track to be five years.

The government has spent over \$1 billion to give hotel rooms and social welfare payments to people from upstate New York. Maybe we could talk about that. No, what we have here today is the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation. What?

Okay, those are two things we could have talked about. I am happy to talk about those things. I think they are important. They are certainly important to my constituents. One thing my constituents have not emailed or called me about, and I have not heard about at the door in any of the ridings I have door-knocked in, is the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation.

I could be surprised. Maybe this is a burning issue in a riding that went from a single-digit national rate of unemployment to one of the highest unemployment rates in the country because of the government's failed policies that have been punitive to the energy sector. My constituents phone me about the fact that they might have to move out of Alberta, that their houses are up foreclosure and they are out of credit card room, and they ask me to do something about their jobs. No, maybe my constituents want me to talk about the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation. Come on, what is going on in this place?

Seriously, how could this even make the legislative agenda, given the government tabled a eight-billion-page omnibus budget bill where it conveniently snuck in the deferred prosecution agreement? Maybe we should have debated that at the justice committee but the government stuck that in there.

However, we have to have a whole day of debate on the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation. Why would the government want to spend a whole day of debate on—

• (1315)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I question the relevance of the member's speech. The only reference to the bill has been the member reading its title.

An hon. member: That's true.

• (1320)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will let the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill continue. Actually, based on what I have heard today, she is probably the most relevant of anyone who has spoken.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague opposite, because lately the Liberals have been doing their very best to silence strong women that do not agree with their position. I will not stand for that, so I am quite pleased to continue my speech on the fact that the government, while our border is not secure and Alberta

energy sector workers have no jobs, has prioritized the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion.

The government tabled an omnibus budget bill that contained virtually every topic under the sun, including a deferred prosecution agreement that is now the subject of a major scandal in the Prime Minister's Office, but today we are going to spend a whole day of debate talking about the Canada and Republic of Madagascar avoidance for double taxation bill.

Perhaps we could have talked today about the fact that Canada still has ridiculously punitive tariffs on it from the United States of America. I would have loved to talk about some sort of government response or legislative framework or strategy to deal with these tariffs that the government has done nothing about, which are damaging the Canadian economy. Auto sector workers and union workers across the country are saying maybe the government could do something about that. We could have talked about that but, no, we are talking about the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation.

We sure as heck are not talking about the fact that the Prime Minister is embroiled in an alleged scandal where he allegedly exerted political influence to influence the outcome of a criminal corruption case involving allegations of bribery of a Libyan official. Maybe we could talk about that.

Maybe we could talk about the fact that the Clerk of the Privy Council is at the justice committee right now giving the most partisan political speech I have ever heard out of a public servant in my life as an attempt to deflect—

An hon. member: That is because you don't like what he is saying.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Maybe we could talk about that, Mr. Speaker.

We could have had a public inquiry. We could have had a whole day of discussion dealing with the fact that there are serious allegations of obstruction of justice, of interference in our judicial system in Canada. We could have talked about that. No, we are talking about the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion. Come on. What are the government's priorities? Canadians are watching this. Investors, workers, everyone is looking at our country now and asking, "Who is in charge? What is going on?"

The Liberal government needs to get its act together. The government needs to start putting some stuff forward that will actually benefit Canada and get us out of the mess that it has created, but instead we are talking about the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar on the avoidance of double taxation. I am tired of this. This is a joke.

Government Orders

At this point in time, the government needs to go. Nothing is getting done because it is so busy trying to figure out how to avoid public prosecution and public inquiries. How many ongoing inquiries are there involving cabinet ministers now? We had the “clam scam”. We had all of the stuff happening with the Norman case. There was the Aga Khan island incident.

Madagascar has a special place in many Canadians' hearts for being a lovely country. There is a lovely film about it. In that spirit I would like to move the following amendment because “I like to move it, move it”. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following: “Bill S-6, An Act to implement the Convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, be not now read a second time but that the Order be discharged, the Bill withdrawn and the subject matter thereof referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.”

Let us get this act together and get some accountability from the government.

• (1325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat inspired by my colleague across the way. She asked why we are debating this. Why do we not get rid of this? That is what she spent nine and a half of her 10 minutes talking about.

I think it is important that I let her know what her caucus colleagues are doing. The Conservative Party supports the legislation. It has been very clear. In fact, the origins of the legislation go back to the former Conservative government. The Conservatives are supporting it, yet speaker after speaker is continuing the debate.

I highly recommend that my friend across the way talk to her colleagues. It is a pretty straightforward piece of legislation. The Conservatives support it. I agree with her that we should not be talking about it right now. It is something that should be passed.

We stopped putting up speakers after our first speaker had spoken about it. I do not think even the NDP or the Green Party are putting up speakers. It is the Conservative Party that wants to hold up this legislation. Would my colleague not agree? I will join her in asking her Conservative colleagues to stop speaking and allow this vote. I support her initiative. I wonder if she agrees with me and will appeal to her colleagues. Please, please let us move on to a different agenda item.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, despite my colleague's pleading and begging us to be silent, the Conservative Party of Canada will always stand up for Canadians. It will always stand up for people's right to lower taxes and smaller government and against the tax-and-spend corrupt agenda of the Liberals.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I had the same reaction as my colleague. For once, I agree with the member for Winnipeg North.

I must remind the Canadians who are watching at home that we began with three good 20-minute speeches that were directly related

to Bill S-6. They were given by the parliamentary secretary, a member of the Bloc Québécois, and me, which I say in all modesty. A Conservative member also gave a speech that was more or less related to Bill S-6. The Conservatives focused a little less on the bill, but they mostly stayed on topic.

When my colleague finishes her speech, will she allow the bill to be passed? All of the parties agree. The Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals and the NDP all agree on the bill. Could the member allow us to move on to the next item on the orders of the day? She is criticizing the Liberals' agenda and priorities. Can we move on to the next priority after her speech, or will another Conservative member, perhaps the finance critic, be speaking?

If so, it will mean that the Conservatives are the ones filibustering today in the House.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, what my colleague just said is that the NDP is not willing to stand up and speak against the government. The Conservative Party of Canada is the only party that is going to stand up and speak to oppose the terrible, wasteful spending and the terrible agenda of the Prime Minister, which Canadians have had enough of. I am proud to be a Conservative and to day after day stand up for the interests of everyday Canadians, as opposed to this Liberal-NDP coalition that will not speak against garbage agendas in the House of Commons, when the rest of the country is on fire.

I hope that every single member of the caucus of the Conservative Party of Canada will stand here today to stand up against the Prime Minister.

• (1330)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

I am speaking today to this tax treaty. Now that we are on the subject of taxes, the finance committee is responsible for that subject. Today we had hearings on the government's spending and on other tax treaties. Normally, when government spending is up for testimony before committee, the finance minister shows up to answer questions. Curiously, today that did not happen. I say “curiously”, because his absence screams with suspicion. He sent his parliamentary secretary in his place.

Why would he do that today? It turns out that it was reported in The Globe and Mail today that the finance minister met with SNC-Lavalin exactly two weeks after the director of public prosecutions decided formally not to cut a side deal with that company to avoid trial and prosecution. Apparently, the—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, my colleague wants me to stand up on a point of order. I am not disappointing the member.

There is an expectation that we be somewhat relevant. I know the Conservatives want to change the focus of all debate to one issue, but this has nothing to do with Bill S-6.

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe that the hon. member for Winnipeg North was talking about relevance. I will be honest with you. Through this whole debate, there has been nothing relevant to Bill S-6.

The hon. member for Carleton seems to be going in a different direction. However, I will let him bring it back to Madagascar. I am sure it has something to do with Bill S-6.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, this debate is about fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, which is a matter of corporate ethics. I was raising the issue of corporate ethics with respect to SNC-Lavalin, which stands accused, with formal charges, of over \$100 million in fraud and bribery.

Earlier today at committee, the Liberal chair tried the same trick the member across the way just deployed to silence me from speaking out on this very issue. This is a finance issue, and I am talking about the conduct of the finance minister. That minister refused to testify in the finance committee today precisely because he was afraid to answer why he was talking about justice and law enforcement with SNC-Lavalin two weeks after the independent and non-partisan director of public prosecutions had decided that the company was not entitled to receive a special deal to avoid prosecution and trial. When I raised that question, the chair slammed his gavel. When I raised it again, he shut down the meeting.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise again on a point of order. It is about relevance. The member seems to be upset about something that took place in the standing committee. I would suggest that he go back to the standing committee and raise a point of order if he is not happy with what took place there.

Today we are talking about Bill S-6, and I would ask the member to reflect on the content of Bill S-6.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Winnipeg North does have a point with respect to this. The argument is very much about an activity that took place outside of this chamber. I will remind the hon. member for Carleton that what we are debating today is Bill S-6.

The hon. member for Carleton.

• (1335)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, you are indeed wrong. It happened at the finance committee, which is not outside of this chamber. It is a creature of this chamber.

I will continue, and I will advise our friends—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on another point of order, you asked the member to be relevant. You reflected on it being a standing committee. The member then stood in his place, and in essence, challenged your ruling by saying that he was going to continue the way he was speaking.

I would ask the member to understand that if he has an issue with the standing committee, the most appropriate thing for him to do is to go—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I will stop this now. It is turning into a debate. Again, the point of

relevance does come into play. I will leave it to the hon. member for Carleton to hopefully come back to Bill S-6 and talk about the treaty with Madagascar.

We have a point of order from the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say, on behalf of the New Democratic caucus, that I have enormous respect for the work you do. I think you have a very difficult time at times, so we want to thank you for the work you are doing, and we certainly support you in most of your decisions.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the government would like to silence voices speaking out against it at this time. We have seen that over and over. We know that the Liberals, particularly that member, are prepared to ramble on about any subject under the sun whenever they get the opportunity. The member has never been concerned about relevance except when we talk about things he does not want Canadians to know.

We are on that subject right now. The finance minister and the Prime Minister do not want the former attorney general to speak about what she knew and what they tried to force her to do with respect to SNC-Lavalin. The Liberals shut down a finance committee today to avoid tough questions on that subject. Now this member, who speaks for the government, is trying to shut me down, because he does not want any more debate or discussion on this issue.

If they want relevance, I will tell them about relevance. This treaty is supposed to be about fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, but it is about more than that. It is about who the government is working for. We have seen a pattern with the current government of crony corporatism and favouring the powerful and moneyed elite.

Since the Liberals took office, there has been a massive spike in reported lobbying activity. That is because the government has become the leading decision-maker on who gets what money. Businesses increasingly understand that the way they get ahead in this Liberal economy is not by having the best product but by having the best lobbyist.

Lobbyists managed to secure \$400 million in handouts for Bombardier, a company that then laid off its workers, shipped the jobs to America and sold the IP to Europe. Europe got the IP. America got the jobs. Canadian taxpayers got the bill. Why did the Liberals do it? If the Canadian taxpayer did not kick in, the Bombardier-Beaudoin family would have lost control of the company. It would have had to issue more shares, which would have diluted its interest and brought it below 50%. Therefore, \$400 million Canadian tax dollars from working-class people was used to protect the interests of feudal billionaires who wanted to maintain control of this company.

Why did the Liberals want SNC-Lavalin to get off these charges? It is a Liberal-linked corporation, which gave over \$100,000 in illegal money to the Liberal Party and has lobbied the current government and its members over 100 times since.

Government Orders

The richest Canadians are paying \$4.6 billion less. Those who inherit wealth and massive fortunes from ancestors, as the Prime Minister did, are able to shelter their money in special vehicles. The finance minister introduces tax changes that go after plumbers, pizza-shop owners and farmers, but interestingly, do not touch his family business, Morneau Shepell.

The Liberals set up an infrastructure bank that guarantees against losses for large construction companies in large public procurement projects so that all the risk is with taxpayers and all the profits are with the private-sector corporations.

That is the crony corporatism that drives the current government. Instead of relying on free enterprise, the Liberals want government control. Instead of meritocracy, they favour aristocracy. Instead of businesses making it by having the best products, they make it by having the best lobbyists. Instead of those same businesses obsessing over customers, those businesses have to obsess over pleasing politicians. That is the Liberal economy they are building. They are building an economy of political insiders, where people get ahead through their connections and where those with money turn that money into power and turn that power back into yet more money.

That is exactly the kind of crony corporatism we must end. When we do, we will replace it with a meritocracy driven by free markets, where we favour the challenger over the incumbent, the underdog over the fat cat, and everyday Canadians ahead of the interests of those on the inside track.

• (1340)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I move to questions and comments, I will note that from the start of this debate, Bill S-6 was supposed to be the topic of discussion. Debate has gone far and wide. Normally, we allow members discretion. I assume they have a different path for their argument and that they will bring it back to Bill S-6. I ask the hon. members to ask questions and give answers about Bill S-6, the item we are debating.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Bill S-6 does, in good part, is take away barriers for investment in trade. The government has taken a very aggressive approach regarding world trade and tax agreements like this to enable Canada to have a stronger, healthier economy. That will give strength to our middle class.

Now to the question for my colleague across the way. The member who spoke before him talked about whether we should stop debating this proposed legislation, since all parties in the chamber are supporting it. She asked the government why we could not just let the bill go through so that we could debate other issues, perhaps those that the member across the way would like to talk about.

Would he not agree with me and his colleague, who spoke just before he did, that we should allow the bill to pass so that we can change topics?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, we are members of Parliament and we have the right to speak to legislation before it passes. The government would do well to stop trying to ram

legislation through without proper debate. That is exactly how we got into the problem with SNC-Lavalin in the first place.

Earlier today, I was told at finance committee that I could not ask about SNC-Lavalin because the deferred prosecution agreements are not a financial issue and do not belong in discussions at the finance committee. That is funny. Why were they in the budget if they are not a financial issue?

Liberals keep telling us what is relevant and what is not so that we will not look at what they do not want us to see. Our job is to hold them accountable. It is not to heap praise on the Prime Minister, who had nothing but praise heaped upon him his entire life. We are not here to be his cheerleaders. We are here to hold him accountable, and we will not apologize for doing so.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I take to heart your comment that we should be speaking about the bill, which is about Madagascar.

I have never been to Madagascar and I am probably not likely to go there, but I am concerned about the offshore tax havens that are protected by the Liberals. They may be in Madagascar but are more likely to be in the Cayman Islands and warmer climates.

In the KPMG case, in which a fraud scheme was set up so that billionaires would not pay tax, the government allowed KPMG not to be held accountable. Imagine if ordinary Canadian citizens did not pay their taxes. The government would come down on them like a ton of bricks, just as they do in going after single mothers in my riding over child tax benefits. Furthermore, not only did the government not prosecute KPMG: it picked a KPMG representative to be the treasurer of the Liberal Party. I guess Liberals just thought he did business so well.

This leads me to the question regarding SNC-Lavalin. The government wrote a get-out-of-jail card for one company and slipped it into an omnibus bill that we were not given the opportunity to properly debate. Members of Parliament were not aware that this get-out-of-jail card had been written at the behest of SNC lobbyists, but SNC lawyers were already aware that this legislation was ready to go and so they went to the independent public prosecution.

Canada is not Madagascar. We tend to think we are not a banana republic. However, this kind of shoddy backroom deal with friends certainly makes us look less than credible as a G7 country.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what he thinks about this pattern of Liberal corruption involving lobbyists and insiders.

Government Orders

● (1345)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is very relevant. This is a Prime Minister who was found guilty of breaking the ethics legislation four times by accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in free vacations from someone who was seeking grants from the government. This is a Prime Minister who skipped out on his parliamentary duties to do paid speaking engagements at which he forced charities and school boards to give him their money to do a job he was already being paid to do as a member of Parliament. This is a Prime Minister who brags about a family fortune he inherited, and who kept that fortune in a tax-preferred trust fund that allowed him to avoid declaring the trust fund income on his personal income tax.

That is the kind of Prime Minister we have. It is not surprising that someone who comes from that privileged background, who has enjoyed all of those benefits and has profited privately from his public life, would seek to make profit for those around him. That is why he has favoured the SNC-Lavalins, the Bombardiers and all the other crony corporatists that he is helping.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-6 regarding an agreement between Canada and Madagascar.

I will support Bill S-6 because I think it is good for Canada to have agreements with other countries.

I would like to talk about the agreements that were signed while the Harper government was in office and compare them to what the current Liberal government has done. I will talk about the impact on my riding and a few other things.

[*English*]

To start, having agreements with other countries is a good thing. In this case, we are trying to prevent double taxation and fiscal evasion between Canada and Madagascar. If I look at the number of trade agreements that were signed under Stephen Harper, I see 43 trade agreements with huge significance in terms of economic benefit to Canadians. If we compare that to Bill S-6, which seems to have a very small impact, we can see that the government is focusing on things of lower priority.

Where is the focus, for example, on NAFTA? This is an agreement between Canada and the U.S. that has huge economic implications for us, but this agreement still has not been ratified on either side. We still have tariffs of 20% on steel and 10% on aluminum, and that situation is impacting businesses in Canada, especially in my riding. Sarnia—Lambton has a manufacturing base. These kinds of tariffs actually cause jobs to move to the U.S. I would think that the government would have a concern there and spend more time on that issue than on talking about the offshore impacts here in Madagascar.

Again, the CETA accord was negotiated but has not been signed yet by any of the 13 countries. Where is the government's effort to get that in place? It would have a huge economic benefit to Canadians if we could get that going. On the CPTPP, there is not much to say, except that the Prime Minister made a lot of countries

angry when he went over there. We are still waiting to see the economic benefit of that agreement.

While I think it is good to have agreements in place, there has to always be a concern about priorities and about working on the things that have the largest impact first.

In terms of the fiscal evasion of taxes, we saw the paradise papers and the Panama papers, but where is the follow-up on that by the Canada Revenue Agency? To me, the amount that could be at risk in Madagascar is a very small amount compared to what is in those papers. We have seen no follow-up, and that is a definite concern.

In terms of avoidance of double taxation, I can certainly speak a lot to the issue of double taxation because we have seen double taxation happen all the time with the Liberal government. Most recently, this week I held a press conference to talk about the tax on a tax on medical cannabis. In this case, the government put in place a 2.5% tax on the producers after all the deals were signed, an additional tax, and then the provinces have an excise tax of 7.5%. On top of that, there is the GST. There is a 15% tax on what is prescribed by doctors for people who are suffering from pain, vulnerable people with medical conditions.

This is not the first time the Liberal government has decided to target the vulnerable with taxation. We saw this happen with the disability tax credit. In the past, 80% of people with type 2 diabetes or conditions such as autism or mental health disorders, such as being bipolar, were able to take advantage of that disability tax credit. The Liberal government got involved, and then 80% of people were not eligible. In fact, the reason for that change was to try to make them ineligible for the retirement disability pension, which had built up to about \$150,000 per person. The government was attempting to claw that back.

It is not good to try to double-tax our own citizens, and to be focusing on the double taxation in Madagascar compared to the double taxation that is happening in Canada does not seem to be the right priority.

It is always good to try to get more tax revenue. It is very important. In order to get tax revenue, we have to take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves.

● (1350)

As an example, with respect to Sarnia—Lambton, the government would receive \$4.3 million in tax revenue every year if the ferry border crossing at Sombra was repaired. However, two years ago now, the border crossing was broken by the Coast Guard's operation of an icebreaker when the ice was too thick, crushing the border crossing. It has not been fixed. There has been a lot of time wasted and a lot of economic job loss on the Canadian side. All of the restaurants and services located there went out of business. On the U.S. side, the restaurants have gone out of business.

There was an outcry to multiple ministers in Canada. One would think that the Minister of Public Safety, whose CBSA organization was getting this \$4.3 million worth of tax revenue, would have done something. It was only going to be \$2 million to fix the border crossing and the government is spending \$80 billion on the Gordie Howe bridge, so it is surprising to me that the public safety minister chose to do nothing.

Government Orders

The Minister of National Defence had combat engineers in my riding. I was told that if it was in the national interest to have a border crossing opened, it could be done out of the budget of Minister of National Defence, and he also refused. The member for Milton, the former minister of transport, indicated there was a contingency fund there that could have been put in place, but the current minister told me that this was not the case and that he could not do anything. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities refused to help.

We even appealed to the Prime Minister's Office. In fact, it is really disturbing to me that when the Marine City mayor, congressman Paul Mitchell, senators from the state of Michigan and the U.S. ambassador to Canada appealed to the Prime Minister's Office to reopen this border crossing, nothing was done. In this example, there was an opportunity for payback in less than a year, in terms of paying to fix the Sombra ferry crossing and getting the revenue, yet the government did not take advantage of that opportunity. That was wrong.

It is currently in litigation, so the crossing will remain closed and the economic opportunity to use that border crossing is lost.

People question the seriousness of the government on the NAFTA agreement. If the government really wants to do business with the United States and will not even spend \$2 million to open a border crossing, there is a question about the government's priorities.

That is certainly something we have been talking about as we study Bill S-6 and think about the government bringing this forward as a priority when we know there are other huge issues. There is a huge loss of jobs in some sectors, such as the oil and gas sector, and what about the forest products sector? We know the government has done nothing to address the problems with the tariffs on softwood lumber. This is something we have been talking about since the Liberal government was elected in 2015, and still there is no resolution to this issue.

While it is great to have an agreement between Canada and Madagascar and it is fine to address issues there, hopefully that will be leveraged to take advantage of all of these other priorities that are being ignored while we are discussing this particular bill in the House today.

When it comes to CRA, one of the concerns I have is that we are not taking action on the Auditor General's report. We are very sad about the passing of the Auditor General, but if we recall the results of his report, we know that on average people have to call four times and wait 110 minutes to get an answer from CRA, and a third of the time the answers they get are wrong. I have personally seen all kinds of mean-spirited letters sent to my constituents from CRA, basically threatening to put them in jail. These are hard-working, taxpaying people, and there are very small amounts of money at risk. The amount of money we are talking about in offshore accounts for tax avoidance is far superior to that, and it seems to me that there are already 70 CRA employees in a position to work on this specific sort of thing. Perhaps we should increase our focus on going after the people hiding their taxes in the millions of dollars range rather than the hundreds of dollars range.

● (1355)

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

Mr. Speaker, my colleague's friend and colleague, the Conservative member for Calgary Nose Hill, spoke on the legislation for 10 minutes. For about nine minutes, she pleaded with the government to actually pass the legislation. She challenged why we are debating the bill now. There are many other things that she wanted to debate. I have heard from the opening remarks of Conservative Party members that they are supporting the legislation. In fact, all members of the House are supporting the legislation, yet the Conservative Party wants to continue the discussion. Why is the Conservative Party, which is enthusiastically supporting the legislation, choosing to continue the debate? It is the only party putting up speakers.

On the other hand, the member tried to say the EU agreement was a part of the trade agreements under Stephen Harper, yet then she challenged the government as to why we have not signed off or seen the other countries sign off on the EU agreement. She is criticizing us for not finalizing it, yet she is taking credit as if Harper did finalize it. There are inconsistencies within the Conservative caucus today. I am wondering if she could provide clarification on both of those points.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind the hon. members that when the Speaker stands he does say questions and comments. It is up to the individual to make the statement he or she wants.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is talking about something that is very dear to my heart. As an engineer, I am all about efficiency. One of the things that drives me crazy in the House of Commons is that when we do show up with a bill and everyone is seen to agree to it, then we proceed to discuss it for days. Then we send it to committee where we do not amend it because everyone is in agreement and we proceed to send it on and on. There are opportunities for efficiency.

Why does the government not change the Standing Orders? The reason we debate the way that we do is that this is what the Standing Orders say we need to do. It is within the government's control to change that and make it more efficient. Certainly I would be a fan if it changed the rules. We would definitely abide by those more efficient rules. I encourage the parliamentary secretary to take that forward to his government.

As to the member's other question, the Harper government did all the heavy lifting on the CETA. There is no doubt about that. The Minister of Foreign Affairs showed up to do the final cry before the signing of it and that was fine as well, but now it is not ratified by 13 countries and there are protests. What is the government doing to manage that? This is a very important agreement and it is important that it gets ratified. What actions are the government taking to make sure it puts those fires out?

Statements by Members

•(1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We are going to break for question period. The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton will have two minutes for questions when we return.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, February being Black History Month, I think it behooves all of us to reflect on the enormous contributions to this country of Canada from members of the black community.

I look back in my riding to the extraordinary history of Salt Spring Island, where some of the earlier settlers moving in among the Coast Salish people were African Americans, some of whom were escaped slaves. For a while one of the largest population of settlers were black Canadians.

We have had political leadership and breakthroughs from women like Jean Augustine and Rosemary Brown, but I want to reflect on a dear friend of mine from Nova Scotia, who was one of the pioneers in Canada for achieving a place in the nursing profession for black women.

Clotilda Yakimchuk, from Sydney, Cape Breton, was consigned by environmental racism to be unable to rent anywhere but between the steel mill and the coke ovens, but she is and was a pioneer. She was the first black woman through the Nova Scotia school of nursing and she is a member of the Order of Canada for her many achievements. Happy Black History Month.

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[Translation]

WINTER IN RIVIÈRE-DES-MILLE-ÎLES

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, winter has been extremely tough this year in Quebec, with bitter cold, heavy snowfall, freezing rain and more. Winter in Quebec may be a burden for some folks, but in my riding, there is something for everyone at our many winter festivals.

Boisbriand's snow festival was a huge success. The big slide in the shape of a whale was quite popular. Rosemère's winter carnival went very well, even though it was a little cold. The sun was out, and everyone was delighted to be there. Saint-Eustache's snow festival is always a big hit. Everyone loved it, especially the evening percussion show, with drums that lit up. The Deux-Montagnes winter carnival organized by the Lions Club was a major success, as always.

These wonderful events would not be possible without the immense support of many volunteers. I would like to thank all the volunteers who took part in all these winter festivals, which bring joy to the people of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles year after year.

RECOGNIZING OUTSTANDING QUEBEC ENTREPRENEURS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Cercle des grands entrepreneurs du Québec has grown. Six new members joined the select group of accomplished business people.

I would especially like to congratulate Alain, Bernard and Laurent Lemaire, co-founders of Cascades. I know the Lemaire brothers well. I am proud to say that they got their start in 1964 in Kingsey Falls, which is in my riding, Richmond—Arthabaska.

Their business grew from one small mill into a multinational empire that now employs over 11,000 people. Still headquartered in that same wonderful municipality, population 2,000, their business is doing Quebec and Canada proud. Alain, Bernard and Laurent are much more than great entrepreneurs and pioneering members of Quebec's business community. They are also mentors to the decision-makers of tomorrow, generous philanthropists and very involved in our community. They support countless athletic, cultural, economic, heritage, community and health causes.

I would like to congratulate them on their many accomplishments.

* * *

[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of the celebrations of Black History Month, harnessing diversity and multiculturalism in this month of February.

Today, I am even more proud to recognize and highlight the contributions by a Brampton community stalwart, Madam Marjorie Taylor. With an everlasting smile on her face, she is the epitome of volunteerism. Some of her major achievements include serving as president of the Kiwanis Club and United Achievers' Club. She is the recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee and H. Franklin Parker awards, and ultimately conquered the Brampton Citizen of the Year award in 2015.

Brampton is blessed. Canada is blessed to have someone like Marjorie to grace its shores. Long live Marjorie.

* * *

•(1405)

HERRLING AND CAREY ISLANDS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Fraser River is one of the greatest wild salmon rivers on the planet.

The stretch of the river from Hope to Mission, known as the Heart of the Fraser, sustains almost 30 species of fish, critical habitat for chinook, chum and pink salmon, and endangered white sturgeon.

Statements by Members

Recently, Fisheries and Oceans Canada ordered the owners of Herrling and Carey islands on the Fraser River to take corrective measures after they allegedly destroyed fish habitat. These islands provide key rearing habitat for millions of juvenile salmon before they migrate to the ocean. These salmon are essential to our economy, ecosystem and west coast way of life. They are also the primary food source for endangered southern resident killer whales. To protect these whales, we must protect and restore Herrling and Carey islands.

Canadians want their government to take immediate action to protect, conserve and restore these islands, the Heart of the Fraser and the entire Fraser watershed.

* * *

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, wherever we go in this world, we will find most people care about the same things. They care about family, friends and community. They care about getting ahead, whether it be economically, socially, emotionally or spiritually.

In Canada, we proudly celebrate that sameness through different cultural beliefs, traditions and religions. We celebrate our diversity of perspectives and our common values. That is our Canada. In South Surrey—White Rock we are fortunate to have so many wonderful people working to make our community ever more welcoming and ever more grounded in those common values.

The vision of the Chinese Village Club is to connect people in order to provide a bridge of multiculturalism, a bridge that contributes value and understanding for all. The Surrey—White Rock Political Engagement Society's mission is to provide an understanding of Canadian democracy to assist Chinese Canadians to embrace and enhance Canada's multicultural identity and way of life.

Our community's multicultural festival of lights fosters support for the growth of multicultural understanding. It has presented the traditions of over 18 different cultures—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lethbridge.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, SNC-Lavalin, an engineering firm, is facing serious criminal charges for bribery. We know the company met with the Prime Minister's Office a number of times, and it appears that a special deal was in the making. Court documents show that federal prosecutors had already rejected a settlement with SNC-Lavalin and decided to move forward with a criminal trial. Nevertheless, evidence would suggest the Prime Minister thought it was worth his while to try to strong-arm the Attorney General into doing his dirty work for him.

We all know this did not work, however. In retaliation, the Prime Minister removed the justice minister from her cabinet post. She later resigned from cabinet altogether. Interestingly, the Prime Minister's senior adviser and best friend, Gerald Butts, resigned a few days later.

Despite the Prime Minister's so-called commitment to openness and transparency, the Liberals have blocked every single attempt made in this place to bring about accountability and get to the bottom of this situation.

It is clear the Prime Minister is trying to cover up what really happened, and Canadians deserve fairness and transparency. Today and every day, we will continue to call upon the government to do the right thing and for the Prime Minister to tell the truth.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 22, I was proud to welcome the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction to Surrey, where he announced over \$7 million in new funding that will target at-risk youth and help them make better, smarter and safer choices. The funding is just one of many actions that our government has taken in making a real difference in tackling guns and gangs and supporting our youth in Surrey.

We will continue to work alongside all of our partners, such as the Surrey RCMP, Surrey school district, local community groups and all levels of government to ensure our neighbourhoods are safe for our young people.

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WEST CARLETON WARRIORS

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell the House about a fabulous group of young men in my riding who decided to step up and make a difference in the lives of others.

Last September, our small community of Dunrobin was devastated by a category three tornado. This resilient community is recovering, and I want to thank the many who have stepped up to help.

Among those lending a hand were the West Carleton Warriors, a peewee hockey team that decided it could do more by fundraising, cleaning up and acting as Santa's elves at the Christmas party for the Dunrobin families. Now they are competing in the Chevrolet Good Deeds Cup, hoping to win \$100,000 to put toward Dunrobin community relief, and they have made the top three.

Now they need our support. People can go on to Facebook and Twitter, share my posts or create their own, #WestCarletonWarriors, #GoodDeedsCup, to post and help them.

We should all be proud of these amazing young men.

* * *

● (1410)

CLEANUP OF LAKE SIMCOE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of York—Simcoe are hard-working and honest. They love their community and appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds them with Lake Simcoe and Cook's Bay.

Statements by Members

Former York—Simcoe MP, Peter Van Loan, championed the cleanup of Lake Simcoe. Millions were invested. Hundreds of stakeholders worked with the previous Conservative government for a cleaner and healthier lake, fish habitat, water courses and shorelines. However, the Liberals cancelled the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund, putting the health of this crown jewel in central Ontario at risk.

On Monday, a by-election will be held in York—Simcoe. Voters in this riding will get a chance to send a message to the Prime Minister to say enough of the debt and deficits, enough of the foreign policy disasters, enough of destroying our natural resource sector and enough of his divisive politics.

The people of York—Simcoe cannot afford any more of the Prime Minister's failures and mistakes, and neither can Canadians.

* * *

SKILLPLAN

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that one of the greatest obstacles to achieving success is access to good education and skills training. Thankfully, there are organizations across the country dedicated to helping Canadians achieve upward social mobility by giving them an equal chance to succeed.

Today, I want to recognize SkillPlan, a not-for-profit organization based in Burnaby North—Seymour that is creating opportunities for everyone so they can build a better future for themselves and for their family.

For nearly 30 years, SkillPlan has been helping at risk youth and low skilled workers gain the experience they need to find and maintain good jobs. With a \$3.7-million investment from our government for its new essential skills training system, SkillPlan will be able to connect individuals across the Lower Mainland to institutions like BCIT, and provide mentorship to overcome barriers to their employment.

By investing in these programs, we are investing in a more inclusive future where every person, no matter their background, has a real and fair chance at success.

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SCOTTIES TOURNAMENT OF HEARTS

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past week in Sydney, Cape Bretoners have been hurrying hard to Centre 200 to take in the 2019 Scotties Tournament of Hearts.

Centre 200's hockey rink has been transformed into a curling sheet to host Canada's best women curlers as they compete for the right to represent our country at the 2019 World Championship in Denmark. I had the pleasure to join these curlers last Saturday at the kickoff and to throw the first rock, and it landed well.

Organizing this event was no small task. I am proud that our federal government was a major sponsor, as well as the province of Nova Scotia, the Cape Breton regional municipality and, of course, the corporate sponsors and local businesses that came together to support this great tournament.

I congratulate the organizers and volunteers on a job well done. I would like to send my thanks to Cape Bretoners for their warm welcome of so many teams and tourists from across Canada.

There will only be one team that will sweep the trophy. I wish all the teams good luck and, most important, have fun.

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FINANCE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in just three years, the Prime Minister has blown his budget, leaving us with two times the debt he promised, yet with no results. Worse, Parliament's independent budget watchdog confirms the Liberals have no plan to balance the budget. Another broken Liberal promise; another Liberal budget failure.

While the Prime Minister has little to show for his massive spending, Canadians, with no money left at the end of each month, are left with the bill for the Liberal failure. Last year, the Liberals pushed Canada's debt to an all-time high. Each Canadian family now shares more than \$47,000 of that debt, which is about the price of a reliable new family minivan.

It was reported in the Waterloo Region Record just this week that an average family in the region would be paying over \$200 more per year on their natural gas bill alone.

Make no mistake that the Liberals have found ways to hike Canadians' taxes to pay for their past failures. If given another chance, Liberal taxes will go up again. The Liberals have blown their budget, and Canadians will have to pay for it. The Conservatives are fighting for better.

* * *

● (1415)

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month, an important time to reflect on the contributions made by black Canadians to our nation. The theme for this year is "Black Canadian Youth: Boundless, Rooted, & Proud".

I am proud to recognize the black Canadian youth who are the leaders of today and tomorrow. I have met with some of these youth in my riding of Brampton West and I am excited about what I have seen.

I have seen the promise of what is possible when these young individuals are given access to opportunities that can lead them to a better future. I have seen these young black Canadians start their own businesses, start enterprises and initiatives that give back to the community, and build platforms to politically engage Canadian youth.

Most important, I have seen hope and I have seen pride about their roots, about their history and about what lies ahead, a better and brighter future not just for them but all of us.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

YOUNG FARMERS IN SAINT-HYACINTHE—BAGOT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the next generation of farmers in Quebec, and in my riding in particular, is passionate about providing the people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton with fresh quality products that meet the highest health and wellness and environmental standards, and I am honoured to tell the House about their hard work.

Among them are Julie Bissonnette, president of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec, an organization for young people interested in agriculture; Maskoutains RCM bursary recipients Marc-Antoine Pelletier, Emmanuelle Plante and Kévin Richard; and Acton RCM bursary recipients Nicolas Baron and Zoé Bisailon. They have the support of organizations such as the Montérégie UPA with its local and specialized unions and the Association de la relève agricole de Saint-Hyacinthe, a member of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec.

My constituents care about what they eat. The government should listen to them and limit food imports. The NDP is proud of its long history of supporting the local farmers who help nourish and nurture Quebec.

I thank them.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's list of failures keeps growing. U.S. tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum are still in place. Energy sector layoffs are being announced because the Prime Minister cannot get Trans Mountain pipeline started, let alone built. Experts are warning of a recession, as the Prime Minister readies a fourth straight deficit budget. Even the Prime Minister's promise there would be enough legal supply to end black market cannabis has gone up in smoke.

Canadians are paying for the Prime Minister's failures, and he is happy to let them. A recent survey said that half of Canadians barely made it at the end of every month, with little if anything left to cover unexpected expenses.

Here is one expense Canadians can expect: higher Liberal taxes to pay for Liberal overspending. In fact, secret documents let it slip that the Prime Minister's new carbon tax would go way up if given another chance.

Canada's Conservatives are fighting for better.

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INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, the United Nations declared today, February 21, as International Mother Language Day. This was initiated by Mr. Rafiqul Islam, a Bangladeshi Canadian, to pay tribute to the 1952 martyrs of the Bangla movement, where Bangladeshi freedom fighters fought and

died for the language of Bangla to be recognized as an official language.

Today, at 12:01 a.m., I paid tribute at a shaheed minar that was specially built by Mr. Shah Bahauddin and his team of the Bangladesh Canada Association of Ottawa Valley.

Last Saturday, I attended an event at Ottawa City Hall, organized by Dr. Monjur Chowdhury and his team of Bangla Caravan and PEACE.

I will be attending, on International Mother Language Day, the Bangladeshi movie *Fagun Haway*, organized by Tanjib Chowdhury and his team of Bangladeshi Canadian—Canadian Bangladeshi.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if an attorney general receives evidence of illegal activity within the government, he has an obligation to act. I asked the Attorney General this morning at justice committee whether or not he felt he needed to act based upon what was told to him at cabinet by the former attorney general. He did not respond.

However, the Clerk of the Privy Council has now confirmed for us that the minister was not present and recused himself from that part of the cabinet meeting.

Could the minister tell us if the Prime Minister told him to leave the room?

• (1420)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Attorney General of Canada, I am going to defend the principles of cabinet privilege, cabinet confidence, as well as solicitor-client privilege. One cannot just cherry-pick when it is convenient to let that go.

When the question was asked of me this morning, the answer to the question was that it was covered by cabinet confidence. I have now been released by Mr. Wernick in his answer and I can confirm that I left the meeting. I recused myself from the meeting of my own accord.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there were incredibly troubling admissions made at this morning's justice committee, so many that I do not have enough time to go through them all. However, we are going to fight to do better and make sure we get this on the record.

This morning, the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed that he and the Prime Minister sought to influence the decision of the attorney general in the matter of bribery and fraud charges against SNC-Lavalin. Could the Prime Minister confirm that this indeed is the case?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always respected the work that committees do and that is exactly why we are the government that increased resources at committee. Members from both sides have been asking for witnesses to appear. Committee is doing that important work.

Last week, the director of public prosecutions confirmed that prosecutors in every case, “exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration.”

Today, the Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the prime minister made it clear that this was the decision for the minister of justice...”

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the chronology.

On September 4, a final decision is given by the director of public prosecutions. On September 17, there is a meeting between the minister as she then was, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister, where she asked whether or not she was being directed, and she was told no.

After that, there is a meeting on September 18, between SNC-Lavalin and the Clerk of the Privy Council. On December 5, there are discussions, again, between the former attorney general and the former private secretary to the Prime Minister. On December 19, the Clerk of the Privy Council picked up the phone to pressure the attorney general in her decision—

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the record shows, the Conservative leader met with representatives of the company. The NDP leader met with representatives of the company. Today, the Conservative deputy leader herself said, “I do not want that impression to be on the record that I think there is anything wrong with meeting with SNC-Lavalin...”

The Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the prime minister made it clear that this was the decision for the minister of justice to take.”

We will continue to respect the independence of our judicial system as well as the rule of law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 4, after carefully reviewing the case, the director of public prosecutions decided to pursue criminal charges.

Why did the Prime Minister choose to meet his former attorney general and justice minister 13 days later, on September 17? Why?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians must have confidence in their institutions.

We know that the committees are doing their work. We are the government that increased resources to help them do just that. Members on both sides asked for witnesses to appear. Today, these witnesses appeared at public hearings, and the members' questions and the answers were public.

I think we need to respect the independence of the committees and the judicial system.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is simple.

The day after September 4, 2018, after the director of public prosecutions launched a criminal case against SNC-Lavalin, ministers and their staff met with people from the company. I am talking about people in the Department of Finance and the Department of International Trade, the office of the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's Office.

If the decision had already been made by the director of public prosecutions, why did the Prime Minister think it was appropriate to meet with his former attorney general?

• (1425)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians have confidence in their institutions.

Here is what we heard today at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. When asked if it is appropriate for the Prime Minister and his officials to discuss the matter with the attorney general, the Attorney General of Canada confirmed that those kinds of conversations would be appropriate. When asked if it is appropriate to have conversations with his cabinet colleagues as Minister of Justice and Attorney General, he replied, “Absolutely”.

We respect our institutions and always will.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can always count on the Liberal Party of Canada to come up with a good political scandal by bending the rules to help out their corrupt millionaire friends. The Liberals always deliver the goods and even throw in an extended warranty.

First Gerald Butts resigns, and now the former justice minister is saying that she was inappropriately pressured. That information was leaked by cabinet.

If the Prime Minister is afraid of a public inquiry, can he at least allow the former minister to give us her side of the story?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the question of solicitor-client privilege is complex. We want to be transparent. That is why we are working hard to get an answer so the former minister can have her say.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 4, 2018, the director of public prosecutions decided to move forward with the case against SNC-Lavalin. Two weeks later, the Prime Minister met with the then attorney general to discuss this file. The next day, the multinational's lobbyists met with the Minister of Finance and the Clerk of the Privy Council. On December 5, 2018, Gerald Butts met with the then attorney general to do exactly the same thing as the Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

What was the purpose of these discussions, if not to try to change the then attorney general's mind?

Does this not clearly show that there are some rules for regular people and other rules for the Liberal Party's friends?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative leader met with representatives of the company. The NDP leader met with representatives of the company. Today, the Conservative deputy leader herself said that she did not want to give the impression that she thinks there is anything wrong with meeting with SNC-Lavalin.

On this side of the House, we respect the independence of the committee and the judicial system. We see the committee doing its work.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the ongoing saga of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, Canadians are watching the government melt down in front of their very eyes.

According to yet another bombshell report from *The Globe and Mail*, the former attorney general told the cabinet this week that she was improperly pressured to get SNC-Lavalin a sweetheart plea deal in its corruption case.

These Liberals promised transparency, but all we see is cover-up. They promised to work for all Canadians, but it is the wealthy and well connected who always get what they want.

With obstruction of justice allegations directed at the Prime Minister's own office, how can Liberals actually stand up and stand in the way of a proper inquiry?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, it is this government that increased resources for committees, to enable committees to do their important work.

The member was asking to have witnesses appear. Members from both sides got together to ensure that witnesses could appear. We see today that those meetings are taking place in public. We can see that members are asking questions. We can see that witnesses are answering questions. I believe we should respect their work.

We respect the independence of the judicial system. We will continue to respect officers of Parliament. That is what we do on this side. The member can choose what he chooses to do.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is she talking about? The Liberals claim this whole thing is about protecting jobs, but where were they for Sears workers? Where were they for Aveos, for Rona and for GM workers?

If the Liberals actually cared about working people, maybe they could start jailing their corporate friends when they break the law. Instead, the Liberals are too busy getting them sweetheart deals. Liberals claim to care about the rule of law, but instead, in their world there is one set of laws for the wealthy and well connected and there is another set for everybody else.

Just yesterday, the Prime Minister voted against an inquiry while his former attorney general properly abstained. Does the Prime Minister not get conflict of interest, or does he not care?

• (1430)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that member knows better than most that we have an Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. That office is doing its work. We respect its independence. We think we should let that office do its work.

The member talks about Canadians. He talks about the importance of employees. Let us talk about this government's record. We have made strategic investments in Canadians, bringing in 800,000 jobs.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Bardish Chagger: They find it funny—

The Speaker: Order. I am having trouble hearing the answer. We have to hear the questions and the answers. People do not always like either one, or both sometimes. We have to hear them nevertheless.

The hon. government House leader has the floor for 10 more seconds.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, they find it funny that 300,000 plus children have been lifted out of poverty through the Canada child benefit. The Conservatives chose to tax that benefit. We believe that families with children, who need the most, should get the most. We will keep fighting for Canadians.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we know and what is undisputed is that subsequent to the September 4 decision that was delivered to SNC-Lavalin, there were numerous meetings between the Prime Minister and the former attorney general, and even between the Clerk of the Privy Council and the former attorney general.

We have also heard on numerous occasions, through media reports, that the former attorney general felt pressured. We are hearing from the Prime Minister that his description is that it was not pressure but vigorous discussion. Again, we seem to have it that the Prime Minister sees things one way and the former attorney general sees them a different way.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see the justice committee doing its work. We see it bringing forward witnesses and having these conversations. I believe that the committee should be able to do its work independently. Members from all parties are present for that work. We are the party that increased resources to committees so that they could do this work. Members from both sides asked for witnesses to appear. They were able to work together to bring forward a list of witnesses. Let us let the committee members do their work.

Oral Questions

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the simple question we have been asking all day yesterday and today, and to which we still have not received an answer. Who called for the meeting between the Prime Minister and the former attorney general on September 17? Who asked for that meeting?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can definitely state that there is obviously a different approach with this Prime Minister and this government than was the case under the previous government. We have conversations all the time. When it comes to the lives of Canadians and the important decisions we need to take, it is important that we take a whole-of-government approach and that every minister represents them. We work with members on both sides, because the voices of their constituents need to be heard.

Therefore, when asked at justice committee today if it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister and officials to discuss the matter with him, the Attorney General confirmed that those kinds of conversations would be appropriate.

Talking to each other, communicating, is important. It is appropriate.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is not whether the discussion was appropriate. The question is, in the wake of the decision made on September 4 and the meeting at the Prime Minister's Office or with the Prime Minister on September 17, who asked for that meeting?

Was it the Prime Minister, or was it the former attorney general? It is not complicated.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee is doing its work. It has called its witnesses.

Today we saw many questions being asked, and we heard many answers.

It is important for us to point out that the Conservatives keep talking out of both sides of their mouths. In French, they say they have no intention of hurting the SNC-Lavalin employees, as the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles said. However, in English, it is quite a different story. The members, like the member for Carleton, want to shut down that company, and they are not even trying to hide it.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to know whether, with the ultimate goal of protecting jobs, the Prime Minister or anyone from his office put any pressure on Canada's justice system.

It is not complicated.

On September 17, a meeting took place between the Prime Minister and the former attorney general of Canada.

We want to know who asked for that meeting.

• (1435)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members from both sides

of the House sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. They are asking these questions and getting answers. Everyone can listen to these discussions.

Today, when asked whether it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister and his officials to discuss the matter with the Attorney General, the Attorney General said that those kinds of conversations would be appropriate.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 4, Canada's top prosecutor decided that SNC-Lavalin's case would go to trial. On September 17, in the presence of the Prime Minister and the Clerk of the Privy Council, the former attorney general indicated that she would not intervene to try to change the top prosecutor's decision.

What followed was an unsolicited and coordinated effort by the Prime Minister and his minions to influence an ongoing legal process, and when the then attorney general did not co-operate, he fired her.

In what world does this interference not constitute a clear attempt to obstruct justice?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, on this side of the aisle, the government respects the independence of the work that committees do. We respect the independence of officers of Parliament. We respect the independence of the judicial system. Today, we see that the justice committee is hearing from witnesses. Members are asking tough questions, and they are receiving answers.

Just last week, the director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case “exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration”. I think the member on the other side is projecting from his experience under the previous government.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed today that months after the former attorney general had made it clear she would not interfere in an ongoing court proceeding involving SNC-Lavalin, the Prime Minister refused to accept that decision and continued to pressure the former attorney general to change her mind.

The director of public prosecutions had made a decision. The former attorney general had made a decision. Why did the Prime Minister then make the decision to try to obstruct justice in an ongoing legal proceeding?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member seems to believe that if he raises his voice, all of a sudden there is more validity to what he is saying. The record has stated, as I have said and will continue to say, that the justice committee is doing the work. The member can raise his voice louder if he wants to, but the justice committee has asked for witnesses to appear. Members have asked questions. Witnesses are answering questions.

It was last week that the director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case “exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration”.

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I would ask the hon. opposition House leader to come to order.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to speak truth to power, a citizen cannot ask anything more from an elected official, yet when the former attorney general attempted to speak with her cabinet colleagues about political interference in a justice case, the Prime Minister left her sitting outside his office for two hours while he dithered about the optics of letting her into his domain. In that meeting she spoke truth to power, and he came out and said he was disappointed in her.

Canadians are disappointed in him because she is ready to speak her truth to his power. What is he so afraid of?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the justice committee has asked for witnesses to appear. Witnesses will appear. Members from both sides will be able to ask questions. Witnesses will answer those questions.

I understand that the former attorney general has also been asked to appear at committee. Members from both sides will be able to ask questions. The former attorney general will be able to answer them. I am confident she will.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then the Prime Minister should lift the privilege. The poor Liberals are without Gerry Butts to write their lines for them.

Yesterday the former justice minister stood in the House not once, but twice, and told her colleagues and every member of the House that she is being silenced in her ability by the Prime Minister. His treatment of her is not just spiteful, not just pusillanimous; this is about the exercise of power and protecting his friends and his insiders. One woman with integrity is standing in his path. What is he afraid of? He should let her speak her truth and her power to him.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said a number of times in the House and before the committee earlier today, the question of privilege, in the words of the former attorney general, is complex and multi-layered. We are doing our best. The committee is doing its work. We are doing our best to study that question to allow the former attorney general to speak, but we have not yet resolved the issue.

• (1440)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court, in Krieger, stated, “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.” In the face of that, what in the world were the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's principal secretary and the Clerk of the Privy Council doing talking to the attorney general to overturn the decision of the public prosecutor?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, because I keep saying it, but I am not sure if it is registering with the members opposite. Conservatives have members from their party present at

the justice committee as well. The justice committee is doing really important work. Members have been working together to ensure that they can get a list of witnesses to appear so that members can ask tough questions and get these answers. We see that work happening today, and we see it as important work.

Today, when asked at the justice committee if it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister and officials to discuss the matter with the attorney general, the Attorney General confirmed that those kinds of conversations would be appropriate.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was revealed that at the September 17 meeting, the former attorney general unequivocally stated that she would not overturn the decision of the director of public prosecutions, and yet following that, on December 5, the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, and then on December 19, the Clerk of the Privy Council himself, urged the minister to change her mind. If that is not pressure, then what is?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Clerk of the Privy Council also today at the justice committee confirmed, “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the minister of justice to take.”

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been exactly two weeks since *The Globe and Mail* revealed this new Liberal scandal. In the past two weeks, what have we seen? We have seen this government get into a comedy of errors, a minister slam the door on cabinet, and the Prime Minister's principal secretary step down.

Today, another layer was added to this Liberal scandal. We found out that the former attorney general told cabinet that she was pressured inappropriately. That is known as obstruction of justice.

Why is the government tolerating that?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, members from both sides worked together to have witnesses appear. That started today. We can see members from both sides asking questions and witnesses answering those questions.

I think that the member across the way should have faith in the committee process. It was our government that increased resources to committees. On this side of the House, we respect and will continue to respect the work of committees.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to have confidence in their institutions, but the problem is that the Liberal government is attacking our institutions by interfering in a matter before the courts. That is not right.

According to today's *Globe and Mail*, the former attorney general says she was subjected to improper pressure. That is obstruction of justice.

How can the government tolerate that? It is unacceptable.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with one thing the member opposite said, namely that it is important for Canadians to have confidence in their institutions. That is exactly what we on this side of the House believe. That is why we respect the independence of the judicial system. That is why we respect the work of committees, and they are doing their work.

We also respect the office of the commissioner, which is doing its job, and we will continue to respect it because we know that Canadians must have confidence in their institutions.

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POVERTY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' poverty reduction bill does not go far enough and does not do enough. I am not the only one saying so. We are hearing this from a thousand organizations and individuals from across the country. They are calling on the government to show leadership and to revise its bill so we can achieve the objectives.

The fight against poverty is not a public relations exercise.

When will the minister listen to them and finally bring forward concrete new measures to make a real difference in the fight against poverty?

•(1445)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to clearly state that, from day one, our government has stressed the importance of giving everyone a real and fair chance to succeed in Canada.

That is why, in July 2016, we implemented the Canada child benefit, which lifts 300,000 children and 200,000 parents out of poverty every month. By April 2019, 650,000 people will have been lifted out of poverty thanks to the measures we have implemented.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been nine months since Trump imposed the destructive tariffs on steel and aluminum, which have forced companies to close shop and workers to lose their jobs.

Liberals keep trying to assure Canadians that they have a plan, but the tariffs are still there. This is the same old story: "Do not worry, we are working on it, and we care about jobs." After months of witness testimony at the trade committee, we now know that their plan is a failure, a failure to protect communities and jobs, a failure to remove the tariffs.

How much more do Canadians need to lose before this Prime Minister will act?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to the illegal U.S. tariffs, we have imposed Canada's strongest trade actions ever. Over 40 American groups, representing

dozens of U.S. industries, have called for the removal of the U.S. steel and aluminum tariffs, citing the impact of our retaliatory actions.

Recently, a senior Republican said that our tariffs are having such an impact that the U.S. must lift its steel tariffs before Congress looks at the new NAFTA deal. Our program is working.

The Speaker: Order. I encourage the hon. member for Abbotsford not to interrupt when someone else has the floor.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our country is strengthened by its diversity, and members of all communities in Canada must feel safe and be safe. We know that we are not immune to hate-motivated crimes. Communities across the country, including my riding of Oakville North—Burlington, have witnessed these cowardly acts.

Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness tell the House what he is doing to help communities at risk of hate-motivated crime improve their security infrastructure?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, acts of hate are intended to drive wedges of fear and division. Such acts can be a jarring reminder that the inclusive and tolerant Canada we want is a precious and delicate work in progress that we dare not take for granted.

Canadians must be free to practise their faith and culture without fear. To that end, we have doubled federal funding for the security infrastructure program to help pay for security upgrades for communities at risk. We have significantly broadened access to the program. More new projects will be announced this spring.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the decision to go to trial had already been communicated on September 4. The Prime Minister held a meeting with the former attorney general on September 17. At that meeting, the former attorney general refused to stop the trial.

I have a simple question, and I do not need a lesson on the non-answers we got from the justice minister at the justice committee. Why did the Prime Minister, his cabinet and the Clerk of the Privy Council continue to put pressure on the former attorney general after the September 17 meeting?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member can refer to it as he pleases, but the fact remains that today, at the justice committee, the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed, “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the minister of justice to take.”

We on this side respect the work of committees. We know that members are asking tough questions. They wanted to have witnesses appear. They have worked together to have those witnesses appear. We will not undermine the work they are doing—

Some hon. member: No, they have not.

Hon. Bardish Chagger:—like that member is now choosing to do.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are just Liberal talking points.

The Speaker: Order. I am asking the hon. member and all members to respect one another.

The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

• (1450)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister tried to stop criminal proceedings. The former attorney general said no.

My question is simple. Why did the Prime Minister, the PMO and the Clerk of the Privy Council continue to interfere in the case after the September 17 meeting? Why?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear. It is obvious that the Conservatives do not have much respect for our institutions. On this side of the House, we respect the work of committees. We respect the independence of our judiciary. We will continue to work with them.

That is exactly why we increased resources for committees so that they can do their important work. We respect our institutions, and we know it is important for Canadians to have confidence in their institutions, too.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former attorney general told cabinet this week, according to *The Globe and Mail*, that she faced inappropriate pressure to interfere with the trial into the criminal charges against SNC-Lavalin.

Subsection 139(1) of the Criminal Code makes it an indictable offence, punishable by up to two years in prison, to obstruct the course of justice in a judicial proceeding. Has any member of the cabinet who bore witness to the former attorney general's remarks this week passed them along to the RCMP for investigation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us review what we heard at the justice committee this morning. When asked if it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister and officials to discuss the

matter with the attorney general, the Attorney General confirmed, “Those kinds of conversations would be appropriate.” When asked about conversations with cabinet colleagues in his role as Minister of Justice and Attorney General and whether they were appropriate, the Attorney General answered, “Absolutely.”

We always have and we always will, on this side of the aisle, respect our institutions.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now she is quoting a politician about an incident he just admitted he did not witness. Why not get back to the people who did witness her?

The former attorney general told cabinet this week, according to *The Globe and Mail*, that she faced inappropriate pressure to interfere with the criminal trial of SNC-Lavalin. If that happened, it may have violated sections of the Criminal Code. Did anyone in the cabinet refer her allegation to the RCMP for investigation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I responded two days ago, we have no knowledge of any such activity.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a coalition of organizations representing Canada's retirees was on the Hill yesterday to urge the Liberal government to protect workers' pensions in case of corporate insolvency. It also called on the government to create a national pension insurance plan and to change federal insolvency legislation to give workers' pensions priority status. The NDP unequivocally supports these initiatives and has been asking the minister over and over to ensure pension security.

Will the Liberals finally listen to Canadian workers and retirees and protect their pensions, yes or no?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his passion and work on this file. Pension security is very important to our government. We made a commitment in the 2018 budget, as well as in my mandate letter, to consult with Canadians, and that is exactly what we have done.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have submitted contributions to this consultation process. Our government wants an evidence-based solution to this issue. To do that, we are going to take a look at what has been submitted and come up with an evidence-based solution. We do not want a Band-Aid solution with unintended consequences. We want the right solution, and that is what we are going to deliver.

*Oral Questions***SPORT**

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sport Canada's policy to prevent harassment and abuse in sport has been ineffective. Each week brings new headlines detailing old or new abuses that have come to light. Athletes and sports organizations are calling on this minister to establish an independent body able to investigate abuse and harassment. Instead of listening, she announced yet another code of conduct.

Will this minister stop stalling and establish an independent investigative body for abuse allegations in all sports?

• (1455)

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science and Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am heartbroken for all the athletes who have suffered. Let me be clear. There is zero tolerance for abuse, discrimination or harassment of any kind in sport. That is why last June, we introduced strong measures to end abuse, discrimination and harassment in sport. Last week, for the first time in our country's history, a declaration was signed by all sport ministers from coast to coast to coast. The Red Deer declaration will drive a systemic culture shift to prevent abuse, discrimination and harassment in sport.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Prime Minister met with the former attorney general on September 17. We also now know that the Clerk of the Privy Council was present at that meeting and that there was discussion of a matter before the court.

Here is a simple question that may one day be asked in court: Does the Prime Minister still challenge the former attorney general's belief that this was an attempt to improperly influence her?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the record. Just last week the director of public prosecutions confirmed that prosecutors in every place "exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration."

Earlier today, the deputy minister of justice confirmed that "there is no direct communication, in any specific case, between the PMO and the DPP."

Today, at the justice committee, the Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that "At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take."

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to know what happened in committee this morning. Here is my question.

On September 4, the director of public prosecutions informed SNC-Lavalin that its case was going to trial. On September 17, the former attorney general told the Prime Minister and the Clerk of the Privy Council that she would not overrule her director's decision. That should have been the end of it.

Why did the Clerk of the Privy Council, the PMO and even the Prime Minister himself hound the Attorney General of Canada to change her decision?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let's look at the facts.

The director of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada confirmed that prosecutors, in every case, exercise their discretion independently. The deputy minister of justice confirmed that there was no direct communication, in any specific case, between the PMO and the PPSC. The Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that, at every opportunity, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was a decision for the Minister of Justice to make.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is now very clear that the Prime Minister cannot be trusted. We know now that he met with the former attorney general after the independent prosecutor decided to proceed with the trial. We also know that the former attorney general told the Prime Minister and his office that she would not intervene. It should have ended there, but it did not.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why on earth he and his government would embark on an unsolicited, coordinated and sustained effort to change her position? How is this not political interference?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadians should have confidence in their institutions. We know that Liberal members have confidence in the independence of the judicial system and the work that the committees are doing. We have confidence in the officers of Parliament. We know that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter.

We also know that the justice committee is looking into this matter. Members from both sides have been working very hard to call in witnesses. They are asking challenging questions. They are receiving answers. I think we should let them do their important work. We have confidence in committees.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):

[*Member spoke in Gwich'in as follows:*]

dunich'uu? drin gwiinzii shilak kat

[*Gwich'in text translated as follows:*]

How are you? Good day, friends and relatives.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago the Government of Canada tabled Canada's first indigenous languages bill. This is a historic step in rebuilding Canada's relationship with first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples as we continue the dialogue on reconciliation.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism please explain to the House how this bill would help indigenous peoples defend their language rights and ensure that indigenous languages are transmitted to future generations?

[Member spoke in Gwich'in as follows:]

Mahsi cho.

[Gwich'in text translated as follows:]

Thank you.

[English]

• (1500)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Yukon for his amazing work.

Our language represents who we are. It is how we tell our stories to our children. Most indigenous languages are in danger and many have been lost. We need to act and we need to act now, hand in hand with indigenous peoples.

[Translation]

I hope all parties will join indigenous peoples and pass this bill, which recognizes indigenous languages as a fundamental right. This is a clear response to calls to action 13, 14 and 15. Furthermore, this bill provides for stable, long-term funding.

[English]

Let us do this together.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the independent director of public prosecutions made a decision to proceed to trial on a case of corporate criminal corruption. Then the former attorney general decided to let the decision stand. Then the Prime Minister, his cabinet and Michael Wernick tried to get her to change her mind. She did not. Then she was fired.

Does the Prime Minister understand that neither he nor Michael Wernick gets to define what constitutes inappropriate pressure?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, justice committee members have asked for witnesses to appear. They are appearing. I have confidence in members on both sides to ask tough questions. They will receive the answers they are looking for.

Just last week, the director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned from this morning's PBO report that the Liberals misled veterans with their new pension for life, which is actually less generous for the most seriously injured veterans. Worse, throughout this whole SNC-Lavalin scandal, veterans are losing out because the

Prime Minister has yet to appoint a veterans affairs minister. The revolving door of Liberal and Conservative ministers is disrespectful, with eight ministers in nine years. It is heartbreaking to see veterans sacrifice their lives while consecutive governments will not properly invest in services that veterans deserve.

Why are the Liberals leaving veterans out in the cold?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand here very proud to be the acting Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Our government is committed to ensuring that our veterans receive the benefits and support they deserve. The needs of Canada's veterans have changed significantly over the past hundred years, when the Pension Act was introduced, and our support needs to change as well.

Thanks to our government's \$10-billion additional investment, all veterans today, including the most vulnerable, are better off than they were under the previous Harper government.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian highways play a key role in moving our economy forward. In fact, they are vital to rural and remote communities specifically. Good condition of these roads allows Canadians and goods to move more efficiently across the country and help our economy continue to grow. This is particularly crucial in my home province of Manitoba, as trade is an important part of our diversified economy.

Could the Minister of Rural Economic Development update the House on what investments are being made for the highway network of Manitoba?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for his question and for his hard work.

[English]

Our government understands that modern, safe and efficient highways play a crucial role in the economy of Canada. That is why we have announced over \$140 million for eight highways to help Manitoba businesses improve competitiveness and improve commutes for Canadians. This is an important investment, and the kind of investment that will continue to make Canada prosper.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the interactions today, I have one simple question for the justice minister, and I would like the Attorney General to offer a legal opinion on behalf of Canadians.

Can cabinet confidentiality be used to cover up criminal actions?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Attorney General for Canada, I will not answer a legal question or give a legal opinion on the floor of the House of Commons.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the act empowers the attorney general to sign remediation agreements. A remediation agreement with SNC-Lavalin would allow taxpayers to recover hundreds of millions of dollars, which we really need, and it could help save thousands of jobs in Quebec and Canada. We know that the minister wants to sign one. We just want to know why he did not simply do so instead of making such a mess of things over the past few weeks.

Why jeopardize thousands of jobs in Quebec?

• (1505)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

He asked the same thing in committee today. The answer is the same. As Attorney General of Canada, I cannot comment, as that would have an impact on the legal proceedings currently under way.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the past two weeks, the government has been getting bogged down in its versions, secrets, resignations and half-truths.

Why did the Minister of Veterans Affairs resign? We do not know.

Why did the Prime Minister's advisor resign? We do not know.

If the Attorney General can reach an agreement with SNC-Lavalin, why is he choosing not to do so? We do not know that either.

Once again, thousands of jobs are on the line in Quebec. Why is there no remediation agreement?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to understand that my role as the Attorney General of Canada is to protect Canada's legal institutions and that is what I am going to do. That is my top priority as Attorney General.

One of those institutions is the protection of litigation. Litigation privilege is very important. I cannot influence a case that is before the courts.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it was certainly welcome news more than a year ago when the current government announced that we would have a Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise. For too long, Canadians have been horrified by human rights abuses at the hands of Canadian mining companies and their actions overseas that bring shame to this country.

Speaker's Ruling

The Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise was supposed to be a model for the world. It is a year later. Where is it?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of International Trade Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to our government that Canadian companies around the world respect human rights and are operating with the highest possible ethical standards.

We are moving forward with appointing the first-ever ombudsperson for corporate social responsibility to help reflect our core values in the world and deliver on our trade agenda. The ombudsperson will work to ensure that Canadian firms operating abroad exercise leadership in ethical, social and environmental practices. The appointment will be announced soon.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the government House leader was quite busy today during question period not answering questions, but I think this one she will be able to answer. I have full confidence that she will be able to answer what we will be doing for the remainder of this week in the House, as well as next week.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between getting answers and not liking the answers, but we will let the Conservatives figure that one out.

As for the work this week, this afternoon we will commence report stage debate on Bill C-83, the administrative segregation legislation.

Tomorrow, we will deal with report stage and third reading stage of Bill C-77, the victims' bill of rights.

[*Translation*]

Monday shall be an allotted day. Tuesday, if need be, we will resume debate at report stage of Bill C-83, on administrative segregation.

Finally, pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I am pleased to request the designation of an order of the day for the Minister of Finance to present budget 2019 at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, March 19.

* * *

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

VOTE ON OPPOSITION MOTION—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised yesterday by the hon. opposition House leader concerning the participation of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada in the votes on the opposition motion on political interference allegations.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the honourable opposition House leader for having raised the matter, as well as the members for Timmins—James Bay and Saanich—Gulf Islands for their comments.

Government Orders

After the member for Vancouver Granville explained why she had voluntarily abstained from voting because of personal interest, the opposition House leader asked whether the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada should also have abstained. In her opinion, they too have personal interests in the matter. She asked for guidance from the Chair.

• (1510)

[English]

The right of all members to vote is fundamental. This cannot be overstated. It is through voting that members participate in making the decisions of this House. As Speaker, I am entrusted with protecting this right that belongs to all members.

Yesterday's vote was a typical and normal vote and, as usual, every member was free to vote or to abstain. On occasion, the Chair has been asked to reconcile this right with alleged conflicts of interest. At all times, however, the answer has been the same. When ruling on a similar matter back on November 30, 2017, I stated, at page 15799 of the Debates:

It is not the role of the Chair to determine if a conflict of interest exists, but instead, to ensure that the rights and privileges of members of this House are always safeguarded. By extension, as Speaker, I cannot unilaterally deprive a member of the right to vote any more than I can unilaterally order that a vote be redone.

The role of the Speaker in addressing the right of a member to vote is limited. These limitations are procedural in nature and involve ensuring that a member heard the question in order to vote.

As to the matter of an alleged conflict of interest, the House has adopted rules under the Conflict of Interest Code concerning these potential situations. Bosc and Gagnon explain at page 576:

No member is entitled to take part in debate or to vote on any question in which he or she has a private interest (formerly referred to as a "direct pecuniary interest"), and any vote subsequently determined to have been cast in these circumstances would be disallowed.

[Translation]

The House not only adopted the Conflict of Interest Code for itself but has also granted the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner the sole authority to interpret and apply this code, including the power to conduct investigations.

Specifically, section 13 of this code stipulates that, "A Member shall not participate in debate on or vote on a question in which he or she has a private interest."

All questions relating to compliance with the Conflict of Interest Code and the Conflict of Interest Act must be directed towards that office.

[English]

It is the Ethics Commissioner to whom members must turn when they believe that there has been a contravention of the code, including when it involves a member's participation in a vote.

Accordingly, the votes taken yesterday stand.

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-83, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: On Friday, December 7, 2018, the Assistant Deputy Speaker delivered a ruling relating to the motions at report stage of Bill C-83. Therefore, I shall now proceed directly to proposing Motions Nos. 1 to 27 to the House.

[Translation]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-83, in Clause 3, be amended by replacing line 5 on page 2 with the following:

paragraph 37.3(1)(b) or section 37.4 or 37.8 that the offender

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 7.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by

(a) deleting lines 25 to 30 on page 8;

(b) replacing lines 1 to 3 on page 9 with the following:

(3) Before making a determination under this section, the institutional head shall visit the inmate.

(4) The institutional head shall maintain a record indicating the circumstances of every instance in which, because of security requirements, a visit was not face to face or took place through a cell door hatch.

(5) No later than one working day after the day on which he or she makes a determination under this section, the institution head shall orally notify the inmate of the determination as well as the reasons for it and no later than two working days after the day on which the determination was made, the institutional head shall provide the inmate with those reasons in writing.

Government Orders

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by

(a) replacing lines 11 to 18 on page 9 with the following:

registered health care professional shall provide advice to the committee established under subsection (3).

(2) The registered health care professional providing the advice is to be a senior registered health care profes-

(b) replacing lines 23 to 30 on page 9 with the following:

rank than that of institutional head for the purpose of making determination under section 37.32.

37.32 (1) As soon as practicable after the institutional head determines under subsection 37.3(2) that an inmate's conditions of confinement in a structured intervention unit should not be altered in accordance with the recommendations of a registered health care professional, the committee established under subsection

(c) replacing lines 34 to 36 on page 9 with the following:

(2) As soon as practicable after the institutional head determines under paragraph 37.3(1)(a) that an inmate should remain in a

• (1515)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 11

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 10.

[English]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is not present to move her motion at report stage. Therefore, Motion No. 12 will not be proceeded with.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 13

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by replacing lines 2 to 7 on page 6 with the following:

in which an inmate is authorized to be transferred into a structured intervention unit indicating the reasons for granting the authorization and any alternative that was considered.

(3) No later than one working day after the day on which the transfer of an inmate is authorized, the Service shall, orally, provide the inmate with notice that the authorization was granted as well as the reasons for it and no later than two working days after the day on which the transfer of an inmate is authorized, the Service shall provide the inmate with those reasons in writing.

Motion No. 14

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by replacing lines 25 to 36 on page 7 with the following:

37.11 If a staff member or a person engaged by the Service believes that the confinement of an inmate in a structured intervention unit is having detrimental impacts on the inmate's health, the staff member or person shall refer, in the prescribed manner, the inmate's case to the portion of the Service that administers health care. Grounds for the belief include the inmate

(a) refusing to interact with others;

(b) engaging in self-injurious behaviour;

(c) showing symptoms of a drug overdose; and

(d) showing signs of emotional distress or exhibiting behaviour that suggests that they are in urgent need of mental health care.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 15

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by replacing lines 16 to 23 on page 8 with the following:

(c) as soon as practicable in any of the prescribed cir-

Motion No. 16

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by replacing line 10 on page 10 with the following:

and every 60 days after the Commissioner's last determi-

Motion No. 17

That Bill C-83, in Clause 10, be amended by replacing lines 1 to 10 on page 11 with the following:

37.6 (1) The Minister shall appoint one or more persons to be independent external decision-makers.

(2) To be eligible for appointment as an independent external decision-maker, a person must have knowledge of administrative decision-making processes in general. A person is not eligible for appointment as an independent external decision-maker if the person was, at any time, in the previous five years a staff member or appointed under subsection 6(1).

(3) An independent external decision-maker is to be appointed for a renewable term of not more than five years and holds office during good behaviour, but may be removed at any time for cause by the Minister.

(4) An independent external decision-maker may be appointed to serve either full-time or part-time.

37.61 An independent external decision-maker is to be paid

(a) the remuneration that is fixed by the Treasury Board; and

(b) in accordance with Treasury Board directives, any travel and living expenses that they incur in the performance of their duties and functions while absent from their ordinary place of work, in the case of a full-time decision-maker, and their ordinary place of residence, in the case of a part-time decision-maker.

37.7 (1) The Service shall furnish to an independent external decision-maker all information under the Service's control that is relevant to the making of a determination in respect of an inmate by the independent external decision-maker.

(2) For the purpose of making a determination in respect of an inmate, an independent external decision-maker may require any staff member, or any person whose services are engaged by or on behalf of the Service,

(a) to furnish any information that, in the decision-maker's opinion, the staff member or person may be able to furnish in relation to the inmate's case; and

(b) to produce, for examination by the decision-maker, any document or thing that, in the decision-maker's opinion, relates to the inmate's case and that may be in the possession or under the control of the staff member or person.

(3) Within 10 days after the day on which an independent external decision-maker makes a determination, the decision-maker shall return to the Service any document or thing furnished under subsection (1) or paragraph (2)(a) or produced under paragraph (2)(b), as well as any copy of one.

37.71 (1) Before making a determination in respect of an inmate, an independent external decision-maker shall provide or cause to be provided to the inmate, in writing, in whichever of the two official languages of Canada is requested by the inmate, the information that is to be considered by the decision-maker or a summary of that information, other than information provided to the independent external decision-maker by the inmate.

(2) The independent external decision-maker may withhold from the inmate as much information as is strictly necessary if the independent external decision-maker has reasonable grounds to believe that

(a) the information should not be disclosed on the grounds of public interest; or

(b) the disclosure of the information would jeopardize the safety of any person, the security of a penitentiary or the conduct of any lawful investigation.

37.72 Before making a determination in respect of an inmate, an independent external decision-maker shall ensure that the inmate is given an opportunity to make written representations to the independent external decision-maker.

37.73 For the purpose of making a determination in respect of an inmate, an independent external decision-maker may communicate with the inmate.

37.74 (1) Subject to subsection (2), an independent external decision-maker shall not disclose any information that comes to their knowledge in the course of the exercise of their powers, or the performance of their duties and functions, under this Act or any other Act of Parliament.

(2) An independent external decision-maker may disclose information referred to in subsection (1) in the exercise of their powers or the performance of their duties and functions.

Government Orders

37.75 An independent external decision-maker is not a competent or compellable witness in any civil proceedings in respect of any matter coming to their knowledge in the course of the exercise or purported exercise of their powers, or the performance or purported performance of their duties and functions, under this Act or any other Act of Parliament.

37.76 No criminal or civil proceedings lie against an independent external decision-maker for anything done, reported or said in good faith in the course of the exercise or purported exercise of any power, or the performance or purported performance of any duty or function, of the independent external decision-maker under this Act or any other Act of Parliament.

37.77 An independent external decision-maker may, in accordance with regulations made under paragraph 96(g.1), publish or otherwise disseminate information, other than personal information, relating to any determination made by the independent external decision-maker.

37.8 Thirty days after each of the Commissioner's determinations under section 37.4 that an inmate should remain in a structured intervention unit, an independent external decision-maker shall, in accordance with regulations made under paragraph 96(g.1), determine whether the inmate should remain in the unit.

37.81 If a committee established under subsection 37.31(3) determines that an inmate should remain in a structured intervention unit or determines that an inmate's conditions of confinement in the structured intervention unit should not be altered in accordance with a recommendation of a registered health care professional under section 37.2, an independent external decision-maker shall, as soon as practicable, in accordance with regulations made under paragraph 96(g.1), determine whether the inmate should remain in the unit or whether the inmate's conditions of confinement in the unit should be altered.

37.82 (1) The independent external decision-maker may determine under sections 37.8 and 37.81 that an inmate should remain in a structured intervention unit only if the independent external decision-maker believes on reasonable grounds that allowing the inmate's reintegration into the mainstream inmate population

(a) would jeopardize the safety of the inmate or any other person or the security of the penitentiary; or

(b) would interfere with an investigation that could lead to a criminal charge or a charge under subsection 41(2) of a serious disciplinary offence.

(2) In making the determination, the independent external decision-maker shall take into account

(a) the inmate's correctional plan;

(b) the appropriateness of the inmate's confinement in the penitentiary;

(c) the appropriateness of the inmate's security classification; and

(d) any other consideration that he or she considers relevant.

37.83 (1) If, for five consecutive days or for a total of 15 days during any 30-day period, an inmate confined in a structured intervention unit has not spent a minimum of four hours a day outside the inmate's cell or has not interacted, for a minimum of two hours a day, with others, an independent external decision-maker shall, as soon as practicable, determine whether the Service has taken all reasonable steps to provide the inmate with the opportunities referred to in subsection 36(1) and to encourage the inmate to avail themselves of those opportunities.

(2) If the independent external decision-maker determines that the Service has not taken all reasonable steps, he or she may make any recommendation to the Service that he or she considers appropriate to remedy the situation.

(3) If the Service, within the period of seven days commencing on the day on which it receives recommendations, fails to satisfy the independent external decision-maker that it has taken all reasonable steps to provide the inmate with the opportunities referred to in subsection 36(1), the independent external decision-maker shall direct the Service to remove the inmate from the structured intervention unit and provide a notice of the direction to the Correctional Investigator as defined in Part III.

37.9 An independent external decision-maker may, in the prescribed circumstances, make a prescribed determination or review in the prescribed manner.

37.91 (1) The transfer of an inmate to a structured intervention unit must be completed not later than five working days after the day on which the authorization for the transfer is given. Until the transfer is completed, the Service may impose restrictions on the inmate's movement and sections 33, 35 to 37.4 and 37.81 to 37.83 apply with any necessary modifications in respect of the inmate as though the inmate were in a structured intervention unit. However, the opportunity referred to in paragraph 36(1)(b) is to be provided only if the circumstances permit.

● (1530)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 18

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 11.

Motion No. 19

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 14.

Motion No. 20

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 29.

Motion No. 21

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 31.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 22

That Bill C-83, in Clause 31, be amended by replacing lines 34 to 36 on page 17 with the following:

(g.1) respecting the powers, duties and functions of independent external decision-makers, including respecting the making of a determination as to whether the conditions of confinement of an inmate in a structured intervention unit should be altered or as to whether an inmate should remain in such a unit;

(2) Section 96 of the Act is amended by adding the following after paragraph (g.1):

(g.2) respecting the admission of inmates to and the

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 23

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 32.1.

Motion No. 24

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 33.

Motion No. 25

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 36.

Motion No. 26

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 39.

Motion No. 27

That Bill C-83 be amended by deleting Clause 40.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak at report stage of Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

Bill C-83 has several elements, and the first is to eliminate the use of administrative segregation in correctional institutions.

During the committee's study, we heard from witnesses from a number of organizations, including the correctional investigator of Canada, who was quite surprised that he was not consulted while Bill C-83 was being drafted. The correctional investigator of Canada told us that eliminating solitary confinement was one thing but that replacing it with a regime that imposes restrictions on retained rights and liberties with little regard for due process and administrative principles is inconsistent with the Corrections and Conditional Release Act as well as the charter. That is a pretty strong statement.

In his testimony, the correctional investigator also said that there had been very little detail provided by the Correctional Service of Canada or the government on how this is going to be implemented. Not for the first time, my colleagues were improvising.

Government Orders

Canadian penitentiaries use administrative segregation under two circumstances. The first is when a prisoner behaves in a way that poses a danger to the prison's general population. One example that I think all Canadians will be familiar with is that of Paul Bernardo. He was not sent into the regular system because he was still thought to be too dangerous. Since no rehabilitation was possible in his case, Mr. Bernardo spends most of his time in the segregation area.

There are also prisoners who request segregation. They want to be segregated for their own safety, and also to have some mental downtime. This reminds me of someone I met recently at Donnacona Institution. Mr. Dumas has been in prison for over 40 years, for various reasons. He always wants to be in segregation. He says he is just fine there and wants to stay.

Considering the amendments in Bill C-83, what will happen to Paul Bernardo? Will he be told that he now has four hours of freedom to meet up with his buddies and pontificate over a nice glass of water? I do not believe this can really apply in his case.

As for the inmate I met at Donnacona, when he tells us that he prefers to stay in segregation, we will have to tell him that it is not possible because segregation will be a thing of the past. That will be a serious problem for him.

This new approach will create structured intervention units. That is a nice term, but what does it actually mean?

We never really got any answers, because it is actually a grander name for the same thing. It is an area of the prison, a wing set aside for segregation, but it might have a room where people can sit around a table and talk, and perhaps another small room where they can meet with caseworkers. When we asked questions, the government did not have any answers. They are basically trying to make us believe that segregation cells are like what we see in the movies. We think of them as bare, windowless cells that are pitch black when the door is closed. That is how it was in the days of Alcatraz. That was a long time ago.

Segregation cells are exactly like regular cells. The difference is that they are in a different area of the prison. Prisoners in segregation are even entitled to TVs and many other things. Even the size of the cell is the same. They can see outside. There is no problem.

One of the major differences, I admit, is time. Currently, prisoners in segregation stay in their cells for 22 hours a day. That will change. They will now stay in their cells for 20 hours a day instead of 22. However, the concept of structured intervention units is a very philosophical one. I doubt that any amendments will be made in this regard. After all the discussions and checks that happened in committee, there is really nothing left to change, except the name.

• (1535)

At any rate, change costs money. Normally, when a bill that imposes new standards is introduced, the necessary funding needs to be earmarked. Once again, we have no information about funding. We know that more than \$400 million was sent to the Correctional Service of Canada last year, but we do not know how much will be allocated to the implementation of Bill C-83.

We do agree with the scanners. We do not always disagree. We think body scanners are very important. Right now, Ontario and

British Columbia have body scanners in their provincial penitentiaries. They are very effective, detecting more than 95% of what people entering the penitentiary may have on or inside their bodies. They are intrusive but necessary. Some people have very inventive ways of smuggling drugs and other things into prisons.

The irony is that prisoners are going to be provided with needles so that they can inject drugs. This is a program that is currently being rolled out in Canada's penitentiaries. The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers is totally opposed to this program, and other stakeholders have also said that it makes no sense. The argument is that it is a public health issue, and we understand that, but from a safety standpoint, it does not make sense. The union says that handing out needles to prisoners could be very dangerous for correctional officers and other prisoners.

I know that there is the idea of an exchange and all that, but let us not forget that prisoners have a lot of time to think and make plans. When I visited the Donnacona prison recently, I saw all sort of things going on, things people would not even imagine. People do not realize that prisoners have nothing to do but think. They will find ways to misuse the needles.

If we introduce body scanners, which would detect drugs coming into prisons and therefore greatly reduce drug use, there would be no need to supply inmates with needles. We need to be consistent. The Conservatives think the important thing is to stop drugs from entering prisons by using scanners as much as possible. We also cannot forget the drones that are used to get drugs into prisons. If prisoners no longer have drugs to inject, they will not need taxpayer-funded needles.

There was some talk of other health parameters, and we made some suggestions. I could read out our proposed amendments, which were based on conversations with representatives from the John Howard Society and the Elizabeth Fry Society. For example, we proposed that:

...correctional policies, programs and practices provide, regardless of gender, access to activities and to training for future employment but provide inmates who are soon to be released with priority access to the activities that prepare them for release, including counselling and help with mental health issues.

This amendment was rejected by our friends on the other side. Here is another one:

A staff member may recommend to a registered health care professional employed...by the Service that the professional assess the mental health of an inmate, if the inmate:

- (a) refuses to interact with others for a prescribed period;
- (b) exhibits a tendency to self-harm;
- (c) is showing signs of an adverse drug reaction;

In short, we thought our health-related amendments were quite relevant, but they were rejected.

Government Orders

In closing, we know that the B.C. Supreme Court and the Superior Court have ruled on administrative segregation, but Bill C-83 was introduced in response to those rulings, even though the government appealed the rulings. We are currently at report stage, and the House is being asked to force prisons to do things in a certain way that will have direct repercussions on the safety of prison guards and prisoners themselves. We think that is unacceptable.

• (1540)

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, as well as for his work at committee. While we did not necessarily agree on all aspects of the bill, we did work extremely well together on something that could have been quite divisive.

Let us be clear that there is nothing in the bill with respect to syringes and needles. However, there is a provision in the bill that deals with victims and their ability to receive transcripts of the parole hearings when they are unable to attend. I wonder if the hon. member could speak to this. If the Conservatives do not support the bill, do they not support the ability of victims to be able to avail themselves of this service?

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Just because I did not mention something does not mean I oppose it. I gave a summary of Bill C-83 and our concerns.

There is nothing in Bill C-83 about the needle exchange program. However, we believe that the prison needle exchange program administered by CSC that is currently being rolled out across Canada undercuts the use of body scanners to prevent drugs from entering prisons.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The improvisation he is talking about is real. We have seen many examples of it.

In all my time as an MP, this is the first time I have seen a bill get rejected by every witness except for departmental officials. That speaks volumes about how effective these measures are.

One of the main reasons the witnesses rejected this bill is that it does not go far enough to eliminate the scourge of solitary confinement in penitentiaries. Solitary confinement has an impact on inmates' mental health. Two courts, one in British Columbia and the other in Ontario, found that it violates the charter. There have also been high-profile cases of deaths, suicides, of people whose mental health suffered as a result of being placed in solitary confinement, both in prisons and in penitentiaries.

I have two questions for my colleague.

Does he subscribe to the social consensus that the use of solitary confinement must be reduced?

Does he agree that our prisons need to be given more resources to deal with serious mental health problems, in terms of both

rehabilitation and the safety of inmates, our communities, and guards working in prisons?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his two excellent questions.

My answer to the first question is no. As I said in my speech, I believe that administrative segregation is necessary. Can we change how it is done? Yes, possibly, but do we absolutely need to do so?

We are talking about safety and security. Criminals who must be placed in administrative segregation, like Paul Bernardo and many others, are often beyond redemption. The others need administrative segregation for their own mental health.

I do not think that eliminating administrative segregation is the right thing to do, especially in terms of safety and security.

As for prevention and additional resources, we obviously always need to add resources. This costs money, but the fact remains that we can always review how things are done and how health care professionals work with inmates. I have no objection to that.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand here today with a great deal of pride to speak for a second time in support of Bill C-83, which would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Bill C-83 would strengthen our federal corrections system, making the rehabilitation of offenders safer and more effective. Crucially, the bill would end the practice of administrative segregation and establish structured intervention units, or SIUs.

I am extremely proud to have had the opportunity to work on this legislation at committee stage and I commend the government for introducing this important piece of legislation.

This legislation will be transformative for our federal corrections system. My friend Stan Stapleton, the national president of the Union of Safety and Justice Employees, said when asked by the media about this bill, that

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

I could not agree more.

The new measures introduced in Bill C-83 will create safer institutions and safer communities. By creating SIUs as a new approach to replace administrative segregation, introducing provisions for spending more time outside the cell, empowering health professionals and providing enhanced programming to offenders in these units, we will better equip offenders for safe reintegration, reduce their likelihood for recidivism and ultimately make our communities safer.

Government Orders

I am incredibly proud of our work at the public safety committee on the bill. We listened to feedback from witnesses and experts and worked across party lines to bring back to the House a strengthened Bill C-83. We listened to testimony from a diverse range of stakeholders and took their feedback to heart.

In addition, every party that submitted amendments to the bill saw some of theirs accepted. I would like to highlight some of those changes now.

The most significant amendment is the one I have introduced today at report stage, which would provide independent oversight of the new structured intervention units. I will not ever forget hearing the Speaker read that amendment into the record today.

My amendment would create an independent external decision-maker who will monitor a number of factors for inmates in SIUs, including whether inmates avail themselves of the time out of their cells or if there is a disagreement with a health care provider's recommendation to transfer an inmate out of an SIU.

With this amendment, if an inmate does not receive the required minimum hours outside of the cell or the required minimum hours of human contact for five straight days or 15 days out of 30, the independent external decision-maker can investigate whether the Correctional Service has taken reasonable steps to provide opportunities for those hours, make recommendations to the Correctional Service to remedy the situation, and if the Correctional Service has not acted accordingly after seven days, the decision-maker can direct it to remove the inmate from the SIU and give notice to the Correctional Investigator.

In addition, the independent external decision-maker will also have the power to review cases and provide direction in the event that the senior Correctional Service health care committee disagrees with the recommendation of a health care provider to transfer an inmate out of an SIU or alter conditions of confinement.

Finally, the independent external decision-maker will conduct a review of each offender's case after 90 days spent in an SIU and every 60 days thereafter.

The creation of an external oversight mechanism was supported by the majority of witnesses we heard at committee. I am so pleased that we were able to respond to their input and move forward with this vital independent oversight mechanism.

I applaud the government for listening and agreeing to the amendment, which would provide more confidence in SIUs and how they will function.

In addition to this report stage amendment, the committee made other amendments to the bill. We heard from indigenous groups who called for changes to the definition of "indigenous organization" to ensure that it properly captured the diverse range of those working on these issues across Canada. While the parties had some variations as to how best to do this, with the assistance of departmental officials the committee was able to unanimously approve an amendment that calls for indigenous organizations to have predominantly indigenous leadership. We also heard about the need for the Correctional Service to seek advice from indigenous spiritual leaders or elders,

particularly in matters of mental health and behaviour. I was pleased that my amendment to that effect was adopted at committee.

● (1550)

The bill would also enshrine in law the principle that offender management decisions must involve the consideration of systemic and background factors related to indigenous offenders. However, our committee heard testimony that these reports can be misused in corrections to impact risk assessments. My amendment to ensure that these reports would not be misused was also adopted by the committee.

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands introduced several amendments that would return the threshold of "least restrictive" measures, while maintaining the protection of society, staff and offenders, to the corrections legislation, a provision that had been removed by the Harper Conservatives. I promised the hon. member that I would work with her on amendments to Bill C-83, and I was extremely happy that the committee was able to include her amendments in the legislation.

We supported the amendment of my NDP colleague, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, which specified that corrections must take note of any reasons given as to why inmates did not avail themselves of time out of their cells.

We heard from corrections officers that they did not always have the skills or training to deal with mental health issues, so an amendment by the Conservative Party that would explicitly allow staff to refer a matter to health care professionals was a welcome addition to the legislation.

Indigenous offenders are the fastest-growing prison population. However, the member for Whitby highlighted to me that black offenders are the second-highest prison population, and their unique needs must also be addressed.

In addition, during my visit to a number of corrections facilities in Edmonton, a year ago January, I had the opportunity to meet a trans inmate and learned about their experience navigating the corrections system. I was pleased to introduce an amendment that would expand the guiding principles of CSC to respect sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and ensure that the service would be responsive, in particular, to the special needs of visible minorities.

My colleague from Toronto—Danforth introduced an amendment that would further define meaningful contact so that it would not be limited to physical barriers, an amendment that would enhance record-keeping, and an important amendment that would strengthen the role of health care professionals. Finally, we amended the bill to include a five-year review by Parliament.

Government Orders

There are two areas that were beyond the scope of the legislation but that the committee wanted to highlight for corrections. One is the fact that there are only 10 women in all of Canada currently in segregation, while there are 340 men. Therefore, we have asked Corrections Canada to review a proposal for a pilot program in women's institutes. We also used this opportunity to draw attention to the challenge offenders face when placements or transfers mean that they are located long distances from critical support systems.

We heard from many witnesses that significant investments in corrections would be required if SIUs were to work. The entire concept rests on the premise that there are adequate staff to ensure that offenders receive time outside their cells and the health care services and programming they need. With the \$448-million investment in the fall economic statement to support this new approach, we have both the legislative framework and the financial means to transform how corrections functions.

This is a case of the parliamentary process working at its very best. We had government legislation that was transformative in its approach, witnesses who passionately shared their concerns and suggestions, committee members who worked diligently as a team, a minister who listened and responded, and a Prime Minister and government that were not afraid to let committees do the good work they are meant to in this place and amend the bill.

I also feel incredibly privileged, as the member for Oakville North—Burlington, to be able to introduce a major amendment to the bill, here at report stage, that would enshrine independent oversight in Bill C-83.

I know there are those who are skeptical about whether this system will work. However, I believe in my heart that under the leadership of our Minister of Public Safety and the new head of corrections, Anne Kelly, along with the fine men and women working in corrections, we will see transformative change in our correctional system.

I want to finish by thanking all the witnesses who appeared before committee; my fellow committee members; our chair, clerk and analysts; our staff, and in particular, Hilary Lawson, from my office; the Minister of Public Safety and his staff, in particular, Michael Milech; and everyone else involved who worked tirelessly on this legislation.

I urge all members of this House to support Bill C-83.

• (1555)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the public safety committee, I was quite surprised by the number of problems we had with this bill initially. Witnesses appearing at committee regarding the bill said that they had not been consulted. Even the correctional investigator of Canada told the public safety committee that all the consultations seemed to have been done internally. To his knowledge, there had been no consultation with external stakeholders. He said, "I think that's why you end up with something that is perhaps not fully thought out." If members were to look at all the amendments put forward, they would understand what he said.

For the Liberal Party, which purported to put consultation on a pedestal, this seems very strange. The Liberals did not consult with

the unions, the victims, the prisoners or the prisoner advocates. Could the member opposite tell me exactly who they consulted?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, we received comments from many stakeholders regarding the proposed legislation we have before us today. I know that not all stakeholders are happy with the bill. I recognize that they are skeptical about whether it will work. However, the bill is a testament to how extremely hard the committee worked to listen to the witnesses who came before it to alter the bill, where needed, to make it better.

As I said, with the investments we have made, I am confident that once corrections starts working on the bill, we are going to see transformative change in how these units are used and in how the rehabilitation of offenders within our prison system takes place.

• (1600)

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would say that our committee indeed works well together. I have a lot of respect for the member opposite, and I think we get a lot of good things done.

That being said, unfortunately, I have issues with the legislation before us, not least of which is that members on the other side continue to talk about ending the practice of solitary confinement, or administrative segregation, to use the legal jargon. The concern the NDP has is that we are going to continue creating these Band-Aid solutions to an issue that is obviously important enough that two courts have ruled that the abuses we see in the current system infringe on Canadians' constitutional rights.

Let us look at the amendments that were proposed. As one example, the member referred to some of the definitions used with respect to indigenous communities. That is interesting, because she referred to working with departmental officials. I proposed an amendment regarding a definition crafted in collaboration with the witnesses we heard, not least of which was the Native Women's Association.

I have a hard time understanding why, after talking about the importance of consultation so many times in the House, we have a bill that was panned by the witnesses. Now we have one amendment at report stage that is 2,000 words long. Does this not demonstrate that we have a patchwork solution for a practice that has been so abused that two courts in the country have found it to be unconstitutional?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his passion on this issue.

I too met with the Native Women's Association. If I recall the amendment correctly, there were words in the amendment proposed by the Native Women's Association that do not actually exist in current legislation. It would have caused problems in interpretation. If I remember correctly, the word was "community", although I could be wrong. That is why departmental officials were asked to come up with wording that would reflect what is currently in legislation so that there would be no conflict.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak at report stage of Bill C-83.

While we were studying this bill in committee, I saw something that I have rarely seen, if ever, since I became an MP.

All of the witnesses spoke out against the bill to varying degrees, with the exception of departmental officials, of course. This is very worrisome. Context is very important with Bill C-83. This bill is a response to two legal rulings, one from the Supreme Court of British Columbia and another from an Ontario court. Both courts noted cases of abuse in the use of segregation, and they declared it unconstitutional. In response, the government appealed the decision and then introduced Bill C-56 three years ago in 2016, if memory serves. Now, it has introduced Bill C-83, which is completely different.

[English]

A question needs to be posed before we even get into the substance of the bill and the amendments. Why is the government, on the one hand, appealing a decision of the B.C. Supreme Court, and on the other hand, presenting legislation that it claims will be a remedy for the court's findings of practices, and certain abuses of said practices, that are unconstitutional?

It is a little confusing and extremely concerning when we hear the government continue to say that it has eliminated what is called, in law, administrative segregation, but what most Canadians understand to be solitary confinement. To that end, I want to quote Senator Kim Pate, who has worked extensively on many issues related to justice and public safety, in particular issues relating to the situation in our penitentiaries. One quote stands out. She wrote, "Ottawa cannot declare that segregation has been eliminated, while failing to address the horrors associated with this practice and gutting what minimal restrictions courts have placed on its use."

•(1605)

[Translation]

The problem is that the new practice replacing segregation will eliminate a number of legal protections.

I will admit that several members from various parties sought to resolve the issue in committee.

The most striking example is that an amendment is usually about 2,000 words long. There was a lot of havoc in the House back in December. Several members raised a point of order because we did not have access to an acceptable French translation. The amendment was literally written moments before debate was scheduled to start. Not to mention that several witnesses in committee spoke out against the lack of consultation on the bill.

[English]

I want to come back to what Dr. Ivan Zinger, the correctional investigator, who is essentially the watchdog for the correctional system, said when speaking to the bill. Given that my time is limited, I will stick to the one quote that sums up the issue of improvisation. He said, "I think that's why you end up with something that is perhaps not fully thought out."

I apologize to Dr. Zinger for not using the full quote. As I said, my time is limited. When we have an expert such as Dr. Zinger saying that something is not fully thought out, that says a lot, unfortunately, about the lack of consultation and the kind of patchwork we are dealing with here.

These are report stage amendments the Liberal members are proposing, let us be clear, after the minister came to committee with the knowledge there would be the requirement of a royal recommendation and having clearly worked with specific members so that they could propose specific amendments to fix a bill that is so unfixable. We end up with a patchwork that in some cases would leave us looking at a period of up to 90 days, potentially, before a case of abusive use of solitary confinement would actually get properly reviewed.

[Translation]

When we consider the work that was done in committee and the statements made by several Liberal members, including the minister, we need to understand that this was already in the mandate letters of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of Justice when the government was sworn in. Regrettably, the objectives of the bill before us today have not been achieved.

I will give a few examples of the direction we would like to take. The hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington was right to mention the situation of women. Very few women are placed in segregation, but those who are placed in segregation are often far more vulnerable. Consider serious mental health issues, for example.

After hearing several witnesses in committee, I proposed an amendment eliminating the use of segregation in women's prisons. It was rejected.

Another example is the possibility of judicial review.

•(1610)

[English]

The opportunity for judicial review is one that is really important. It is something that goes back a number of years to a recommendation that was made by Justice Louise Arbour, after the situation that unfolded in the Kingston Penitentiary. She put it much more eloquently than I could when she explained that the abusive use of solitary confinement in Canada undermines our judicial system, because it comes to a point where administrators within the corrections system are playing a role in sentencing. When we get to a point where certain offenders are being treated in a certain way, and in a way that undermines their pathway to rehabilitation and any objectives the court might have set for them in sentencing, then we have come to a situation where the only remedy could be considering a judicial review.

Government Orders

I know others have proposed other tools, rather than just judicial review. I know in committee we heard that judicial review could undermine public safety. That is not so. To go back to the comment my Conservative colleague made that I did not have a chance to respond to, he talked about preventative segregation. That is fine. We understand that there can be a need for it in situations where riots ensue and where safety is in jeopardy, and that there should be an examination of the good use of preventative isolation.

However, that does not need to take place over a prolonged period of time. We are talking about a situation that could be resolved, arguably, in 24 hours. Those were some of the examples that were given to us by, among others, folks from the John Howard Society.

[*Translation*]

The last aspect I can think of, as I can see that my time is running out, concerns duration.

We have heard a lot about review and accountability mechanisms for prison administrators. Of course, there are the issues of appropriate mechanisms and accountability in the case of mental illness to avoid hindering rehabilitation and improving the mental health of prisoners in segregation.

That said, we missed a great opportunity given that Bill C-56—which was introduced by the same minister but never debated—was already firmly headed in the same direction. We missed the opportunity to enforce the standards established by the United Nations, the Nelson Mandela rules, which limit the duration of administrative segregation to 15 days. We missed the opportunity to directly address the greatest abuses of the system.

In conclusion, despite the good intentions behind the amendments, they are just attempts at fixing a bill that is so bad that it was unanimously condemned in committee. We cannot support this bill.

I hope that the government will seize this opportunity to go back to square one and to drop its appeals of two court decisions stating what we have known for far too long, which is that these abuses of segregation are unconstitutional.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the way for his intervention and his work on the justice committee.

He mentioned mental health when winding up his comments. Improving mental health in Canada is one of the most important goals we have as a government. Our efforts should not neglect the criminal justice system when it comes to mental health. The Union of Safety and Justice Employees has said it is very supportive of this legislation, provided new investments increase staffing levels. In fact, the fall economic statement included \$448 million over six years, of which \$300 million would go toward human resource and infrastructure updates. More importantly, \$150 million would go toward much-needed improvements in mental health care in the correctional system.

How will Bill C-83 improve the mental wellness and well-being of correctional officers and inmates within our criminal justice system?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, ultimately, that is the big issue we have here. We have raised this issue several times.

One of the reasons we see the abusive use of solitary confinement in our federal corrections system is the lack of resources. That is one of the things that came back repeatedly during the study of the bill, because we are looking at completely reformatting how our prison system operates but are bringing administrative segregation back under a different name. After repeated questioning, both the minister and the officials were unable to explain to us how much funding would be available or how all of this would be implemented. That is problematic as there is enough fine print in this legislation that, in the event there is a lack of resources to deal with offenders who have serious mental health issues, the only recourse would be to put them in solitary confinement.

The government is going to respond, through the amendments it has brought at report stage, by saying not to worry and that it is dealing with it because there is a review mechanism. However, the problem with that review mechanism is that we are looking at 30 days after an initial decision has been made; 30 days again, after which it goes to another committee; and another 30 days after that. Therefore, it is nowhere near respecting the United Nations' norms and the Mandela rules. Rather, it is going to deal with all of this bureaucracy that ultimately is undermining mental health outcomes and the rights of these individuals.

• (1615)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech and his work with us at committee.

Could the member tell us his concerns for the safety of correctional officers and other inmates because of the removal of disciplinary segregation and the introduction of a needle exchange program in many institutions?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I am also pleased to be able to work with him in committee.

That is exactly the problem. Correctional officers have to make do with the resources they are given. They say that they want to abide by higher standards when it comes to the mental health of inmates. If the government allocates more financial resources to help inmates with mental health issues, it would inevitably improve prison security.

As my colleague suggested, correctional officers have to improvise in order to follow the directives they are given because they do not have sufficient resources. When Jason Godin, the president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, appeared before the committee, he said that they would like to apply the new directives, but that it will be extremely problematic if they are unable to do so.

Government Orders

As my colleague said, there is a difference between short-term segregation for security reasons and long-term segregation because the resources are not available to deal with serious mental health problems. Many organizations working in the field raised that issue. Bill C-83 does nothing to address that issue.

We need to go back to square one because the government's bill is worse than a draft. It is unacceptable.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate at report stage of Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

This legislation strengthens the act in several ways, including by eliminating administrative segregation in favour of a new system designed to achieve two objectives: ensuring the safety of staff and inmates, and offering inmates the rehabilitation programs they need. It goes without saying that our communities are safer when rehabilitation is more successful.

[*English*]

First off, I would like to thank all of the witnesses who appeared before the public safety committee, as well as the members of the committee who engaged in thoughtful and productive analysis of the bill. In fact, there were amendments accepted from all parties. There were some amendments proposed by a member of one party, with a subamendment by a member of another party, that were ultimately supported by both. This is what it looks like when parliamentarians work across party lines, when ideas are seriously considered on their merits, regardless of what party they came from, and when the government listens to Canadians and welcomes constructive feedback.

The initial version of Bill C-83, introduced in October, was immediately a major step forward for the Canadian correctional system. The committee amendments made the bill even stronger and there are amendments that have now been introduced at report stage, especially the proposal to create an external oversight mechanism that will make it stronger still.

The main feature of the bill is the creation of structured intervention units. These SIUs will allow for the separation of inmates from the general population when that is necessary for security reasons. However, unlike the current system of segregation, SIUs will be designed and resourced to provide interventions including mental health care and inmates will get a minimum of four hours out of their cell daily, with at least two hours of meaningful human contact.

At committee, certain witnesses asked for greater clarity regarding when the hours out would be offered and what the nature of the meaningful contact would be. Thanks to amendments by the members for Montarville and Toronto—Danforth, the bill now specifies that the hours out must be offered between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m., and that the meaningful contact should, as a rule, be face to face.

There were also committee amendments related to oversight. In the original draft of the bill, the decision to place someone in an SIU would be reviewed by the warden after five days and after another 30 days, and by the commissioner every 30 days thereafter, for as long

as the person remained in the unit. The warden would also conduct a review if the inmate did not get their minimum hours out for five days in a row or 15 out of 30, and a health care provider could, at any time, recommend changes to the conditions of confinement or removal from the SIU.

That was already a solid internal review system but an amendment from the member for Toronto—Danforth strengthened the health care review process even further so that, in the event the warden disagrees with the health care provider's recommendations, the matter gets elevated to a senior committee within the correctional service.

The amendment that has been proposed by the member for Oakville North—Burlington would add external oversight in the form of independent external decision-makers. These individuals would examine cases where an inmate has, for one reason or another, not received their minimum hours out of the cell or minimum hours of meaningful contact for five straight days or 15 out of 30. They would also examine situations where the senior health care review committee disagrees with the recommendations of the health care provider and they would examine all SIU placements after 90 days and every 60 days thereafter.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

These independent external decision-makers will have real decision-making power, and not just the ability to make a recommendation. Both parties, the Correctional Service and the inmate, could apply to the Federal Court for judicial review.

The strength of this review system, which would include internal and external reviews, as well as the involvement of health care professionals, is unprecedented. I thank the hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington for her proposal. The government will be happy to support it.

[*English*]

One of the other points that was raised at committee was the question of whether the new SIUs would be appropriately resourced.

For instance, the head of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, Jason Godin, said that the bill was ambitious, but required significant new resources to implement safely and effectively.

Stan Stapleton, president of the Union of Safety and Justice Employees said that the bill was a step in the right direction, but new resources were needed to ensure its success.

We could not agree more. That is why the fall economic statement included \$448 million over the next six years to support the implementation of Bill C-83. That includes about \$300 million specifically for the SIUs as well as \$150 million to strengthen mental health care, both within SIUs and throughout the corrections system. That is on top of almost \$80 million in the last two budgets for mental health care in the corrections system.

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In other words, we are putting our money where our mouth is. This new approach will have the resources it needs to be successful.

I know I am nearing the end of my time and I cannot go into detail about all the aspects of the bill, from better support to victims at parole hearings to the creation of patient advocates to strengthened health care governance or even the consideration of systemic and background factors in decision-making involving indigenous inmates. I have not even been able to touch on all of the amendments made at committee or on all of the amendments proposed at report stage.

However, it is clear that this legislation, bolstered by a vigorous and constructive legislative process, would help achieve our objective of having a better corrections system, one that would provide employees with a safe work environment, that would provide victims of crime with information and support, that would hold offenders to account and that would offer the programs, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, skills training and other interventions necessary for safe and effective rehabilitation.

Our communities are better protected when people end their sentences prepared to lead safe, productive, law-abiding lives and the bill would help make that happen.

•(1625)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the comments I hear from the prison guards in the penitentiary in Prince Albert are about their lack of consultation in the process, their lack of ability to have input in how this is going to happen, how this is going to work.

There are many examples, and I will use one very simple example of the electronic screening of inmates. It sounds really good, but this penitentiary was built in the sixties. It does not have the electrical requirements to do this, yet no budget has been set aside for it to put in the appropriate electrical facilities.

How are they going to implement things like this, based on Bill C-83, when there is no budget, no more resources or anything else to help them do that?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his commitment to making improvements in this area, especially in corrections.

I attended a stakeholder meeting and I heard concerns about whether there would be enough resources to make the changes that were required in so many different prisons. The experts from the correctional services said that they would be implemented incrementally and that they were committed to ensuring that the individual facilities would have the resources they needed to implement this safely.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member down the way for bringing up the improvements that we are looking at in our correctional facilities. It is in contrast to previous governments wanting to build large jails and locking everybody up versus investing in the system and the people operating within our correctional services.

We are investing over \$300 million over six years on infrastructure and personnel improvements and \$150 million on

mental health care for inmates and the people working within the facilities.

Could the hon. member talk about the strategic purpose of investing in this way to improve our system versus building bigger jails and locking everybody up?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, we want effective rehabilitation. We want a system in which offenders are held to account for whatever their actions are, but are put into a system that will help them address any issues that may have led to their behaviour. Whether it is abject poverty, substance abuse or mental health issues, we want a system that helps them come out of the correctional system ready to play a role in society.

We believe we can reduce the reoffend rate by ensuring the inmates we are in charge of have the opportunity to create a better life so they do not feel they need to go back to the criminal world in order to survive. We want safer communities, and this is a major part of that.

•(1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hear the parliamentary secretary when she speaks to the importance of caring for those with mental health issues.

That is something I have come to understand through decades of work with troubled youth. That kind of support requires resources, however, and the witnesses that appeared before the committee clearly spoke of a lack of resources. To support these people with mental health problems, saying it is important is not enough. The necessary resources need to be there.

I would like to hear what she thinks about the resources the government is prepared to put in place to achieve the objectives she has set for us.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, in the fall economic update, it was \$448 million over the next six years. That includes \$300 million specifically for the SIUs, in addition to \$150 million to strengthen mental health care within the SIUs and the corrections system. That is almost \$80 million in the last two budgets for mental health care in the corrections system.

We know this needs to get done, and we are making the investments necessary.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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 South Okanagan—West Kootenay, The Environment; the hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain, Carbon Pricing; the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, Transportation.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here today to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

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A lot of people do not realize that on any given day in Canada we have roughly 40,000 plus prisoners in custody. They are in eight maximum-security facilities, 19 medium-security facilities, 15 minimum and 10 multidisciplinary type facilities. We have 18,000 Canadian government employees looking after these prisoners, of which 10,000 are on the front line. They are either correctional officers, parole officers or health care workers.

I want to personally thank them here today for the service they do in our correctional services from coast to coast to coast. I have a facility in my community, as does the gentleman beside me. We know the problems they go through on a day-to-day basis and the great service they give our country.

This was and is a bad bill. Even worse, this is ill-thought-out legislation. It is a lot worse than the cannabis bill. Simply, Bill C-83 was a knee-jerk reaction to two Supreme Court rulings in February of 2018, regarding the clarity on indefinite solitary confinement. Bill C-83 does not correct this; it just rewords it and disguises it in flowery words.

No longer is it called solitary confinement. It has been renamed “structural intervention unit”. It sounds nice. The heads of the institutions will be allowed to designate any area of a jail to be that. Why do we need that? Structural intervention units are needed for unmanageable prisoners and those who are dangerous to staff, inmates or themselves. Perhaps they are being held for an investigation. Perhaps it is an attempted murder within the facility and he or she has to be segregated. There is a need, and there are reasons why people are held in these types of lock-ups in these facilities.

A 19-year prisoner appeared before the public safety committee. He was pretty intimidating when he first came in there, but the man talked with a lot of sense. He was originally sentenced for 14 years, but he was so bad he got an additional five years, of which a lot was in solitary confinement. He said that they were a must, that we should not get rid of them. Many more witnesses came before the public safety committee, even the Minister of Public Safety.

Again, I am going to say this is a bad bill. Every group of witnesses or individuals who appeared said that it was a bad bill. These are not my words. It was the witnesses who said that, except for the minister and his ministerial staff who said that it was such a great bill. How many amendments were read by the Speaker today?

The Elizabeth Fry Society said it was a bad bill. It said that structural intervention units were not needed, that it failed to focus on the programs and that there was lack of oversight. It is concerned about section 81, due to the workings of indigenous governing bodies.

The John Howard Society calls it a bad bill. It wanted to know what was the difference between solitary confinement and structural intervention. It said there was no difference, that the bill changed the words, but it did little to change anything.

Those are their words, not mine.

Increasing two hours outside the prison cells to four hours does little to help the prisons. There is a lack of infrastructure, physical and human resources. The bill does not address the need.

I will go back to the 19-year prisoner. He admitted to being a bad boy. He spent a very long time in solitary confinement. He said that he needed to be there, as he was dangerous. He felt these units were needed to protect guards, prisoners and even people like himself. However, he stated that prisoners must be helped with programs, counselling, etc., and that this was not happening within the institution. What he really stressed was that there was no one looking after the prisoners once they were released. They are just dumped out into society. He said that continued help needed to be there to rehabilitate the prisoners.

● (1635)

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association says that it is a bad bill and it cannot support it. It said the bill lacks external oversight, lacks programs that are needed to assist prisoners to reform, and lacks sufficient resources and manpower for social and educational needs, health professionals, etc.

The Native Women's Association of Canada says it is a bad bill. The association was not consulted. It says the bill does not address traditions, protocol, or cultural practices, and does not clarify indigenous communities.

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers also says it is a bad bill, that it is not feasible and leaves prisoners and guards vulnerable. That is where my concern is, with prisoners and guards, especially the guards, being vulnerable.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says it is a bad bill. It says it is not a meaningful reform and should be repealed. It said there was no consultation, and we have heard that many times here.

Aboriginal Legal Services says it is a bad bill, and that there is a big gap between the rhetoric and reality.

When we were gathering evidence on some of the costs related to prisoners, the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, who is also on committee with me, was told by a witness that the cost of keeping a female prisoner in a structured living condition was \$533,000 a year. He was shocked. Then he was told that the cost for males in structured living conditions was between \$300,000 and \$600,000 a year.

When he heard that, he asked me for an aspirin. I did not have one; I just told him he would have to cope.

I am just about done. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said in the 2016-17 report that the cost of an average prisoner is \$314 a day or \$115,000 a year. If a prisoner is segregated, the average cost is \$463,000 plus per year. That is \$1,260 a day to keep a person in segregation.

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Bill C-83 will cost way more than the Liberals are talking about. When the member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner asked the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness what the cost would be to implement this bill, the minister replied that he had no idea. He said he had no clue, but we should trust the Liberals because they would work it out. He wanted us to just pass the bill as it was.

I have heard from a number of speakers opposite today that \$400-some million is being thrown at this program to make structural modifications at our prisons and to improve the health care facilities, but I have not heard anyone from across this great room say there was any money going to hire additional staff, or to improve staff resources or staff training. Nothing. There was nothing that came from the parliamentary secretary; nothing came from anybody.

We heard the Liberals were going to fix the buildings, but I have talked to a number of the prisons around Alberta, and they have not even been asked about what needs to be done. The guards and unions have not been spoken to.

We are supposed to trust the Liberals. I think they said they are putting \$448 million into this, but what about increasing staff? We know it is going to cost more to do it. We know it is going to cost more in manpower to operate these new units, especially if we are going to move them around to different spots in the prisons.

There is nothing in the Liberal plan or budget to account for that.

• (1640)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I used to be the health care critic in the province of Manitoba, and members will see the link here, it was a fairly significant budget. What happened was the government would often make a decision in terms of what direction a hospital facility would take. The hard numbers were not necessarily known.

One of the reasons those hard numbers may not always be known is that we have a great reliance on our civil servants. A lot of that is the shuffling around effect, where maybe one cost factor will decrease because of a change, yet another cost factor will increase because of that change. It is very difficult, at the best of times, to give the type of numbers the member across the way is proposing.

Generally speaking, and I emphasize that, it is an envelope of money that is assigned. Through that, there will be some changes. Ultimately it will be determined whether or not there is a need for an increase.

Would the member provide his thoughts about what I am saying, and apply the same basic principle for other divisions of government?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, it all boils down to consultation. Every witness other than the minister and his staff said there was no external consultation. We cannot be expected to know what it is going to cost to renovate the institution in my area unless we talk to people on the ground.

We can even look at this building. I do not know if it is the same on the other side of the House, but on this side there is a closet where

I can hang my coat. On either side of that closet, there are three feet in which I cannot put anything because I cannot get to it.

Consulting and working with people on the ground makes a big difference. I still have not heard anything mentioned by anyone on the other side about any money going for labour resources or training or education, which is what they are asking for. They are begging for that.

• (1645)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many cases of inmates who are placed into segregation are related to mental health. Do Conservatives believe that segregation is the way to treat these individuals instead of mental health programming that may help to address the root cause of their behaviour? Does he believe this despite the overwhelming evidence that segregation will likely cause further damage to the mental health of an inmate?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. Is segregation going to help them? No. We need to look at this medically. We need to look at training our staff members to understand what the inmates are going through. They need to know. To put an inmate into a locked cell and let the guy walk an eight-by-eleven foot cell all day long does not help his mentality. He needs to be taken to a medical facility, or we need to have fully trained medical people on site. We do not have that at the present time.

No, it will not help them. We need to address their concerns.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague hit on a few topics.

One thing I find very concerning is the safety aspect for the prison guards. The reality is that they were not properly consulted, and they have told me that over and over again.

There are lots of things in Bill C-83 that sound good on paper but would not be practical in practice.

Many examples were given about whether the guards feel they are more at risk now than before because of Bill C-83, and there are no resources to offset that risk.

The committee talked to different people, and I am just curious as to how extensive the consultations were. What was the guards' reaction to Bill C-83 when the member and the committee talked to them?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, based on my conversations with prison guards who work in my area and in other parts of Alberta, they were not consulted. They are frustrated, because they want to have the tools to provide a great service for this country and for the prisoners they are looking after.

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The guards are concerned about their own safety and about the safety of the prisoners. They are concerned about their health care, but they are not getting enough training. I talked to a young guard who said he was there two weeks and was put on the segregation unit because it was short-staffed. He said he was very uncomfortable, and I think he was right to be.

We need resources to help train these people if we are going to add a whole new set of burdens to the prison reform system.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to rise at the report stage of Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act. This bill has been extensively debated and scrutinized since its introduction. I have been watching with great interest as it proceeded through the House and the committee.

At the outset, I would like to thank all hon. colleagues, witnesses and members who shared their thoughts and offered constructive suggestions throughout the process, both in the chamber and at committee. As a legislator, the debate gave me and the House as a whole much to think about, and resulted in a stronger and more comprehensive bill.

Bill C-83 proposes the elimination of segregation and the creation of innovative new structured intervention units, or SIUs, for offenders who must be separated from their fellow inmates for safety and security reasons. SIUs would allow offenders who pose particularly difficult challenges to be separated from the mainstream inmate population when and if required. However, they would continue to receive the programming, intervention and health care that are essential to their rehabilitation.

Segregation is an immoral and ineffective practice. It does not deliver the results we are looking for in our correctional system, for our prisoners or for our correctional officers. As a member, I considered incorporating similar principles in my private member's legislation, Bill C-375, which would similarly legislate the nexus between mental health and our judicial system. However, as we saw with measures previously proposed in Bill C-56, the transformation of our penitentiaries is a profound undertaking that would require measures far beyond those made possible through private members' legislation.

Bill C-83 had a series of amendments adopted during its time in committee. In fact, every party that put forward amendments had at least one amendment ultimately adopted. Specifically, I will use my time to home in on amendments that strengthen the capacity of Bill C-83 to improve the mental well-being of prisoners. I will specifically address five areas that piqued my interest.

First, when Bill C-83 passed at second reading, it had, in principle, legislation that would guarantee inmates held within SIUs four hours outside of their cells. One of the proposed amendments to the bill specified that those hours be between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. Those are normal waking hours for most people. This responds to the concerns raised in committee that time out of cells could be offered, say, in the middle of the night, when inmates would be unlikely to avail themselves of them.

The CMHA has connected lack of daylight to dips in mood and depression. There is also research that shows maintaining a regular

sleep cycle, connected to the natural ebb and flow of the day, is important for maintaining mental health. This amendment would ensure that the four hours of time outside SIUs are not outside of the bounds of the natural day. It would prevent officials from providing these hours as an obligatory or dismissive exercise and ensure that they serve their intended purpose.

Second, human beings are built to seek out interaction with others, particularly in times of stress. Isolation can reduce cognition and even compromise the immune system. Extensive time in an unchanging environment can alter the way we process external stimuli. It can literally warp the way we experience the world around us. This is why Bill C-83 includes provisions that would guarantee inmates the opportunity for two hours of meaningful human contact each and every day.

Thanks to amendments put forward in the committee, this principle has been strengthened practically. By looking to ensure that this interaction is not hindered by physical barriers such as bars or security glass, the proposed amendment would ensure that those two hours are not just perfunctory but meaningful human contact.

• (1650)

Third, socializing with peers and participating in rehabilitative programming outside their cells would also go a long way toward improving the mental health and well-being of inmates in an SIU. It would put them on the right track to reintegrating into the mainstream inmate population. Beyond that, it would help their chances of successfully reintegrating into society as law-abiding members of society at the end of their sentences.

Fourth, the proposed reforms in Bill C-83 would also strengthen health care, including mental health services, in corrections in several ways. It would mandate the Correctional Service to support the autonomy and clinical independence of health care professionals working within a correctional facility. As well, it would allow for the use of patient advocates, as was recommended by the inquiry into the death of Ashley Smith.

Within SIUs, inmates would receive daily visits from health care professionals, who could recommend at any time that an inmate's conditions of confinement be altered or that they be transferred out of the SIU. These recommendations could stem from a professional mental health assessment. In turn, these recommendations could preempt mental health crises or imminent self-harm.

Fifth, an amendment adopted at committee would strengthen this aspect of the bill by requiring an additional review at a more senior level external to the institution if the warden does not accept medical recommendations.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these measures. Mental health is an extremely serious problem in our prisons. Some 70% of male offenders have a mental health issue. At 80%, the percentage is even higher for women offenders. The ministers of public safety and justice have been mandated to address gaps in services to people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system. The proposed reforms in Bill C-83 support that commitment.

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They also build on recent investments in this area. The last two budgets included nearly \$80 million for mental health care in corrections, and more recently, in the fall economic statement the Minister of Finance announced substantial funding of \$448 million for corrections. This funding will help support the transformational changes to the correctional system proposed in this bill, and it will allow for comprehensive improvements to mental health care in corrections within SIUs and across the board.

It also directly addresses calls for increased resources made at committee by Jason Godin, the national president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, and by Stanley Stapleton, the national president of the Union of Safety and Justice Employees.

In other words, should this bill pass into law, the appropriate resources will be in place to ensure it successfully fulfills its objectives. I know this was a concern raised at committee, and it was also raised during this debate. I am reassured there is already an effort on behalf of the government to allocate appropriate resources.

In conclusion, the number one objective of this bill is safety. Correctional staff and other inmates need to be protected from certain offenders who cannot be safely managed in the mainstream population. By ensuring inmates separated from the mainstream population get the interventions they need to increase their chances of successful rehabilitation, the bill would lead to greater safety inside correctional institutions, and greater safety in our communities when those inmates are eventually released.

We started this process with a very good bill. What we have before us today is an even stronger version of the legislation, bolstered by the productive contributions of witnesses at committee and the serious work of committee members.

In closing, I fully support Bill C-83 and I urge all hon. members to do the same thing.

• (1655)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the four hours the prisoners now get out of solitary confinement, when they have two hours to mingle with other prisoners. When I toured the Prince Albert penitentiary, one of the concerns the guards had was about all the different gangs inside that prison and how they have to manage all these different populations in order to keep everybody safe. If they do not have the resources to manage this scenario, two different gang members could possibly be out together, beat up on each other and force the guards to be in an unsafe situation.

This is another example of something that sounds good on paper and needs to be thought about, but there have been no resources given to the guards to prevent a situation like this from erupting. What does he suggest the guards do to prevent this type of violence from happening? It is going to happen unless there are more solutions given to the guards to prevent it.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Speaker, officers are there to maintain peace and maintain the safety of the inmates. This bill would provide for four hours of activities outside of the cell. Out of that time, two hours of meaningful interaction are designed to make sure that a relationship is maintained not only with inmates' family members, but also with individuals who can help in the rehabilitation process.

We can hypothesize that four hours or two hours is going to be used to connect with other gang members, but that is not the intention. That is why we have the officers there. Also, that is why we have invested \$448 million, out of which \$200 million is to support the training and the services that are needed to deal with the situation.

• (1700)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill itself, Bill C-83, will effectively make some tweaks to existing legislation, one of which is to rebrand solitary confinement as administrative segregation in what are called "structured integration units". The B.C. Supreme Court and the Ontario Superior Court have ruled that administrative segregation is unconstitutional. This bill in and of itself does not fix that issue. In fact, as the member identified, one area of concern that he has centres around mental health.

The bill still allows for indefinite isolation and segregation of up to 20 hours instead of the current 22 to 23 hours. This segregation can cause permanent mental health damage to inmates, who need to be integrated into society. I would like to have the member comment with respect to the mental health aspect of this action being taken, as is allowed under this bill.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her passion about mental health. I share the same passion, as I am sure she is aware.

The way I look at it is that without this bill and this amendment, we have not started on the journey of making sure that we make meaningful impact. It may not be the best and it might not be the be-all and end-all, but it is the right step in the right direction. The right step is that it would provide inmates with four hours outside of their cells. During those hours there will be interaction with a mental health professional, who can determine if the inmate needs to be maintained in the SIU or if the method of rehabilitation needs to be altered or if the inmate should be removed from the SIU.

On that note, I would say that we are taking the first step. There is lot of work to be done, but this is the right first step. As with any other legislation, this is a journey. Hopefully, in five years we are going to have the opportunity to review it and make it much stronger.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-83, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and another act.

Before I begin my remarks on Bill C-83, I would just like to comment on what I have been hearing since this debate began.

We live in a world where we appear to want to rely on the goodwill of others. We think that everything will be fine, that nothing bad will happen and that everything will go smoothly just because we amend a bill. We think inmates and guards will magically change their behaviour.

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Unfortunately, that is not how it works in real life. There is a group of people we have not talked about enough since this report stage debate began. I am referring to correctional officers. They are the ones responsible for security in prisons, for the safety of inmates and colleagues, and for the inmates' well-being. We do not talk about them enough.

For some time now, I have had the pleasure of being the official opposition critic for agriculture and agri-food. This reminds me of some people's perception of farmers. Farmers take excellent care of their livestock, but many people think they do not care about the animals' health at all. People think farmers do not care about making sure their livestock are treated properly. The truth is that farmers care deeply about the well-being and safety of their livestock.

I think that is also what correctional officers want. They have a role to play with regard to inmates. They are there to guard individuals who are in prison and keep them away from the community. Many people think guards are only there to rap inmates' knuckles and maintain law and order. Since I know a few correctional officers, I know that they care about taking care of the inmates and ensuring their well-being. They also care about their rehabilitation. I think that is important to mention, before getting into the substance of Bill C-83.

Why am I talking about correctional officers? Because, from everything I have seen and everything I have read about Bill C-83, correctional officers have unfortunately not been consulted about the impact the bill will have on their daily reality.

No correctional officer would wilfully and maliciously deprive a prisoner of his or her rights. There are rules to follow. Some situations require correctional officers to take action. Unfortunately, the government missed a good opportunity to listen to them, to consult them and to ensure that the bill would enable them to act and do their job to the best of their ability.

Bill C-83 proposes to eliminate administrative segregation in correctional institutions and replace it with structured intervention units. It also proposes the use of body scanners for inmates. It proposes to establish parameters for access to health care. It also proposes to formalize exceptions for indigenous offenders, women and offenders with diagnosed mental health disorders.

The legislation also applies to transfers and allows the commissioner to assign a security classification to each penitentiary or to any area in a penitentiary. We will have an opportunity to come back to that.

Unfortunately, Bill C-83 does not address the safety of inmates and correctional officers as a priority. As I mentioned, all those who participated in the study of the bill criticized the lack of consultation. The only people who were consulted were the people around the minister and the minister himself. Members of civil society working for inmates' rights and the inmates themselves have found that the bill does not at all meet its objectives.

• (1705)

It is obvious that the Liberals did not do their homework for Bill C-83. Before beginning report stage discussions, several motions were moved, including Motion No. 17.

The motion contains seven pages of amendments to the bill. The reality is that the Liberals realized that they had not done a good job. One does not move a seven-page motion if the work is done properly. They moved this motion because they realized that they had not consulted and listened to other people. They made mistakes because they improvised. That is what happened. Once again, the government improvised because two rulings were handed down.

Instead of doing things properly, the government chose to improvise, move quickly, not consult anyone, bulldoze ahead and then clean up the mess. The main problem with this bill is that it will not in any way solve the problems we sought to address. It is not a coincidence that most people disagree with the bill and that everyone opposes it.

I will quote some of the comments heard in committee. The president of the Union of Canadian Correctional Workers, Mr. Godin, said that this bill is probably dangerous for others because “[s]ometimes the safety and security take precedence over mental health treatment because of the safety and security of other inmates.”

That means that we wanted to give priority to something without considering the reality of the prison environment.

Mr. Godin also said:

...by eliminating segregation and replacing it with structured intervention units, CSC will further struggle to achieve its mandate of exercising safe, secure and humane control over its inmate populations. We are concerned about policy revisions that appear to be reducing the ability to isolate an inmate, either for their safety or for that of staff...

Sometimes using segregation is an entirely legitimate way to protect staff and the other inmates. That is what Mr. Godin said. Unfortunately, this bill does not take that into account.

The correctional investigator of Canada, Ivan Zinger, said that:

Eliminating solitary confinement is one thing, but replacing it with a regime that imposes restrictions on retained rights and liberties with little regard for due process and administrative principles is inconsistent with the Corrections and Conditional Release Act as well as the charter.

As you can see, people on both sides disagree.

Today, at the last minute, the government tried to somehow save the day. Why did it not do what had to be done, namely start all over, consult and come back with a good bill that would be acceptable to stakeholders?

The government must amend the bill in order to meet expectations. In other words, it must improve security, ensure respect for the rights of inmates and support the rehabilitation of inmates when possible. If the bill's provisions support these objectives, the Canadian prison system will be cited as an example instead of being challenged in the courts again.

This government's main problem is its failure to consult. The Liberals consult one another and talk at cabinet meetings behind closed doors. Afterwards they cannot justify why they made these decisions because they cannot talk about what was discussed in cabinet. This means that we cannot get the actual rationale for the changes even though Canadians have the right to be given all the answers on this issue.

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In closing, I would like to thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for his excellent work on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to say that we have had a number of Conservative members stand up and imply something that is just not true. In the fall economic statement, it was made very clear that there are additional resources, into the millions of dollars, being put into the system for new hires. That would include correctional officers. It would include health care professionals.

Would the member not at the very least recognize the reality that monies have in fact been allocated to deal with some of the issues that the Conservatives have been raising this afternoon?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I heard several of my colleagues talk about funding. Unfortunately, the announcements that were made said nothing about funding for Bill C-83.

What is unfortunate is that I did not even have time to talk about the allocation of resources in my speech. I did not even talk about the budget. I only talked about the lack of consultation and the Liberal government's failure to listen. That is what is missing. It is clear that my colleague did not bother to listen to me, because I did not talk about that at all.

When people have something to say, we should listen to them and ask them questions about the content of their speech, not about other subjects that were addressed by others.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises a very valid point about the lack of consultation, which we have heard from a number of stakeholders who raised concerns with respect to the bill and why they do not support it.

That was also indicative of the number of amendments that the Speaker read at the beginning of this debate, where he spent at least half an hour talking about them. I do not think, as a new member since 2015, that I have gone through a bill where the Speaker spent half an hour outlining the amendments to the bill we were debating. That is also indicative of the lack of foresight from the government side and the lack of homework with respect to the bill.

Having said that, one of the issues the government did not address, which is also central with respect to the bill, is the constitutionality of solitary confinement. The B.C. Supreme Court and the Ontario Superior Court have ruled that it is unconstitutional to have this kind of administrative segregation take place. Would the member agree with the court decision?

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles mentioned, I think that solitary confinement is sometimes necessary. However, we also have to

ensure security and safety as well as the mental and physical health of inmates and correctional officers.

The outcome would likely have been different, had the government properly consulted legal experts, correctional officers and all of the other stakeholders it should have consulted before drafting this bill.

I think I agree with my colleague. I am convinced that this bill will end up before the courts because, at first glance, it clearly does not respond to the British Columbia and Ontario court decisions. I am convinced that the House will have to re-examine this bill in a future Parliament because the courts will not be satisfied with the recommendations and changes made in Bill C-83.

[English]

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard from prison guards who work at the Grande Cache Institution in my area about the lack of training and the need for more training, especially in health care and dealing with people with mental health situations. I wonder if the member would like to comment on that need.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, that is a very big question, a tough one to answer in 30 seconds.

If we want things to go smoothly in prisons and we want to provide the best services and the best security to inmates and correctional officers, then we obviously need to provide those officers with adequate training.

Problems change over time. We now have mental health problems we did not have 30 years ago. If we want these prison reforms to make things better for inmates and correctional officers, the only way to ensure that is to provide the necessary training, education, staff and resources.

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all my colleagues for being here this Thursday evening to discuss this very serious bill and the implications it will have on employees in the penitentiary system across Canada.

When the bill came about I reached out to the correctional workers in my riding and had a chance to actually tour the facility with them. I had a chance to see first-hand what they deal with. These are some of the most courageous people I know. With their mental ruggedness and physical stamina, their work is something I definitely could not do. I really appreciate the work they do, and how they are there to protect Canadians and deal with some of the worst of the worst in our society.

One of the things they brought to my attention right off the bat was the lack of consultation. They were not involved in the process, in the creation of what the requirements were to improve the facilities. We have to understand that these facilities are very old. They have been around for generations, built in the 1960s and 1970s. They have processes in place based on experience and knowing what they are dealing with.

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I will give a good example of that. When I first started the tour in the facility they took me into one of the rooms and gave me an overview briefing. They talked about the different types of gangs and groups of criminals they have within their facility. They talked about how they worked with the RCMP and special crimes units to identify these people so that when these people are in the facility they know exactly where they are and who they are mingling with at all times. They know one group cannot mix with the other group. They also know that group three cannot mix with group four, but maybe with group two on certain days. They are aware of not only what is happening within the penitentiary among these different groups, but of what is going on outside the penitentiary with these different groups, which has implications for how they treat them within the facility.

One of the things that came to light in Bill C-83 was the change to get rid of voluntary solitary confinement. One of the safety issues they brought up right away was that there were some prisoners in their facility who have fallen out with their gang who really want this and need this. However, not having the ability to get it now will put them in a predicament. What they are concerned about, and I think it is a very real concern, is that they are still going to get it. They will just assault an officer or a guard to get it, because they know they need to do it for their own safety.

By taking this away, it sounds good on paper, but in practice it will create a situation that is even more unsafe for our officers and guards. There has to be some consultation when doing this so that we can see things like this brought to light. Then we can think of a different way to treat it and handle it.

However, the Liberal government does not like to consult. No matter what the Liberals said when they were elected, they do not do it, especially when the consultation does not give them the answer they want. They want to take the suggestions and solutions from Ottawa and shove them down on people who actually have to work with them. It is those people who will pay for these guys' mistakes. They will pay through financial costs, physical harm and their safety. That is not right.

That is why I am so disappointed in the government for not actually recognizing and understanding that, taking a step back and asking what it has to do to make sure it does it right. The Liberals want to ram it through because they know best: "We are Liberals. We know best." With 30 years' experience what does one know? They have been elected for two years. "We know best" is the Liberal mindset, and it is wrong and they need to change it.

One of the other things that cropped up on the tour was that they are going to put body scanners in the facilities, which were built in the 1960s and 1970s. That sounds great. They are happy to have that. However, the first problem is where to put them. These are cement structures. They have solid walls. They cannot just take a sledgehammer and knock out a wall and away we go. This is a major construction problem.

The second problem is that they do not have the power requirements. These are older facilities. They do not have the wiring or infrastructure to handle something as simple as a body scanner. We look at that and say that obviously the government is going to put money aside to do that. However, there is nothing in the budget

for that, so how are they going to do that? We do not know. There has been no game plan.

We heard the members across the aisle saying, "Just trust us". We have heard that once too often from the government. Usually that means it does not know, it is not sure, it will do it anyway and Canadian taxpayers will pick up the bill no matter what it costs. If the Liberals would have just taken a step back and asked, "What do you guys think would be the best way to implement this?", they probably would have gotten a reasonable, logical solution that would have had the same results, saved the taxpayers a lot of money and made it safer for our guards.

• (1720)

Here is one example of what the Liberals have not done. They talk about solitary confinement and the four hours these prisoners are going to be allowed outside the facilities mingling with each other. These facilities were not made that way. They were not made to handle that situation. If I go back to my original comments about how careful planning is done as to who is out in the yard mingling with who, for the safety of the guards and the prisoners, that is all structured and very carefully managed.

However, the Liberals are now regulating the fact that they have to break those groups up. All of a sudden, they could have the members of two gangs out in the yard together, who look at each other and just beat the crap out of each other. What would also happen is that two or three guards would intercept that, try to break it up and get hurt in the process. It is crazy. The lack of practicality from the current government is scary, yet it is going to ram the bill through because they are Liberals and they know best.

It is really disheartening when one goes to these facilities. I would never want to be in one. We joked about a cell for the current Prime Minister of Canada, because that is where he is going to end up after the SNC-Lavalin stuff. Nobody ever wants to be there, that is for sure, and the people who are there are bad people.

The other thing I have to mention is the fact that these guards go to work every day and a lot of them have not been paid or have not received their bonuses or increases in pay when changing shifts. They do not even get the shift differential when they go from one part of the penitentiary to the other. Instead of the Liberals looking for solutions and trying to find a way to fix that for these guards, they put their heads in the sand and just say, "Take it." It is amazing. The disrespect they have for our public employees is phenomenal. It shows up in this piece of legislation, in the Phoenix pay system and in so many other ways the government has treated our employees and Canadian citizens. It has to change.

The good news is that on October 20 it will change. Then the guards will understand that there will be a Conservative government in power that will have their backs.

Private Members' Business

• (1725)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not know where to start with a speech like that. I thank the hon. member for providing some fiction and entertainment this afternoon. However, when we look at what the previous government did between 2012 and 2015, it cut \$300 million from Correctional Service Canada. Now he is saying our prisons are in terrible shape. Why would that be? How could that happen when we are jamming two inmates into a cell designed for one, cutting 30% from the pay of inmates while canteen costs are skyrocketing, introducing a tough-on-crime agenda, mandatory minimum sentences, and flooding 1,500 prisoners into cells that were not designed for 1,500 cellmates?

Could the hon. member at least acknowledge that the investments we are making today, the \$448 million going into our correctional facilities, might help undo some of the disastrous cuts from the previous government?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Speaker, in reality, Bill C-83 is going to generate more costs than the \$448 million will even touch. The Liberals know that but are going to do it anyway. They do not care. They know best. They are from Ottawa. They can tell everybody else in Canada what to do. We see it in their attitude and the arrogance in their faces.

The reality is that the Liberals have to make some structural changes to buildings that were built in the 1960s and 1970s. Those buildings will not allow them to safely do what they want to do under Bill C-83. What will happen? The safety of the guards will come into play because they will be put into a facility that was not created to do what the Liberals want it to do. Who will pay? The guards will pay, not these members, and that is not right.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member has a prison facility in his area. He mentioned during his speech that he has toured the facility, has seen the good and bad parts of it and has talked to the guards and the prisoners, just as I did with the institution in Grande Cache. That institution is quite a beautiful one. It is located on top of a mountain. It has about 350 employees and 300 prisoners.

However, these are older facilities and I do not believe the government of the day has taken into consideration that some of the changes that will be required regarding health care, scanning facilities and the like just cannot be done with some of the older buildings. It was tried with that one and it required a lot of modification. I do not believe the Liberals have put enough money into the budget. Does the member care to provide his thoughts on that?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his hard work and practicality at committee, which was ignored as it went through the committee, obviously.

Again, it comes back to the reality here. These are older facilities that are designed based on processes that have been developed over years and years of experience of guards. That is way they work. If we want to change this, that is fine, but do the proper consultations, do the proper analysis, actually talk to the guards, talk to those who are impacted and some of the prisoners.

We have to remember that some of the prisoners are the worst of the worst, but some are in there for things like drunk driving or petty

theft, and hopefully they will be rehabilitated and will leave the facilities.

The way the Liberals are handling this is putting the guards at risk, and that is not right. The guards are being ignored. The Liberals have not talked to them. That is just wrong. Safety is at stake. I do not understand that.

The government came into power saying that it was going to consult. It only consults when people say what it wants to hear. In this situation, people have not said what the government wants to hear so it is just ramming it through anyways. That is really unfortunate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, where was the compassion for correctional officers when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, when the former Conservative government did absolutely nothing to reform and try to improve the quality of living, both for the security and other professionals working in our fine institutions?

• (1730)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Speaker, that is rich, coming from the government that has totally ignored them. It is basically saying that it knows best.

The reality is that the Liberals have ignored those people. They are doing a worse job and are putting our guards in harm's way. Guards were never in harm's way under the Harper government, but they are now. The guards are speaking out and they are upset. The Liberals are not listening, and that is unfortunate. The Liberals should be listening.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC) moved that Bill C-406, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (foreign contributions), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, Canadian citizens hold the basic fundamental expectation that when they vote, that when they cast their ballot to determine their local representative, the composition of the House of Commons and the political direction of our country, their voice will matter. Unfortunately, in previous general elections the voice of every Canadian citizen has been drowned out, diminished and undermined by foreign entities that would unduly influence our legitimate and democratic electoral process.

Foreign interference has been widely reported in elections in numerous other democratic countries, and Canada is by no means different. Our electoral process is just as vulnerable to the sort of undue foreign influence we have seen take place in the United States, in Britain and elsewhere.

Private Members' Business

This occurs in our country most frequently through the wilful contravention of the Canada Elections Act, whereby registered third parties receive contributions from foreign entities, which are subsequently used to fund various political activities, including for election advertising purposes.

The need to prohibit such foreign influence is clear. Canada's former chief elector officer from 1990 to 2007, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, stated unequivocally:

We simply cannot allow any kind of money that is not Canadian to find its way into the Canadian electoral system...A general election is a national event, it's not an international event and foreign interests have no place and for them to have found a back door like this, that is not acceptable to Canadians.

I think the overwhelming majority of Canadians care about foreign money playing a role in our elections, regardless of what party they favour. This issue is about the overall fairness of our elections, about keeping a level playing field.

Last year, the former Canadian Security Intelligence Service director and national security adviser, Richard Fadden, confirmed that it was very likely that foreign countries had attempted to influence the 2015 general election.

Looking ahead, a report by the Communications Security Establishment found that foreign entities were well positioned to influence the next federal election and that Canada would not be immune from it.

Indeed, prior to and during the last federal election, numerous registered third-party organizations in Canada received significant contributions from foreign entities to achieve certain political objectives.

For instance, the Tides Foundation, which is based in the United States, donated more than \$1.5 million to numerous different third-party organizations in Canada. Leadnow, one such third-party organization, which was one of the most active third parties in the last election itself, attributes more than 17% of its funding from foreign sources. Each of these groups spent thousands and thousands of dollars in elections advertising in the 2015 general election.

Meanwhile, the number of registered third-party groups is higher than ever, as are concerns about them. Between the previous two elections alone, complaints about third-party groups by everyday Canadians increased by 750%, from just 12 in 2011 to 105 in 2015. Sadly, many of the political causes advocated by these groups directly benefit the economic or political interests of foreign countries and directly disadvantage the economic and political interests of Canada.

As the member of Parliament for Red Deer—Lacombe, I am particularly concerned, as are my constituents, that many third-party groups receiving foreign contributions for elections advertising purposes are dedicated solely to undermining the Canadian oil and gas sector. This is no secret. Amid record low oil prices in Canada, foreign entities like the Tides Foundation have trumpeted their accomplishments in preventing Canadian oil from reaching international markets. Their success in doing so can be attributed in part to their ability to finance the elections advertising of collaborative third-party groups.

Numerous instances of this kind of foreign influence have been revealed through the dedicated work of researcher, Vivian Krause. Vivian has worked tirelessly to follow the money trail and uncover

the many connections between U.S. oil interests and Canadian environmental groups that are working together and making use of elections law loopholes against the interests of the broader Canadian public.

However, this is just one of many issues related to foreign influence. Foreign influence in all our elections should be of concern to all members of the House and all Canadians, regardless of their political persuasion.

Why are we allowing foreign entities to influence our elections in this manner?

• (1735)

This question was formally investigated by the Commissioner of Canada Elections at the behest of my colleague, the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton. The commissioner's office determined that third parties are subject to much less stringent regulations than other political entities but concluded that there was no technical breach of the Canada Elections Act, as it is currently written.

Crucially, the office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections noted that pursuant to subsection 359(4) of the act, there is no requirement for a registered third party to report to Elections Canada funds used for election advertising if those funds were received outside the period beginning six months before the issue of the writ and ending on election day. Therefore, in effect, foreign entities or organizations like the Tides Foundation are currently permitted to make unregulated financial contributions to third-party organizations for election advertising outside the pre-writ period. These sorts of contributions would otherwise be prohibited at any other time.

From this it is clear that there exists a serious loophole in the Canada Elections Act that must be addressed. We must stem the significant flow of foreign money in our elections and help restore the full sovereignty of our democratic process. It is for this reason I introduced the legislation before us.

Bill C-406 would address the growing issue of foreign influence in Canadian elections by prohibiting foreign entities from contributing to third parties for election advertising purposes at any time. Bill C-406 would also amend the Canada Elections Act to include this prohibition and would require any ineligible contributions to be either returned by the domestic third party to the contributor or to the Receiver General. With this prohibition in place, foreign entities would no longer be able to shamelessly flout the Canada Elections Act. Consequently, their ability to undermine our electoral process and unduly determine the political discourse in this country would be severely diminished. These measures would preserve the sovereign principle that Canadians, and Canadians alone, should decide who governs on their behalf.

Private Members' Business

The issue of election reform, including the undue influence of foreign entities, was debated in this chamber recently as we considered the provisions within the government's bill, Bill C-76. At that time, members on the government side explicitly stated that they consider this to be an issue of real concern. I note that the hon. member for Whitby declared that "Canadian elections belong to Canadians, and it is not the place of foreigners to have a say in who should have a place in this chamber." Similarly, the hon. member for Humber River-Black Creek admitted that the last federal election was subjected to foreign influence and expressed her desire to see legislation that makes it "more difficult for the bad actors that we have out there to influence our elections." Even the hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions stated that she supports measures that will "prevent foreign interference in our elections that could undermine trust in our democracy." These are Liberal MPs.

I could go on, but regardless of my objections to aspects of Bill C-76, while debating that legislation, members opposite made it clear that they believe foreign influence to be a problem that needs to be addressed, particularly as another election will soon be upon us.

Members on the government side might like to suggest that Bill C-76, the elections modernization act, which is now being studied in the other place, renders the provisions to eliminate foreign influence in Canadian elections within my bill, Bill C-406, redundant. However, I can assure members that this is not the case. While Bill C-76 contains provisions to prohibit third parties from utilizing foreign money for the purposes of election advertising, Bill C-406 would prohibit the foreign entities themselves from contributing to domestic third parties in the first place. Therefore, the enactment of the provisions in Bill C-76 and Bill C-406 would be complementary, rather than contradictory or redundant.

Given that foreign entities are currently contravening the existing prohibitions concerning elections advertising in the Canada Elections Act, having further measures in place to prevent this from happening would be the most sensible thing to do and would prevent any uncertainty about compliance for domestic third parties here in Canada and for foreign entities elsewhere.

• (1740)

By ensuring that the legal prohibitions apply both to the contributing foreign entities and the recipient domestic third parties, Canadians will be much more assured in the security and sovereignty of our electoral process and in the legitimacy of their government.

It is undeniable that we live in an age of rampant misinformation, political disruption and an acute lack of confidence in traditional institutions. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, Canadians' trust in media, NGOs, businesses and government declined in 2017, and more than half of Canadians lost faith in the system. This should be concerning for all members of the House, especially since the barometer also indicates that the credibility of its own leadership is also declining among Canadians.

It is for this reason that Canadians especially deserve to have full confidence that our elections will not be tampered with or interfered in by foreign entities.

Members should take their seats here following an election only because they have the confidence and trust of their constituents who

placed them here. Members should not have a seat here because some foreign entity preferred one candidate or party over another to pursue its own personal objectives and was able to use its significant resources to sway certain elections from abroad.

In less than a year's time, Canadians will have returned to the ballot box once more to have their voices heard. Enacting Bill C-406 before then to prevent foreign influence in our elections would go a long way in rebuilding the trust of Canadians in their institutions and, in particular, the validity of our election process and the credibility of the government.

The alternative is troubling to consider. Without the prohibitions within Bill C-406, our elections will be determined not by Canadians alone, not by those who have a vested interest in what is best for our country, but by those who have a vested interest in their own objectives, which almost certainly will not be in the best interests of Canada.

Worse still, if this practice continues unabated, Canadians will lose all faith in their electoral process and in the government itself, regardless of which party is in power. Such a profound loss of faith will be very difficult to earn back once it has been lost.

In the past few months, we have heard from the experts and officials responsible for administering our elections, as well as those who are tasked with keeping our nation and its institutions secure. Each of them has said that the issue of foreign influence in our elections is of concern, and is something that needs to be addressed prior to the election next year. Members from both sides of the chamber have echoed this sentiment and have shown support for other measures that would help curb foreign influence in our elections.

It is my sincere hope that all members of the House will take this warning to heart and join me in supporting Bill C-406. By doing so, members of Parliament will not only be ensuring that foreign entities can no longer unduly influence our elections, but they would also be sending a clear and specific message to all Canadians, that their voices matter and their voices will not be undermined or drowned out by those who should have no place or no say in our electoral process.

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, we on this side of the House agree wholeheartedly with the objective and the principle of the bill and what it targets, which is interference with elections that must be safeguarded here in the House.

I have a couple of clarifications I would like to make.

The member mentioned that Bill C-76, which had the same objective, is being studied in the Senate right now. The bill actually received royal assent on December 13, 2018. Therefore, Bill C-76 is now official law in Canada.

I want to make a couple of points in respect to Bill C-76.

Private Members' Business

At the time the member's legislation was originally given first reading, Bill C-76 was in committee where it was subsequently strengthened. The original incarnation of the bill talked about only prohibiting the use of foreign funds during an election period. However, helpful amendments made at PROC made it illegal for a third party to use foreign funding at any time to engage in partisan activities, bringing it into line with the very bill that he has proposed today.

Does the member agree with the changes made in committee?

Also, with respect to the extraterritorial aspect of the legislation he is now proposing, it presents a difficulty in enforcement. Does the member recognize that limitation with respect to the enforcement of this bill?

• (1745)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, the policing of this would be a lot easier.

The issue that I brought up in my remarks, the investigation initiated by my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton, was an inability for them to find any fault in the current legislative gambit that Elections Canada had in front of it. That is because when the money comes across the border, it becomes much more difficult to police and enforce. If we police it before it comes across the border, if we make it illegal for the foreign funding to come across the border in the first place, it is much easier to detect, much easier to track and much easier to enforce.

As I said, the legislation I am proposing, Bill C-406, builds on some of the things that were done in Bill C-76, but it would add and strengthen our elections and make them more secure. That is why I am hoping all members of the House will help pass it.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his presentation of his private member's bill and for all the work he has done on it. It takes a tremendous amount of research and preparation to get to this point. That should certainly be noted and appreciated.

This bill has to do with foreign interference in our elections in Canada, and of course, wanting to put a stop to that. In Canada, our democracy is based on the principle that only those who should vote, should vote. In other words, those who are Canadian citizens over the age of 18 should be given the opportunity to vote. When this is the case, our democracy is protected. When this is not the case, our democracy is thwarted.

When we are talking about foreign interference, money being laundered into Canada, we are talking about another act that could impact our overall democratic system. Could the member comment on the democratic system that exists within Canada and how his bill would go about making sure that it is protected and why that is important not only for today but for future generations in this great country we call home?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, my bill proposes to change the Canada Elections Act. Right now, the prohibition on the use of foreign contributions is simply a matter of judgment on that funding after it has already been sent to a third party organization in Canada from abroad. It could be from a government, a business or a foundation that actually has no interest in Canada at all.

The prohibition would apply to a person who is not a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident who is trying to influence our elections, a corporation or an association that does not carry on any business in Canada at all, a trade union that does not have any bargaining rights or employees in Canada, a foreign political party, or a foreign government or an agent of one. What my bill says is that instead of allowing money to come across the border from those actors and then trying to figure out if that money was used in an election, let us just not let that money come in in the first place. Then it would be a lot easier to enforce.

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 rise in this House today as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions and as the member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park to speak to the second reading of Bill C-406, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

This bill, which was introduced by the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, seeks to amend the Canada Elections Act to prohibit foreign contributions to third parties for election advertising purposes.

The spirit of Bill C-406 is part of a broader conversation regarding the role of money in Canadian politics and the potential for foreign actors to influence Canadian elections. The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs issued a report last year expressing concern that the Canada Elections Act did not "... sufficiently protect Canadian elections from improper foreign interference". That said, the report further argued that the third party regime needed to be modernized to ensure transparency and fairness in our democratic system.

Our government takes this issue very seriously, and it is a pleasure to be addressing this topic in the House this evening.

When it comes to the issue of foreign interference and influence more generally, we are taking a whole-of-government approach to protect the integrity of our democracy by defending the Canadian electoral process from hacking and malicious cyber-activities.

More frequently than ever before, we are learning in the media about how western democracies are dealing with new types of threats and new types of attacks. There have been allegations of undue foreign interference in the British Brexit referendum, the United States' 2016 presidential election and the French 2016 presidential election, to name but a few. Canadians are rightly concerned about the potential impact of foreign interference in our elections as well.

I have heard from the engaged residents of my riding of Parkdale—High Park, and indeed from Canadians from around the country, that we cannot be complacent. In 2019, we need to anticipate and ward off the threat of foreign interference in order to secure and strengthen our democracy.

Private Members' Business

This is why our government recently announced its plan to safeguard the upcoming election. The plan is built on four pillars. One is enhancing citizen preparedness. The second is improving organizational readiness. The third is combatting foreign interference, and the fourth is working with social media platforms. In particular, Canada's security agencies will work to prevent covert, clandestine or criminal activities by foreign actors.

I would like to remind members of this House that Canada also has a robust political financing regime. We know that to date there is no evidence that foreign actors have unduly influenced previous elections in this country. As a result, Canadians can feel confident in the outcome of our past elections and in our democracy as a whole, but that does not mean we will rest on our laurels. To the contrary, we are being vigilant to address potential threats. Our government has already taken action to address potential avenues of undue influence in advance of the upcoming 2019 federal election.

In addition to the government's recent announcement, our government has passed Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act, which received royal assent on December 13 of last year. The Elections Modernization Act strengthens Canada's democratic institutions and restores Canadians' trust and participation in our democratic processes. This generational overhaul of the Canada Elections Act will allow it to better address the realities facing our democratic system in the 21st century, including requiring organizations selling advertising spaces to not knowingly accept election advertisements from foreign entities.

● (1750)

[Translation]

Our legislation draws heavily on the recommendations in the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 2015 general election and on studies by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

[English]

The member for Red Deer—Lacombe opposite has already outlined a number of measures in Bill C-406, measures that are redundant when one considers Bill C-76. This is because Bill C-406 has already been considered by our government as part of the Minister of Democratic Institutions' commitment to review spending limits for both political parties and third parties.

This review also examined third party financing and the potential impacts of foreign contributions and interference in Canada.

While Bill C-406's objective of preventing foreign interference in Canadian elections is worthy in principle, the mechanisms outlined in this legislation would be ineffective.

Allow me to explain. A major issue with Bill C-406 is that it seeks to legislate the actions of people outside Canada, such as foreign entities or persons making a contribution to a Canadian third party. These provisions have an extraterritorial aspect, which would be extremely difficult to enforce. We know of these difficulties from other acts that have attempted to legislate actions outside of Canada.

It is clear that the measures in Bill C-76 are enforceable, whereas those in Bill C-406 are problematic, because Bill C-76 addresses the

problem from a different perspective. While Bill C-406 seeks to prohibit someone outside of Canada from contributing to a third party, Bill C-76, which has received royal assent, prohibits Canadian third parties from using these contributions. In this way, the problem of foreign influence is brought under the umbrella of our established domestic regulatory regime for third parties.

There are also a number of unfortunate drafting errors in the bill, which would further make the argument that the provisions are difficult to enforce. In one case, the bill refers to subsection 363(1.1) of the Canada Elections Act, which is a provision that does not exist in either the act or in Bill C-76. As well, while the bill creates two new prohibitions on foreign contributions, it neglects to enact corresponding offences, which would lead to significant enforcement difficulties. The two must go hand in hand, and the latter is absent here. There are no corresponding offences listed in the bill.

Further, Bill C-406 misplaces the new rules regarding third party election advertising in part 18 of the Canada Elections Act, the part that deals with financial administration of political entities, instead of placing them in part 17 of the act, which deals with third party election advertising. This would lead to confusion for Canadians and political actors about which sections of the Canada Elections Act apply to which entities.

● (1755)

[Translation]

I would like to mention that certain measures in Bill C-76 that have to do with foreign interference were strengthened by amendments adopted by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. When Bill C-406 was introduced in June 2018, the measures in Bill C-76 had not yet been improved by the committee's meticulous work.

[English]

Bill C-76 initially only limited the prohibition against using foreign funds to an election period, something I mentioned in my first contribution to this debate. However, there is now a new provision that stipulates there is no explicit time limit to this prohibition, thanks to helpful amendments brought forward at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This change brought Bill C-76 in line with the measures introduced in Bill C-406, which also do not stipulate any time limit. Canadians can therefore be assured that foreign influence will be guarded against at any time, rather than only during the pre-writ or writ periods of an election.

Strengthening and protecting our democratic institutions should not be a partisan issue. On that, there is agreement. In Canada, our free and fair elections contribute to our strong democracy, which is revered around the world. Canadians rightfully expect their elected officials to come together and work hard to ensure our elections are accessible and we are doing our utmost to ensure foreign money has no place in our elections, which is essential to the health of our democracy.

I want to thank the member for Red Deer—Lacombe for the chance to continue this important discussion on foreign influence in our elections. We can expect that Canadians will become more interested in this topic in the lead-up to the federal election this fall.

To conclude, while Bill C-406 identifies an important issue for Canadians, the tools the bill proposes cannot be effectively enforced, which is why the government will not be supporting Bill C-406.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will begin where my colleague across the aisle left off and say that, yes, in principle, there are good intentions in the idea of limiting funding from foreign entities to third parties.

We are all concerned about foreign interference in our elections, in our democratic systems, here in Canada and basically around the world. We have seen some rather troubling front-page headlines recently. This interference is a direct attack on our democracy, our democratic systems. We must take notice and come up with solutions to avoid it. Obviously, funding leaves the door wide open to interference.

Let me be clear. We in the NDP fully support the idea of limiting foreign contributions to third parties. However, we are very concerned that this bill will not meet that objective.

There are a number of problems. Some have talked about problems implementing what the bill proposes. There are many such problems. There are extraterritorial issues here, which are significant and complex, so yes, there will be implementation problems.

That said, the thing that concerns me the most is the major loopholes in this bill. It essentially talks about contributions for election advertising purposes. Why only advertising? That is a loophole, because a third party could receive money and divert it for other purposes. The third party could take a foreign contribution that was meant for a specific purpose and use it for advertising instead. By limiting the focus to advertising, the bill undermines the primary objective, which is to combat foreign influence.

Advertising is one aspect, but there is so much more. There is the question of the definition of a foreign entity. The bill uses the definition from the Canada Elections Act. That definition includes individuals who are neither citizens nor permanent residents and corporations that do not carry on business in Canada. That is rather interesting. It is 2019. In 2019, there is no shortage of small companies all around us, but there is also the private sector and the vast number of multinationals. That means that if we exclude individuals only, then we leave the door open to multinationals and welcome them with open arms because they are not excluded. They can continue to make contributions to third parties for advertising during election campaigns. They are not covered by this bill.

That is very interesting because the Conservatives always seem to be fairly selective when we talk about defending democracy and election financing.

I listened to the speech given by my colleague who talked about the Tides Foundation and environmental organizations, which often address issues of global concern, since the environmental challenges we are facing are global challenges that know no borders.

Private Members' Business

Listening to my Conservative colleague's speech, I got the impression that he is really bothered by environmental groups and that he thinks we should stop letting them speak. Multinationals, however, should be able to keep doing what they are doing.

● (1800)

I find that rather ironic. I also find it ironic that the Conservatives are the ones who raised this concern about political financing when they are the ones who decided, at one point, that public funding for political parties was not a good idea.

They said that it was really not a good idea and that we should do away with it. I found that rather sad. When I was young, I would vote for the NDP in Quebec at a time when people did not really know much about the NDP yet. I would tell myself that the NDP would surely not win in my riding but at least the party I believed in would get a couple of bucks from my vote. The Conservatives preferred to do away with that practice.

Does that mean that there is no public funding for political parties? No. Public funding for political parties still exists because now, when I make a donation to a political party, I am entitled to a tax refund.

This tax credit is not a form of public financing, but it is for people who, like me, earn enough income to pay taxes. It is a fact that those who give the most money and who have the most money are the ones with the largest tax refunds. However, there are no subsidies for political donations for people who have very low incomes. They pay out of pocket.

I find it ironic to see the Conservatives rise in defence of Canadian democracy, when so many of the measures they took when they were in power only served to undermine it.

That said, as one of my colleagues suggested, I hope that we will be able to take a non-partisan approach to this. It would be so wonderful to avoid petty games on matters like electoral reform, democratic development and the preservation of our institutions.

However, it seems to me that this bill, which is difficult to implement and full of holes, is still quite partisan.

● (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today to Bill C-406, tabled by my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe, which would amend the Canada Elections Act to ban foreign contributions to third parties for election advertising purposes.

Private Members' Business

Some of the comments we heard prior to my intervention go to the very reason I think this legislation is so important. I want to point to the comments from the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, who was very clear that he is not going to support this legislation, but then said that there is no proof whatsoever that there has been any interference in Canadian elections in the past. That just proves how naive the Liberal government is in the situation we are facing right now. We have a group out there, Leadnow, that is, on its website, bragging about how many ridings it influenced in the 2015 election. It is a third-party group that spent more than \$1 million in the 2015 election, and almost 20% of those dollars were raised by foreign actors.

The government is saying, and I guess we really should not question this, because it has sort of been the government's theme all week, as well as in the last couple of weeks, when it comes to SNC-Lavalin, "There is nothing to see here, nothing to fear. We have everything under control. Just go to bed at night and sleep well."

The proof is there that there was certainly influence in the 2015 election by foreign entities funding third-party groups in Canada that were going to specific target ridings and having an impact on the Canadian election.

If this had come up four years ago, I was one of those who would not have thought it was an issue. However, that changed significantly during the 2015 election campaign. Many of us here in this House helped our colleagues and friends in other ridings when they were doing their door knocking and canvassing. I remember going to Calgary Centre during the 2015 election, and I was shocked by the number of lawn signs I saw on public boulevards and public spaces. What surprised me was the fact that those lawn signs outnumbered every political party two to one. These signs were not Liberal, New Democrat, Green or Conservative. These lawn signs were put up by Leadnow and Tides. The amount of money those groups spent in that one riding was incredible. We had third parties spending more than \$1 million in a campaign.

Let us put that in perspective. The average party in a constituency probably spends about \$50,000 to \$75,000. This group spent 30 times that in our election. To say that there is nothing to see here and that there is no proof of foreign funding having an impact on Canadian elections is extremely naive. It shows why this private member's bill, Bill C-406, brought by my colleague, is so important. I am very proud to support it.

When we talk about the activism that is going on in our country and having an influence on our elections, that should be extremely concerning to Canadians. In the presentations we have heard so far, I think everyone has said that Canadian elections should be decided by Canadians.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to travel to Brussels and meet with many of our NATO partners and representatives from those countries. We talked about foreign influence in their elections. It was a top priority for our NATO partners, who are doing everything they can to address cybersecurity and tightening up their own elections legislation to limit the opportunities for foreign influence.

Canada is not immune to this. We have a Liberal government that passed Bill C-76 with minimal strategies to address foreign funding. That is concerning. This private member's bill, Bill C-406 would close that loophole when it comes to the influence foreign funding would have on future Canadian elections. We are not immune. It has happened. If we do not do something about it, it is going to happen again. Elections are sacrosanct in a free and sovereign country.

• (1810)

Times have changed. Unfortunately we have seen it in the United States and in other western democracies. We have seen it in Canada. Our elections are open and vulnerable to foreign influences, whether at the cyber level or through the funding of third party organizations that are well organized and target specific ridings to make an impact.

We should not allow that to happen. Third party associations should not be allowed to accept foreign funding for use in Canadian elections. Bill C-406 would close that loophole to ensure that third party groups cannot not accept foreign funding, period. This would make things easier to enforce and track, ensuring that Canadian elections are protected.

However, we should not be surprised that the Liberals are leaving this loophole there. They have been quite clear that they have no issues with foreign entities and actors influencing Canadian policy. We have a Liberal government that ensured that Canadian taxpayer dollars were used to fund summer jobs for Leadnow and Tides, groups that actively protested against Canada's energy sector. Liberals should not allow these foreign funds to impact our decision-making on our own economy, on massive infrastructure projects, and on nation-building projects like pipelines.

We have seen what has happened with Trans Mountain, a project that is integral to Canada's economy, but they tell us not to concern ourselves with foreign actors influencing the Canadian economy and our natural resource sector, or with the more than 100,000 jobs that have been lost as a result of the activism that most often comes from foreign entities.

If Liberals are going to turn a blind eye to that, it only makes sense that they would turn a blind eye to foreign influences in Canadian elections. This is no mystery. Foreign money has been used, and as I said, these third party groups are actively, in the public and on their websites, bragging about how successful their efforts have been in influencing a Canadian election.

Private Members' Business

This is not a conspiracy theory. This is not speculation. It is proven. In fact, as I said, Tides spent more than \$1.5 million on influencing the Canadian election. That got the attention of the Canada Revenue Agency, which is investigating Tides regarding how that money was raised and spent. For the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions to say this has never happened is very disconcerting. He is parliamentary secretary to the minister, who should be extremely concerned about the influences foreign entities and actors could have on the Canadian election. The parliamentary secretary was being quite honest when he said it was not an issue or a problem, and that we did not need any legislation to protect ourselves from this. In all honesty, I find that to be ridiculous. It is proven that this is happening.

We are now in an election year, and it is quite clear that the Liberals are not going to take this issue seriously. This is not something they are addressing earnestly. They are refusing to take steps to close the loophole.

I find it interesting that the Liberals and my colleague from the NDP keep talking about this being a non-partisan issue. I am not saying this is a partisan issue. I am saying there is a very clear void in the legislation. We are bringing forward an opportunity to correct the mistake in Bill C-76, which did not have the teeth needed to ensure that Canadian elections are protected.

Elections are a foundation of Canadian democracy, plain and simple. If we cannot trust that our elections are fair and that Canadians alone are deciding who forms our government and who represents them in their constituencies, we have a very serious problem.

Bill C-406 would end any opportunity for foreign influence in a Canadian election. The integrity of our democracy and of our electoral system is at stake, and I would ask all members of the House to support Bill C-406. It is a priority.

• (1815)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to address a number of the points my colleague across the way raised this evening.

The first is something we do not do enough, which is to recognize the incredible role Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections play in ensuring one of our fundamental pillars of democracy is healthy. I would argue that it is envied around the world.

People from many countries around the world come and visit our election officials. Apolitical election officials are often requested to visit numerous countries so they can explain why Canada has been as successful as it has been over the years at ensuring it has a very healthy and vibrant democracy.

I appreciate and recognize the importance of the independent offices, whether it is the Ethics Commissioner, or the ombudsman or Elections Canada. We appreciate their contribution to our system of parliamentary procedures and democracy as a whole.

One of the most interesting comments I heard about the bill was by the parliamentary secretary, and members should take note of it.

A great deal of effort was put into bringing forward Bill C-76. When it was debated at second reading, we clearly indicated that if members had ideas on how to improve the legislation, they should bring them to committee. We often hear that from this side of the House, something we never heard when Stephen Harper was prime minister. The Prime Minister and other members have talked about bringing issues to committee.

In fact, there were a number of ideas raised at committee. It was interesting that the parliamentary secretary made reference to Bill C-76. The original bill only prohibited the use of foreign funds during an election period. However, once it went to the procedure and House affairs committee, amendments were put forward to make it illegal for third party to use foreign funding at any time to engage in partisan activities.

This brings it in line with what Bill C-406 proposes. It is not a perfect alignment, as has been pointed out. The opposition believes that if we pass a law here, we will have no issues in implementing it outside Canada's jurisdiction. That is questionable.

What Bill C-406 hopes to achieve was achieved by Bill C-76. There was debate and presentations were made at committee to enhance the bill and make it stronger. This should have been taken into consideration with respect to the bill before us now.

Bill C-76 has now received royal assent. The member who introduced Bill C-406 was not necessarily aware of that. We need to reinforce the fact that it is now the law of the land.

• (1820)

I have been around for a number of years. I can remember the legislation that was brought in by former prime minister Stephen Harper in regard to reforming the Canada Elections Act and the incredible resistance to the changes that the Harper government received. There was very little support for the legislation. There was a great deal of opposition from political parties. More importantly, many different political stakeholders in Canada, whether they were academics or average citizens, were talking about issues such as the identification cards and how people were being disenfranchised and so forth. That was the type of legislation that Stephen Harper brought in when he was Prime Minister.

As to the support that we have for Bill C-76, and when I say "we" I am referring to something more than just the Liberal Party or the Government of Canada, there was widespread support for many of the changes for the modernization of our elections act. It received wide support.

I talked about changes at committee stage then and it fell on deaf ears. Today we have a government that is committed to more transparency and more accountability, especially when we talk about the issue of elections—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Foothills that he had an opportunity to speak. Somebody else has the floor and he knows that in the House we respect others who have the floor, so if he wishes to speak more on this, then I would suggest that he wait until the proper time comes along.

Adjournment Proceedings

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the point that I was attempting to get at is that, as a government, in bringing forward changes to the Canada Elections Act, there was a great deal of consultation and effort by not only the minister but the standing committee and many members on all sides of the House. Ultimately, we have very strong and robust election laws as a direct result in good part of the fine work of members on all sides of the House and the many individuals who contributed to that legislation.

Contrast that to the legislation that was brought in by Stephen Harper. If the member feels that this is so critical now when nothing has really changed in the last few years, why did Prime Minister Harper not bring in that change to the Canada Elections Act at the time? I suspect that it might have had something to do with the arguments that were used against it at different points in time. I believe the legislation that we now have put in place, which has received royal assent, deals with the issue that the Conservatives are trying to raise.

If the Conservatives would reflect on some of the posturing that has taken place, they should reflect on their own behaviour in terms of the transparency and accountability issues we have been raising consistently as we try to look at ways in which we can improve democracy and accountability by political parties to Canadians.

An example of that is challenging the Conservative leader to open up his fundraising meetings. He has not done that yet. Why not? When they talk about accountability, why not have accountability to the electorate right from the leader of the Conservative Party by saying these are the people who are attending? Why not open it to the media? This is something our Prime Minister and government members are still encouraging opposition members to do. There is more work to be done. We are anxious to be able to continue on in that way.

• (1825)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to take a few minutes to speak to Bill C-406 and more specifically to two clauses of the bill that are essential to any self-respecting democracy that wants to manage its own democratic affairs and that does not want to give others the chance to influence its democratic process.

I just listened to my colleague's speech and I have to wonder whether he agrees with the Clerk of the Privy Council and cabinet secretary, who shared his concerns with the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights this afternoon.

[English]

He said, "I worry about foreign interference in the upcoming election, and we're working hard on that."

[Translation]

The purpose of the bill introduced by my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe is to prevent this foreign interference in the next election. Groups like Tides Foundation and Leadnow invest millions of dollars to defeat candidates and influence the democratic process even here in Canada. If a Canadian group took Canadians' money to

try to influence the election, it would be part of the democratic process. We have a major problem when we let foreigners interfere in our elections, with money obtained who knows where, by targeting very specific ridings where candidates are standing up for their values and their country and hoping to represent their constituents.

The interests of these groups are not those of the voters. These groups become involved because they perhaps have a chance to beat someone in a riding, to get out their message and to score points on the international scene by stating that they influenced the outcome of an election in Canada. That is something that happens and it will happen again if we do nothing. Therefore, we must guard against this interference.

I am pleased that the Clerk of the Privy Council raised his concerns this afternoon about the major role that this foreign interference could play in the next election. That is why our colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe is asking that we prohibit any foreign entity from making a contribution to a third party for election advertising purposes. It also proposes to prohibit any foreign entity from making a contribution to a third party for election advertising purposes that comes from money, property or the services of another person or entity that was provided to that person or entity for that purpose.

That is clear. I believe that Canadians are mature enough to make their own decisions. I believe that Canadians who want to influence the election can make a donation to the various political parties and strictly Canadian organizations. Why would we allow foreigners to meddle in our electoral process? That is completely unacceptable.

• (1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have a little over six minutes to finish his speech the next time the bill comes before the House.

The time provided for consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise here this evening to expand on a question I asked the minister regarding the Supreme Court decision on the Redwater case, which involved the bankruptcy of Canadian resource companies and their obligation to clean up their abandoned wells and mines. The case covered both the federal responsibilities under bankruptcy law, provincial responsibilities for natural resources and the dual responsibility for both levels of government to protect our environment.

Adjournment Proceedings

In the Redwater case, the Alberta courts had ruled that the trustee in the bankruptcy of a resource company could absolve itself of obligations to clean up and reclaim its inactive wells and instead give priority to paying off its creditors, the banks. Therefore, the considerable costs of cleanup and reclamation would fall to the provincial government in this case, to taxpayers. On January 31, the Supreme Court reversed this decision and found that bankruptcy was not an excuse to absolve companies or their trustees of their environmental liabilities.

Why is this important? First of all, the issue of inactive and abandoned wells is a very large and growing problem. There are over 122,000 inactive wells across western Canada, and most of those wells have absolutely no prospect of ever operating again. That is almost a quarter of the wells out there. Most will require cleanup and reclamation in the near future. Many are on private land, on farms, where they impact the work and lives of farmers who are no longer receiving rental payments for those wells. The cost of this reclamation work will be in the billions of dollars. Increasingly, those costs are being borne by Canadian taxpayers.

This issue goes beyond abandoned oil and gas wells. The cost of cleaning up the oil sands has been estimated at over \$100 billion. Who will pay for that? The federal government will say it is the problem of the Alberta government, but what about resource projects north of 60, in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut?

The Faro Mine in Yukon was abandoned 20 years ago. It is a 25-kilometre-square moonscape of toxic waste. The federal government has already spent about \$300 million maintaining the site over the past 20 years and has barely begun to clean it up. It is estimated that Canadian taxpayers will have to pay another billion dollars to do that for that one mine alone.

The Giant Mine outside Yellowknife is a similar story. Over its life, the mine spewed tons of arsenic across the landscape, and the site still oozes arsenic and other toxins. Remediation of the Giant Mine includes the freezing of arsenic waste forever—for eternity. Eternity, as Woody Allen says, is a long time, especially toward the end. The cleanup has already cost a billion dollars. That cost will continue to go on, with the taxpayers paying those costs forever.

Will the federal government be looking to change the federal laws regarding bankruptcy and abandoned mines and wells? When will we truly have a regulatory system where the polluter pays, instead of one in which some corporations profit from reckless exploitation and let taxpayers pay for the cleanup?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay for his question, since it gives me a chance to reiterate our government's position.

Given that we debated this issue yesterday evening, the House will not be surprised to hear that our position has not changed.

Our position could not be any clearer. No company has a licence to pollute. Companies cannot do so in the course of their regular operations. They cannot do so as they wind down their operations. They cannot do so if they abandon their operations. They cannot do so if they go bankrupt.

In the case of orphan wells, we understand the range of interests at stake. Indeed, this matter transcends provincial jurisdiction over natural resources and federal responsibilities under Canadian bankruptcy legislation.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Canadians depend on the federal government to ensure that Canada's oil and gas pipelines are built securely and operated safely. That is why we put in place the Pipeline Safety Act, which came into force in June 2016, creating a culture of safety across Canada's oil and gas sector. Companies are held liable regardless of fault and are required to have the resources to respond to incidents.

In addition, we will continue to strengthen our pipeline safety system, including through the proposed new Canadian energy regulator act. Through Bill C-69, we would ensure that projects were designed, constructed, operated and decommissioned in a way that was safe for the public and the environment.

The National Energy Board regulates interprovincial and international pipelines in the Canadian public's interest. It ensures that Canada's pipelines are safe and secure. The NEB has a comprehensive compliance program for regulating facilities throughout a pipeline's life cycle and has the power required to hold companies accountable during construction, post-construction, operation and abandonment.

We have confidence in the National Energy Board as a strong, independent regulator committed to maintaining the highest standards of pipeline safety.

The importance of the energy sector cannot be overstated. That is why our government has taken strong, decisive action to support competitiveness in the oil and gas sector and to help the sector enhance sustainability, thereby enabling the industry to create the jobs we need while protecting the environment Canadians depend on.

Our government will continue to work with provincial partners to ensure that companies that develop Canada's resources have the tools they need to respond in the event an incident occurs.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, companies are polluting and are getting away with it, whether it is under provincial jurisdiction or federal jurisdiction, and that has to change.

The Liberal government is fond of saying that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. The saying should be that we cannot have a healthy economy without a healthy environment. Too often the government uses that to mean that we cannot take steps to protect the environment without concurrent steps to protect the short-term economic gains that actually put the environment at risk.

Adjournment Proceedings

Natural resources are the backbone of the Canadian economy, and most resource companies act in a responsible manner and provide good jobs for Canadians and clean up after themselves. However, we must have regulations in place that ensure that corporations that pollute our environment pay for cleaning up that pollution and that environmental protection comes before the protection of corporate interests.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, we have to take steps to ensure that companies are and will remain responsible for their pipelines.

We are continuing to strengthen the legislation to make sure our regulatory regime is modern and effective.

We have a strong, independent regulatory body to ensure that Canada's pipelines are safe for the environment and for Canadians.

We are also taking steps to help our oil and gas sector compete and become more sustainable. That is what Canadians told us they want: an economy that works for everyone, that builds healthy, prosperous communities, that generates jobs and that protects the environment.

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am happy for the chance to bring this issue back to the House. It is of very serious importance to my constituents and for all small business owners in Canada.

Back in October, I asked the Minister of Environment a very specific question regarding the Liberal carbon tax and the devastating effect it will have on small businesses in Canada. I spoke about a company in my riding, Bert Baxter Transport, whose diesel fuel cost for its trucks is going to rise dramatically each year, increasing to about \$400,000 per year by 2022. This is just for diesel costs alone and does not include all the other expenses that come with running a business.

Furthermore, should the Liberal government get re-elected, it has not given a plan for the carbon tax after 2022. This means the cost to small businesses in Canada will continue to soar, with some reports saying it could go as high as \$300 per tonne or higher. If the government is unwilling to be forthcoming with its plan for the future, how are Canadians supposed to plan ahead to ensure they are still able to pay for their bills each month, especially those who run businesses or those employed by small businesses?

In my initial question, I had asked where the discount was for small businesses such as Bert Baxter Transport, given that the Liberals were keen to give major exemptions to big corporations in order to, in their words, protect jobs and keep them in Canada. This is interesting given that the majority of employers in Canada are actually small businesses. This is especially true in my riding, which is rural and depends on these enterprises to keep the local economy going.

As most are aware, the energy industry in Canada, especially in western Canada, has not received much support from the Liberal government. Bert Baxter Transport is part of the energy industry. Not only has it struggled due to the general lack of support by the

government but it is now being told it has to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars more per year just to fuel up its trucks. It gets no exemption and no support from a government that is meant to help businesses, not hurt them. These businesses continue to keep up with all the latest and newest energy-efficient technologies, which cost tens of thousands of dollars, yet their government still heaps new taxes on them.

This lack of support for these individuals and thousands of others like them became even clearer this week when a convoy of trucks, mainly from western Canada and many my constituents, including Bert Baxter Transport, rolled into Ottawa and up to Parliament Hill with the aim of drawing attention to the current plight of energy workers in Canada. These people, who are already feeling alienated by the Liberal government and who are struggling, will be hit hard by the carbon tax. All they want is the government to recognize and champion the contributions that they make to the economy, yet they and their business operations are essentially vilified for working in the oil and gas industry.

It seems very hypocritical for the Liberals to give major exemptions to major corporations, to the tune of an 80% exemption or more, when small family-owned and operated businesses will have their expenses skyrocket to the point where life is no longer affordable. Why is it the giant corporations, whose emissions are significantly higher than companies like Bert Baxter, are getting a break when the average, hard-working small business owner is not?

I was extremely frustrated by the minister's non-answer to my initial question. My constituents deserve to feel heard and supported. Bert Baxter Transport is just one of many companies that may be forced to lay off more employees or eventually close their doors for good because of this carbon tax. They do not want to hear the minister spout off figures about heat waves in Quebec or droughts in Saskatchewan because, believe it or not, they are very well aware of them. They have lived it for centuries. Canadians want to know what their government is going to do for them, because so far it seems the answer is to make life more expensive.

I will put the question forward again with the hope of getting an honest and fulsome answer. Given that companies like Bert Baxter Transport will have their operating expenses increase dramatically due to the Liberal carbon tax, where and how much will their exemption be?

• (1840)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, like many Canadians, Mr. Baxter runs a successful small business and he wants to know how pricing carbon pollution will affect his business.

Adjournment Proceedings

The federal carbon pollution pricing system will increase the cost of his fuel by about 5¢ per litre when it comes into effect this spring. However, it is also true that the federal government will return all of the proceeds collected back to every household, including Mr. Baxter's, as well as to small businesses and other sectors that will face higher costs.

The majority of direct proceeds from the fuel charge will be returned directly to individuals and families through climate action Incentive payments. Canadians in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick can claim this payment when they file their taxes this year.

The government will also use proceeds to support small businesses like Mr. Baxter's. Small and medium-sized enterprises are a critically important part of the Canadian economy. Providing direct support will help them take climate action and lower their energy costs, while keeping them competitive.

In Saskatchewan, the government estimates that nearly \$300 million in proceeds will be available over the next five years to support SMEs in that province. Proceeds are also being earmarked to support schools, hospitals, colleges and universities, municipalities, not-for-profits and indigenous communities.

Through Canada's climate action and clean growth plan, the Government of Canada is providing additional financial support to help companies invest in actions that will increase their energy efficiency and reduce their exposure to carbon pricing.

For example, since 2016, the Government of Canada has allocated over \$336 million for investments in public transit projects in Saskatchewan, projects like bus fleet renewals in Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. In addition, over \$416 million is allocated for investments in green infrastructure in Saskatchewan for projects that will reduce emissions, build resilience to the impacts of climate change or provide additional environmental benefits such as clean air and clean water.

Canada's climate plan will also help the trucking sector get cleaner over time. Between pricing carbon pollution, new regulations on emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and financial support to help develop new clean technologies, we will see more and more trucks that pollute less. There are many technologies that already exist, like using regenerative braking, new technologies to monitor and maintain tire pressures at optimal levels, more efficient engines and alternative fuels.

Carbon pollution pricing is a necessary and common sense way to reduce our emissions, invest in a cleaner tomorrow for our kids and grandkids and help Canada compete in the emerging global low-carbon economy.

• (1845)

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Madam Speaker, it is apparent that the parliamentary secretary and the minister have never been to Saskatchewan and have no idea what it is like to live in rural Saskatchewan.

He talks about giving money for green energy and for transportation systems. He should try taking a ride in a truck from Maryfield, Saskatchewan to see a doctor in Regina, which is a drive

of over two and a half hours. Try doing that with anything but a truck at this time of year, when it is -40° outside, the snow is blowing, the roads are covered in ice and black ice and these people have to get around.

The parliamentary secretary talks about giving money back. The Liberals initially said they were going to give 100% back. Now it is only 90%, and who knows what it will eventually come to. The one thing they are not saying is what it is going to cost if they get back in power.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Madam Speaker, 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.

This is just one part of our 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.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Madam Speaker, earlier this month, I asked whether the federal government was offering to share the cost of restoring needed bus service in Saskatchewan. I did not get a very specific answer that day, but the next day, news broke that the federal government had offered cost sharing to Saskatchewan but unfortunately our provincial government had turned down the money. I would like to use this adjournment debate to examine what the federal government offered and what it should potentially offer, going forward.

As reported in the media, the federal government's offer was an amount of \$10 million to all four western Canadian provinces to replace the service lost when Greyhound withdrew from western Canada. Saskatchewan would have received about \$2 million.

A large part of the reason that amount is so low is that the federal government was only proposing to replace the service lost from Greyhound. Greyhound only provided interprovincial routes from Saskatchewan. Routes inside the province were operated by a provincial crown corporation, the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. Therefore, the federal government was not proposing anything to replace the service lost when our Saskatchewan Party government shut down and sold off that enterprise in 2017. The Sask Party said that it would have cost \$85 million over five years to continue operating the STC routes, which of course is an order of magnitude greater than what the federal government had offered to replace just the lost Greyhound service.

Adjournment Proceedings

To put these numbers in context, budget 2017 unveiled a \$20-billion transit fund. It allocated this money between the provinces, mostly according to existing transit ridership. That funding formula skewed very much in favour of large metropolitan centres that already had well-developed transit systems and a large number of people already using those systems. This focus on existing transit ridership disadvantaged smaller provinces such as Saskatchewan.

To provide some numbers, the federal government's formula gave Saskatchewan 1.6% of the transit funding, whereas our province comprises 3.2% of Canada's population. In other words, the federal government is providing transit funding of \$320 million to Saskatchewan, whereas our equal per capita share of the money would be more like \$640 million.

Of course, as members know, most federal transfer programs are allocated on a strictly per capita basis to the provinces. Therefore, the case that I would make is that by simply providing a fair per capita share of transit funding to Saskatchewan and making it clear that this money can be used not only for urban transit but also for interprovincial and rural bus service, there would be more than enough funding to restore needed bus service in Saskatchewan to replace not only the routes abandoned by Greyhound but also the routes that used to be provided by our provincial crown corporation, the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. I hope the government will agree to this approach, going forward.

• (1850)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation for raising this very important issue.

Greyhound's decision to discontinue western service on October 31, 2018, impacted many communities across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, as well as northern Ontario. Intercity bus service remains an important transportation option for Canadians, particularly seniors, youth, indigenous peoples and individuals in rural and remote communities. Without it, Canadians could have a difficult time connecting with friends and family in other communities, as well as accessing important community services such as health care.

While most intercity bus services fall within the jurisdiction of provincial governments, we stepped up because we recognized the magnitude and interprovincial nature of Greyhound's departure from these provinces and have worked diligently to develop solutions to address the issue. On October 31, 2018, after collaborative work with the provincial governments, the federal government announced its plan to address Greyhound's service reductions. The first part of the plan includes a willingness from the federal government to offer support on a transitional and cost-shared basis to the provinces affected so that they can fill the gaps in service left behind by Greyhound on October 31.

Recently, the Minister of Transport reached out directly to his counterparts in the provinces, including the Province of Saskatchewan, where gaps remain to reiterate the federal government's offer of support. The federal government remains ready and willing to support the provinces in addressing their intercity bus needs.

We know that more needs to be done to ensure Canadians continue to have access to intercity bus transportation options. For several years, intercity bus services have been reduced or eliminated in many parts of Canada. That is why the federal government also announced its commitment to continue collaborating with our partners to develop innovative longer-term solutions to address the surface transportation needs of all Canadians.

Mr. Erin Weir: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for providing a very good account of why intercity bus service is so important.

The parliamentary secretary suggested that the federal government would fund only interprovincial service, but of course, the federal government has chosen to fund urban transit, which is clearly within provincial jurisdiction. The federal government could choose to fund other bus service within provincial jurisdiction as well if it wanted to offer the money.

The parliamentary secretary seemed open to future federal support or future federal offers. I wonder if he could clarify whether the Government of Canada will make its public transit infrastructure fund available to provinces on an equal per capita basis and whether it will make those funds available not only for urban transit but for intercity transit.

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, of course our government is proud of the unprecedented and historic investments we are making in transportation.

As it refers to Greyhound, which was the original question, and its withdrawal and our reaction to that withdrawal, as announced by our government on October 31, 2018, the current focus is on helping affected provinces fill the gaps in service left by Greyhound. Because of the wide-scale impact of these service gaps on many communities in these provinces, it is important to work quickly and diligently to ensure as minimal a disruption as possible.

We will continue to work hard for communities across the country, and it is our hope that our provincial leaders and partners will do the same.

• (1855)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:55 p.m.)

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